The Integration of the Lao States into the Thai Kingdom

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Abstract

During the course of the century beginning in 1827, the central Mekong basin territories inhabited by the majority of the Lao speaking people were radically transformed from semi-independent principalities, with loose ties of vassalage to Bangkok going back only to the late eighteenth century, into simple provinces of the modern kingdom of Thailand. The first half of this period witnessed the appearance of new Lao administrative centres, each ruled by a local aristocratic family presiding over a political and social system which was distinct from that of the Thai. A new system of taxation was instituted, allowing the Bangkok treasury to gain significant revenues for the first time from the Mekong basin. This half of the century also witnessed migrations on a vast scale, both from the left bank of the Mekong to the right, and within the river basins of the right bank alone, with a resulting proliferation of small towns throughout the plateau area to the west of the Mekong and a decline in administration to the east. The complex administrative structure which the Thai allowed the Lao of the right bank to develop was not extended to the left bank, except in a few small towns of the lowlands. The same period is characterised by rivalry between the Thai and the Vietnamese for domination over those parts of the left bank easily accessible to the lowlands of Vietnam. The clashes between the two outside powers on the left bank, and those between the Thai and the left bank inhabitants themselves, had produced by the 1870s a kind of buffer zone between the Thai kingdom and Vietnam which was so weak that it was unable to defend itself from waves of bandits moving southward from China at that time.

Thai efforts in the 1880s to extend direct rule over the Lao speaking states derived from two distinct policies. The first important Thai intervention was a direct result of internal political disorders, which the Lao elite could not resolve themselves. This was followed closely by growing Thai concern over the likelihood of the expansion of French influence and control over the left bank states which were dominated jointly by Bangkok and Hué, but had never been formally incorporated into the provincial administrative structure of either side. From 1883 to 1893 both the Thai and the French made efforts to extend their influence over the complex geographical region east of the Mekong. In a treaty in 1893 Bangkok was finally forced to withdraw her forces behind the river. The period 1893 to 1904 is characterised by poor relations between French Indochina and Thailand, largely over questions and disputes concerning the Mekong states arising from the 1893 treaty. For most of this time the Thai were in danger of being ejected from the Mekong basin altogether by force; and Thai authority was widely resisted by the Lao living along the banks of the river itself.

The remaining Lao (and a few Khmer) towns of the right bank, which form the north-east of modern Thailand, were absorbed into the Thai kingdom during the following decades, through a policy of assimilation which included territorial reorganisation into a new system of provinces and districts, the suppression of all aspects of traditional Lao administration, the gradual displacement of the Lao aristocracy by a new national bureaucracy, and an attempt to suppress the ethnolinguistic distinctions between Lao and Thai for all official purposes. It also included a policy to transform the peasantry into citizens with a sense of national unity and a sense of responsibility to the state, working through the national army, the education system, and some state agricultural services designed to stimulate production in the impoverished Lao provinces and tie them into the national economic system. The interest of the central government in the Lao towns reached its peak during the period of poor relations with French Indochina; was maintained through the first decade of the twentieth century in order to manage the political and territorial reorganisation of the north-east; but declined quickly after the threat to Thai security along the eastern frontier diminished.

Chapter One: The Lao States to 1828

The Lao are a rice-growing people. Lowlands and rivers are the unifying features of Lao settlements filling the central Mekong basin. It is thought that the Lao as an ethno-linguistic group originated in the mountainous regions to the north of this basin, and expanded southward in search of flat and well watered lands. Population has never grown very dense in the lowlands; and vast tracts of land suitable for rice-growing have always been available to accommodate an increasing population. The uplands have been left to numerous hilltribes, who are able to live there because they engage in dry-field agriculture and also have acquired some resistance to malaria. (Malaria is present almost everywhere above 200 metres, rendering the mountains encircling the basin far more formidable barriers than their geophysical features suggest.) The cataracts on the lower Mekong at Khon and the wilderness to the north-east of the Great Lake of Cambodia mark the southernmost limit of Lao expansion. The uplands and high mountains of the Annamite cordillera form the outer limit of expansion to the east, with Lao settlements in the narrow valleys penetrating this region. In the nineteenth century a Lao people called the 'Phuan' dominated the fertile Phuan plateau just to the north.'

The division of the central Mekong into distinct political entities followed centuries behind the southward migration along the Mekong river and later into the Mun and Chi river basins. The kingdom of Luang Phrabang in the north was founded around 1353. The capital was moved south to the city of Wiangchan two centuries later. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Luang Phrabang and Wiangchan split into two separate kingdoms. Shortly thereafter the southernmost Lao people founded the independent kingdom of Champasak whose western territory, around the modern town of Ubon in the lower Mun basin, broke away from Champasak in the 1770s and became independent. The succeeding period up to the middle of the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of small towns westward up the Mun and Chi river basins.

In the area between the Mun river and the Dong Rak mountains remain various groups of people firmly established before the arrival of the Lao: predominantly Khmer from the Great Lake basin further south, but including villages of hilltribes people as well. The Dong Phraya Fai, thickly forested mountains framing the western extremity of the central Mekong basin, always isolated and sparsely populated, forms the western limit of Lao settlement. (See maps 1 and 8.)

Beyond the mountains to the west of Luang Phrabang--in the upper Chao Phraya basin--were the Muang principalities whose people were erroneously called 'Lao' by outsiders up to the end of the nineteenth century. And along the Mekong to the north-west lay the Shan States. Both belong to the same ethno-linguistic group as the Lao. They speak dialects closely related to Lao, but are culturally and politically distinct. Neither will be treated directly in this study.

The pattern of Thai expansion was similarly one of migration towards the south throughout the Chao Phraya basin. Their kingdom of Ayutthaya, whose traditional date of founding was only a few years earlier than that of Luang Phrabang, gradually extended its control over the outer provinces of the declining Khmer empire towards the south-east. According to tradition the Thai captured the Khmer citadel of Nakhon Ratchasima near the headwaters of the Mun river in the

second half of the seventeenth century. The only outpost of the Thai in the Mekong basin, Nakhon Ratchasima was retained during the eighteenth century as a tiny colony ruled by a Thai-appointed elite who gradually extended their control over the upper Mun basin. The mixed Lao and Khmer population adopted many Thai habits and practices. And by the middle of the nineteenth century this part of the kingdom had developed a unique Thai culture of its own, which has yet to be carefully studied.

The Lao Kingdoms prior to 1779

During the course of Lao political expansion from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries, the central Mekong basin was little involved in

the empires that surrounded it. Vietnamese southward expansion during this period was confined to the narrow band of lowlands along the seacoast. The power of the old Khmer empire, having reached its peak in the twelfth century, waned steadily from the early thirteenth century; and there seem to be no records of any Lao-Khmer wars, even though the Khmer formerly dominated much of the plateau north of their Great Lake homeland into which the Lao were migrating. Luang Phrabang lay astride a caravan route from China and seems to have accepted Chinese suzerainty very early, sending decennial tribute missions to Peking. The power of Burmese kings extended at various times into the Muang principalities and the Shan States; but although both Luang Phrabang and Wiangchan accepted the nominal suzerainty of the strongest Burmese kings, Burma did not try to extend direct control over either. And the Thai, periodically weakened by wars with Burma, presented no threat to the Lao kingdoms until the second half of the eighteenth century.

There is little evidence in the few documents extant from the period prior to the founding of Bangkok that any contact was maintained between the Thai and the Lao. The question of allegiances always came to the fore when any state was engaged in warfare; but the records of the Thai wars with Burma, which lasted from the middle of the sixteenth century until the defeat of the Thai in 1767, and destruction of the capital at Ayutthaya, make only peripheral mention of the Lao kingdoms, as occasional auxiliaries of Burmese armies.1 Following the removal of the Lao capital to Wiangchan, a pact was made between the Lao and Thai kings; a Buddhist monument was erected on the watershed west of Wiangchan between the Mekong and Nan rivers; and religious ceremonies were observed in both capitals simultaneously in 1563 to mark the ‘delineation’ of the two kingdoms.2 If the Thai had any serious designs against the

1. See accounts in Damrong Rachanuphap, ‘Collected Historical Papers, Part 6: Thai Wars with Burma in the Ayutthaya Period’ (Bangkok, 1917).

2.*Thesaphiban*, xxx/114 (Oct. 1915), 8-11: text of inscription, 1563.

Lao at this time, they were forestalled by a Burmese invasion and the surrender of the Thai capital a few years later --a defeat from which they did not recover until the early seventeenth century.

Although Thai writers have, in the twentieth century, tried to claim that the Mekong basin was part of the Thai kingdom much earlier than the late eighteenth century, the fourth king of the Bangkok dynasty himself observed that, during the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767), the Lao states 'were fully independent' and the Thai kings 'honoured the Lao [kings] as equal to themselves'.1

Annexation

Around 1771 Luang Phrabang and Wiangchan fought a minor war in which the Burmese intervened on behalf of Wiangchan, forcing Luang Phrabang once again to accept Burmese suzerainty.2 Perhaps to counterbalance Burmese domination, Wiangchan concluded a pact of alliance at about the same time with the short-lived Thonburi kingdom (1767-1781) which was attempting to restore Thai rule in the Chao Phraya basin. In 1775 Thonburi agreed to give military assistance to Wiangchan in return for a military alliance against Burma.3 At the same time Luang Phrabang also was negotiating an alliance with Thonburi, and exchanged embassies with the Thai in 1776.4 Two years later an excuse was found by Thonburi to intervene militarily in the Lao states. Wiangchan attacked a group of rebellious Lac officials near the site of Ubon in territory to which the Thai laid claim. Thai armies attacked Wiangchan, and also Champasak (which claimed Ubon as well), bringing both kingdoms under Thai

1. Rama IV, 'Collected Proclamations' (Bangkok, 1924), supplement i, p. 82: proclamation, n.d. (1853-1854?).

2. *Thesaphiban*, iii/16 (July 1907), 130: 'Annals of Luang Phrabang and Wiangchan, according to the Ministry of the North Text'.

3. D. Wyatt, 'Siam and Laos, 1767-1827'. *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, iv/2 (Sept. 1963), 15, 17-18.

4. Ibid., 18-19. *Thesaphiban*, iii/16 (July 1907), 130: 'Annals'.

domination in 1779. Luang Phrabang followed soon after.1

The three kingdoms were reduced to the status of principalities, each ruled by a prince of its own dynasty. The Wiangchan prince was succeeded in 1781 by his son, the first ruler to be installed by the Thai (who were themselves just on the point of installing a new dynasty and moving the capital across the river to Bangkok).2 Following a rebellion in Champasak in 1791 Bangkok appointed its own candidate for prince of Champasak from outside the local royal family.3 The next year Bangkok made its first selection of a prince for Luang Phrabang,4 and also created the town of Ubon, appointing a local Lao candidate as first governor to be supervised directly by the Ministry of the North.5

Security in the Mekong basin was of the greatest importance to the stability of the new kingdom controlled from Bangkok. Burma had long been politically and militarily farther advanced than Thailand, with an imperial system that controlled minority groups along its frontiers to significant military advantage. During the restoration of Thai sovereignty over the central Chao Phraya basin, first Thonburi and then Bangkok began to develop politically in a similar way, bringing under effective Thai suzerainty the Khmer, Lao, and Muang states bordering on the east and north. Such

vassals could be expected to provide auxiliary forces in the event of a new Thai-Burmese war. It was essential that the Lao states no longer be free to assist Burma in war against the Thai, as they had done in 1765 and 1774,6 or call upon Burma for aid against the Thai, as Wiangchan had done in 1779 on the eve of annexation.7 The

1 *Thesaphiban*, iii/16 (July 1907), 130-131: 'Annals'. For alternative versions of the succession of events leading to the annexations, see C. Archaimbault, 'L'Histoire de Campasak', *Journal asiatique*, ccxlix/4 (1961), 559-560; and TNL R4/1222/77: memo., n.d. (1860?).

2. TNL R1/1153/2: diploma of appointment, Dec. 1781.

3. TNL R1/1153/2: diploma of appointment, 22 Sept. 1791.

4. TNL R1/1153/2: diploma of appointment, 3 Feb. 1792.

5. TNL R1/1153/2: diploma of appointment, 16 July 1792.

6. Wyatt, 'Siam and Laos', 25-26.

7. TNL R4/1222/77: memo., n.d. (1860?).

defeat of the Lao states allowed Bangkok to resettle part of the Lao populace in sparsely populated areas of strategic importance, such as the upper Sak river basin,1 to help defend potential invasion routes into the kingdom while farther weakening the Lao principalities from whom they were taken.

Relations with Bangkok 1779-1826

Extant documents reveal little about the relationship between Bangkok and the Lao states during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There are no records relating to taxation or appointing local governors. The princes apparently retained all effective powers and privileges in their own states, but sent tribute missions regularly to Bangkok and made other professions of allegiance to satisfy the conquerors. This arrangement was not unlike that between Bangkok and Peking. Wiangchan provided craftsmen and labourers to assist in the construction of new royal palaces and gardens in Bangkok.2 A palace was even maintained in the city for the use of visiting Lao princes and their families.3 Nonetheless, relations between Wiangchan and the newly founded Vietnamese dynasty in Hue may have been as close as those with Bangkok. The Wiangchan prince Anu, following his ascension in 1804, paid homage to Gia-Long and sent tribute missions triennially from 1808 to 1817 to Hue.4

While accepting nominal Thai suzerainty, Wiangchan began to expand its powers. In 1782 Wiangchan secured the submission of the Phuan State to the north and Nakhon Phanom and Kham Koet to the east, whose tribute was taken to Wiangchan and then sent on to Bangkok.5 (See maps 2 and 8.)

1. TNL R4/1213/43: memo., n.d. (after 1836).

2. TNL R2/1181/11: .Chakkri to Prince Anu, 17 Dec. 1819.

3. Phum, ‘Poetical Relation of a Tour to Bang Yi Khan Palace in 1869’ (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1922), p. 13 fn. 1 and pp. 18-19.

4. Bui Quang Tung, ‘Chao Anou, roi de Vientiane, à travers les documents vietnamiens’, *Bulletin de la Société des etudes indochinoises*, new series, xxxiii/4 (1958), 401. Wyatt, ‘Siam and Laos’, 26-27.

5. TNL R1/l147/7: Nanthasena to Rama I, 4 Aug. 1782.

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This arrangement probably enhanced the powers and prestige of Wiangchan more than those of Bangkok. Accusing his traditional rival the Luang Phrabang prince of plotting against Wiangchan with the Burmese, the Wiangchan prince attacked and captured Luang Phrabang in 1792 with tacit Bangkok approval. A weak state at all times anyway, Luang Phrabang seems to have been a dependency of Wiangchan in fact, if not officially, from about this time--while continuing to send tribute to Thailand, to Vietnam, and to China as well.1

Alliances and allegiances in the Lao states had never been lasting ones; and undoubtedly prince Anu, son of the king whom Bangkok had defeated, sought from the beginning of his reign to find a way to throw off all ties of Vassalage and establish his rule over all the Lao states. Champasak had been weakened by losses of territory to newly created towns--such as Yasothon in 1814--which were placed directly under the supervision of the Ministry of the North2. A rebellion in Champasak in 1819 provided the occasion for expanding Wiangchan control to the south. Having suppressed the rebels after the former Champasak prince had fled, Anu was able to get Bangkok to approve the appointment of his son to the post of Champasak prince.3 Thus by the end of the reign of Rama II in Thailand, Anu had established some measure of influence over all the Lao states.

Rebellion 1827-1828

A combination of circumstances following the death of Rama II in 1824 provided the most favourable situation for breaking all ties with Bangkok. The Lao kingdoms had been suppressed only a half century earlier; and it was still by no means a foregone conclusion that Thailand should dominate the Mekong basin permanently. Bangkok and its dynasty were still relatively new in the 1820s in comparison with

1. MAE CP Siam 10/68: Kergaradec to Flourens, 4 Oct. 1887.

2. Archaimbault, ‘L’Histoire de Campasak’, 565-566.

3. Damrong, ‘Introduction’, in Decha Adison, ‘A Poem of Remembrance’ (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1923), p. 5.

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the Lao capitals. And even in the reign of Rama III attacks from Burma were still feared by Bangkok.1 The defensive posture of the kingdom was traditionally oriented towards the western borders because of centuries of warfare with the Burmese. The eastern defences remained

undeveloped. Both prince Anu and the Luang Phrabang prince journeyed to Bangkok in 1825 for the royal cremation. The Luang Phrabang prince decided to remain in the capital to enter the Buddhist Order temporarily,2 leaving only subordinate princes to manage affairs at home. The elite of Bangkok may have appeared divided politically to Anu, as the succession in 1824 was a somewhat irregular one. The change of reigns was always one of great uncertainties in the best of times; but the most powerful prince, son of a commoner-consort, had ascended as Rama III although he had two younger half-brothers of higher rank, both sons of a queen. Furthermore, a lengthy debate was in progress at court over whether or not to sign a treaty proposed to Britain, which was in fact designed to bind the action of the Thai on the Burma frontier while Britain was engaged in the first Burma war, as much as it was to facilitate commerce.3 The kingdoms of the region were not accustomed to entering into such agreements: to do so was probably regarded as a sign of weakness and a threat to the city, which was the symbol of authority that held intact the tenuous links of vassalage. One need only note that Thailand broke into numerous warring factions following the Burmese capture of the old capital in 1767 to recognise the crucial significance of the fate of the city to the survival of the kingdom. An uprising in an eastern coastal province in 1824J5 was a further indication of weakness in Bangkok.4 Towards the end of 1826 when the

1. Rama V, 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 33: The Eastern Regions, a Sermon in Honour of King Rama III' (ed. Bangkok, 1926), p. 44.

2. *Thesaphiban*, iii/16 (July 1907), 136-138: 'Annals'.

3. The text of the Treaty of 20th June 1826 is published in C. U. Aitchison, ed., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta, 1929), xiv,, 115-120.

4. Powaret Wariyalongkon et alia, 'Biographies of the First Four Kings of the Chakkri Dynasty, in Sermon Form' (Bangkok, 1887), pp. 207-208.

signing of the British treaty in Bangkok became known in the Lao states--the text indicating that the British would return to exchange ratifications during the month of January 1827--Anu saw the time most favourable for an attempt to throw off Thai domination and restore the independence of the Lao.

Anu departed Wiangchan with his army in January 1827, and arrived at Nakhon Ratchasima in February. Having captured the Thai fortress while the governor was away,the Lao forces were counter-attacked in the middle of March by an army commanded by other high Nakhon Ratchasima officials, who had notified Bangkok of events immediately.1 By the end of the month the Thai army had arrived. Anu withdrew to his capital, and then fled eastward into the mountains before the Thai captured it in May.2

Part of the following year was spent by Anu conducting negotiations with Hue. An escort of Vietnamese soldiers was provided to accompany him back to Wiangchan, where he was re-installed in July 1828. Attempts by Hung to reach an agreement with the Thai over the matter came to naught. Vietnamese overtures to the court were ignored.3 Anu himself began to execute Thai soldiers in Wiangchan; and the remainder of the Bangkok forces withdrew. The~ a small detachment of Vietnamese, including an emissary from the Vietnamese court, sent to seek an

entente with the Thai was massacred on the orders of a Thai general.4 The Thai army regrouped and attacked Wiangchan again. Anu fled north to the Phuan State where the Phua6 prince, under the threat of invasion, was persuaded by the Thai commander to give him up. Anu was taken to Bangkok and soon died from torture and neglect. All resistance against Thailand collapsed.

1. TNL, ed., 'A Collection of Accounts and Documents.concerning Nakhon Ratchasima' (Bangkok, 1968). pp. 29-31: elders of Nakhon Ratchasima to Chakkri, 23 Mar. 1827.

2. Ibid., pp. 38-40: elders to Chakkri, 1 May 1827. Ibid., pp. 43-44: Phra Khlang to Ong Le Bo, 21 July 1827.

3. W. F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III* (Locust Valley, New York, 1957), p. 87.

4. Rama V, 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 33: The Eastern Regions', pp. 55-57.

Chapter Two: Thai Policy towards Vietnam in the Lao States

During the half century that followed the Prince Anu revolt, Thai activities in the left bank of the Mekong river were determined by three distinct policies, each corresponding to one of three major geographical regions east of the river. (See map 2.) In the south the 'lower left bank' region consisted of the Khong and Don river basins, and the remnants of the old Champasak kingdom down to Stung Treng at the mouth of the Khong River, which was the southernmost limit of Thai domination. The San and Srepok basins can be entirely ignored, for the wild mountains they drained formed an effective barrier against neighbouring peoples. The 'middle left bank' region is framed by the segment of the Annamite Cordillera which narrowly separates the South China Sea from the Mekong. It is penetrated deeply by three river basins--the Banghian, Bangfai, and Kadin--each of which is joined by passes across the mountains to the lowlands lying between the Vietnamese cities of Hue and Vinh. The 'upper left bank' region is geographically the most complex. A central plateau region, drained towards the east by the Ca river into Vietnam and towards the south by tributaries of the Mekong, was settled by the Phuan, a people ethnically the same as the lowland Lao but speaking a separate dialect. Situated immediately to the north, around the head waters of the Ca, Chu, and Ma rivers which drain eastward into Vietnam, were the Huaphan states, whose people were similarly little different from the Lao, as also were those of the Sipsong Chuthai states situated even further north along the uppermost reaches of the Ma and Da rivers. The western limits of these three states were framed by the Lao principality of Luang Phrabang, whose people were settled in all the river valleys draining into the Mekong.

Upper Left Bank: Dual Suzerainty

Prior to the Anu revolt, the tiny towns of the Huaphan states were considered as vassals of Wiangchan. They probably paid tribute also to the Vietnamese governors of provinces downriver to the east. Thai armies at Wiangchan

during 1827-1828 did not advance to the north; and the Huaphan states passed under Vietnamese control alone until about 1833. At the beginning of the wars between Thailand and Vietnam which lasted through the 1830s and 1840s, a Thai expedition was sent by way of Luang Phrabang to secure the frontier north-east of the Mekong. Faced with the threat of a Thai attack, the Huaphan governors agreed to accept allegiance to Bangkok. They were too insignificant for direct supervision from the capital, and so were given as vassals to the Luang Phrabang prince.1 The towns were isolated, of little economic value, and especially difficult to govern because there was no good route linking the two states. They were thus simply neglected by the prince.2 Luang Phrabang itself did not recognise the Bangkok king as its sole suzerain at this time, and was considered by the Lao living along the borders between Thailand and the Lao states to be a vassal of Hue as well as of Bangkok.3 So long as there were no disturbances in the hinterlands, the

Vietnamese--like the Thai--were satisfied to receive occasional tribute missions from Luang Phrabang, plus irregular tax payments and other professions of allegiance from the isolated towns in the head waters of the Ca, Ma, and Da river basins.

The situation of the Sipsong Chuthai states was similar. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Bangkok accepted this area as subject to both Luang Phrabang and Vietnam.4 Luang Phrabang claimed suzerainty over the states as a matter of prestige, but without being able to exercise authority., partly because Vietnamese intervention there was more direct than in the Huaphan and partly because the Black Thai populace resisted Luang Phrabang domination and were culturally oriented towards Vietnam. The Vietnamese even built and maintained for a time a 600 metre square moated fortress at Dien Bien Phu just east of the watershed

1. TNL R3/ll97/4: Thammathibet to Huaphan governors, 21 Nov. 1835.

2. TNA R5M64/17/6: Waiworanat to RV, 31 May 1886.

3. J.-B. Pallegoix, 'Notice sur le Laos', *Bulletin de la Société de géographie*, second series, v (1836), 41-42.

4. TNL R1/1168/2: Rama I to Emperor of Vietnam, 1 May 1806.

between the Da and the upper U rivers.1 Thai royal commissioners in the mid-nineteenth century, although expressing concern that the vassal states of Luang Phrabang were untrustworthy, nonetheless did not attempt to fortify positions beyond the upper U river basin opposite Dien Bien Phu.2 By the 1850s Luang Phrabang had ceased to consider the Sipsong Chuthai as her vassals; and nearly thirty years passed before the prince, prodded by Bangkok to reassert his claim over the area while Vietnam was weakened from French intervention, sent his own representatives to Dien Bien Phu along with a Thai commissioner, who

> 'returned to Luang Phrabang, bringing fourteen people: the lord governor, elders, and interpreters. In speaking to the Dien Bien Phu governor, [the Thai commissioner] Phraya Phichai, the Luang Phrabang prince-*ratchawong*, and I [the reigning prince] impressed upon them the fact that the French have already captured Vietnam. It is true that the governor of Dien Bien Phu is Vietnamese, but by chance lives in the territory of Luang Phrabang, a vassal of Bangkok. He thus ought to submit himself as a subject only of Luang Phrabang, which is a vassal of Bangkok. Under our inducements, the Dien Bien Phu governor's side agreed. We have thus seized the governor and are holding him in Luang Phrabang. Whether we should appoint him to return to Dien Bien Phu as lord governor, subject to Luang Phrabang alone--or subject to both sides as previously--or whether we should send him down to Bangkok will depend on Bangkok's pleasure.'3

This report reveals the extent of rule maintained by both sides in the Sipsong Chuthai and Huaphan states. Each officially claimed sovereignty, while recognising that the border lands were in fact subject to dual suzerainty. Neither side exercised any regular authority, other than that which the occasional military intervention could enforce temporarily. Governors were semi-independent, undoubtedly with a locally recognised hierarchy of stronger and weaker towns, paying modest tribute to whichever

1. MAE Pavie 7: Pavie journal, entry for 15 Feb. 1888.

2. TNL R4/1213/44: Luang Phrabang prince-*ratchawong* to Chakkri, 20 Feb. 1852.

3. TNL R5/7/8: Luang Phrabang prince to Chakkri, 2 July 1884.

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outside power was strong enough to send commissioners to collect. Unlike the towns of the right bank placed under direct Thai supervision, the towns of the Huaphan and Sipsong Chuthai were not organised into an administrative system which fits the model of the Thai-dominated towns of the right bank. Bangkok did not even have a fixed list of towns in this region to which it laid claim.1

In the middle of the nineteenth century the Phuan State further south also became subject to dual suzerainty. The intervention by both the Thai and the Vietnamese in its internal affairs prior to mid-century were far more serious than elsewhere. From 1829 to 1833 Vietnam attempted to extend direct rule over the Phuan plateau, building fortresses on the old frontier between Wiangchan and the Phuan State.2 To counter the Vietnamese offensive, and at the same time overawe other vassals on the left bank, a Thai army was sent in 1833 to attack Phuan towns, using as an excuse the fact that the Phuan State had failed after 1828 to resubmit to Thai suzerainty through the newly established town of Nongkhai on the right bank,3 which had superseded old Wiangchan as the principal administrative centre. Unlike the Vietnamese, however, the Thai did not occupy the region, but merely attacked and carried off a portion of the populace. Bangkok was still in the process of reorganising the Lao territories on the right bank which were left in turmoil following the dissolution of the Wiangchan principality, and already involved in a major war with Vietnam in the southeast. The Phuan State was simply too far away for Bangkok to attempt to administer or defend effectively. The 1833 Thai attack was unsuccessful in displacing the Vietnamese,

1. Half the town names differ in two separate lists of the Huaphan states prepared in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of the sites are today obscure. Compare TNL R5/38/28: list of Lao towns, n.d. (late 1860s with corrections in the early 1870s); TNA R5M64/2-8: diplomas of investiture, 27 Oct. 1886; and TNA R5M64/9-16: diplomas of investiture, 22 Feb. 1887.

2. SOM Indochine Cl0(193): Neis to Ministre de la Marine,
1 Dec. 1884, annexed memo. ‘Notions historiques’, 20 Nov. 1884-

3. TNL R3/ll97/4: Thammathibet to Huaphan governors, 21 Nov. 1835.

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who returned once the Thai soldiers had withdrawn.1

In 1834 Bangkok formulated a new policy to prevent the expansion of Vietnamese power: the entire Phuan population was to be evacuated and the state thus entirely destroyed. Orders were sent to the Thai commander to round up the populace and divide them as spoils of war to the Lao governors of the right bank towns.

> ‘It will be well if someone can go up to prevail upon and take away the Phuan families, so that the Phuan State will have no population at all remaining. If you feel that within this year 1834-1835 you cannot prevail upon and carry off the entire Phuan population, and that some will be left behind, then impress upon the lords governors and elders of N0ngkhai, N0nghan, and Chaiburi that they must appoint men to maintain border posts to watch over and investigate official matters very strictly and to be wary in preventing any Phuan people who have already been carried off from being able to flee back to their homes. When the dry season (March-May 1835) arrives you are to plan to continue to prevail upon and take away the Phuan who are left behind there. If they will come willingly, then prevail upon them to come down.
>
> If you feel that not all will come willingly, and that some will still be left behind, then we shall send an army up to attack and carry off every one of them, so that they cannot be a source of food and supplies for our enemies in future.’2

Total depopulation of this isolated region could never have succeeded; but from the point of view of Bangkok, nonetheless, the Phuan State officially ceased to exist.

In early 1836 on orders from the Thai commander who was at Luang Phrabang to direct a general campaign against all three of the upper left bank states, the prince-uparat of Luang Phrabang attacked the Phuan State and began to carry out the depopulation orders.3 A second Thai attack was directed from N0ngkhai north into the Phuan State. Phuan governors and elders were taken to Bangkok in April 1836, but allowed to return home after receiving gifts from the king in an attempt to provide them with inducements to

1. SOM Indochine C10(193): Neis, ‘Notions historiques’.

2. TNL R3/l196/58: Chakkri to Ratchawarin, 16 Apr. 1834.

3. *Thesaphiban*, iii/16 (July 1907), 140: ‘Annals’.

persuade the populace to emigrate and resettle in new towns on the right bank. In mid-1836, however, a Vietnamese mandarin appointed new Phuan governors to all of the towns; and the governor of one town was disciplined for sending a mission to Luang Phrabang with tribute. In early 1837 a Thai army once again attacked the Phuan State, drove the Vietnamese and much of the populace across the watershed into the upper Ca river basin portion of the Phuan plateau, and burnt the Phuan capital Chiang Khwang.1

It was already clear to Bangkok that the Phuan could not be treated in the same way as the docile Huaphan populace farther north. Bangkok was worried not only that the Phuan would openly resist all Thai attempts to dominate them, but also that the Vietnamese were taking advantage of their close ties with the Phuan elite to maintain troops in the state, collect taxes, and persuade the Phuan to adopt Vietnamese customs. With a strong base in the Phuan State, the Vietnamese might easily begin to interfere in the affairs of other Mekong basin towns dominated by Thailand. Orders were thus sent out in May 1837 to have arrested any Phuan governors seeking to establish ties of vassalage with Luang Phrabang; and yet another depopulation campaign was ordered for early 1838 in an attempt to destroy the remaining Phuan towns. The state had already been extensively

depopulated; but the Phuan people who had been taken to the right bank were resisting resettlement and taking every opportunity to flee homewards. Bangkok thus ordered a general evacuation of all Phuan peasants from both banks of the Mekong down into the Thai kingdom itself so that they could no longer attempt to return home.2

These measures merely weakened the Phuan State and provided only a partial solution to the Vietnamese threat. Bangkok recognised early 1838 that further Thai attacks would only continue to drive the Phuan to seek and support Vietnamese intervention. Orders sent to the governor of N0ngkhai for a significant change in tactics noted with resignation that

1. TNL R3/1208/28: depositions of Phia Thiamchai and Phia Sihanam, 5Apr. 1846.

2. TNL R3/l199/l: Chakkri to Phiren, 28 May 1837.

> 'It appears one cannot place any trust in the affairs of the Phuan State. For a long time now the Phuan people have paid respect to the Vietnamese, and have been intending to rely on the support of Vietnam. The bloody Vietnamese have come to administer the Phuan State.'l

The governor was instructed to maintain Surveillance over the Phuan State and send reports of any new developments to Bangkok, while continuing to remove all Lao people from the left bank of the Mekong near Nongkhai.

A compromise was reached during the 1840s whereby Bangkok tacitly accepted Vietnamese domination over the Phuan State and the presence of a Vietnamese resident commissioner. The Thai continued to distrust the Phuan, however, and admitted that Phuan tribute sent to Bangkok through the intermediary of the Luang Phrabang prince was merely a ruse to ward off further attacks.2 Order was restored in the state during the early 1840s; and although the Thai continued an effort of peaceful resettlement on the right bank by offering inducements to Phuan elders to persuade their peasants to emigrate, the Vietnamese felt secure enough to allow the old elite and their families--held in Vietnam since 1829--to return home to Chiang Khwang on the occasion of the ascension of the new emperor in 1847.3

The return of the old elite, with the son of the former Phuan prince as new governor, nearly drew Bangkok into renewed conflict. Internal rivalries, and the resistance of the Phuan elders not only to Thailand but also to Vietnam, were major reasons leading Hug to remove them entirely from Chiang Khwang in 1829. Many of those who returned in 1847, including the son of the new governor, decided in April 1850 to seek closer ties with Bangkok; while in October of the same year the governor and other elders made an embassy to Vietnam and returned home with the news that the Phuan State had been raised to the status of a principality under the authority of Hue. Vietnamese soldiers continued to be posted

1. TNL R3/1200/11: Chakkri to Prathum, 31 Aug. 1838.

2. TNL R3/1206/36: Chakkri to Phraya Phichai, June/Aug. 1844.

3. TNL R3/1214/75: depositions of Thao Thap and Thao Phromma, Jan./Feb. 1853.

in rotation at the Chiang Khwang capital; and early in 1851 Bangkok issued orders to have the prince and Phuan families forced to resettle on the right bank of the Mekong.1

Some resettlement did take place in 1851; but in April King Rama III (1824-1851) died; and his brother who ascended as Rama IV was reluctant to act with force against the Phuan State. Rama IV noted that various Phuan elders had come to Bangkok to declare their allegiance, but had been sent down by Vietnamese-appointed Phuan governors who were reluctant to go themselves even to Thai-controlled Nongkhai. Preferring the tactic of sending gifts of clothing and money up to Nongkhai as enticements for the Phuan elders to resettle on the right bank, the king ordered the policy of persuasion to be renewed, observing that the Thai position in the Phuan State was still very weak.

> 'The Phuan State formerly was a vassal of Wiangchan. When Prince Anu revolted, the Phuan people all sought shelter under the Vietnamese. Vietnam and Bangkok broke diplomatic relations. These requests by Thao Thap [son of the Phuan prince] and the Phuan elders to remain at Chiang Khwang to oversee the peasants were made only because they feared we would send an army up to attack unexpectedly, and totally destroy their homeland. They thus sent representatives to negotiate just enough to establish a tendency towards friendly rapport with our side as well. The statements of the Lao-Phuan cannot be trusted.'2

Nonetheless, as a result of negotiations through the Nongkhai governor in late 1851, the Phuan prince accepted the Bangkok king once again as the second suzerain of his state; and in early 1852 he sent a tribute mission to

Luang Phrabang.3 The policy and attitudes of the 1840s were thus maintained from the beginning of the new reign in Bangkok. There was to be no attempt to extend Thai control into the region--Bangkok still did not recognise the existence of the state--but merely a continued effort to remove the populace from the left bank to the right. A vague dual suzerainty very much in favour of Vietnam was thus

1. TNL R4/1213/19: Phonphisai *uparat* to Chakkri, 13 Mar. 1851.

2. TNL R4/1213/34: Chakkri to Prathum, 27 June 1851.

3. TNL R4/1213/44: Luang Phrabang prince-*ratchawong* to Chakkri, 20 Feb. 1852.

re-established. The Thai remained wary into the 1570s of extending direct authority over any of the Phuan region.1

Middle Left Bank: Neutralisation

The mission of the second Thai campaign against Anu was to recapture Wiangchan, remove its populace to other Lao towns and into Thailand, pull down its fortifications and raze the city to the ground. The city and principality of Wiangchan thus ceased to exist. Its former territory on the

right bank was divided up among the right bank governors; and each of their towns, along with the newly established town of Nongkhai, slightly downriver opposite the old city of Wiangchan, was placed under the direct supervision of the Minister of the North. However, the status of left bank vassals of Wiangchan, especially in the middle left bank region drained by the Bangfai, Banghian, and Kadin rivers, was not recognised at all by Bangkok.

After the annexation of the Champasak kingdom and the installation of a new Vietnamese dynasty at the turn of the century, the towns of the Banghian basin owed allegiance to both Hue and Champasak. (See map 3.) The governor of Tapon was appointed by the Champasak prince, and sent an annual tribute of silk to Champasak and a triennial tribute of elephants and beeswax to Hue.2 Prior to the Anu revolt, however, Vietnamese power in the region had expanded. Hue appointed local officials to each of the principal towns; and the towns discontinued sending tribute to Champasak.3 Preoccupied with reorganising the towns of the right bank of the Mekong as well as with resettling thousands of prisoners of war captured during the 1828 Wiangchan campaign, Bangkok did not turn her attention immediately towards the middle left bank.

It was not until July 1831 that a special commissioner, Phra Sunthon (governor of Yasothon), arrived on the Mekong

1. TNL R4/1228/8: Phisaisuradet to Chakkri, 27 Mar. 1873.

2. TNL R4/1214/8: deposition of Thao Klang, May/June 1852.

3. TNL R3/1205/15: depositions of the Tapon elders, Wang elders, and Ranong.elders, n.d. (ca. May 1852).

as acting governor to Nakhon Phanom, a town centrally situated for military operations against the middle left bank.1 His mission was to create observation posts along the Vietnamese frontier, to gain the allegiances of frontier governors, and to resettle large numbers of peasants on the right bank. His first task was to evacuate the old town of Mahachai on the Bangfai river, formerly a dependency of both Wiangchan and Hue. Mahachai had administered the Bangfai basin and apparently the right bank basin of the Karo River which includes the Sakon Nakhon lake. Sunthon resettled the Mahachai peasantry around the lake and in the upper Songkhram River basin to the north which had been dominated by the town of N0nghan immediately to the west.2 The old town of Mahachai was abandoned and its administrative centre moved to the right bank where the town of Sakon Nakhon was then created to supersede it. Sakon Nakhon nonetheless retained rights over the old Mahachai territory in the Bangfai basin, continuing to collect taxes in the region.D And ultimately Sakon Nakhon was permitted to establish the small town of Phuwadon as an administrative centre near old Mahachai.4 Elsewhere the resettlement efforts were not initially a success.

By 1832 many Lao families that had been taken to the upper Chi river basin were fleeing back to the left bank.5 In early 1833 Vietnamese soldiers established a camp on the Mekong directly opposite Nakhon Phanom. Bangkok feared a pact between Hue and the former governor of Nakhon Phanom (who had fled to Mahachai during the Anu revolt), which would allow the governor to consolidate control over Mahachai all the way up to the Mekong. A combined

Lao-Vietnamese army might then be able to attack the Thai post at Nakhon Phanom. Instructions were thus sent to Sunthon not

1. TNL R3/l193/7: Sunthon to Chakkri, 11 Dec 1831. The site of Nakhon Phanom is thought to have been moved across to the right bank a decade or two before the Thai annexations.

2. TNA R5M59/5/89: Suriyadet to Rattanabodin, 23 Mar. 1891.

3. TNA R5M62.1/26/367: Maha Amat to Chakkri, 26 Mar. 1889.

4. TNL R4/1225/133: appointment edict, Nov./Dec. 1863.

to attack or quarrel with the Vietnamese, but neither to negotiate nor to yield to them on the question of the 'borders'.1 Thai influence in the region remained weak; 'and in mid-1834 Vietnamese mandarins were actively seeking an alliance with the towns of Mukdahan, Khemmarat, Ubon, Yasothon, and the remnants of Mahachai to fight against the Thai armies.2

Due to the initial insuccesses of the Sunthon mission, the resistance by the peasantry to resettlement, and the renewed danger of Vietnamese expansion, Bangkok decided to send an army to Nakhon Phanom to deal with the entire left bank problem.3 Declaring that the left bank towns were in rebellion for requesting aid from Hue both during and after the Anu revolt, and for failing to submit to Thai domination, Bangkok justified sending an army in 1834 to move the populace forcibly to the right bank and to destroy the old towns of the left bank.4 The real reason was of course strategic.

> 'An edict expressing the views of His Majesty [King Rama III] was sent out to the royal commissioners to make plans with the lords governors and elders to remove by force absolutely all families from the eastern banks of the [Mekong] river. Whenever they have any opportunity--in the dry or rainy seasons--they are to take forces up to attack any province that joined the Vietnamese, and remove the populace forcibly, so as to cut completely the routes of the Vietnamese armies.'5

Bangkok was already involved in a major war with Vietnam, having taken advantage of disorders around Saigon in 1832 to send a large naval force eastward along the Cambodian coast and later two armies into the middle and upper Mekong regions.6 One army sent by way of Nakhon Phanom advanced

1. TNL R3/l195/5: Chakkri to Chanthasuriyawong, 31 May 1833.

2. TNL R3/l196/12: Nghe-An mandarins to governors of Khemmarat, Mukdahan, Ubon, Yasothon, and Mahachai, 20 June 1834.

3. TNL R4/1215/65: Chakkri to Nakhon Phanom Uparat, 11 Aug. 1853.

4. TNL R3/1206/33: Chakkri to Mukdahan elders, 9 Aug. 1844. TNL R3/1197/4: Thammathibet to Huaphan and eastern-Lao governors, 21 Nov. 1835.

5. TNL R5/15/1: memo., n.d. (1830s).

6. Rama V', 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 33: The Eastern Regions', pp. 60-61.

towards the cordillera, capturing Mahachai in the Bangfai basin and the small towns of the lower Banghian.1 The attack evidently did not extend so far as the Kadin or the upper Banghian basins.

In contrast to the policy already being implemented farther north, in which the Wiangchan and upper left bank peoples were attacked and carried great distances away into Thailand, the mission of the middle left bank armies was at first only to gain the allegiances of the people and induce them to migrate across to the right bank. Phra Sunthon persuaded Bangkok that mere armed attacks on the left bank would only cause chaos; and that resettlement could be better accomplished by acting through the existing elites.2 Thus during the decade following 1834 the highest officials of the towns of the Kadin, Bangfai, and lower Banghian were invited frequently to Bangkok where they were entertained, presented at court, and received extravagant gifts of money and goods from the king.3 The officials were given assurances of appointments to posts in new towns which Were to be created under, and supervised by, the larger towns on the right bank. The left bank elite was thus charged with rounding up the populace in their home areas and persuading them to resettle in areas designated by the royal commissioners. The left bank elite were free, however, to choose any right bank town they wished, and then come under the supervision of the local governor.4 Resettlement assistance was provided by the right bank towns in the form of water buffaloes and seed-rice for planting.5 In 1837 the programme was accelerated in the Kadin basin, when a high ranking commander was sent to force the submission of the Lao and hilltribes towns in the region, and bring the elites

1. Ibid., p. 63.

2. TNL R3/1201/2: Chakkri to governors of Kalasin, Chaiburi, and Sakon Nakhon, 2 Oct. 1839.

3. TNL R3/l197/54: memo. concerning affairs of officials received at court on 5 July 1835, 1 Aug. 1835, 4 May 1836, 3 May 1836, 22 Apr. 183, 20 July 1837, 5 Oct. 1836, 6 Sept. 1837, 10 July 1838, and 17 Dec. 1839.

4. TNL R3/1206/33: Chakkri to Mukdahan elders, 9 Aug. 1844.

5. TNL R3/l199/19: Phrom to Chakkri, 17 June 1836.

to Bangkok to receive gifts and appointments to new towns. During this campaign more than one thousand people were taken to the right bank for resettlement at the new town of Atsamat on the Mekong just above Nakhon Phanom.1 (See map 4.) New orders were sent out in 1838 for the right bank governors to continue to force the Bangfai and Kadin populace to move to the right bank so that none would remain to join or give assistance to the Vietnamese in the event of a Vietnamese armed attack towards the Mekong.2

Within a few years it became obvious that Sunth0n's policy of working through the local elite could not succeed in depopulating the entire left bank. The Vietnamese also were active in the Kadin basin, had resettled a portion of the populace around Nape and other border posts along the watershed, and were collecting taxes as usual. Bangkok thus sent orders for a Series of massive attacks to be made in mid-1839 all along the middle left bank by armies from the right bank towns of Ubon, Khemmarat, Kalasin, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Chaiburi, with the goal of

driving the Vietnamese army away from their camps, out of the left bank region, and thus prevent them from expanding their influence ultimately onto the right bank.3

These attacks continued for a period of several years and were met with considerable resistance. Although Vietnamese mandarins did not actually reside in any of the Banghian towns, they were sent regularly by the Vietnamese governor of Camlo to inspect and collect taxes. Some were reported there in 1840.4 A large army from three right bank towns was sent in 1841, meeting resistance but accomplishing its mission of burning the towns of Wang, Tapon, Phin, and Ranong in the upper Banghian basin and carrying off the

1. TNL R3/l199/3: memo., n.d. (.ca. 1845).

2. *Thesaphiban*, xix/112 (July 1915), 120, 124: Chakkri to Siyotha, 17 Aug. 1838. TNL R3/1200/9: Chakkri to Barommaracha, 17 Aug. 1838.

3TNL R3/1201/2: Chakkri to governors of Kalasin, Chaiburi, and Sakon Nakhon, 2 Oct. 1839.

4. TNL E3/1EO1/ED6: Phrom to Chakkri, 10 Jan. 1840. *Thesaphiban*, xv/87 (June 1913), 121-125: deposition of the Vietnamese mandarin Lai Muk Len, ca. May 1843.

remainder of the peasants and elders who had not fled eastward to seek Vietnamese protection.1 At the same time another army was sent into the Kadin basin to sweep the area once again, carrying off more than 1,900 Lao and hilltribes people.2 Unexpected resistance was met from the hill peoples.

> ‘On 10th January 1841 Phra Sunthon, the lord governor of Nakhon Phanom, sent twenty men from Atsamat to induce the families of the Saek town [their own former residence]. The Saek families would not be persuaded. They took rifles and fired upon the Atsamat unit, which fled back to its own territory. Phra Sunth0n, seeing that the Saek town would not submit voluntarily, thus sent the *uparat* of Chaiburi and the governor of Sakon Nakhon with a force of 500 soldiers to the Saek town. But on 20th April they found no one there. Thus they sent units out to intercept the families and to seek out those hiding in the forests. ...families from the Saek town informed them that the Saek people had fled in November/ December 1840, saying that they would go to take shelter in Vietnam. Our forces set fire to the Saek town and then returned. ‘3

In February 1842 a Thai commissioner commanding an army from Mukdahan attacked the towns of the eastern Banghian basin in order to destroy potential Vietnamese supply lines. More than 2,500 people were carried off; but the governors, high officials, and a portion of the populace fled into the mountains to the east.4 Another major campaign into the area was carried out the following year by armies from the Mekong river bank towns and from Sakon Nakhon. About 2,100 people were carried off to the right bank.5 But most of the Lao elite and an estimated 500 peasants fled into Vietnamese territory, pledged allegiance to the Vietnamese emperor, and settled at Ai Lao near the watershed.6

1. *Thesaphiban*, xiv/80 (Nov. 1912), 48-50: Bodin to Maha Amat, 4 Aug. 1841.

2. Ibid., 50-51.

3. Ibid., 48-53.

4. TNL R5/1204/l: Phrom to Chakkri, 8 May 1842.

5. TNL R3/1204/16: memo. of 10 Mar. 1843 concerning a despatch of 12 July 1843 (sic).

6. TNL R3/12OS/15: deposition of elders from Tapon, Wang, and Ranong, n.d. (ca. May 1852).

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Early in 1843 the governors of the Banghian basin towns attempted without success to find a peaceful solution to the constant Thai raids by seeking to restore the old dual suzerainty arrangement which had been discontinued during the reign of Minh Mang (1820-1841). With the approval of the Vietnamese governor of Camlo, they sought to pay a second tribute to the Thai through the commissioner at Nakhon Phanom.1 The latter, however, received orders to intensify the depopulation campaign and extend it to include Vietnamese peasants living along the frontiers. Already at the beginning of the wars between Thailand and Vietnam that lasted through the 1830s and 1840s, more than 2,000 Vietnamese prisoners of war had been resettled near Bangkok.2 In the middle of 1843 a number of Vietnamese were being moved to towns deep in the interior of Thailand,3 to prevent them from migrating back towards the eastern borders. At the same time Bangkok had sent orders to Phra Sunth0n at Nakhon Phanom to capture Vietnamese living in the valleys of the left bank--especially in the eastern Banghian basin towns--and transport them to Bangkok.4 Orders later specified that Vietnamese should be included in the depopulation of the Bangfai basin to prevent them from attracting more Vietnamese peasants to settle there.5 In order to prevent the Banghian route from being useful logistically to the Vietnamese, Bangkok sent orders for the right bank governors to establish camps in the region after depopulating and burning the towns. Some of the populace was then resettled in the newly created town of Kusuman near Nakhon Phanom; but most were taken farther away from the Mekong, across the mountains

1. *Thesaphiban*, xv/87 (June 1913), 121-125: deposition of the Vietnamese mandarin Lai Muk Len, ca. May 1843.

2. J.-B. Pallegoix, *Description du royaume thai ou Siam* (Lagny, 1854), ii, 289. Rama V, Collected Historical Papers, Part 33: The Eastern Regions', p. 68.

3. TNL R3/1205/160: Maha Amat to Phraya Sukhothai, 18 July 1843.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xv/87 (June 1913), 118-119 : Bodin to Maha Amat, 4 May1843.

5. TNL R3/1211/24: Chakkri to Prathetthani, 19 June 1849.

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and into the upper Chi river basin, to be settled in the new towns of Kutchinnarai, Khorayang, and Saengbadan under Kalasin jurisdiction.I (See map 4.)

In view of the sparseness of the left bank population, and the weakness of Bangkok influence there in the 1830s, the results of the depopulation campaign carried out from 1840 to 1843 by Phra Sunth0n were staggering. During these four years more than 26,500 people (probably not

including children) were forced to emigrate. About 1,150 were transported as slaves to Bangkok or the provinces south-east of Bangkok; an additional 600 were given as slaves to commanders who had carried out the mission; and the remainder were resettled largely in the territories of Mukdahan, Kalasin, and Sakon Nakhon on the right bank, where six small new towns were created for them.2

The Lao peasants continued to resist resettlement; and even those taken as far away as the Chao Phraya basin began in the early 1840s to flee back to the middle left bank. Lao elders sent in pursuit were unsuccessful in inducing them to return. In 1844 more than 2,000 people who had been resettled initially at Khemmarat on the Mekong, fearing to be carried off into Thailand, fled across the river and up into the Banghian once again.3

Renewed fears of a Vietnamese offensive against the Thai-controlled towns along the Mekong prompted Bangkok to order fresh attacks by an army of 3,000 from Ubon against Vietnamese camps and posts in the eastern Banghian region in early 1845.4 There were further clashes between Ubon-Khemmarat armies and Vietnamese forces in the Banghian during 1846.5 But in 1847 Vietnam was still maintaining a 300-man garrison

1. Rama V, 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 33: The Eastern Regions', pp. 74-75. Rama V's date in this account is incorrect. The campaign took place early in 1843 as reported in TNL R3/1204/16 above.

2. TNL R3/1206/205: memo., 22 July 1844. TNL R3/1204/16: memo., l0 Mar 1843e

3. TNL R3/1206/10: deposition of Nai Di, 25 Jan. 1845.

4. TNL R3/1206/205: memo., 20 June 1845.

5. TNL R3/1205/15: depositions of elders from Tapon, Wang, and Ranong, n.d. (ca. May 1852).

at Tapon; and Mukdahan officials were limiting themselves merely to reconnaissance of the left bank.1

A dispute arose among several towns over families that had been forcibly resettled on the right bank south of Khemmarat in the small town of Khongchiam in 1839. (Map 6.) Many of the families were fleeing back to the left bank. The former governor felt he had not received suitably high status in the new town, and was unhappy about losing many of his peasants regularly to neighbouring governors. Bangkok agreed thus to a compromise in its depopulation policy, and allowed the governor to move back to the left bank--but only to the lower Banghian basin--where he was appointed governor of the new little town of Songkhon, to be supervised by Ubon.2 As resistance to resettlement on the right bank continued, with disputes among various right bank towns over the Banghian peasants, large numbers of people continued to move into Songkhon.3 As an officially recognised left bank administrative centre, Songkhon was useful in assisting the continued depopulation effort for the upper Banghian basin as well as for reconnaissance, providing more effective control over recalcitrants.

A distinction was drawn between the lower Banghian, which was considered an extension of Thai-controlled towns, and the upper Banghian, which was regarded as outside the zone of Thai influence. An 1865 order from Bangkok declared that

> ‘We feel it is commendable that the elders of Songkhon and of Phlan have gone up to overawe the (Wang) families and have brought them into the country.’4

Songkhon itself, however, was not entirely under Thai control, for in 1847 the governor openly received Vietnamese mandarins on the Mekong river who had been sent to collect taxes in the nine Banghian towns claimed by Camlo.5 The division of

1. TNL R3/1209/49: Chanthasuriyawong to Chakkri, 19 Mar. 1848.

2. TNL R4/l214/47: Chakkri to Khemmarat elders, 21 Jan. 1853.

3. TNL R4/1216/25: Chakkri to Phrom, 11 Apr. 1854. TNL R4/1214/47: Chakkri to Khemmarat *uparat*, 21 Jan 1853.

4. TNL R4/1227/11: Chakkri to Ubon elders, 2 May 1865.

5. TNL R3/1209/123. translation of Vietnamese letters to Lao governors, 9 June 1847.

the middle left bank was readily apparent to the first French explorers to arrive in the mid-1860s, who paid close attention to the political situation of left bank towns. While the peasants living near the Mekong banks were more under the domination of Bangkok, those in the upper basins considered themselves more under Hue.1 A list of towns along the frontier compiled by the ministry in Bangkok in the late 1860s made a much firmer assessment of the situation than had previously been taken, indicating that the towns of the upper Banghian and the Kadin were towns ‘bordering on Vietnam, supervised and governed by the Vietnamese, not under Bangkok’, whereas the towns of the Phuan State in contrast were listed as ‘vassals of Vietnam, sending tribute annually to Luang Phrabang, and thus claimed by Thailand.2

In the early 185Os Vietnam was still collecting taxes in the upper Banghian towns, but providing no real aid to protect the Lao populace against Thai attacks. The Banghian was near enough to Vietnamese administrative centres east of the cordillera to allow mandarins to extend some administrative supervision over them and to collect taxes annually, whereas the overextended Thai armies were limited to temporary occupation and pillage. The king himself observed decades later that ‘our old methods of administering these border regions were limited to attacking and carrying off the populace forcibly.3 With a few exceptions the Lao towns of the right bank were not officially allowed to maintain any form of administration on the middle left bank except in a narrow strip of land along the Mekong itself. No records suggest that the Vietnamese carried prisoners off into Vietnam. This was a tactic peculiar to the Thai. Thai commanders regularly observed that the Lao populace fled in front of their advancing armies towards the mountains and Vietnamese territory for safety. The populace settled in the narrow passes and around Vietnamese border posts in the upper

1. Le marquis de Chasseloup-Laubat, ‘Exploration du Mékong’, *Bulletin de la Société de géographie*, fifth series, xiv (July-Dec. 1867), 99-100.

2. TNL R5/38/28: list of Lao towns, n.d. (late 1860s with corrections in early 1870s).

3. TNA R5M62.1/32/19: R5 to Phichit, 15 Apr. 1892.

extremities of the valleys, returning to their homes during the rice-planting season if no Thai armies appeared. After many years of these unsettled conditions, the elite of six Banghian towns journeyed to Bangkok in May 1852 to attempt once again to make peace with the Thai and pledge allegiance to Bangkok and the new king Rama IV.1 The little towns were still not officially accepted as part of the Thai provincial administration; but a loose measure of supervision over them was entrusted to the five right bank towns nearest to them. (Map 3.)

In 1865 Bangkok approved a project formulated by Ubon

officials to continue the evacuation of Wang on the upper Banghian and attempt to send more of the populace to a province south-east of Bangkok where the Wang deputy governor had settled earlier.2 Instructions were sent to Mukdahan shortly afterwards to assist in these regular depopulation efforts on the left bank and to maintain reconnaissance over the Vietnamese posts along the borders.3

Although the aged Phra Sunthon, master-mind of the depopulation campaigns of the 1830s and 1840s, relinquished his post as governor of Nakhon Phanom and returned home in early 1854 to govern only Yasothon, Bangkok remained wary of Vietnamese involvement on the left bank and maintained a policy of regular depopulation on a smaller scale. (One of the reasons for the withdrawal of Sunth0n was that Bangkok discovered that he himself had been corresponding surreptitiously with Vietnamese mandarins on the left banks4) Following the French attack against Vietnam, Bangkok sent orders to the Mekong towns to capture any Vietnamese peasants found fleeing west across the mountains, or migrating to the left bank because of impoverished conditions at home, and to resettle them in existing Vietnamese villages around Nakhon Phanom.5 Bangkok felt that the right bank towns should act

1. TNL R3/1205/15: depositions of elders from Tapon, Wang and Ranong, n.d. (ca. May 1852).

2. TNL R4/1227/11: Chakkri to Ubon elders, 2 May 1865.

3. TNL R4/1227/25: Chakkri to Mukdahan elders, 20 July 1865.

4. TNL R4/1216/4: Chakkri to Sunthon, n.d. (mid-1854?).

5. TNL R4/1224/53: Phanom to Chakkri, 14 May 1862.

while Hue was in no position to defend the outer Vietnamese posts, and chided the governor of Sakon Nakhon for failing to take full advantage of the situation:

> ‘The power of the Vietnamese emperor has been greatly weakened. In 1861 the Nakhon Phanom governor sent elders across the (Mekong) river to overawe the Vietnamese population settled on the frontiers of the eastern Lao states; and he got more than one hundred. Vietnamese families to move across the river. You sent elders to overawe them and got eleven families. This is too few. You and the *uparat* are to send elders across to reconnoitre and induce a large number of families to come across into the country.’1

Efforts to prevent Vietnamese peasants from immigrating and settling on the left bank were not entirely successful. They spread into the upper Banghian from the 1850s,2 and also into the depopulated Kadin basin.3 Vietnamese mandarins were actively seeking the establishment of ties in the mid-1850s even with Vietnamese peasants resettled in right bank towns.4

Vietnamese officials continued to supervise the left bank towns in spite of Thai efforts to displace them. Following the French attack in Tonkin in mid-1872 Hue ordered a general mobilisation of left bank peasants to assist her armies. The appeal was made on the basis of the close relationship between the Vietnamese and their allies west of the cordillera:

> 'Do not set yourselves against us, for our lands are like elder and younger brothers.'5

While the Vietnamese were requisitioning Supplies along the borders and the Vietnamese army was making plans to camp on the Mekong river in preparation for the expected campaign against the French, the towns under Thai control maintained surveillance from the right bank.6 By the time news of the

1. TNL R4/1224/38: Chakkri to Prathetthani, 16 Aug. 1862.

2. C. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', *Revue maritime et coloniale*, xxxii (Mar. 1872), 477-478.

3. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 10 Apr. 1892.
4. TNL R4/1216/4: Chakkri to Sunthon, n.d. (mid-1854?).
5. TNL R5/64/16: trans. of Vietnamese edict, 25 July 1872 (?).
6. TNL R5/64/16: Sakon Nakhon governor to Chakkri, 28 Dec. 1872.

troop movements had reached Bangkok late in the year, however, the crisis had already passed and a settlement had already been reached in Tonkin.

Officials from the right bank undoubtedly exerted some control over left bank towns through the reconnoitring system by which each right bank town was given certain areas to observe and instructed to scout 'up to the mountains'.1 (Map 3.) The governor of Nakhon Ratchasima, while on mission as a special commissioner in the late 1850s, designated local officials for towns in the Banghian basin and placed them loosely under the supervision of right bank towns, although the same officials continued to send tribute to Vietnam as before.2 He did not have the authority to make appointments alone; and Bangkok never confirmed them. The Banghian elite nonetheless accepted appointments and confirmations from either right bank governors or from Vietnam; and professed allegiance to both sides.3

With few exceptions Bangkok continued into the reign of Rama V (1868-1910) to regard the towns of the middle left bank officially as non-existent. This neutralised part of the left bank was still considered an extension of the Lao states, but was not organised administratively. Bangkok did not appoint officials to the towns and did not maintain any ceremonial aspects of provincial administration, such as sending representatives to the cremations of governors--both of which functions Hug carried out into the 1880s.4 Taxes were collected by right bank officials for themselves, generally on an irregular basis and not in quantities significant enough to draw the attention of Bangkok. An informal system was maintained in which the right bank elite retained

some control over the inhabitants of the left bank lands where they had formerly governed--and complete control in the fertile lowland strip along the Mekong--and sent

1. TNL R5/49/4: list of towns on the Mekong, n.d. (1866?).

2. For the Phin case see TNA R5M57/28: deposition of the Phin governor, 5 Aug. 1885.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

officials out to collect levies from the left bank people.1

Bangkok was aware that Vietnamese mandarins came regularly into the Khamkoet region to collect taxes and to trade.2 But no move was made to expand Thai control or to recognise the existence of the towns.

Lower Left Bank: Domination

In the early 1820s Champasak still retained the appearance of an important principality; but following the Anu revolt it was stripped of most of its territory and left to rule only a short segment of the Mekong. In 1827 it governed seven towns and numerous small villages, but most of these were taken away by a major administrative reorganisation two years later.3 (Map 5.) Two of its towns on the Don River and one to the south (the only town to occupy an island in the Mekong) were placed directly under Bangkok.

Four smaller towns were given to neighbouring towns to rule. And the villages of Stung Treng, Saenpang, and Attapu were raised to town status directly under Bangkok for the purpose of organising the Khmer and hilltribes people living in the Khong basin along the south-east frontier.4 Thus the powers formerly held by Champasak alone were dispersed among numerous weak towns independent of each other.

The Champasak vassals of the Don basin were retained as administrative centres by Bangkok, and did not suffer the same fates as those of the middle left bank townse There seems to have been almost no Vietnamese involvement in this region. Insulated by the mountains to the south-east, they were so little susceptible to attack by armies from Vietnam that no reconnoitring was maintained along their frontiers. In addition the local elites had acted quickly to join Bangkok during the Anu revolt, giving no cause for their removal from office. Bangkok appointed governors regularly

1. TNA R5M59/5/89: Suriyadet to Rattanabodin, 23 Mar. 1891.

2. MAE CP Siam 7/36: Garnier to Decazes, 26 Feb. 1876, annexed translation, Ho Chin Sin to Thai commissioner, 21 Nov. 1875.

3. TNA R5M62.1/34: Yuttitham to Phitsanuthep, 13 July 1892.

4. TNA R5M62.1/34/l: Phichit to RV, 15 May 1892.

to Salawan,1 and received taxes from the towns on a regular basis. The towns of the lower left bank had little or no contact with Vietnamese officials, and thus remained firmly under Bangkok domination alone.

Outer Dependencies of Thailand, 1830s-1870s

The Lao towns were never given any official status within the Thai provincial system.2 They were all referred to as 'outer' towns, as distinct from the 'inner' towns which constituted Thailand proper. The distinction of 'outer' town was based partly on distance from Bangkok, but more significantly on the form of administration. The governors and officials of the five 'Forest Khmer' towns (Sangkha, Surin, Sisaket, Khukhan, and Det) and Nakhon Ratchasima were given Thai-style ranks as members of the official class of the Thai kingdom; and their administrative structure, as well as the taxation system they employed, were almost the same as those of towns in Thailand proper. In spite of their physical isolation from Bangkok, they were regarded theoretically as 'inner' towns.3 (The Forest Khmer towns were nonetheless never treated entirely as inner towns because of their ethno-linguistic differences.)

In examining the expansion of Thai domination into the Mekong basin during the nineteenth century, one should not speak in terms of 'borders'. Such a concept seems to have been absent from Thai notions of administration. The kingdom of Thailand was the aggregate of inner provinces centring on Bangkok, and the easily accessible coastal provinces to the south and south-east. (Map 8.) Bangkok maintained an imperial system with the king styling himself as supreme sovereign of all border rulers who surrounded him. One should not seek a fixed geographical limit to Thai domination, but rather an understanding of how far, and to what degree in actual practice, the sovereignty of the king

1. TNL R4/1222/134: Chakkri to Salawan *ratchawong*, 23 July 1860.

2. TNA RSM59/31: Prachak to D, 5 Mar. 1897, and D to RV, 16 Mar. 1897.

3. TNA R5M2.3/4/81: proclamation, 24 June 1891. TNA R5 M2.3/4/5: cabinet ministers to RV, 26 June 1891.

extended. The Mekong river itself is the only clearly defined point of reference in nineteenth century documents.

In practice as well as theory all lands on the right bank were exclusively under Thai domination. But Bangkok's attitude towards the left bank was less clearly formulated. The depopulation campaigns from the 1830s into the 187Os--where Thailand was confronted by Vietnam in the Phuan and middle left bank states--clearly represent a general confining of Thai authority to the Mekong river banks, but with no intention of abandoning Thai claims to the adjoining left bank territories. From the beginning of the reign of Rama III the defensive posture of the kingdom shifted from the west, where the traditional enemy Burma had been weakened by British attacks, to the Mekong basin to meet the challenges of the Anu revolt and the wars with Vietnam that

occupied the following two decades. It was to Thailand's advantage to attempt to neutralise parts of the left bank--the weakest and most thinly populated region bordering on Vietnam--and create a buffer zone as a defence against Vietnamese attacks or involvement to the west of the Mekong. Bangkok had never maintained any kind of administration in the left bank states, as they were formerly divided in allegiance among Luang Phrabang, Wiangchan, and Champasak on the one hand, and Hue on the other. The alternative to expanding Thai power into the region was to neutralise it, so as to regain the status quo by which the Thai would not be seriously threatened along this frontier. It was not, moreover, of great importance that the kingdom did not control the territory itself. Bangkok seems to have always been satisfied when frontier peoples submitted to demands for tribute and allegiance, regardless of whether they also were maintaining a similar relationship with Hue or even China. By tradition Thai authority was exercised directly over peasants and only indirectly over land.1 This concept of administration helps to explain why Thai armies were concerned more with carrying off peasants into areas where they could more easily be controlled by Bangkok than with occupying the region permanently.

1. MAE CP Siam 10/32: Kergaradec to Freycinet, 27 Sept. 1886, annexed 'Note philologique'.

Chapter Three: Political Philosophy of Thai Domination

In places where local Lao administration was recognised by Bangkok, the Thai exerted their control exclusively through the Lao aristocracy. The authority of the king was indirect, superficial, and largely ceremonial in nature. Local elites governed according to Lao traditions, retaining effective administrative and judicial autonomy. The Ministry of the North was the sole Bangkok agency concerned with the Lao states. Within the ministry the office of a deputy called the 'Phraya Maha Amat' dealt with all Lao affairs. He was the only high official who made occasional journeys into the region.

Thai knowledge of the region was limited to contacts with the Lao aristocracy. Correspondence was maintained on an *ad hoc* basis; and if there were no news of interest, no reports were despatched to Bangkok at all. For many of the less significant towns where very little of note occurred, this series of correspondence--which began in the 1830s and lasted until the 1890s--was very irregular. Urgent matters were usually discussed by the high officials of the town, who drafted a despatch in the Thai language addressed to the Minister of the North relating all urgent matters which required the attention of Bangkok. The despatch was stamped by all the officials with the seals of office provided to them by the king as part of the regalia, and carried by special messenger to Bangkok. The minister then sent instructions in reply, in the form of a provincial edict which carried the force of law. On rare occasions a special royal commissioner was sent to attend to provincial affairs; but most orders were carried out by the Lao elite themselves.

The Lao elite made frequent visits to Bangkok, partly to maintain their contacts with the court and partly to trade. They also visited relatives whom Bangkok commonly held either as guests, as students in the royal pages corps, or simply as hostages in order to guarantee the allegiance of their families.1 Governors were expected to pay courtesy

1. TNL R3/1205/160: Maha Amat to governors, 22 July 1843. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR.39: Phiren to Chakkri, 28 Nov. 1887.

visits to Bangkok. They usually brought a large number of gifts which were required for distribution among the officials of the Ministry of the North as well as for the king. But the exchange worked in both ways. Visiting governors expected to receive gifts from the king such as cloth, garments, silver vessels, and imported household goods. Such items were always forthcoming as rewards for faithful service. While sending royal gifts to the governor of one distant town, the minister chided him gently for not going to Bangkok for many years to see the king.1

Sons of provincial governors were often left at court for a few years for their education. By taking the opportunity of leaving a son as a royal page, the governor could be assured of maintaining relations and expanding his contacts in Bangkok. The court in turn was pleased to accept the boys

not only as guarantees of submission but also for the opportunity it provided to extend Thai tutelage over future provincial officials. Taking advantage of a journey to Bangkok for the cremation of Rama II, the Luang Phrabang prince left two sons to serve Rama III as pages.2 One of them was the ten year old Prince Unkham, who was to become reigning prince of Luang Phrabang nearly fifty years later.3 Daughters were also sent to court to extend the contacts of provincial families. Apparently no daughters of Lao governors were given to kings as consorts, although two princesses of the Wiangchan dynasty were consorts to Rama IV.4 Lao governors presented some daughters to high Thai officials as minor wives, but the extent of this practice is not known for lack of family records.

Symbols of Royal Authority

Although most affairs were left in the hands of the Lao elite, Bangkok retained certain essential prerogatives:

1. TNL R4/1215/49: Nikorabodin to Prathum, 8 Apr. 1853.

2. *Thesaphiban*, iii/6 (July 1907), 138: 'Annals'.

3. MAE CP Siam 10/75: Kergaradec to Flourens, 22 Nov. 1887.

4. Phum, 'Poetical Relation', p. 1 and fns. 2-3, p. 14 and fn. 2.

5. TNL R4/1213/43: memo., n.d. (1836?).

making appointments to the highest offices, creating new towns, fixing rates of taxation, and waging war.

Whenever a governor died it was customary for the king to do him the honour of lighting his cremation fire. This was usually provided symbolically in the form of a flint and stone apparatus sent out with great ceremony. Men in line for appointments and promotions often took the opportunity of going to Bangkok to request the fire in order to present themselves as candidates for vacant offices.1 Once the cremation was completed, Bangkok sent out new diplomas of investiture and the seals and regalia of office to the new appointees.

The principal regalia consisted of a round ceremonial footed tray, a set of small covered vessels for use in preparing betel for chewing, a spitoon, and a water jug,2 plus a sword of state and a ceremonial umbrella for governors of especially high status. Princes received solid gold pieces. Governors of ordinary towns received silver ones, whereas the *uparats* (or deputy governors) received similar objects of lesser value~ Richly woven or brocaded garments, slippers and pieces of cloth were commonly presented to new governors, *uparats*, and their immediate subordinates the *ratchawong* and the *ratchabut*.3 The regalia were carried about wherever the official went, and displayed as symbols of his status. Presented directly by the king to many new appointees, the regalia were a symbolic tie to the crown. They were returned to Bangkok after the cremation of a deceased official, although this custom was not always followed in the smallest towns.4

The only other public manifestation of Thai authority in the Lao towns, besides the regalia, was a ceremony which took place twice yearly for the drinking of the 'water of

1. TNL R3/1187/6: three memoranda, May/June 1825; two memoranda, 16 Mar. 1843.

2. TNL R5/42/2: inventory of regalia, ca. 1866.

3. MAE Pavie 30 : Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', 470-471.

4. TNL R3/1204/10: Chakkri to Chao Phraya Nakhon Ratchasima, 14 Dec. 1842. E. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos* (Paris, 1897), ii, 54.

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allegiance' to reaffirm loyalty to the king.1 The appointed dates coincided with two important Lao festivals, however, and were probably not maintained in their own right. The ceremony was a symbolic tie between the king and the individual official. Ideally the entire elite, down to the level of village headman, should have participated~ although this was not followed in practice. The gathering of officials took place in an important monastery of the town, where the sword of state presented by the king was dipped into water over which bhikkhus chanted. The oath, required of those who drank, implied damnation after death in the Buddhist hells for those who later proved disloyal. When making new appointments the king exhorted officials to remember to maintain the allegiance ceremonies, performing an obeisance (at least from the time of Rama IV) in the direction of Bangkok.2 Bangkok even sent out a royal calendar annually which gave details of the lunar calendar drawn up by court astrologers.3 But the significance of the allegiance ceremony was not understood by many of the simple elite, who thought they were declaring allegiance to a local official, and not to the king in remote Bangkok.4 Officials of some towns did not participate in the ceremony at all; and at best the others joined only when it suited them.5

Another symbol of royal authority~ over the Lao states was the king's right to receive any white elephant captured in the forests. The white elephant was believed to harbour the spirit of a future Buddha, and was thus of the highest religious significance. Only a supreme sovereign was supposed to have the honour of taking such an elephant under his protection and care; thus the possession of a white elephant was of great concern to the Thai king.6 Control of the Lao

1. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

2. TNL R4/1214/23: Chakkri to Luang Phrabang prince-*ratchabut*, 2 July 1852. TNL R4/1214/24: Royal Instructions to Phra Phisai, l0 July 1852.

3. Aymonier, *Voyage*, ii, 319.

4. TNL R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 2 Jan. 1895.

5. TNA R5PS25/185: Phonphithak to Chakkri, 29 Apr. 1884.

6. TNL R5/57/7: Chakkri to Yuttitham, 23 June 1874.

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states was a matter of prestige in terms of white elephants alone: twenty-seven of the seventy received by the first five kings of the Bangkok dynasty came from the Lao states.1

The Lao Sangha was independent of Thai control. The king did not appoint high ecclesiastical officials to supervise religious affairs in the Lao towns as he did in the inner towns. Royal connexions were nonetheless maintained with the Buddhist Order indirectly. The Thammayut sect, founded by Rama IV while still a bhikkhu himself, spread to the Lao states by the middle of the nineteenth century and was especially strong in Ubon. In addition to royal gifts sent to members of the Sangha to make merit for a governor or high official about to be cremated, the king sometimes sent similar gifts to existing officials to be used for public merit-making ceremonies in the monasteries.2
There were no royally supported monasteries in the Lao states; and no one was appointed to represent the king in important annual ceremonies as was the practice in Thailand proper. But when a special request was made, the king did sometimes make donations to Lao monasteries. Rama III sent gold leaf and pieces of coloured glass to decorate two new monasteries built by the Nongkhai governor, plus yellow robes, sandals, and umbrellas for the bhikkhus.3 Symbolic royal support for the Lao Sangha was thus exercised through the provincial elite.

Small quantities of arms and ammunition were supplied by the king to governors for the purpose of maintaining order and security, and to use during wartime. When Sakon Nakhon was founded it was given 50 flintlock rifles and 2,500 rounds of ammunition.4 Khukhan had an arsenal of 150 flintlocks in 1883, although most were not in working order.5

The Lao states maintained no regular armed forces. Whenever

1. *Thesaphiban*, xi/65 (Aug. 1911), 148-172: list of white elephants.

2. *Thesaphiban*, xix/112 (July 1915) 128: Chakkri to Siyotha, 17 Aug. 1838.

3. TNL R3/1207/291: Chakkri to Prathum, 30 Apr. 184 5.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xix/112 (July 1915), 128.
5. TNL R5/65/25: Sisinghathep to Chakkri, 19 Aug. 1883.

soldiers were needed, the officials of individual towns merely conscripted local peasants, equipped and commanded the force themselves. Sometimes these small armies acted alone, as in many of the depopulation campaigns against the left bank. And whenever Bangkok waged war the Lao forces served as auxiliaries under the Thai army.1

The threat of Thai military power kept the Lao states well in hand. As a matter of policy Rama IV felt that Bangkok must make herself appear powerful in the eyes of provincial people as a practical deterrent against resistance to Thai authority.2 Thai kings were praised as Chakkravartins--world conquerors--an image which was still popular in the middle of the nineteenth century.3 Proclamations sent to the outer towns referred to the divine lineage of the Thai ruler:

> 'His Majesty the Great and Mighty Chulalongkon (Rama V), Sovereign of the Great Crown of the Divinities and Descendent of the Dynasties of the Perfect-Gems and of the Sun ... King of Thailand, both North and South, and of all the lands nearby--which are: the 'Chiang' Lao, the 'Kao' Lao, the Malays, the Karens, and Others--Who maintains the most sublime principles of the Buddhist Dharma.'4

Although the aristocrats, who were able to visit Bangkok occasionally and view the pomp of the court, were always profoundly impressed, one doubts that the image of the king as a divine ruler penetrated to the Lao states, where his right to rule was founded instead upon moral authority according to the principles of the Dharma.5 There was no fixed code of law: the claim to rule by moral correctness rendered it unnecessary.

1. Rama I, 'An Account in Klon Verse of the Battle with the Burmese at Tha Dindaeng in 1787' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1921), p. 23. *Thesaphiban*, xvii/99 (June 1914), 218: Saraphet to Chakkri, 12 Mar. 1846.

2. Rama IV, 'Correspondence of King Rama IV' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1919), i, 9.

3. Phum, 'Verses Composed in Honour of Kings Rama III and Rama IV' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1921), p. 21.

4. TNA R5M64/2: proclamation to Huaphan states, 27 Oct. 1886.

5TNL R1/l147/7: royal letter to Wiangchan prince, ca. 1782.

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Ideal rule was one unmarked by events of serious consequence. The key words of the traditional exhortations to new appointees to provincial office were 'peace and happiness'.

> 'The governor, *uparat*, *ratchawong*, and *ratchabut* . . . are to govern by the 'traditional Buddhist virtues combined with compassion and generosity; to look after the welfare of their relatives, the elders, the people of the land, and merchants, so that they may live in peace and happiness; and to take an interest in Buddhism, maintaining the monasteries and looking after the welfare of the bhikkhus and novices, in order that they may engage in the study of the Dharma so that Buddhism will flourish steadfastly in future.'l

So long as taxes were paid and no incident arose, Bangkok remained uninvolved /and uninterested in Lao affairs. Most of the correspondence with the Lao elite was merely in response to external events, and did not represent any initiative on the part of the Thai towards internal town affairs. No state services were provided other than those involved with appointments, although the right of appeal for justice was reserved to the king in theory.

Each Lao high official was expected to be familiar with the 'royal laws' as well as the local customs, usages, and traditional Lao law. In practice this meant merely using 'good judgement' or common sense. Appointments to the highest posts required as a qualification no particular knowledge of law at all. From the Lao viewpoint the ideal governor

> 'governs correctly according to customs handed down from the past, he looks after the welfare of the people, he is devoted to Buddhism, he listens to the festival-season sermons every year without fail, and he decides cases involving litigation among the people with justice and correctness according to the royal laws.'2

Although widely bandied about, the term 'royal laws' had little substance. There were no legal texts; and provincial officials did not in fact have any particular knowledge of Thai law. One royal commissioner sent to supervise affairs in the Lao states complained:

1. TNL R4/1214/24: royal instructions to the Phonphisai governor, 10 July 1852.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Salawan: Salawan elders to Chakkri, 17 Feb. 1891.

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> ‘Because in the Lao states there exists nothing but mischief and oppression according to one’s personal powers, and because there exists no. benevolent desire to act according to the royal laws, whenever I give counsel to the elders and make judicial decisions concerning wrongful acts, they say they have no knowledge of the royal laws. Whatever ought to be done will depend on his majesty’s wishes.’1

Bangkok’s reply was the inane suggestion that the commissioner Should learn everything about the royal laws himself, so that he might in future judge cases well.

> ‘You are to read and examine the royal laws diligently so that you understand each and every point. In giving any judicial decision, you are to decide with accuracy in every way according to the royal laws and to justice.’2

In the matter of appeals Bangkok was slow and unresponsive. Any appeal could be made only through existing officials and was limited, for practical purposes, to the aristocracy alone. Appeals for Bangkok intervention in disputes among governors were not vigorously pursued either. Of twenty-two major cases concerning disputes over territory and peasant control brought to court by various governors from 1875 to 1883, only five had been settled when a general investigation of all such cases was finally undertaken in late 1883 as a result of serious disturbances in the area involved.3

The relationship between the Lao states and Bangkok was clearly a ritual which had constantly to be affirmed. Favour gained at court had to be replenished periodically lest it become depleted by circumstances of which Bangkok disapproved. In reducing the authority of one especially powerful governor, the king warned him:

> ‘The privileges gained by your past achievements have been exhausted.’4

There was so little substance in this suzerain-vassal relationship in the Lao states themselves, however, that foreigners who came into the frontier states in the latter half of the nineteenth century seriously questioned Thai

1. TNA R5PS25/8: Phakdi to Chakkri, 11 Oct. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS25/210: Chakkri to Phakdi, ca. July 1884.

3. TNA R5PS25/40: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883.

4. TNL R4/1216/4: Chakkri to Sunthon, ca. 1854.

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sovereignty. The British consul was first in 1860 to raise doubts about the dependence of the Muang principalities on Bangkok.1 The French consul reported in 1865 that the authority of the king did not seem to extend beyond the Chao Phraya basin.2 So indiscernible was the political influence of Bangkok in the Lao towns even in 1890 that a French agent likened the relation

between a Lao governor and the king to that of a farmer who sent his rents to his absentee landlord, adding that

> 'la grande habilité des siamois, au point de vue de leur domination sur le pays: ils ont su, tout en restant maitres absolus, laisser entière une organisation dont les laotiens du reste ne se sont jamais plaintes.'3

It was difficult for Europeans to see that the ritual nature of relations was the glue that kept provincial administration from coming unstuck. So long as ritual was maintained, it was to be hoped that the life of the countryside would remain idyllic as it did in towns of ancient myths:

> 'The Solar Dynasty Prince and the people of Udon-Panchan town paid homage to the Naga Lord. Every year this was consecrated without fail. The land was thus bounteous and happy and not endangered.'4

The highest officials in Bangkok were constantly preoccupied with the organisation and staging of royal and religious ceremonies, sometimes to the detriment of their mundane responsibilities of managing everyday affairs.5 Even the king, wearied by ceremonies and impatient to get on with more pressing matters of state, declared privately:

> 'I cannot work in Bangkok so well as at Sichang Island, because my health is not at all what it should be. I waste my time building up my strength only to expend it mostly in rituals--

1. Brailey, 'The Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement in Western Laos' (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1968), pp. 129-130.

2. SOM Siam 20: Drouyn de Lhys to Chasseloup-Laubat, 21 Nov. 1865.

3. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon' Aug.-Sept. 1890.

4. 'Plays in Verse from the Ayutthaya period: Nang Manora and Sang Thong' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1919), p. 7.

5. Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1902), p. 106.

> which really ought to be called "frivolous play"--and have little remaining for use in serious affairs.'1

Officialdom was concerned with conducting affairs according to prescribed ceremonial correctness, often more for the emotional effect than for the actual results. It was thus considered the natural order of things for Bangkok to limit her role to consecrating the Lao elite, leaving them to govern themselves as they would.

The Thai played a reluctant political role in internal Lao affairs. Policy towards the official class was one of response rather than active involvement. Unless called upon by the Lao, the Minister of the North preferred to do nothing. Once the pattern of administration through the towns, each independent of the others, was fixed following the disintegration of the Wiangchan principality, Bangkok no longer needed to pursue a policy of divide and rule. In the large towns the local elite balanced their own powers, giving places in the official class to everyone, providing new places as needed by subdividing their lands and shunting their quarrelsome members accordingly into

semi-independent positions of authority. There was never any real possibility of a Lao threat to Thai domination. Lao administration tended in exactly the opposite direction from unification. The ruling families failed to develop into hierarchies (as they did in Thailand) centred around a single powerful individual. Rather than combining to consolidate wealth and control over several towns, the ruling families remained independent of one another. (Almost nothing is known of marriages between families; but even though they did take place, they did not result in any alliances combining territories.) At home the governor's power was limited in practice by the controls which the elders exercised over the segments of the peasantry reserved exclusively to them. At best the ambitious governor could expand very little by resettling his peasants on unclaimed land or on the lands of neighbouring towns, or enticing units of peasants away from rival towns.

1. TNA R5M46/l: RV to Sanphasit, ca. 1 Nov. 1891.

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The contacts and relationships between the Thai court and Lao officials were shallow and mechanical. No Thai official was maintained in any Lao town. With the exception of sons sent to court to save for a few years as pages, and a few daughters sent as consorts to high officials, none of the Lao ruling elite resided in the capital. A Lao official could expect to journey to Bangkok accompanying the tax caravans only once in several years to renew acquaintances with high officials and distribute the customary gifts; but even this brief contact could be of immense advantage, especially for those who had found influential patrons while serving as pages. Unfortunately there is little evidence to reveal the unofficial relationships cultivated by the Lao in Bangkok. They were certainly not very strong or lasting. Gifts and bribes undoubtedly shifted in pursuit of those in power at any particular time. Except for former pages, the court hardly knew the candidates for offices. Appointments could not be personal, so they tended to be ritual and automatic, merely confirming a status quo or a political equilibrium already reached as a result of the power struggles among the Lao themselves.

The king was willing to give active official patronage to a certain individual only in return for unusual services: in repayment for commanding soldiers well, as a reward for a white elephant sent to the capital, in recognition of a great display of loyalty. The king merely exercised the symbolic and limited right to be recognised as the source of authority, which the Lao elite eagerly sought in order to legitimise themselves. Bangkok provided the ritual that renewed periodically this legitimacy of the ruling elite, but could go little further to manipulate the politics of the Lao town, which always remained in the hands of local elders and the entourages of the highest town officials.

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Chapter Four: The Nature of Townships and the Satellite System

Within a town there was a large wooden pavilion usually at the governor's residence where the elite met to conduct official business. Even this single administrative building was not to be found everywhere, because governors and other high officials in dealing with day to day affairs tended to use their own houses, which were not always situated in--or even near to--the town proper. The only town with significant fortifications was Nakhon Ratchasima, whose low brick walls were about 300 metres square. In important commercial centres such as Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon, Nakhon Phanom, and Nongkhai there were a number of wooden buildings in rows along the unpaved streets, occupied by Chinese merchants. Most towns and villages had only open air markets, frequented by itinerant peddlers, to which peasants brought local produce to barter. At least one Buddhist monastery was to be found in each town, and in almost every village as well.

There was very little, therefore, to characterise a town as an urban area. It would appear that the clustering together of permanent buildings for commercial or administrative purposes was almost alien to Lao tradition, used more by Chinese and Vietnamese merchants, and by Thai officials towards the end of the century, than by the Lao themselves. For all official purposes a town consisted only of its name and the titles of the four to six senior officials appointed by Bangkok. Regardless of its physical appearance, the elite were the only indispensable element. The Thai considered a town to be 'deserted' if it had no officials to administer it, regardless of whether it were populated and functioned as a commercial centre.1

No municipal limits were formally established for a town proper. The limits of the territory governed were also vaguely defined--radiating outward, with control waning in proportion to distance from the centre. Authority was exerted directly over peasants alone, and only indirectly over land. The land itself was of little importance.

1. TNA R5M62.1/34/l: Phichit to RV, 15 May 1892.

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One should not speak in terms of 'provinces' in reference to the traditional Lao administrative system. This would imply fixed and finite territories, each separate from those of surrounding towns. Such a concept seems to have been absent, as neither Thai nor Lao had a separate word in the nineteenth century for 'province' in its territorial sense. The word 'town' (*mûang*) was used in both cases, for the administrative centre as well as for the territory it controlled. The term 'township' will be used in this work wherever the second meaning alone is required.

The territory which constituted a Lao township was never formally delineated. Claims to territory were based primarily upon the residences of the peasants. The Lao definition of a township was, in part, a populated territory which the governor and elders could easily oversee, all of which should be within a few days' journey of their houses.1 Although general limits between towns were often expressed in documents in terms of certain rivers, forests, and mountains, the legal status of

unoccupied land always remained vague. It will be seen later that the resettlement of part of the peasantry of one town onto land regarded by a neighbour as its own became a constant source of conflict after the middle of the century.

Territory could be effectively shifted from one town to another under exceptional circumstances. The transfer which took place, however, was jurisdiction over the peasants themselves, usually involving an entire large social, unit such as a village. Jurisdiction over the land upon which they lived was automatically included. The transfer of territory itself was never of concern to the elite. Land without peasants had no value. The governor of Loei gave the villagers of the Wangsaphung area to Lomsak as part of a marriage arrangement between his daughter and the son of the Lomsak governor.2 This had the effect of bringing the territory immediately south of Loei under the control of Lomsak, even though Lomsak was much further away than Loei, and separated from the area by a range of mountains. (Map 13.)

1. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos*, ii, 168.

2. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to Prachin, 3 Apr. 1907.

It was possible for a town to exist without any fixed territory at all. When Uthen was created, Bangkok intended for Nakhon Phanom to give up a portion of its territory on the north to the new town. But unknown to Bangkok this was never done. The Uthen governor, elders, and peasants continued to live in the Uthen townsite on the Mekong, and in about fifty villages scattered on both sides of the river (two of which were 'shared' with other towns), in what was considered as Nakhon Phanom and Chaiburi territory.1 Uthen nonetheless functioned adequately as an administrative and social unit with no 'territory' of its own for more than forty years.2

Bangkok had access to much information concerning the geography of the Lao towns in terms of relative distances and compass directions, as well as the names of waterways and mountains. But there was no effective scheme for situating or separating newly created towns. (The first map of the region was not dressed until the late 1880s.) Even if there had been a plan, the Lao elite would have defeated it unwittingly because of the ease with which townsites could be shifted and reshifted in search of suitable sites.

In general the administrative centre was situated close to a principal river in the centre of flat, fertile, rice-growing lands, but on high enough land to avoid flooding. A fine townsite might be abandoned, however, because of bad omens or misfortunes, simply on the whim of the governor.3 The elite of Khonkaen shifted among at least three different places during the nineteenth century, evidently in search of sites with adequate water supplies.

Access to a dependable source of fresh water was the major factor determining village settlement patterns. The Mekong, whose banks were densely lined with villages, provided water in abundance, although it was subject to flooding during the Monsoon season. The five rivers of the plateau area that contained water year-round (the Mun, Chi, Phong, Pao, and Kam)

1. MAE Paviee 30: Dugast, journal, 9-15 Sept. 1890.

2. TNL R5/10/28: Chakkri to Siworarat, 21 June 1890.

3. *Parl. Papers* 1888, xcviii, pp. 3, 14: Archer, Report of a Journey in Chiangmai.

tended to rise and fall rapidly with the changing seasons; and the Mun alone was stable enough to allow regular use of small boats.1 (Map 6.) Neither dykes nor canals were built to store water or channel it to suitably fertile land. In the dry season when there was no water at all on the surface, peasants dug wells to provide enough for consumption. Observers often remarked that the scarcity of water in many parts of the interior prevented the population from settling down permanently. One official noted:

> 'If one were to look for a river or canal which is of significant use throughout the year, one can say there is none at all. There is only one single section, and that is [along the Mun] from Ubon down to Phimun. ...This is a reason why the setting up of households and the pursuit of some types of livelihood do not tend to become firmly established in certain places.'2

Unable to improve existing conditions in one place, the Lao simply migrated elsewhere, as land was always plentiful.

It was often observed that the search for adequate supplies of water helped to determine the sizes as well as distribution of settlements within a township. In contrast to central Thailand where the uniform abundance of water allowed rice-growing almost anywhere, the Lao tended to concentrate in very large numbers around a good source of water.3 The observations that Lao settlement was different from that of the Thai are borne out by the earliest census statistics available. Chart i gives the average number of people per monastery for the three administrative areas into which the plateau was later divided, in comparison with Thai areas and the national average. As the one really permanent building which was not only a religious institution but also a meeting place and social centre, the monastery more than anything else was the focal point of the natural community. The people supporting a single monastery can be taken as the members of the 'village' as it was naturally defined. On the basis of this assumption, Chart i suggests that villages on the plateau tended to be no more populous than those of

1. TNA R6M15.1/4l/l: Rat to Yommarat, 18 Sept. 1922.

2. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/11 (1931), 739-740.

3. TNA R6M15.1/41/l: Rat to Yommarat, 18 Sept. 1922.

Thailand proper. Groups of villages of one place, however, formed a commune with a chief headman in charge. It is at this level that the disparity in size of settlements is strikingly apparent.

The number of people living in a single commune in the southern part of the plateau (Isan and Nakhon R~tchasima Circles) was far above the national average, and more than double the averages in the typical Thai (Ayutthaya, Nakhon Chaisi, Phitsanulok) commune. The table accompanying the chart shows that the number of monasteries per commune in both tended to be double or triple the Thai average. Thus in Isan, although the typical village unit tended to be not much different in size from Thai villages, there were typically three or four villages situated together in a commune, whereas in Thailand proper there was typically only one.

The northern part of the plateau (Udon Circle) presented a different situation. There was typically one village per commune, and occasionally two. (Fewer aggregates of villages were found in Ud0n because much of its population was concentrated along the Mekong.) This meant that the commune and the village were little distinguished. But since the size of the Udon village already exceeded the Thai and national averages, the size of the commune in Udon was correspondingly greater than the national average and one and one-half times as large as the typical Thai commune.

Migration was the safety valve periodically relieving pressures which might otherwise have led to unrest and rebellion. Shifting one's residence in response to natural disasters such as droughts or floods provided also a convenient excuse to take advantage of rivalry for peasant control among the elite, or to escape individual obligations to oppressive members of the official class. Although the quality of the land throughout the plateau region was relatively poor in comparison to that of central Thailand, the availability of unsettled land for the relatively small population helped to encourage migration by offering the hope of something better elsewhere. Even the lower Mun river, the best watered part of the region, was occasionally affected. Lack of rain for three consecutives years in Sisaket led to widespread emigration in 1891 to several

towns up the Chi.1 Brief agricultural stress caused by the failure of a single year's crop could, however, be alleviated by importing rice from a neighbouring town where the harvest had been better.2 Taxation was customarily suspended during such periods. For the individual family there was the possibility of evading taxation and services altogether through the loose system of taxation in which control waned with distance from the administrative centre. The system of authority over peasants rather than territory could provide a means of escape for the hard pressed family willing to move only a short distance away from their masters°

Villages lacked aspects of permanence which might have deterred migration. There was no system of land ownership. The architecture was impermanent. The marginal lands most susceptible to the effects of bad weather were settled recently, and offered the villagers no historical ties with the land. An individual or an entire family or village was able to abandon one place without great financial loss or emotional stress. It was not unusual for whole social units to move together, often following their elders in search of an administrative centre from which to assert some degree of independence from town officials.3

Satellites

After 1828 a new element was introduced into the administration of the Lao towns of the right bank: the satellite. The satellite did not differ in appearance from the town. It was in fact a 'town' and governed its own township, but was legally subordinate toga parent town. The governor and other senior officials received diplomas of appointment and titles from the king, although the titles by which they were called indicated that they held slightly lower status

1. TNL R5/62/14: Chakkri to Phakdinarong, 15 Oct. 1891.

2. TNA R6M28/1/18: Sisuriya to D, 4 Dec. 1910.

3. TNL R5/80/16: Chasaenbodi to RV, 25 Aug. 1874. *The Siam Repository,* vi/4 (Oct. 1874), 611.

than those of officials in the parent town.1 The satellite, however, did not maintain direct relations with Bangkok. All of its correspondence, including appointments, went through the senior officials of the town on which it depended. Its tax revenues were remitted to Bangkok through the offices of the parent town. The satellite recognised the right of the town to intervene in its internal affairs under extraordinary circumstances, although day to day affairs were managed by separate local officials.

Any village considered suitable for carrying out the functions of administration could be raised in status to a satellite by simple royal decree. (A town could be created from a village or a satellite in the same way.) The new satellites of the 183Os and 184Os accommodating peasants resettled on the right bank were established on the initiative of Bangkok. These and some other satellites were created in response to an increasing need for more efficient control over the peasantry within an existing township, as well as to provide increased revenues and greater security in isolated areas. Amnatcharoen was founded in 1858 because it was an important crossroads where officials going from Ubon or Yasothon to Mukdahan or Khemmarat often had to pass.2

During the latter part of the nineteenth century the granting of satellite status was often merely formal recognition and confirmation of an already existing administrative centre established by a local governor over a portion of his peasants living at some distance from the parent town. When a town asked to create a satellite in its own territory, Bangkok required only that the governor submit a vague indication of the site proposed--usually the name of a village --along with the number of able-bodied men (all male peasants aged eighteen or twenty and above) to belong to the satellite, and the names of candidates for governor and three or four other senior posts.3 A ceremony was held at court to create the satellite, at which the new officials

1. Town/satellite equivalents four the four senior officials were: *chao mûang* (lord governor)/*chao mûang*, *uparat*/*akkharat*, *ratchawong*/*akkhawong*, and *ratchabut*/*akkhabut*.

2. TNL R4/1220/26: Chakkri to Thepwongsa, 24Aug. 1858.

3. TNL RS/57/4: Chakkri to Rattanawongsa, 26 Jan. 1874.

were formally invested.1 They then returned home to divide off the portion of the peasantry to be placed under the satellite and appoint lesser officials with no further assistance from Bangkok. This new arrangement enhanced the prestige of the parent town and provided more efficient control over villages in outlying areas. The town then received a certain quantity of money in taxes from the satellite, in addition to the fixed taxes remitted by the satellite for Bangkok. It also meant the creation of a whole range of high offices which could be filled by those members of the local elite who could not hope to gain equally high status within the existing administrative structure of the parent town.

It is not possible to say precisely when the satellite system first appeared. It did exist, on a far less elaborate scale, in the Thai kingdom; but far fewer Thai satellites were created in the middle of the nineteenth century than was the case in the Lao states. The first two kings of Champasak created at least six satellites in the early eighteen century, and probably other insignificant ones which did

not survive. It is presumed that as Thai control spread out from Nakhon Ratchasima during the eighteenth century, the surrounding Lao and Khmer towns came more and more under the domination of the Thai governors. The time at which the satellite system was formally introduced here is not known; but by the middle of the nineteenth century, the number of Nakhon Ratchasima satellites had expanded to twelve. Seven towns were created by royal decree from villages either on or near the Mekong soon after the Anu revolt.2

The eighth town created directly from a village was B0ri-khan, established in the 1860s on the left bank to help resettle Phuan peasants.3 Five small towns were created initially as satellites of Lao towns, but later raised by royal decree to full town status. Lomsak was created after the 1779 annexation as a Lao satellite of the Thai town of

1. *The Siam Repository*, vi/4 (Oct. 1874), 611.

2. Nongkhai, Chaiburi, Sakon Nakhon, Sithandon (an old town refounded), Attapû, Saenpang, and Stung Treng.

3. TNL R4/1225/141: list of satellites created (in 1863/47). Rama V, 'Speeches of King Rama V, 1874-1910' (Bangkok, 1915), p. 16: speech, 21 Sept. 1877.

Phetchabun, but became an independent town following the Anu revolt. The Nakhon Ratchasima Lao satellite Phukhiao was likewise raised to town status in the 1880s.1 All others remained as simple satellites.

There were some satellites with which Bangkok was not involved at all. The Champasak prince created his own vassal towns and appointed officials without reference to the king. The prince in Luang Phrabang likewise managed his own satellites independently.2 Bangkok was not aware that some of the little towns in the principalities existed; and even the names of many do not appear in provincial correspondence until the late nineteenth century? With few exceptions the creation of satellites in the middle left bank region was not sanctioned by Bangkok. Thus in 1889 when the Mukdahan governor appointed a full complement of officials to a village on the upper Banghian, designating it as the site for a new satellite, he did not bother to notify the ministry; and the existence of the 'satellite' did not come to Bangkok's attention until nearly four years later.4

Jurisdiction over entire satellites could be transferred. It was government policy to allow any satellite to transfer freely from one parent town to another.5 In theory the decision to request such a change had to be unanimous among the local officials. Otherwise the satellite would risk breaking into two rival factions each refusing to accept the authority of the other, with an ensuing decline in the tax collecting functions of the elite. Such an undesirable result was of supreme concern to Bangkok, as no changes were permitted which would modify significantly the provincial tax structure. In one typical case where the elite did break into factions, there was constant dissension among the

1. Parent town/former satellite (year satellite founded/ year raised to town status): Phetchabun/Lomsak (ca. 1779/ 1836), Nongkhai/Phonphisai (ca. 1829/1847), Nakhon Ratchasima/Phukhiao (?/ca. 1882), Nakhon Phanom/Uthen (ca. 1829/ 1853),

Kalasin/Phulaenchang (1845/1877), Roi Et/Mahasarakham (1865/1868), Kalasin/Kamalasai (ca. 1866/before 1873).

2. TNA R5M64/17/6: Waiworanat to RV, 31 May 1886.

3. TNA R5M62.1/34/15890: Yuttitham to Phitsanu, 13 July 1892.

4. TNA R5M59/7/177: D to RV, 13 Jan. 1893.

5. TNL R5/80/13: Chakkri to Phrom, 28 Feb. 1883.

officials of Rattanaburi who were divided in sympathies between Nakhon Ratchasima and Surin.1 The satellite was created under Nakhon Ratchasima,2 whose High Lord Governor blocked an attempt by the Rattanaburi elite in 1873 to transfer to neighbouring Sangkha.3 The satellite governor died in the late 1870s. His son became acting governor and, along with two younger brothers who held the next highest posts, opposed the efforts of a clique composed of his uncles and other elders to seek closer ties with the Surin governor. The clash between the two factions, and their petitions for transfers, were serious enough to require the presence of a royal commissioner in the early 1880s to collect taxes and supervise ordinary affairs while the case was again referred to Bangkok.4

A satellite was not required to come under the jurisdiction of the town that was geographically the closest, or even one that was adjacent. In 1858 the creation of Amnat-~haroen by Khemmarat was approved even though Bangkok knew that Ubon was about one-third closer and Yasothon was only half as far away as Khemmarat.5 Kamalasai, Sahatsakhan, and Kantharawichai were created as satellites of Kalasin around 1865.6 Kamalasai broke away and was raised to full town status within a decade.7 Kalasin and Kamalasai soon became rivals for territory in the Pao River basin and adjacent lands on the north side of the Chi. (Map 6.) In 1874 Kalasin suggested a new satellite be created, although it already had six others, perhaps to ‘replace’ the lost Kamalasai.8 In 1877 Kalasin lost another satellite

1. E. Aymonier, ‘Une Mission en Indochine’, *Bulletin de la Société de géographie*1, seventh series, xiii/3 (1892’), 341.

2. Thai Royal Institute, ‘Encyclopaedia of Thai Geography’ (Bangkok, 1964), iii, 1202.

3. TNL R5/2/9: Phutharaphai to Sangkha, 15 May 1873.

4. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos*, ii, 41-42.

5. TNL R4/1220/26: Chakkri to Thepwongsa, 24 Aug. 1865.

6. TNL R4/1225/141: memo., n.d. (ca. 1865).

7. It is listed as an independent town in TNL R5/38/28: list of towns, n.d. (late 1860s with corrections early 1870s). Appointments of 1872/3 were made with no reference to Kalasin in TNL R5/22/6: list of appointments, 1872/3.

8. TNL R5/80/16: Chasaenbodi to RV, 25 Aug. 1874.

Phulaenchang to full town status,1 driving a wedge between its remaining satellites on the east. Meanwhile a group of disaffected Yasothon elders transferred to Kamalasai jurisdiction and became in 1879 Kamalasai's first satellite Selaphum, which was situated closer to Yasothon and closest to Roi Et.2 The Sahatsakhan governor made accusations against his overlord at Kalasin, and got permission to transfer the whole satellite (which was north of Kalasin) to Kamalasai jurisdiction, even though Kamalasai (south of Kalasin) could not reach it without going through the Kalasin township. The territories of the three towns thus became inextricably overlapped, with Kalasin governing Kutchinnarai across Phulaenchang township, and Kamalasai governing Sahatsakhan across Kalasin.

The site for a newly created satellite was usually designated in the edict giving royal approval. But local elites often ignored the sites authorised, and used the royal orders to encroach upon the territory of their neighbours by settling elsewhere, causing interminable disputes. A large number of peasants from Nonghan were transferred to Nongkhai jurisdiction; and Nongkhai was authorised to establish the satellite Kumphawapi in order to resettle them. Disregarding instructions, Nongkhai set up the satellite only about thirty kilometres from Nonghan itself. Nonghan in turn was authorised to establish the satellite Waritchaphum; but after receiving the edict, Nonghan selected a village in Sakon Nakhon territory as the best site.3 Surin, expanding north of its traditional limits along the Mun river, created Chumphon at a site only one and one-half days' march south-west of Kasetwisai, in spite of protests from the latter's parent town Suwannaphum.4

Territorial jurisdiction in the Lao towns by the 1850s posed for the Thai a unique problem of provincial administration. Most of the right bank was a flat plateau which sloped gently towards the Mekong, unaccented by significant

1. TNA R5PS25/40: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883, case 3.

2. NL R5/22/8: edict, l0 Feb. 1879.

3. TNA R5M59/7/12: Wichit to D, 13 Mar. 1892.

4. Aymonier,' *Voyage dans le Laos*, ii, 205-207.

natural barriers to contain the expanding population of the townships which had increased suddenly by the evacuations of the two previous decades. The Thai did set up boundary markers during the third and fourth reigns in both Cambodia and along the left bank of the Mekong to indicate the limits of their rule. But no such boundaries were fixed in the right bank Lao states.1 It was the absence of recognised boundaries that brought neighbouring townships into conflict so often. Once it became clear that the Lao governors could not settle their own territorial disputes amicably *after* new satellites had been created, Bangkok merely began to pay more attention to potential objections *before* approving any more requests.

Approval for Roi Et's proposal to create Mahasarakham was withheld until a royal commissioner had been sent out in 1865 to inspect the site and verify that the village was cla'~med by no other town.2 The 'delineations' thus made by commissioners were confined to taking note of' territorial

limits the Lao elite were already agreed upon, and thereby preventing more conflicts. By the time Bangkok came to recognise the difficulties involved in settling the conflicts arising among clusters of satellites, no formal delineations of territory could have been undertaken without transferring jurisdiction over a dozen or more satellites whose lands did not lie contiguous to those of the parent towns that governed them. No initiative was taken for territorial reorganisation while the traditional Ministry of the North retained control over provincial affairs. The Lao ruling families were left to manage the provincial administration in the form that they had created it.

Expansion of the Forest Khmer States

The freedom to expand which was allowed to local ruling families ultimately brought the Thai into conflict with the

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon 8/32: Phakdi to Chakkri, 19 Aug. 1891, proposed to set up stone markers to delineate and settle territorial disputes among Surin, Sisaket, Mahasarakham, Suwannaphum, and their satellites. This was never done.

2. TNL R4/1227/19: Chakkri to Khattiya, 22 Sept. 1865.

French, who had taken the southernmost provinces of Vietnam in the late 1850s and formed them into the colony of Cochinchina. Between the colony and the Thai-controlled Khmer provinces of Battambang and Siemreap lay the Khmer principality, whose ruler recognised both the Thai king and the Vietnamese emperor as his suzerains. The Khmer prince Norodom was persuaded to sign a protectorate agreement with France in 1863 acknowledging through the French Cochinchina authorities his ties to Hu~.1 Then four months later he signed a second agreement, this time with Thailand, symbolically reaffirming the balance of dual suzerainty which had been imposed upon the principality in the 1840s.2 The second agreement went unnoticed by Cochinchina until the following year. The notion of dual suzerainty was alien and incomprehensible to the French, who reacted to the treaty as Khmer treachery and Thai aggression. The French consul in Bangkok was instructed to announce that the Thai-Khmer agreement was not recognised by France, and that the colony would undertake to use force if Thailand attempted to exert any influence over the new French territory.3

A Thai mission, finally despatched to Paris to settle the question, signed a treaty in July 1867 in which Bangkok recognised the French protectorate over the Khmer principality (or Kingdom of Cambodia by this time), and France, in turn, recognised Thai control over the western Khmer provinces of Battambang and Siemreap. The agreement reached in Paris deferred the question of delineation to a joint Thai-French commission.4 A survey of the frontier separating Battambang from Cambodia was made; but although a mixed commission was proposed for the delineation of the area from the Great Lake eastward to the Mekong, no joint delineation

1. The text of the French-Khmer treaty signed at Oudong 11th August 1863 is published in G. Taboulet, *La Geste française en Indochine* (Paris, 1956), ii, 624-627.

2. A partial translation and observations on the Thai-Khmer treaty signed at 0udong Dec. 1863 may be found in SOM Siam 18: Aubaret to Drouyn de Lhys, 5 Oct. 1864.

3. SOM Siam 19: MAE to Aubaret, 14 Jan. 1865.

4. SOM Siam 20: MAE to Marine, 20 June 1867. The text of the Franco-Thai treaty signed at Paris 15 July 1867 is published in Taboulet, op. cit., ii, 654-655.

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of this frontier was ever undertaken.1 (See map 6.)

Meanwhile, the Khmer governors of Khukhan and Sangkha were pressing Bangkok to allow them to expand southward towards French territory. The Khmer peasants and hilltribes people controlled by both towns were already scattered along both sides of the Dong Rak mountains. But the movement to create satellites under the Forest Khmer towns south of the Mun river had lagged behind the movement in the Lao towns to the north, partly because the smaller Khmer population were scattered too thinly over a large area to require or justify the creation of satellites for better control, and partly because the Khmer towns had not profited from the evacuations of the middle left bank of the Mekong. Large numbers of Lao were instead resettled in the similarly unpopulated upper Prachin river basin which led from the Thai town of Prachin eastward to the strategically situated Khmer town of Sisophon. This resettlement provided the bridge of peasants necessary to supply and facilitate the passage of armies into the Thai-dominated provinces of the Great Lake basin. So long as this basin and the right bank Lao states were militarily secure, the Khmer populace sandwiched between them was of little concern to Bangkok. Only when the question of territorial limits was raised in connexion with the protectorate over the Khmer kingdom, was the Thai sense of security in the vacuous interior comprising the Forest Khmer states disturbed.

Khukhan had been the only Forest Khmer town to be able to turn the evacuation policies of Rama III to its own profit, although the officials of other towns participating in the conflict between Thailand and Vietnam in the Great Lake basin doubtless took home with them many Khmer peasants as prisoners of war. In order to assure the defence of the southern limits of Thai control along the Mekong during the war, Bangkok encouraged governors to resettle peasants on the right bank, rewarding their efforts in 1843 by creating the satellites Selamphao under Champasak and Manophrai under Khukhan. 2

1. MAE CP Siam 9/51: Harmand to MAE, 16. Feb. 1883. TNA R5M62.1/31/25638: Sarit to RV, 11 Mar. 1893.

2. TNL R3/1205/160: Maha Amat to governors, 22 July 1843.

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Around 1866 Sangkha requested an extension of its authority over the small town of Chongkan just south of the Dong Rak.1 By 1869 Chongkan had been officially made a Sangkha satellite.2

In May 1867, two months before the new treaty was signed in Paris, Bangkok approved the creation of two more satellites, Kanthararak and Uthumphon, under Khukhan, and appointed governors. In giving the authorisation, the ministry noted that although the governor of Khukhan had sent a map indicating the sites of the two villages, Bangkok was still uncertain of the territorial rights which other towns might claim.3 The exact sites of the villages are not now known; but they

were in the region south of the Dong Rak between Chongkan and Manophrai. The map prepared by the Khukhan governor was undoubtedly made to serve his own ambitions, based on political considerations rather than surveys of existing conditions. The French reaction to the reorganisation activities of the Khukhan governor which followed in early 1868 was that the Thai had 'invaded' the northern frontier of French Kompong Svay.4

Paris protested. And in May 1868 after receiving reports that the Khukhan governor had been boasting that the king had approved the creation of yet a third satellite, whose whereabouts was completely unknown to the Thai, Bangkok began to fear that the governor might indeed be encroaching on territory where France had some rights. A royal commissioner was despatched to make surveys for another map of the region and instructed to investigate the site of Uthumphon which both Khukhan and Kompong Svay were claiming. Orders were sent at the same time to the Khukhan governor declaring that the question of the frontier had *already* been settled with France, and ordering him to evacuate any families that were found to be residing in French territory so as not to be in violation of the treaty.5

1. TNL R5/49/4: list of Mekong towns, n.d. (May/June 18667).

2. TNL RS/22/6: list of appointments, 1868-1873, edict of 12 May 1869.

3. TNL R4/1229/128: Chakkri to Khukhan, 2 May 1867.

4. SOM Siam 23: Cambodia frontier map and notations, 1869.

5. TNL R4/1230/15: Chakkri to Khukhan, 7 May 1868.

The royal commission decided that it was unwise to allow Khukhan to extend its authority over the sites originally approved; and both Kanthararak and Uthumph0n were withdrawn to new sites north of the Dong Rak range, leaving no satellites except long established Manophrai anywhere near the supposed frontier. The Khmer peasants still in the area remained under Khukhan jurisdiction. But new immigrants from the south under the jurisdiction of Komgpong Svay officials later settled there, thus providing a basis for further, overlapping, and international territorial claims to the area which, unlike those in the Lao states, could not be settled by simple royal decree.1

Bangkok was nonetheless satisfied in 1867 that the treaty provisions accepting 'recognised' borders would require nothing more than a unilateral verification of the limits of Ehukhan territory. A map was prepared from the 'surveys' made in the Lao and Forest Khmer towns;2 but it was never published or brought to the attention of the French. In 1885, a few months after the question of limits was again taken up with the French, Bangkok set up the new satellite Tharaboriwat under Champasak,3 in an attempt to define precisely the southern limit of territory claimed along the Mekong. Norodom, the king at Phnom Penh, had earlier requested the aid of the governor of Cochinchina to delineate Manophrai and Selamphao further north--both of which he claimed--and in September 1869 the French had invited Bangkok to nominate members to a joint delineation commission. At that juncture the French were still slowly collecting commercial and political information about the lower Mekong. An initial mission had been sent to follow the entire course of the river beginning in 1866.4 In the

1. R5M62.1/31/241: D to RV, 11 Mar. 1893.

2. Apparently the ‘Map of the Kingdom of Siam and Her Dependencies among the Laosians and Cambodians’ of 1868 listed in L. Sternstein, ‘A Catalogue of Maps of Thailand in the Museum of the Royal Thai Survey Department, Bangkok’ *The Journal of the Siam Society*, lvi/1 (Jan. 1968), 63.

3. TNL R5/R/271(old)/2: edict, 24 July 1885.

4. Documents concerning the planning for the deLagrée-Garnier mission 1865-1866 are in SOM Indochine C10(79). F. Garnier’s *Voyage en Indo-Chine* (1873) was the first study of the Lao states based on scientific investigation.

middle of 1869 one mission was at Champasak;1 and another was at Ubon preparing a map later the same year.2 The information gathered by reconnaissance missions produced no immediate effect on commercial or other French activities, however; and it was not in French interests at the time to press for a frontier settlement. The matter remained dormant until it was raised again by Rama V in 1885, although no formal delineation agreement was in fact reached until 1904. The conflict with France over this isolated Khmer territory was postponed by direct intervention from Bangkok which restricted the powers and expansion of the Khukhan elite. Expansion by the various towns north of the Dong Rak, however, was allowed to proceed, but under closer supervision than ever from the Thai.

Absence of Administrative Evolution

Although the policies of Rama III and Rama IV greatly increased the populations of the Lao states near the Mekong river and opened much of the right bank interior to settlement, this did not bring about great structural changes in Lao administration. New satellites were created regularly as a matter of policy whenever sufficient numbers of left bank peasants had been resettled in a new townsite.3 The principal need for new centres was more effective control over the peasantry. Each township evidently had an optimal size, beyond which control tended to break down. A ‘township’ was a populated territory which was accessible--at least within several days’ walk--of the residences of the town elders. The basic administrative duties of tax collecting and settling litigation could not be carried out if the territory were too large, as communications were very poor. By creating a large number of satellites, Bangkok made it unnecessary for the Lao to develop more efficient and innovative means of administration through a small number of aristocrats.

1. SOM Indochine C10(218): d’Arfeuille to Cochinchina govornor, ca. Apr. 1869.

2. TNA R5B1.3/1 Damrong Papers No. 49: inventory of edicts for 1869/70, Ubon despatch, 9 Nov. 1869.

3. TNL R4/1220/26: Chakkri to Thepwongsa, 24 Aug. 1858

The aristocracy was a large segment of the total populace; and the proliferation of tiny towns and satellites seems in part due to position seekers. The number of official posts available to either aristocrats or commoners in any one town was not fixed, but had its limits. Appointments meant not only status but also livelihood: the only emoluments of officials were the legal fees collected and personal services provided by the peasants. If one had only a low position in his hometown, he might feel dissatisfied, move to an isolated but heavily populated village, and help to form the nucleus of a new satellite. Many satellites seem to have arisen in order to fill the growing demand for new posts. It was always to the advantage of the ruling family of the parent town to create new satellites, where the governor could then nominate his own candidates to the highest posts. This not only relieved the problem of administering outlying territory, but also provided a means for the ruling family to expand its power and prestige, as well as provide jobs for the new generation.

Satellites were created rapidly during the middle of the century. The links between parent towns and satellites were not permanently fixed; and satellites were able to transfer from one town's authority to another's with royal approval. Map 6 represents the system of satellites and linkages recognised officially by Bangkok in 1885, after which time none were created. The map itself may not be entirely accurate, for satellites were not always established at the sites approved by the government; and sites of one or two of the parent towns, as well as numerous satellites, occasionally changed from village to village within the township.

Because of local rivalries and the simplicity of the administrative structure, unofficial 'satellites' sometimes arose. A high ranking commissioner of the Ministry of the North tried to settle a territorial dispute between Surin and Rattanaburi by appointing an acting governor for a new satellite in the disputed area, although the existence of the satellite was never recognised by Bangkok.1 And a

1. TNA R5M46/1/l: Prasit to Phitthayalap, 4 Apr. 1892.

powerful Khukhan elder who controlled 4,600 peasants secured approval to transfer his jurisdiction to Champasak, but never actually moved out of Khukhan. He appointed a whole set of satellite officials and operated a court of law himself without bothering to refer the matter to Bangkok.1

The right to assert authority over peasants, as they migrated into and within neighbouring townships, had led, by the second half of the nineteenth century, to the administrative maze represented in map 6. The tendency to control satellites and peasants not immediately adjacent to one's own territory was also found in rare instances in the upper Chao Phraya basin, where the settlement of peasants formed a basis for a claim by one town to a certain territory even if that territory were not immediately adjacent to other territory that the town governed.2 Three clusters of Lao towns with their administration of entwined satellites--first Nonghan, Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom; second Kalasin, Kamalasai, and Mahasarakham; and third Mukdahan, Khemmarat, and Ubon--were the centres of the most protracted disputes during this period over peasants and territory.

In spite of the complexity of the arrangement, the administrative system continued to function, partly because boundaries were never of great concern to the towns, partly because satellites were more important as symbols of power than as territorial entities. The township was able to function as a social unit, which was largely determined by the tax collecting structure based on the control of peasants, and was able to maintain its own judicial and financial autonomy independent of Bangkok. The Lao elite demanded nothing further from it.

1. TNA R5PS25/40: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883.

2. *Parl. Papers* 1888, xcviii, p. 9: Archer, Report of a Journey in Chiangmai.

Chapter Five: The Official Class: Constitution and Origins

The officials in Lao society were a privileged class separate from the peasantry. All men who exercised control over peasants in the name of the state--from the headman of the smallest village to the lord governor of the town--belonged to this class, which was open to any individual.1 They, and the members of their families, enjoyed complete exemption from taxation and all other obligations to the state that did not fall within the duties of their offices. The only exception was military service. No standing army was maintained. But in the event of war or other emergency, the men of each town formed a small army, with the members of the official class acting as military officers and the peasants as common soldiers.

The official class was subdivided into two distinct groups according to social origin. The origin of the majority was the same as that of the peasantry. But each town also had an hereditary aristocracy whose existence was entirely independent of the offices which its members held. They were a closed caste who claimed descent from various historical and semi-historical figures. The aristocracy was limited to a few families at most in any single town. All children of a male aristocrat belonged to the caste. The status was transmitted through the male line only, and to an unlimited number of generations.

The aristocracy, more than any other feature of society, distinguished the Lao social order from that of the Thai. No aristocracy existed in Thailand. All Thai officials (the royal family excepted) held their posts--and thus privileged social status--only by virtue of appointment from the king. Families of officials of commoner origin in both Thailand and the Lao states did tend to perpetuate their special status through successive generations. But unlike the Lao aristocrat, no Thai official had an automatic right, either by law or by custom, to office or to a privileged position in society independently of his office.

1. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, ‘Renseignements sur Lakhon’, Aug.-Sept. 1890.

The aristocracy were usually engaged fully as officials. Those who did not hold office most commonly entered the Buddhist Order, which gave them an especially high status. Aristocrats who did not hold a post had no immediately recognisable standing in society, and could thus not be accorded respect equal to those who did. Their only sources of income, other than minor trading and the subsistence living from their ricefields, were shares of taxes and fees collected in the name of the state, and labour provided by the peasants who came under their control. A post was an economic necessity. The Lao political system had a large body of ceremonial posts, each of which carried with it a number of peasants for the office holder to employ for official purposes and from whom he derived part of his income. Thus almost every aristocrat was assured of a position of some sort.

The four highest officials of a town, collectively called the four 'keepers of the law', were the only officials regularly appointed by the king. They were: the lord governor; the *uparat*, or deputy governor; the *ratchawong*, a general assistant to his superiors; and the *ratchabut*, who acted as an additional assistant to the other three, as well as supervisor for tax collection. All four keepers came from local aristocratic families.

The 'adjutants' formed a second group of senior officials, Probably never exceeding four in number, who were general assistants to the keepers. They were appointed irregularly on the recommendation of the lord governor to the largest towns only. The four keepers of smaller towns as well as satellites, however, were free to make their own appointments to these and all other posts without reference to Bangkok.1 The adjutants were in line for promotion to the four higher posts, and thus had to be members of the aristocracy. They were most frequently sons or younger brothers of governors.

Any post below that of adjutant was open to aristocrat and commoner alike. It was usual for some commoners to hold posts of higher status than some members of the

1. TNL R4/1228/51: Phutharaphai to Siworarat, 24 Apr. 1866.

aristocracy. The highest posts to which a commoner could aspire were two posts of equal rank called *mûang saen* and *mûang chan*, both of which involved sitting as judges and acting as advisers in administrative matters.1 In the absence of higher officials, Bangkok corresponded with these two together, but never with officials of lower standing. The *mûang saen*, who was always an educated man, was charged with general military affairs and transmitted the orders of the lord governor.2 The *mûang chan* was charged with civilian affairs and acted as a director of corvée.3 They and about fifteen additional men formed the 'senior elders' of the town. A list of their titles and supposed functions as investigated by one Thai historian is reproduced in Table 1. A list of 'junior elders' as complete as is now possible, and suggesting some of their functions, is included. The junior elders varied in number and included some ceremonial posts of little administrative significance which were often not even filled. Below them were the village headmen and finally the peasantry.

Lao society as a whole (women excluded) might be most simply diagrammed as follows.

keepers	always aristocrat	—
adjutants	always aristocrat	—
senior elders	sometimes aristocrat	sometimes commoner
junior elders	sometimes aristocrat	sometimes commoner
village headmen	sometimes aristocrat	sometimes commoner
peasantry	—	always commoner

1. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

2. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', *Revue maritime et coloniale*, xxxii (Mar. 1872), 472.

3. MAE Pavie 33: Malglaive, ‘Essai sur l’organisation éventuelle des provinces Khas-Laotiennes’, 23 Aug. 1891.

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The exact composition of the official class cannot be detailed for lack of documentation. The Nakhon Phanom governor was said to have the power to appoint sixty-nine men to posts as elders.1 A list of titles for about one hundred elders of the old Wiangchan principality has survived;2 but the functions of many of them are not entirely clear. A detailed outline of the political organisation of Ubon in the 1860s does exist; and this has been adapted into Table 2. The total number of officials (excluding village headmen) was 198. The total number of registered peasants--that is, males above about age eighteen--was 6,226. The peasants were divided, however, into two major categories. The first were the ‘levy peasants’ numbering 4,000 who paid taxes of two baht (15 grams of silver) annually. The second were the ‘service peasants’ who were required only to perform corvée, giving a fixed number of days of free labour to the town. Each official controlled a certain number (ranging from 4 to 20 for all except the ten highest officials) of the 2,226 service peasants to assist him in carrying out his duties. The number of service peasants may be taken as an index of the relative importance of the official in the local hierarchy. Only ‘service’ peasants are specified in Table 2, arranged in groups according to function and in descending order of total numbers of officials.

Ranks and Titles

The four ‘keepers of the law’ received their appointments directly from the king. The governor was the only one who was always given a Thai-style rank and title. In contrast, all Thai officials without exception held one of six ranks--(in descending order) *chao phraya*, *phraya, phra*, *luang, khun*, or *mun*--which indicated their relative positions in the bureaucracy. Only three of these were ever actually bestowed upon Lao governors. The rank of phraya was granted

1. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, ‘Renseignements sur Lakhon’, Aug.-Sept. 1890.

2. Published in *Thesaphiban*, xxi/123 (June 1916), 93-99.

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to the governors of only those towns considered politically most important: Nongkhai, Sakon Nakhon, Kalasin, Khukhan, Sangkha, Sisaket, snd Surin. The rank of *phra* went to the rest of the town governors and to most of the satellites. The rank of *luang* was given to governors of only the smallest satellites such as Atsamat, Akatamnuai, and Wanonniwat. The king did occasionally raise the rank of an individual governor who was a *luang* or a *phra* to show special favour, later bestowing only the customary rank on his successor.1 Other than the prestige implied by the designation as *phraya*, the ranks given a governor had little significance. They did not form an integral part of the Thai official hierarchy, were not adopted by the Lao into a local hierarchy of ranks, and represented little more than a convention.

The title of the lord governor for each town was fixed. All governors in succession received identical titles. The title for Nongkhai was 'Prathum Thewa'. And every governor of Nongkhai was known as 'Phraya Prathum Thewa'.

The elders were appointed locally by the four keepers. Their appointments were never referred to Bangkok or even mentioned in correspondence. There is thus no documentary evidence to reveal .how they were selected and invested. Each received a title of office which indicated his function. For the posts (always held by aristocrats) of adjutant and army commander, the titles were preceded by the term *thao* which all male members born into the aristocracy were entitled to use before their given names. Commoners and aristocrats alike acting as junior and senior elders used the term *phia* (phraya in the princely states) to indicate that they were office holders; and in this case the term *thao* was dropped by aristocrats, a custom which suggests that the office held was deemed of greater significance than aristocratic status. Collectively the elders were referred to as the thao-phia. Unlike the Thai bureaucracy which had its hierarchy of six ranks, the Lao had only one 'rank'. The title of office itself sufficed to denote the status of the individual. Relative status

1. TNL R3/1211/21: three edicts, Chakkri to Roi Et elders, 28 Mar. 184l.

was recognised autocratically because the number of elders in a single town was small enough to allow mutual familiarity, and the titles were the same for all towns.

Functions

In spite of the profusion of titles and offices, there was little tendency towards the development of functional specialisation. Each official from the governor downwards had his own little entourage which was responsible to him alone as their patron, and the members of which acted to protect their own group interests against other officials and entourages.1 One explorer viewed the political development of the Lao elite as little above that of an assembly of village chiefs each ruling over his own clientel.

> 'Le *Chao Muong*, l'*Opahat*, le *Muon Sen* etc. ne sont guère plus chacun que les suzerains d'un certain nombre de villages qui leur fournissent la subsistance. On percoit l'impot; on arrange les querrelles et c'est tout. L'organisation communale est encore plus rudémentaire, malgré toute une hiérarchie aussi compliquée qu'inutile de *pia*, de *sen*, de *quan*.... Cet heureux peuple n'est pas gouverné et n'a pas besoin de l'être, pourvu qu'une autorité quelconque soit là surtout pour faire la police.'2

This view does not seem to be an exaggeration of the Simple way in which officialdom functioned. Documents suggest little more specialisation; and officials themselves when questioned about their duties could define their responsibilities only in terms of 'assisting' their immediate superiors.3 Keepers and elders frequently lived at a distance from the town proper, in villages where they acted effectively as headmen, thus becoming powerful patrons to intercede on behalf of local villagers whenever any conflict arose. The number of towns, moreover, each with its complete set of officials, was large in relation to the population. Little political activity above the village level was

l. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', 471.

2. SOM Indochine A30(99): Odendhal to governor-general, 24 Feb. 1894.

3. MAE CPC Nan 2/3: Hardouin to MAE, Mar. 1895, annexed journal, entry for 22 Feb. 1895. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

really necessary. In effect participation in administration was channelled into a non-functional bureaucracy allowing each official a fixed place in a hierarchy without requiring of him any corresponding responsibilities.

Even at the highest level the emphasis was on common agreement in making official decisions. The governor was titular head of the town; but although all general orders were given in his name, all matters were decided upon in counsel with the other officials. The only political affairs requiring regular attention were the dispensing of justice. In acting as judges officials discussed among themselves the proper application of Lao law and custom to a particular case. The opinion of the majority was then submitted to the governor to act upon.

Although limited in theory by Thai law, the Lao governors were in practice absolute rulers. Bangkok readily admitted that in their own towns 'the lords governors have absolute powers in official matters'.1 The only restriction imposed on the governor was that of refering executions of criminals to Bangkok for approval. (Although executions did take place --a special sword was kept in the town for this very purpose2 --no cases seem to have been brought before the king for judgement.) In the view of one explorer:

> 'en un mot, Bangkok le laisse jouer au roitelet sous son active surveillance, tant que les intérêts du trésor et la tranquillité publique n'ont pas à en souffrir. '3

So long as he remitted the customary taxes and professed loyalty to the king, the power of the governor was without state restriction.

Selection of Candidates for Governor

In contrast to the paucity of information concerning the elders, the process by which the keepers were selected and appointed is well documented. When the governor of a town died, an auspicious date was calculated by the astrologers

1. TNL R4/1227/50: Phutharaphai to British consul, ca. Feb./Mar. 1866.

2. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos*, ii, 329.

3. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', 471.

and fixed for his cremation. Bangkok would be informed of the death; and the king would send out a special apparatus for lighting the cremation fire. The lapse of time between death and cremation

might be many months; but the governorship was not customarily considered vacant until after the cremation.

During the interval the next highest official--usually the *uparat*--carried out the governor's duties. It was common for an acting governor to hold office for long periods of time. In one extreme case the governor of the satellite Manophrai died nearly thirty-eight months before Bangkok received the news.1 Several months were ordinarily required for a message to be sent to Bangkok in any case, with a corresponding delay for the royal cremation apparatus to reach the town. The nine months that elapsed during 1867-1868 between the death of the old Nakhon Phanom governor and the appointment of a new one was as short an interval as one could ever have expected.2 Most were much longer, partly because little travel was possible during the monsoon season from July to October every year. Officials typically attempted to journey to Bangkok only after October, and in time to return home before the next year's monsoons began. The final year or two recorded for the rule of any governor should be considered as a time when the governorship was vacant and when political activity set in motion by the need for new appointments reached its peak.

The selection of candidates was limited by custom but followed no absolute rules. It was the policy of Bangkok--dictated by the need for appointees who would be acceptable under Lao custom--to appoint only local aristocrats to govern the Lao towns,3 The simplest procedure, and most common, was a shift upwards of all office holders, each receiving the next higher vacant post, with the governorship going to the *uparat*.Towns could function well without

1. TNL R4/1228/15: Khukhan to Chakkri, 21 Aug. 1866.

2. TNL R4/1213/44: Luang Phrabang prince-*ratchawong* to Chakkri, 20 Feb. 1852. TNL R4/1230/41: Chakkri to Nakhon Phanom *ratchawong*, 26 July 1868 (two edicts).

3. TNL R4/1227/50: Phutharaphai to British consul, ca. Feb./ Mar. 1866.

*uparat*s, *ratchawong*s, and *ratchabut*s for long periods of time. Appointments to these vacancies in the middle of a governor's term in office were not pressing matters. When a governor died, those still holding these posts--even if only the *ratchabut* or adjutant--were considered first for the governorship. If the remaining officials were reluctant to accept promotion--usually pleading old age or infirmity--then close relatives of the old keepers were considered.

The basic principle of filial piety curbed rivalry among sons, grandsons, and nephews while the governor was alive. But once he died such restraints were removed; and the support of cliques of relatives, combined with non-related elders, became more important than family relationships in deciding who would be promoted to governor. If there were two brothers as equal rival claimants to the governorship, primogeniture was taken as a general rule. One of several siblings often had his own exclusive maternal faction of relatives because polygamy was common. The maternal factions supporting different sons by different wives of varying social status sometimes played an important role in influencing the choice of the elders. It was not unheard of for a governor to have five or more sons each by a different mother.1 One case of three such rival claimants did reach Bangkok in 1855, with the local elders supporting the candidacy of the youngest brother because both mothers of his elder brothers were from other towns and considered inferior in status to the native born wife of the deceased. Bangkok disagreed. Rama IV then decreed that the principle of

primogeniture was supreme and that the mother's lineages were irrelevant,2 thus establishing a precedent for overruling the preferences of the elders. Primogeniture was not taken into account, however, if a younger brother already held a very high post such as that of *uparat*.3 Experience in office took precedence over both birth and family.

1. TNL R4/1214/75: dposition of Thao Thap and Thao Phromma, Jan./Feb. 1853.

2. TNL R4/1216/25: Chakkri to Khemmarat elders, n.d. (11 Mar. 18557).
3. TNL R4/1227/29: Chakkri to Khonkaen elders, 9 Mar. 1866. TNL R4/1228/50: Chakkri to Phra Surin, 21 Apr. 1866.

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Candidates for office could be selected not only from the family, of the governor but also any other local aristocratic family. It was not uncommon for the governor to come from one family, and the *uparat* or *ratchawong* from another. A newly designated governor generally requested that a son be appointed as *ratchabut*, however.1 This link not only served as a base of financial power for the governor's family, through the revenue collecting duties of the *ratchabut*, but also to ensure that the succession to the governorship would return to the governor's family. Even if the governorship went next to the *uparat* and thus to another family, the *ratchabut* could expect through stepwise promotions to become governor eventually. Exceptions to the general rules could nonetheless be made for a variety of reasons, especially some extraordinary service to the king.

It was not in the interests of the ruling families to hasten the process of selection. The customary interval leading to the cremation of a deceased governor allowed time for rival factions to consolidate their powers and seek support among the elders for their candidates, making judicious promises of promotions to posts that would become vacant once the new appointees took office. One of the first tenets of Thai rule over the Lao aristocracy was that close and amicable family relationships were essential to smooth administration.2 Bangkok had little choice but to assume that the candidate of the prevailing faction could best ensure tranquil rule and that weaker factions would be placated if their own candidates were compensated by appointments as *uparat*, *ratchawong*, or *ratchabut*. Under ideal conditions only one candidate for each post was proposed for Bangkok's formal approval.

Appointments were made for life. Only the king could remove a royally appointed official, and even then only for reasons of grave misrule or rebellion. This royal prerogative was rarely used; and one can point to few examples in the Lao states. More common than removal from office--which

1. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

2. TNL R3/1211/21: Chakkri to Roi Et elders, 28 Mar. 1849.

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carried with it disgrace as well as the loss of all official privileges--was honorary promotion to a non-functional position. The status of 'senior adviser' was often bestowed as an administrative

convenience for removing unwanted men from positions of responsibility. It served in effect as an honourable retirement for aged officials no longer needed or capable of ruling.

Rich and influential provincial families could gain irregular appointments to office by distribution of gifts to high officials at court and promises of higher taxes to be remitted to the treasury. One observer felt that the Thai themselves often put off appointments for years in order to extract as many gifts and promises as possible from hopeful contenders.1 There was no landed gentry, and no Lao official could hope to become rich independently of his office. A man lived off his office, taking a share of revenues collected in the name of the state. The practice of selling influence and favours was common and popular, although not an accepted ideal.

Gifts were essential to maintaining the patronage of influential ministry officials. One could not hope to approach a high official on any sort of business without following the elaborate etiquette prescribed by custom, which always included gifts. For the Lao arriving in Bangkok, rich gifts opened doors and were without equal in lubricating the process of making decisions. Late in his reign Rama IV issued a proclamation making an Unusually outspoken and unrestrained condemnation of certain unnamed princes and court officials for recommending to the king evil office seekers whom he characterised as 'like ogres, bent upon devouring the blood and flesh of the people of their towns'.2

Thai documents understandably say nothing of how agreements were reached in Bangkok when a governorship was contested. A foreigner in Khukhan in 1883 observing the selection of a new governor discovered that there were two

l. d'Arfeuille, 'Voyage au Laos', 471-472.

2. Rama IV, 'Collected Proclamations' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1923), pp. 130-131: proclamation, 22 Jan. 1864.

factions within the former governor's family, supporting two sons of the governor by separate wives. The eldest son, already experienced as an adjutant, was passed over for appointment by a visiting deputy minister of the North in favour of his younger half-brother. A gift of 30 catties (36 kg.) of silver to the commissioner from the younger brother's mother, his father-in-law (who secured for himself the post of deputy governor), and a satellite governor had turned the designation of acting governor to their candidate in spite of the protests of the elder brother, whom they accused of being mentally incompetent. Further negotiations were being con-ducted--including plans to take money and gifts to the Minister of the North who was one of the king's uncles--in order to ensure that the recommendation of the deputy was confirmed.1

Every governor was expected to send to the king, in addition to the regular taxes, a variety of gifts befitting his own status and powers.2 The custom became magnified in importance to the Lao when seeking new appointments. On a typical office-seeking mission the governor of Yasothon sent three candidates for the posts of *uparat*, *ratchawong*, and *ratchabut*, carrying gifts which included gold, ivory, and rhinoceros horn.3 Gifts played an essential part in the ceremonial side of administration. And the successful candidate received in return not only his appointment, but also rich gifts from the king. Some early French observers viewed this ritual of exchange as the source of power and the principal means employed by Bangkok to exert Thai influence in the Lao states:

> ‘On sait que la grande force du gouvernement Thai éloignées où il n’a pas un soldat et où il laisse aux habitants leurs usages et des chefs de leurs races, consiste dans l’existence de deux parties habilement entretenus dans leurs espérances qui usent toute leur vitalité, dépensent toutes les ressources du pays à envoyer tour à tour à Bangkok leurs chefs et des agents

1. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos*, ii, 15-17.

2. d’Arfeuille, ‘Voyage au Laos’, 472.

3. TNL R5/64/22: Yasothon to Chakkri, n.d. (received 23 Nov. 1873).

> pour gagner à leur cause princes et grands fonctionnaires, et n’ayant pas à leur tête d’hommes d’une valeur suffisante pour tourner à leur profit dans une autre direction, les idées de la population.’1

There is no documentary evidence to suggest that the manipulation of Lao elites was carried out as a matter of policy in order to weaken them. But the contacts sought privately by the Lao aristocracy among the Thai elite sometimes produced this effect.

Hierarchy of Towns and Lineages

There was a mutually recognised hierarchy among the Lao towns which depended on size, the number of peasants controlled, the historical significance of the town, and the origins of the ruling families.

The relative positions in the hierarchy might be estimated most simply by comparing the amounts of taxes, tributes, and gifts remitted to Bangkok, because an important town not only paid greater taxes but also was expected to send gifts in proportion to its importance. The tax records are too fragmented to permit the compilation of revenue tables. Towns remitted their taxes individually and irregularly, often falling several years into arrears. Moreover, no records of revenues received annually were maintained by the central government. On one occasion in 1892, however, a group of seventeen towns and their satellites did send collectively gifts for a special royal ceremony. It may be assumed that each donated according to its wealth and importance. A list of these towns, arranged in descending order of total contribution, is given in Table 3. The contribution of Ubon and its fourteen satellites’ was more than double that of the next highest town, clearly emphasising its leading position in the region at that time. The satellites themselves contributed a fixed minimum of either 40 or 20 baht, suggesting that satellites, even within a single large town system, were not organised into hierarchies.

The prestige held by a town depended upon both its outward appearance and its origins. The number of peasants

1. MAE Pavie 50: Pavie to Harmand, 15 June 1883.

controlled by the parent town directly, as well as through its satellites, was the basic measure of total wealth. A small town ruling over several satellites thus maintained the appearance of political power irrespective of its actual size. The number of monasteries was also an important factor.

The origins of the ruling families, whether real or imagined, provided not only relative prestige for the town but also vague links among the aristocratic families of the Lao states as a region. Ancestors who had princely status--usually understood to mean the Wiangchan royal family--were the best lineage to which one could aspire. Bangkok reserved the right to designate an official as 'prince' when investing him in office, regardless of who was considered by the Lao themselves automatically a prince by birthright.1 However, no one who lacked a princely lineage could be so designated. The recognition of princely status also applied to those who were appointed as prince-*uparat*s, prince-*ratchawong*s, or any other high post in a principality, all of which were filled by members of the local princely family. Even though Bangkok considered the recognition of princely status a royal prerogative to be exercised each time a prince was appointed to office, all male descendants of a prince were nonetheless considered by the provincial people themselves as princes, regardless of whether recognised by Bangkok or not.2

The Champasak princes claimed to be direct descendants of a Wiangchan king of the late seventeenth century, whose pregnant widow fled south to escape an usurper, and whose post-humous son became the first king of Champasak around 1713.3 According to one tradition, which the Champasak princes held in common with the ruling families of Nakhon Phanom, the Lao elite along the lower Mekong were also the successors to ancient Khmer princes reputed to have had magic powers.4 This

1. TNL R4/1218/96: proclamation, 16 Sept. 1856.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.NKl: Phanomsaranarin to Prathum, 31 Jan. 1886.

3. C. Archaimbault, 'L'Histoire de Campasak', 534-538.

4. MAE Pavie 32: Lugan to Pavie, 1 Apr. 1891, MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890. Buddhist Era 25th Century Celebrations Committee, 'Nakhon Phanom Province' (Bangkok, 1957), p. 3.

claim extended their relatively short rule to give the appearance of great antiquity. It was popularly believed that an ancestor of one of the important princes who ruled the Muang principality of Nan, immediately across the watershed west of Luang Phrabang, had known the Buddha himself.1 Although none of the Lao rulers seems to have made similar claims to such immense prestige, popular tradition held that the Buddha had indeed visited the Mekong valley and made contact with legendary rulers.2

Whether governed by a prince or not, a town which was founded by a prince or someone of extraordinarily high rank from Wiangchan held high status in the hierarchy. The founder of Kalasin claimed Wiangchan princely lineage;3 and because of this distinction the people of Kalasin held their town to be superior to its neighbours.4 Khemmarat was said to have been founded by an aristocrat from Wiangchan.5 And there was a tendency among towns highest in the

hierarchy--Ubon and Mukdahan especially--to pretend to perpetuate the old Wiangchan system of administration,6 which gave them the appearance of continuity with the great political traditions of the past.

The second most important lineage for the Lao aristocracy was that of two eighteenth century officials from Wiangchan named Phra Wo and Phra Ta. The heroic exploits of these two men dominate the historical traditions of most of the right bank states. They emigrated from Wiangchan after being slighted by the king, and eventually settled near the town-site of Ubon on the western edge of Champasak, in territory which the expanding Thai kingdom had already begun to consider tenuously as its own. The subsequent attacks by

1. MAE CPC Nan 2/3: Hardouin to MAE, 10 Mar. 1895, annexed journal, entry for 28 Feb. 1895.

2. Toem, 'A History of North-east Thailand' (Bangkok, 1970), i, 293-295.

3. Thai Royal Institute, 'An Encyclopaedia of Thai Geography', ii, 50.

4. Buddhist Committee, 'Kalasin Province', pp. 9-10.

5. MAE Pavie 10/48: Pavie and Caillat, journal entry for 25-26 July 1894.

6. Ibid. TNA R5PS9/259: Phrom to Sisahathep, 1883.

Wiangchan on the two rebels provided the Thai with the excuse for intervention on their behalf, and the ensuing annexation of both Wiangchan and Champasak.

The immediate descendants of the two men became established as rulers of many towns besides Ubon. The son of Phra Ta was appointed governor of Champasak following a disturbance there in 1791, although the 61d princely lineage was subsequently restored. A reading of the first volume of Toem Wiphakphotchanakit's 'History of North-east Thailand' will reveal a large number of aristocrats who claimed descent from Wo or Ta or both. It is difficult to believe, however, that the two heroes produced all the 'sons' from whom later Lao aristocrats claimed descent.

The lineages of all except a few powerful families remain obscure due to the nature of nineteenth century documents and the fact that family names were not used before the reign of Rama VI (1910-1925). Bangkok did not maintain any comprehensive records of provincial appointments, although draft copies of edicts mentioning some of them have survived. Personal names of governors were of no consequence to Bangkok. Once a man had been appointed, he was known only by his title. Since the same title was held by all successive governors of a town, it is often impossible to know whether documents of different dates refer to an individual or to two, or more, different people. The Thai practice was to refer to the 'Lord Governor of Nongkhai' as an office, not as a personality.

No local annals were maintained. A French epigraphist searching expressly for local histories in the early 1880s concluded that nowhere in the Lao states (except perhaps

Luang Phrabang) had any been compiled.1 A number of so-called annals were written at the request of Rama V in the late 1880s and 1890s. The most notable among them are listed in the bibliography under the heading of 'Annals'. They were prepared by Thai together with local officials from whatever local written records and royal edicts were extant at the time, and

supplemented by the oral history and details remembered by local informants. While these annals provide

1. E. Aymonier, *Notes sur le Laos* (Saigon, 1885), p. 155.

a wealth of detail about mid-nineteenth century affairs, they are to be used only with great caution for the semi-historical accounts prior to 1827 (for which period contemporary Thai and Lao documents are unfortunately very rare) and for the interpretations of Thai involvement in the Lao states in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They are concerned with the states where France was challenging Thai rights in the 1880s, and were written in response to a pressing need for documentary evidence demonstrating absolute rights and continuous Thai control over these states. Most are not chronicles of individual towns, but rather general compendiums of information about the states which interested the Thai politically. It is unfortunate they were the only attempts at recording in an organised manner the history of the Mekong basin.

Conflict in Ubon

For most of the nineteenth century Ubon was a small town whose importance lay in its strategic position commanding the entrances to the Mun and the Chi river basins. The efforts of its ruling family to expand their territory and power after mid-century were typical of the right bank towns. By the end of the century Ubon became the largest and most important administrative centre east of Nakhon Ratchasima. But it deserves consideration in detail especially because it was the object of Thai intervention in attempting to appoint someone other than an Ubon aristocrat as governor. The local elite refused to accept this break with Lao tradition; and the result was two decades of conflict and disorder which led Bangkok to reassess the entire basis of Thai domination and administrative policy in the Lao states.

There is nothing unusual to note about the successions of the first three Ubon governors--two sons and a grandson of Phra Ta, the hero-founder. It was not until the time of the third governor Kuthong (ca. 1845-1863) that the power of the Ubon ruling family began to increase, although its members were already filling some of the highest posts (including the governorship at one time) in neighbouring Yasothon. (Also, a nephew of Kuth0ng had become first governor and

founder of the ruling family of Nongkhai.1) At first Kuthong had only the three relatively insignificant satellites of Songkhon, Lamnao, and Senang on the left bank.2 He was considered a faithful governor and presented by Rama IV in 1852 with a set of gold regalia--an honour usually reserved to princes.3 The Ubon peasantry was expanding at this time throughout the lower Mun valley and up the Chi river towards Yasothon. Shortly before Kuthong died, Bangkok approved the creation of three widely separated satellites Phimun, Trakanphutphon, and Mahachanachai on the right bank of the Mekong in 1863. Three sons of Kuthong were appointed as governors to the new satellites.4 Ubon thus confirmed its claim to the extensive and rich lands of the entire lower

Mun basin. The rise of the Ubon ruling family was halted suddenly, however, when Kuthong died and Bangkok found it expedient, because of unsettled conditions in Champasak, to pass over the sons and relatives of Kuthong in appointing the next governor.

While Ubon had been expanding, Champasak was torn by internal rivalry between two branches of the princely family. From the 1840s there had been intrigues over the succession; and two interim rulers sent out were denounced as oppressive, recalled to Bangkok, and disgraced.5 Finally in 1863/4 a new candidate was designated to rule under the title Prince 'Yuttitham'.6 His distant cousin Nokham, the prince-*ratchawong* of Champasak, was the leader of a faction opposed to Yuttitham, and was dissatisfied with his own post. He undoubtedly had influential contacts at court, where he had been educated and served as royal page.7 Possibly he felt his lineage was superior to that of Yuttitham since he was both great-grandson of a former Champasak prince and grandson
(through his mother) of Prince Anu. Through his mother's

1. Toem, 'History of the North-east', i, 132, 275-276.

2. TNL R4/1214/25: Chakkri to Ubon *ratchabut*, 3 Dec. 1852(?).

3. TNL R4/1214/25: Chakkri to Ubon *ratchabut*, 3 Dec. 1852.

4. TNL R4/1225/133: diplomas of investiture, Nov./Dec. 1863. TNL R4/1225/141: memo., 1863.

5. Archaimbault, 'L'Histoire de Campasak', 570-572.

6. TNL R4/1225/133: appointment edict, 1863/4.

7. F. Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine* (2nd ed., Paris, 1885), p. 171.

brother he was also first cousin to Princess Duangkham who was consort to King Rama IV and mother of two royal princes-ses.1 Seizing the opportunity to separate N0kham from further intrigues at Champasak, Bangkok appointed him governor of Ubon in 1866 under the title of Prince 'Phrom Thewanukhro',2 even though he was related to the old Ubon ruling family only through the marriage of his great-aunt to the first Ubon governor.

Prince Phrom then set about to build his own empire separate from Champasak. Songkhon had been transferred to Muk-dahan around 1865; but Phrom was allowed soon after to replace the loss by creating two more left bank satellites Phong and Phlan farther up the same river basin. (Map 6.) In a second major reorganisation of Ubon administration like that of 1863, Phrom was allowed first in 1879 to create two new satellites Phananikhom3 and Chanuman4 (the latter's authority evidently extending over the left bank west of Lamnao), and later in 1883 to create the satellite Krasoem5 and transfer to Ubon jurisdiction Khongchiam, whose governor and elders were dissatisfied with Khemmarat rule.6 Although Ubon's status as a 'town' was never legally changed, Prince Phrom began to reorganise it along the lines of a princely state. In Ubon proper he attempted to modify the administration by suppressing the existing southern Lao structure and substituting a council of ministers copied from the royal Wiangchan system. He even adopted royal forms of address reserved for use by reigning princes and kings.7

Phrom did not take many relatives with him to Ubon. The only son whose name appears in the records served as a royal

1. Phlai Noi, 'Queens and Consorts' (Bangkok, 1963), pp. 368-369. Phum, 'Poetical Relation', p. 1 and fn. 3, p. 14 and fn. 2.

2. TNL R4/1228/58: Chakkri to Ubon, 3 June 1866.

3. Thai Royal Institute, 'Encyclopaedia', iii, 881.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon31: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

5. Amorawong Wichhit, 'The Annals of the Provinces of Isan Circle', in Khurusapha, eds., 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 4' (Bangkok, 1963), iii, 320.

6. Ibid.

7. TNA R5PS9/257: Sisinghathep to Bamrap, 14 Aug. 1883.

page at court, and was neither recognised officially as a prince by the Thai nor given (during Phrom's lifetime) any provincial post.1 Phrom's only relative to be given high status in Ubon was his brother, an obscure figure who served as prince-*ratchabut* and apparently died in the 1870s.2 By the early 1880s when Phrom's authority was weakened by opposition from the old elite, he apparently did not have any other relatives holding posts in Ubon itself.

There is insufficient evidence to trace family affinities among the elite of the six satellites in the immediate area of Ubon. In one case, at least, a son of Phrom's predecessor who was Ubon *ratchawong* and later first governor of Mahachanachai, and had as good a claim as any in 1863 on the succession to the Ubon governorship, died only around 1884 and was succeeded as Mahachanachai governor by his son who was *uparat*.3 Almost nothing, moreover, is known of the four satellites on the left bank. However, the old ruling family were firmly entrenched in both Ubon and its satellites. The opposition to Phrom which raged constantly among them is well documented. Bangkok's meddling in the internal affairs of Ubon upset the political equilibrium for nearly two decades, although this was just the opposite of what was intended. The consequences of this intervention are inextricably tied to the ultimate break with traditional provincial administration, and will therefore be treated in Chapter Eight.

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/11: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 23 Sept. 1887.

2. TNL R4/1228/58: Chakkri to Ubon, 3 June 1866.

3. MAE Pavie 30: Dugast, journal, 'Iottsoton à Sanasay' entry, Oct. 1890.

Chapter Six: Revenues

Tribute

Each princely state was expected to send a tribute to the king at least once every several years. Tribute was distinct from ordinary taxation, which had to be paid in addition, because it was not required of ordinary governors and was more a symbolic gesture of subordination to the king than a source of significant revenues. The choice of part of the tribute was left to the prince, who could send the king any selection of the rare and costly products of his region. But the essential items for any mission were a pair of little 'trees' (sometimes referred to as 'flowers'), one made of gold and the other of silver, shaped into the auspicious number of seven tiers of branches. It was customary for the princes ruling all the frontier states surrounding the Thai kingdom to send these to the king acknowledging his suzerainty.

The value of such tribute had no relation to the wealth of the prince. Tribute was merely a way of sending something of relatively little value of the principality with the greatest possible pomp. One Thai official supervising affairs in an isolated town on the Mekong wrote apologetically for the meagre 2,000 baht revenues the town was remitting, suggesting that the money be converted into gold and silver flowers to make it appear to be more than it really was.1 Tribute was not an undue or even undesirable burden on the princes, who could send an especially fine selection of items to attract the king's attention and secure royal favours. The custom should be viewed as a two way ritual benefiting both king and prince.

In addition to tribute, a certain quantity of gifts was officially remitted to the king and to Bangkok officials. According to an estimate for Ubon given in Table 4, the annual value of gifts there amounted to about 5 per cent of total revenues (or l0 per cent of revenues remitted to Bangkok), and consisted largely of silk cloth given to the

1. TNA R5M1.4/30/4.51: D to Sommot, 17 Jan. 1900.

king, to four high officials of the Ministry of the North charged with Lao affairs (the Minister Chao Phraya Chakkri, and his deputies the Phraya Maha Amat, the Phraya Ratcha-w0ranukun, and the Phraya Sisahathep), and a few lesser officials such as the ministry registrar.1 Gifts could be sent on the occasion of special ceremonies such as the cremation of a Minister of the North.2 Ceremonial events in the royal family, such as the tonsure (top-knot cutting) of princes or a coronation, provided Lao officials the opportunity to bear gifts to the king--and probably gain settlements in return on pending litigation or appointments to office. Something unusual might be sent to the king just to attract his attention, such as the gift of a rare white bird and a brass gong from one governor.3

Requisitions

External political events were always accompanied by extraordinary demands on the revenues of a Lao town. A high ranking official making a visit to a town expected not only to be supplied with everything he required for himself and his entourage, but also to receive gifts from the governor. One deputy from the Ministry of the North visiting Ubon was presented with a gold sword, pieces of silk, ivory, and other costly items.4 During wartime or when troubled frontiers required military action, armies moved from place to place living off the land and requisitioning whatever equipment, foodstuffs, and transport animals were needed without compensation to the peasants. When operations were first begun against the Vietnamese on the left bank, one town was required to supply teak trees to the Nakhon Phanom commander,5 probably for use in building barracks, official residences, fortifications, and granaries. Saltpetre was regularly

1. TNA RSPS9/259: Phrom to Sisinghathep, ca. July/Aug.1883.

2. TNL R5/60/25: inventory of gifts presented by governors and memo., 3 Feb. 1887.

3. TNL R5/4/21: register of audiences for provincial governors and memo., l0 Sept. 1880.

4. TNA RSPS9/257: Sisinghathep to Bamrap, 14 Aug. 1883.

5. TNL R3/l196/24: Sisuriya to Chakkri, 23 July 1834.

supplied by Phuwiang to Nongkhai and by certain villages under Ubon for military use.1

The Lao, unlike the Thai, were not subject to regular taxation on their rice crops.2 Nonetheless, Lao towns were expected to maintain granaries for use in emergencies. Rice collections to fill the granaries took the form of occasional requisitions rather than a regular tax. Granary stocks were used to assist the needy during periods of drought when there were widespread shortages.

The Lao states were among the foremost suppliers of elephants, which were in great demand for transportation. Most of those presented to Rama V by provincial governors during the first two years of his reign came from the Mekong basin.3 A passing army or commissioner always requisitioned the elephants as well as oxen belonging to local officials. Some towns occasionally sent elephants in place of taxes owed to Bangkok.4

Levies in Kind

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Lao towns came to be known collectively as the ‘levy towns’. The Thai regarded them basically in terms of the local products which they sent in taxes for the use of the state. From the Thai financial point of view they existed for their levies. The treasury of Rama II often failed to make ends meet. Rama III was forced to undertake tax reorganisations to provide for the ordinary financial requirements of the kingdom and to finance his campaigns against Vietnam.5 After the suppression of Wiangchan the system of requiring tribute alone was discarded and replaced by one which brought more significant revenues to Bangkok and represented the real wealth of the towns.

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK4/7: Wuttha to Chakkri, 3 Jan. 1889.TNA R5 PS9/259: Phrom to Sisahathep, ca. July/Aug. 1883.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon27: Ratchasena to D, 16 Jan. 1890.

3. TNL RS/19/5: list of elephants presented 1869-1870.

4. TNL RS/19/5: list of elephants, various dates.

5. Damrong, 'Customs and Traditions Series, Part 16: An Historical Study of Various Kinds of Taxation' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1924), p. 11.

Each town made an estimate of the total number of able men liable for taxation and services to the state; and from this number was calculated a fixed quantity of products which the town was required to send to Bangkok annually.

The value of the products determined the quantity. Time and labour were not taken into account; and of course there were wide discrepancies between the efforts required to gather and prepare various products. The effective tax burden of some peasants was thus far greater than others. The system was not an innovation and not limited to the Lao.

Groups of Thai peasants had been designated to provide levies to the state long before the rise of the Bangkok dynasty;1 and various units of peasants in Thailand throughout the nineteenth century were required to pay their taxes in kind with products which could be used by the king and high officials for commerce. Thai commissioners first began to extend the levy system to the Lao states during 1830-1832 by dividing officials and peasants into levy units and fixing the quantities to be demanded.2 For the remainder of the third reign Bangkok's almost exclusive preoccupation with internal affairs in the Lao states was the setting up of a levy system on a functional basis. The majority of extant documents relating to the Lao states in this period deal with demands and receipts of levies. General patterns of levy payments are shown on map 7.

The oldest levy product--which was also the most widespread and most frequently remitted--was cardamoms, a spice whose seed capsules were traded commercially as a condiment and for medicinal uses. Orders were sent out in 1830 for about a dozen towns to harvest cardamoms and remit them to Bangkok.3 Each peasant designated for this work was ordered to remit 12 kg.,4 the value of which was supposed to represent the tax he owed the state. Although they grew wild in the forests, cardamom plants did require a little care and

1. Khachon, 'Status of the Peasantry' (reprinted edition, Bangkok, 1967), p. 17.

2. TNL R3/l192/13: memoranda concerning levies, 1830-1832.

3. TNL R3/l192/13: memo., 5 Oct. 1830.

4. TNL R3/l192/13: memoranda, 30 July 1830 and 21 July 1831.

regular picking at the height of each season in order to ensure the maximum harvest. There was no culture system, however, and the peasants were left on their own to harvest the required quantities as best they could. As the population grew and cardamoms became scarce, the levies were adjusted downwards over long periods of time to reflect the increasing value of the seeds. By the fifth reign the levy was fixed at only 6 kg. per peasant,1 the value of which represented a payment of two baht,2 which was an average tax payment for the time.

A gold levy was demanded from Attapu, situated in an important gold producing region, from the time it was first brought under direct Bangkok supervision. The total levy was high for the sparsely populated region at 280 baht-weight (3.2 kg.) annually.3 But Attapu had charge over the hilltribes of a wide frontier region; and collecting the gold washed from rivers was the principal means of taxing such people.

References to gold levies suggest that the development of gold mining in the mountains along the western rim of the Mun and Chi basins was officially encouraged from the late 1830s, with regular remittances thereafter from Nakhon Ratchasima and Nongkhai (whose limits of influence met between their satellites Phukhiao and Phuwiang). Lao prisoners from Wiangchan resettled in Nakhon Ratchasima were organised into levy Units in the 1830s, paying gold annually to officials of the Grand Palace of the king and the Front Palace of the heir-apparent who were in charge of them.4 A group of 600 men at Nongkhai were designated to produce a 160 baht-weight levy annually (4 grams per man) by panning in the Mekong,5 while the satellite Phuwiang sent an additional 50 baht-weight in

1. TNL R5/60/27: Chakkri to Sisaket, 12 Oct. 1887. TNL R5/64/22: Yasothon governor to Chakkri, n.d. (1873?).

2. TNA R5Kh13.2/13/1283: D to Sommot, 26 Jan. 1897. TNL R4/1229/107.Chakkri to Nakhon Borirak, 7 June 1867. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon31: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

3. TNL RS/64/21: extract of Attapu despatch, 17 Apr. 1864.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.NRl: Phichai to Chakkri, 4 Mar. 1884. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR43: Phiren to Chakkri, 19 Feb. 1888.

5. TNL R3/1200/11: Chakkri to Prathum, 31 Aug. 1838.

gold.1 By the early fourth reign Nongkhai was producing 228 baht-weight (3.42 kg.) annually,2 although this was reduced in the fifth reign to only 169 baht-weight (2.54 kg.), with an output of only 1.26 grams per man expected from the satellite Kamutthasai.3 It was estimated that one person washing in the river below Nongkhai in the best season could produce one-eighth baht-weight (1.87 grams) per week.4 Thus the levy represented at most a week or two of labour.

The other products subject to regular levies were sticlac, beeswax, and lacquer. Fibre used for making string was levied at first, but later discontinued. The silk levied from Khukhan (460 kg.) and Det (179 kg.) was likewise not continued.5 And levies of bleached, white cloth were received on rare occasions. Nongkhai was required to send white cloth worth about 100 baht, plus l0

buckets (about 200 litres) of lacquer.6 Peasants found the work required to make lacquer distasteful, and were extremely reluctant to do it voluntarily, preferring to substitute something else if possible.7

Ivory and rhinoceros horn were valuable export products for the China trade during the third and fourth reigns, procured largely from the lower Mekong basin. Attapd was a principal supplier for ivory. Champasak, Sithandon, and Ubon supplied some rhinoceros horn, although this product was extremely rare.8 In order to ensure a monopoly of the trade for Bangkok, levies of ivory and rhinoceros horn were set for Champasak and other towns, and all trading in the two products between the lower Mekong states and Cambodia or Vietnam was forbidden.9

1. TNL R3/1201/262: memo., 27 Jan. 1840.

2. TNL R4J1216/42: Nikorabodin to Rama IV, 5 Aug. 1854.

3. TNL R5/8/26: Chakkri to Prathum, 26 Sept. 1887.

4. TNA R5YT5.6/IS: Gittins, 'Report on Proposed Extension', 15 Sept. 1894.

5. TNL R3/l199/44: Charoen to Akkharasunthon, 15 Feb. 1838.

6. TNL R4/1216/42: Nikorabodin to Rama IV, 5 Aug. 1854.

7. TNA R5M1.3/16/256: D to R5, 31 Dec. 1900.

8. TNL R3/1194/39: Mahawichai to Chakkri, 6 July 1832. References also in TNL R3/1194/39 and R3/1201/103.

9. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ch3/4: Bamrap to Phanuwong, 4 May 1882.

Commutations

Towns which were unable to meet the quotas set by the levy system were allowed as an alternative to send an equivalent value in silver. Already very common in the late third reign, sending silver in lieu of products became the rule rather than the exception in the latter half of the century. Provincial officials found it convenient to send silver as a levy 'commutation' rather than transport heavy and bulky products long distances. The difficulty in sending products from certain places to Bangkok had already been admitted in an 1824 decree by which padifield tax usually remitted in rice was commuted to a money tax for the Thai towns considered too distant from the capital to send rice easily to the state granaries.1 Without even taking into account the mountains and malarial forests that had to be traversed, the distances were far greater for the Lao. Khonkaen was able to send 400 baht in silver (which weighed only 6 kg.) in lieu of 1,200 kg. of cardamoms, and sent 48 baht (0.72 kg.) in lieu of a bulky white cloth levy,2 free as well of the difficulties involved in packing and protecting the products from bad weather during the journey. Wherever sufficient quantities of coins were in the hands of the peasants, it was certainly simpler to collect specie than produce. Levy commutations were often collected at rates varying from 2 to 6 baht per peasant in different towns.3 Bangkok refused, however, to permit a transformation of the levy system into a simple money tax. In the mid-1830s Ubon tried to establish a tax in silver of 4 baht per peasant; but

Bangkok soon ordered this practice discontinued in favour of the levies.4 Thai demands for Lao products were sometimes beyond the capacities--or willingness--of Lao towns to remit them through the levy system. It was not uncommon for Bangkok to order commutation money used to buy ivory,

1. *Thesaphiban*, xii/68 (Nov. 1911), 50-52: ministerial regulation, Sept./Oct. 1824.

2. TNL R4/1229/107: Chakkri to Nakhon Borirak, 7 June 1867.

3. TNL R5/10/28: Chakkri to Siworarat, 21 June 1890.

4. TNL R3/1201/26: Nakhon Borirak to Chakkri, 19 Mar. 1839.

cardamoms, and beeswax required in excess of the fixed levies,1 or miscellaneous products not regularly levied such as tin, silk, and woven mats.2

Local Revenues

Most revenues for which there is documentary evidence were accumulated for Bangkok alone. A certain portion undoubtedly found its way into the pockets of local officials at every stage of collection, through falsification of peasant registration lists, forcing peasants to pay more than was actually remitted to Bangkok, and sometimes collecting twice for a single year's taxes. Local officials were financially accountable to no one. Bangkok required no receipts to be issued for payments and no accounts to be maintained, as long as a reasonably large lump sum was forthcoming. Statistics were limited to local censuses: the sum total of able men controlled by all local officials and headmen. Officials at all levels were subject to little scrutiny; and it was easy for one to help himself to the revenues or products he handled.3

Local utilisation of revenues is obscure. There is little suggestion in any provincial despatch, edict, commissioner's report, or traveller's account that revenues were put to any public use at all. There were no public works except monasteries, which were built by private donations of money, materials, and labour. The construction of official residences required only requisitions of local materials and conscripted labour. There was no need for public funds. Revenues retained locally were divided up solely as salaries for the upkeep of the official class.

The customary Lao division of labour was to designate two-thirds of registered peasants as 'levy peasants', with their taxes or products reserved for Bangkok, and the remaining third as 'service peasants', whose labour (or taxes in lieu

1. TNL R3/l192/13: memo., 23 Sept. 1830.

2. TNL R4/1221/78: Chakkri to Phanom, 6 Dec. 1859. TNL R4/1220/4l: extract, Nakhon Ratchasima despatch of 8 Sept. 1858. TNL R4/1217/61: Chakkri to Chao Phraya Nakhon Ratchasima, 24 Aug. 1855.

3. TNL RS/9/19: Rattanabodin to Phiren, 27 Jan. 1890.

of it) went largely to the official class.1 Table 4 gives the theoretical value of levies, commutations, gifts and local revenues for Ubon during the middle of the nineteenth century. There were more than 6,000 registered peasants. Roughly 4,000 were designated as levy peasants paying 2 baht each: a total of 8,000 baht to be remitted to Bangkok. The remaining 2,000 or so peasants were divided among the officials as service peasants. But if they provided no labour to the official, he could simply collect a commutation tax of 4 baht from each of them--double the rate on levy peasants. By employing this device Ubon officials were able to reserve half of all revenues for themselves in theory. In practice they undoubtedly kept much more. Table 5 outlines the official class according to the number of service peasants placed under each official. The highest frequency is found among those with 10 peasants, each thus getting 40 baht in lieu of services, followed closely by those with 6 peasants getting 24 baht each.

Incomes of lesser officials were supplemented by legal fees. Headmen and junior elders in charge of small groups of peasants and villages had authority to settle minor litigation; and it was customary to charge a small fee for the service. To bring a serious case up for judgement a plaintiff in Nakhon Phanom had to pay 1.75 baht in fees to the judges and others who decided the case, while the defendant had to pay 0.50 baht secretarial fee to the scribes who recorded the case.2

It is not possible to investigate the financial relationships between provincial towns and their satellites. Nothing concerning the obligations of a satellite to provide revenue to its parent town appeared in the official correspondence. Satellites did pay taxes directly to the parent towns, in addition to the levies destined for Bangkok. Governors of the parent towns remitted the levies of their satellites

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/25: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/31,34: two despatches, Ratchasena to Chakkri, 11 Dec. 1886. TNA R5PS9/259: Phrom to Sisahathep, ca. July/Aug. 1883. TNL R5/58/7: Chakkri to Prathum, 12 Aug. 1880.

2. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, ‘Renseignements sur Lakhon’, Aug.-Sept. 1890.

separately from their own, sending along a covering letter for which they charged a fee from the subordinate governor.1 Once satellite revenues were received in Bangkok, acknowledgements were made by way of the parent town.

Satellite alliances could be loosened as, a result of competitive bidding among neighbouring town governors. Khongchiam was originally under Champasak, paying 9 catties of silver (about 1.2 kg.) to the prince. It transferred to Khemmarat, whose governor demanded only 8, and finally to Ubon where it had to pay a mere 7 catties.2 Unfortunately when satellite governors addressed complaints to Bangkok, their dissatisfaction was expressed only in terms of the ‘oppression’ of their superiors, without further elucidation of the financial arrangements involved.

Revenue Taxes

The complex Thai system of revenue taxes did not extend to the Lao states.3 The presence of Thai-style tax farms in Nakhon Ratchasima and its satellites--and their absence from adjacent Lao towns--provided a striking distinction between the inner and outer provincial areas.4 Property taxes--padifields, orchards, commercial buildings, boats, and fishing taxes--were also farmed out annually in Thailand to the highest bidder (usually Chinese), who paid to the state a lump sum representing the tax on a certain type of property or commercial goods traded by the peasants (e.g., salt, condiments, spirits), for a certain area, where he was then free to collect and keep whatever taxes he could from individual peasants. Chinese collectors were appointed for Nakhon Ratchasima, but to none of the Lao towns. Gambling was similarly farmed out annually to licencees who were given exclusive rights in a fixed area to operate gambling houses. Gambling farms did exist in some Lao satellites such as Kaenthao and Loei, which, as satellites of the Thai town of

1. Aymonier, *Voyage dans le Laos*, i, 302.

2. Ibid., 160-161.

3. TNA R5M46/l: Phitthayalap to Prasit, 2 June 1892.

4. Aymonier, op. cit., ii, 61-62.

Phetchabun, were included in the farm of the parent town.1 The farms did not exist anywhere in the Lao states on a regular basis; and no revenues from gambling were remitted to Bangkok.2 There were no spirit farms in the Lao states, where the practice of unrestricted home distillation of alcohol was allowed to continue.3 Bangkok was not able to collect duties on imports or exports, as no customs officials were posted anywhere along the eastern frontiers.

Although the Thai demanded no revenues for the state from these sources, Lao officials sometimes copied Thai-style taxes in order to increase their own revenues. There were no state taxes on fish, tobacco, or salt. Nongkhai officials nonetheless collected taxes on all three: up to one-third the catch of certain varieties of fish, and l0 per cent on tobacco and salt traded.4 A certain percentage of the production from salt flats near Ubon was collected by local officials.5 Transit impost stations were established by local officials at the borders of some towns; and inland duties were collected irregularly on goods and animals passing in either direction. No revenues from these stations seem to have been remitted to Bangkok. Revenue taxes indeed existed, even though Bangkok knew nothing about them for most of the century.

Opium

Bangkok had little success in suppressing the sale and use of opium in the Lao states. In Thailand sales were an exclusively state-controlled monopoly in theory, with smoking legally restricted to Chinese alone. A law had been decreed by Rama II giving merchants and addicts a period of one year in which to discontinue sales and use of the drug, after

1. TNL R5/73/6: Chakkri to Phetcharat, 23 June 1879.

2. TNA R5M2.12khai57: edict to 36 towns, 4 Dec. 1884.

3. TNL R5/8/2: Chakkri to Maha Amat, 15 Dec. 1886.

4. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 17 Mar. 1892.

5. TNA R5M62.1/30: Maha Amat to Rattanabodin, n.d. (Aug. 1890?).

which time arrests and punishments were threatened.1 The law did not apply to the Lao states, and apparently was not actively enforced in Thailand either until about 1838, when police raids were made against opium smugglers.2 In the same year the prohibition of the drug (except for use by Chinese) began to appear in Lao state edicts as well.3 The following year nine thousand copies of the law were printed,4 and probably distributed to the Lao towns as well as Thai. From the late third reign edicts sent to the Lao states regularly decreed that the laws concerning opium should be enforced as they were in Thailand. Bangkok failed to make any state monopoly arrangements for the Lao states, and appointed no opium revenue collectors. Government monopoly farms were, however, established in Nakhon Ratchasima and its satellites, where Chinese merchant families were most numerous. But none were appointed by the state or by local officials in the five Forest Khmer towns.5 Lao officials generally ignored the edicts; and opium trading continued unhampered by state monopolies or other revenue restrictions.

The opium trade flourished in the principalities, in spite of equal prohibitions there. Unknown to Bangkok the Champasak prince regularly authorised a Chinese to farm opium in his state, and kept the revenues for himself.6 The Luang Phrabang princes and elders were actively engaged in the trade, and at times invested most of their cash in opium trading with neighbouring states.7

1. *Thesaphiban*, vii/42 (Sept. 1909), 186-190: decree, 19 May 1819.

2. Vella, *Siam under Rama III*, pp. 17-18.

3. TNL R3/ll98/4: Chakkri to Suwannaphum elders, l0 June 1836, does not mention opium. The earliest document I have found prohibiting opium in a Lao town is in *Thesaphiban*, xix/112 (July 1915), 120: Chakkri to Siyotha, 17 Aug. 1838.

4. Damrong, ‘Introduction’, in Rama IV, ‘Collected Proclamations’ (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1922), i, 2.

5. TNL R5/8/2: Chakkri to Maha Amat, 15 Dec. 1886.

6. TNL R5/8/2: Chakkri to Maha Amat, 15 Dec. 1886.

7. TNA R5M62.1/60/169: D to RV, 21 July 1893.

Chapter Seven: The Peasantry

Due to the nature of extant documents, the only aspects of peasant and village social organisation which can be investigated are those which were determined by the revenues system. The interests of Bangkok lay in revenues alone. As long as regular payments were made, the Thai were not concerned with the ways in which Lao society functioned. The correspondence thus suggests very little of how the peasantry was controlled by the elite, and almost nothing of village organisation, There is no evidence of Lao social structure prior to 1827. All records in the city of Wiangchan were destroyed; and documents dealing with day to day affairs in other principalities and towns have disappeared. Archives preserved in Bangkok from the period prior to 1827 do not deal with revenues--the usual source of information on social structure for the remainder of the century. Neither are there European sources of any sort. One can attempt to do little more than outline the major divisions of society as they existed from the 1830s onward.

Because the revenues system was imposed by the Thai, one should expect to find strong parallels with Thai social organization. It cannot be inferred that the mid-nineteenth century Lao social system was a purely Lao one. There were overriding Thai influences involved, although there is no evidence suggesting how the new Lao social order was set up, or by whom. The Thai commissioners who went out to the Lao states to oversee revenue matters never stayed very long. It is doubtful that they alone were responsible for modifications. More likely it was the Lao elite themselves who adapted existing social structures to the demands of the new revenues system introduced in the 1830s.

There is no evidence in the archives dealing with the position of women in society. All taxation and other obligations to the state were limited to males. A ‘census’ in the traditional sense was a register of able men, not of

1. The two best general works on old Thai social organisation are Khachon’s ‘Status of the Peasantry, and Rabibhadana’s *Organization of Thai, Society in the Early Bangkok Period*.

the peasantry as a whole.

The class division of the Lao peasantry was threefold. The basic distinction in the Lao states was between those whose revenues were utilised locally, and those whose revenues went to Bangkok. In addition to the official division fixed by the revenues system, with two-thirds of able men designated as levy peasants and one-third as service peasants, there existed a small number of slaves. Each of the three classes was subdivided into two or three distinct categories with equal functions or status, but constituted in different ways. In contrast the Thai peasantry was divided into five classes according to a more sophisticated system of functions and controls. Although the Lao system was less complicated, it nonetheless provided functional equivalents for all the Thai peasant classes.

The Lao service Peasants provided a single equivalent for both the 'public service' and the 'personal service' peasants found in Thailand. (Chart 2.) The Thai public service peasants were required to perform three months of corvée annually for the state without paying other taxes. Their labour was supervised by the princes or high officials charged with building fortifications, official residences and state-supported monasteries, or digging canals. They could escape this work either by hiring substitute labourers or paying a commutation tax. Each high official or prince also received several hundred peasants for his personal use, paying to the treasury a fixed capitation tax on each of them.1 The labour and taxes gained from the peasants of both service classes in Thailand went directly to the state.

Service peasants in the Lao states were reserved expressly for the use of the town. Bangkok received no revenues from this class.2 They were the equivalent of 'public funds' upon which the Lao states could draw if required. The use of peasants was a form of salary alloted to officials. There was no tradition of a separate personal service class. Lao officials employed the service peasants under their supervision as they wished without making any distinction between

1. Khachon, 'Status of the Peasantry', pp. 2-3.

2. TNA R5/10/28: Chakkri to Siworarat, 21 June 1890.

public and private affairs. The service peasants were used to build private residences for officials and their families1 just as they were used for public works such as repairing religious buildings.2 The distinction--even if made--would sometimes have been a fine one, as in the case of peasants required to construct, maintain or guard public property. Since ruling families used their own homes for official functions--as offices, treasuries, arsenals, and granaries--no clear distinction could be made between public and private employment of corvée. When an official went traveling, the same service peasants acted as porters for his baggage or oarsmen for his boats, regardless of the public or private nature of his business.

The function of the service peasant was simply to assist the official in carrying out his duties. As shown in Table 5 every official of Ubon, regardless of how insignificant his post, supervised at least four (and more commonly six or ten) service peasants.3 If he carried out his duties without the peasants, then he was entitled to collect 4 baht from each of them, and retain the money for himself as part of his 'salary'. Alternatively he could use their labour in his padifields or to care for his cattle. The service peasant arrangement was a useful one in view of the subsistence level of the economy, and a profitable one for officials, providing remuneration for carrying out their duties. An exception was the responsibility for border patrols assigned to officials of some towns. If they were to fulfil their obligations regularly, their peasants would probably resist additional labour or taxation. If they were merely to report that the borders were 'quiet' without actually going out to investigate, the officials could employ their service peasants at home for their own purposes. This is undoubtedly one of the causes underlying the erratic nature of security and border surveillance during the middle of the century.

Bangkok did not allow any Thai officials to exercise authority over peasants in the Lao towns. Rather than permit

1. TNA R5T5.1 (Japan-France) 20: Prodhomme to bishop, 26 Jan. 1891.

2. TNL R4/1219/30: Chakkri to Phanom, 4 Oct. 1857.

3. TNA R5PS9/259: Phrom to Sisinghathep, ca. July/Aug. 1883.

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the creation of units of personal service peasants in the isolated Lao states, the king instead shared the revenues from the levies with Bangkok princes and high officials.1 The few documents which state the destination of levies show that they were sent to the Grand Palace, the Front Palace, and to officials of the Ministry of the North. In terms of income the levy peasant class thus served partly as an equivalent for personal service peasants vis-à-vis the Thai elite. It also filled the role of the 'royal peasants' who in Thailand were a class distinct from levy peasants, regularly used for maintaining royal properties, providing rice to royal granaries, carrying on royal trade, building palaces and royal monasteries, and so forth. There were a few royal peasants in Nakhon Ratchasima and perhaps in some of the Lao towns as well to tend cattle and elephants belonging to the king; but their uses were limited because of their isolation from the capital.

In contrast to the service peasants, who were thinly distributed with a few coming under the direct supervision of each of a large number of officials, the 'levy peasants' were organised in large units. This organisation parallels the Thai system, and may have been created along with the Thai-imposed system of levies. The basic levy peasant unit was the 'troop', subdivided into a variable number of 'groups'. Thai influence in the composition of this unit is obvious from the fact that many troop leaders and their deputies were given Thai ranks and titles. The scheme presented in Chart 3 is modelled on a levy troop consisting of about 650 men and women set up at Uthen in 1889 by a Thai commissioner, who made provisional appointments for the troop leader and deputy, and supervised the appointments of group leaders and the division of the peasants among them.2 This organisation was also valid for some service peasants with fixed duties, notably the border patrol troops. However, a troop was supposed to be constituted of peasants of only one class, with no mixing of levy and service peasants.3

1. TNL R5/64/21: extract of Attapu despatch, (1874?).

2. TNA R5M62.1/26/365: Maha Amat to Chakkri, 26 Mar. 18895 Siworarat to Maha Amat, 4 Jan. 1889.

3. TNL R5/3/23: Phanuwong to Intharasa, 15 Aug. 1878.

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Each of the group leaders was required to collect a levy proportional to the number of peasants in his group. The troop leaders collected from the group leaders, and remitted the levy to the *ratchabut* or other appropriate town official. Collections for some products were dictated by the harvest season. Once the cardamom crop was determined to be ripe, usually in September or October, the high officials of the town authorised the troops to mobilise their labourers for the harvest. The group leaders went around to the villages using gong beaters as a signal to call the peasants together to help pick the fruit and prepare it for shipment.1 After temporary storage at the

homes of officials, it was taken to Bangkok by the transport class of service peasants (Table 2) under the supervision of one of the four keepers.

The production of many levy items was unaffected by changing seasons; and in general there were no fixed dates for levy or other tax collections.2 Ideally no demands were made on the peasants during the rice planting or harvesting seasons in order to allow them to grow their crops unencumbered. The tax collectors then came around in the dry season near the end of the local calendar year (March or April) to collect whatever was due for the preceding year. Sometimes collections were put off for years at a time and the town fell hopelessly into arrears. When Bangkok began to press for the arrears, troop leaders were obliged to squeeze multiple payments out of the peasants at one time, as in the case of two troops in Mahasarakham that were behind in their taxes and forced to pay six years' levies (collected in silver) all at once.3 The nature of timing and the unequal intervals between collections could cause great distress.

It was fortunate that Thai supervision of Lao revenues was light handed and undemanding, because Bangkok's attitude towards the arrears built up by some towns was detached from reality. Edicts typically exhorted town officials to collect taxes regularly 'without fail' and remit all arrears in full

1. TNA R5M59/7/45: Prachak to D, 14 Nov. 1892.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/5: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 8 Apr. 1886.

3. TNL R5/6/4: Chakkri to Charoen, 3 Aug. 1882.

'with none lacking' regardless of circumstances, as in the case of one town eleven years in arrears on a levy product.1 Such orders were as strikingly idealistic--the mechanical wording a mere convention--as they were unheeded. Bangkok never specified how such taxes should be collected. That responsibility was left to local officials. The central registry, which maintained the lists of peasants used as a basis for levies, could play only a passive role in levy collections, because it was a weak department with no real authority over provincial officials and no means of forcing delinquents to pay.2 In 1858 Sithandon made a partial payment of its 1847/8 levy, but was still ten years in arrears at more than four thousand baht per year.3 Bangkok could do little more in such cases than issue frequent reminders for the governors to bring accounts up to date, as sending out a special commissioner and his entourage to collect personally would have entailed a greater expense than the revenue gained. Appointments, however, could be withheld, until at least partial payments were made and Bangkok became satisfied that the remainder would be forthcoming.4

The way in which taxes were collected at the village level is not known. Village headmen are rarely mentioned in documents; and there is insufficient evidence to investigate their roles. A hierarchy of village officials did exist parallel to that of Thailand, although the titles were different. There was a village 'headman' (*phô ban*, literally 'village father'), and a 'chief headmen' (*ta saeng*, literally a village 'grandfather') over each 'commune' or group of several villages.5 It may be assumed that the activities of the headmen in both Lao and Thai society were the same: dealing with justice, security, revenue collection, and so forth. There may have been major differences in functions, however, because of the structure of the elite. The Lao who acted as headman may also have been a group leader or town elder at the same time.

1. TNL R5/4/10: Chakkri to Phetchabun, 26 Nov. 1879.

2. Rama V, 'Speech on the 1888 Changes in the Administration of the Country' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1927), pp. 14-16.

3. TNL R4/1220/19: Chakkri to Sithandon, 25 Mar. 1858.

4. TNL R4/1229/l07: Chakkri to Nakhon Borirak, 7 June 1867.

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As group leader he collected levies from his group (perhaps the 'village' itself) and remitted them to the governor through the troop leader. A type of functional specialisation may have been required of villages within one troop.

In one Ubon document some 'villages' were equated with single groups, understood to number about 50 able men, and each was assigned certain tasks: one village providing a saltpetre levy, one for border patrol, one for guard duty at public buildings.1

A stepwise process leading to the formation of troops designated for certain tasks is suggested in some documents. A Nongkhai aristocrat was appointed in 1880 with a Thai rank and title as a revenue collector over about eighty able men in certain villages to collect a bee forest revenue of 240 kg. of wax and honey to be remitted annually to the Grand Palace.2 In such cases once an area had become populous enough to justify organising the peasantry for tax purposes, an official would propose to collect revenues on some natural resource; and Bangkok would then appoint him as a revenue collector with authority over a certain circumscription. This arrangement, organised around the villages with the headmen as group leaders, might later be converted into a troop. There is also some evidence that troops tended to be groups of related families, or some other natural social unit such as the village. An attempt by one troop leader to add to his troop peasants other than those who were related to existing families in the troop was viewed as abnormal, and thus to be discouraged.3 Everyone belonging to the social unit automatically belonged to the troop.

Lao social organisation would appear to be different from the Thai partly because of settlement patterns. The Lao tended to settle in large groups on fertile terrain around the few dependable sources of fresh water, whereas the Thai, thanks to richer soil and abundant water supplies in central Thailand, were able to settle almost anywhere the land was

1. TNA R5PS9/259: Phrom to Sisahathep, ca. July/Aug. 1883.

2. TNL R5/4/l: Chakkri to Prathum, 16 Feb. 1880.

3. TNA RSPS25/40/1245: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883, case 16.

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flat enough for padifield cultivation. The scattered pattern of Thai settlement favoured a strong headman system: a respected local villager to deal with both local problems as well as with higher outside officials. The Lao settlements were more highly concentrated and the headmen in closer contact with one another as well as with town officials. This arrangement was favourable to a more

complex assembly of elders whose status was arranged in a definite hierarchy of ‘town’ elders despite their village connexions, as opposed to the Thai system in which all village headmen were of roughly equal status. It would appear also that the Lao headmen were few in number compared to the whole body of officials. As shown in Table 6 all the headmen and their deputies in Uthen in 1890 formed only about 8 per cent of the official class.

The unsettled character of Lao villages and the tendency to migrate in search of fertile land and water gave rise to two alternative types of troops. As in Thailand, the peasant was not bound to the land but only to a particular troop leader. There was little provision for adjusting the tax payments demanded of the troop to account for population increases or losses, except over long periods of time. Sudden change in troop population was a problem unique to the Lao states, where crop failures could induce entire villages to move elsewhere. If a number of peasants migrated outside the territory of the town where they were registered, it was worthwhile for their troop leaders to seek them out and continue to collect taxes as usual.

Troop leaders were permitted to exercise their authority over their peasants without any territorial restrictions.1 But this system was not efficient. In order to prevent a loss of revenue, mi. grant peasants were sometimes designated as ‘non-resident’ peasants in reference to the town where they had moved. If there were a sufficient number of them, settled in one place but belonging to another town, they could be organised into a ‘non-resident troop’ with their

1. TNL R4/1228/108: Phutharaphai to Phichai, 4 May 1866.

own troop leader.1 They legally belonged to their former town; and their taxes could be remitted either through the town of registration or the town or residence.

The second alternative was the ‘external troop’, which might be formed as a result of both migration and political rivalry. If a large portion of a troop moved to a new town and the troop leader petitioned Bangkok, the complete transfer of jurisdiction to the new town was usually approved as a matter of policy. An entire troop transferring could be designated, however, as an external troop in reference to the new town, paying its usual levy directly to Bangkok without acting through either town. Au equivalent reduction was then allowed in the levy demanded from its former town. In principle the external troop was a means of adjusting the tax rates without a drop in revenue. In practice the troop leaders escaped the authority of local governors. Most external troops simply remained in the host towns without ever coming under their direct authority. The troop would, however, become part of the new town if it were used as a basis for founding a satellite.

Occasionally a portion of the peasantry of a single town was set apart as an external troop as a means of breaking up powerful cliques or reconciling conflicting cliques that could not govern together. The formation of an external troop was sometimes favoured locally as a means of dividing power, because the governor and other town officials could not collect levies from the external troop unless designated by Bangkok to do so. The governor of Nakhon Phanom secured the separation of some of his peasants to form an external troop under a local official over the objections of the *uparat* and elders. Once the old governor died, his successor tried, but was unable, to suppress the special status of the troop and bring it back under the control of the town.2

The external troop could also be used by ruling families as a means of retaining exclusive control over a portion of the peasantry regardless of which clique was in power.

1. TNL R5/10/28: Chakkri to Siworarat, 21 June 1890.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK5/36: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 4 Mar. 1889.

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Following the death of the Khukhan deputy governor, his son requested to become an external troop leader and take over his father's cardemom levy troop. The request was approved, and he was then given a title and rank by Bangkok. The Khukhan governor, reluctant to relinquish his authority, resisted turning over to him all the peasants that he claimed.1 The new troop leader was exhorted to remit his levies regularly in full--but significantly the usual exhortations to a lesser town official to obey the governor and deputy governor was omitted, emphasising his independence from their control. In such cases the external troop was legally outside the authority of the governor and town elders, while remaining physically in its home territory.2 The external troop leader could correspond with the Ministry of the North directly on matters of taxation--although this was not often done--and thus had direct access to Bangkok independently of town officials.3 Bangkok recognised that the external troops were not firmly under the control of the town elite and that they tended to resist the orders of the town officials.4 There is nonetheless no evidence to suggest that Bangkok used the troop leaders in order to manipulate power within the towns.

An estimate of the populations of troops is difficult to determine owing to the varied ways in which censuses were reported. Frequently only the number of able men of the peasant class (comprising those subject to taxation or services, but not the officials and other exempt classes) were included, although sometimes figures for the total population--or even the latter minus children--were given. Chart 4 outlines the division of labour among adult males in selected populations. (One should bear in mind that this represents only about one-quarter of the total populations of the towns and troops used as examples, and in terms of manpower neglects considerably more than one-quarter of the population composed of women and older children, none of

1. TNL R4/1223/29: Chakkri to Khukhan governor, 7 Dec. 1861.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/30: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

3. TNA RSM2.12kai.Chl: Charoenrattana to Chakkri, 11 May 1884.

4. TNA RSM59/7/12: Wichit to Chakkri, 13 Mar. 1892.

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whom owed obligations to the state but who provided probably up to one-half of all labour required for the livelihood of the individual family.) The men of Chart 4 are divided into two categories, according to whether liable to taxation or exempt. Those receiving official class exemptions (including male adult relatives of high officials even if they held no posts) tended to comprise about one-fifth to one-third of adult males. Exemptions were also allowed to peasants in-

capable or working: the aged and the infirm. Members of the Buddhist Order were exempt from all official obligations; and any peasant could enter this exempt class at will by taking the vows of a bhikkhu. This class was not always added to old town censuses. But in cases where it was, it would appear that it contained at any one time something of the order of 10 per cent of adult males. Total exemptions thus tended to include about one-third to one-half of all men. Correspondingly only one-half to two-thirds--that is, the 'able men'--actually paid taxes or gave services in the form of labour to the state.

The number of people per troop varied widely. Data presented in Chart 4 indicates the sizes of two levy troops (with about 280 and 580 able men) and one service (border patrol) troop (with 190 able men). The Nonghan *uparat* became the external troop leader in Nongkhai, and then governor of the satellite Kamutthasai, with only 490 able men under his control.1 A troop leader under Kalasin was able to gather, through transfers of peasants from four other towns, a total of nearly 800 able men, which was deemed sufficiently large for the Kalasin governor to propose that the troop be converted into the satellite Kantharawichai with the troop leader as governor.2 An external troop leader in Nakhon Phanom was given 270 able men.3 One cardamom levy troop in Khemmarat created in 1832 had 470 able men, and another created in 1855 had 470 also.4 A new troop

1. TNA R5PS25/40/1245: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883, case 6.

2. TNL R5/80/16: Chasaen to RV, 25 Aug. 1874.

3. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK36: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 4 Mar. 1888.

4. TNL R3/l192/13: memo., 14 Apr. 1832. TNL R4/1216/25: Chakkri to Khemmarat elders, 11 Mar. 1855. (?).

created in Uthen from volunteers was given a total of 640 peasants (evidently adult males and females), and a local official was designated as troop leader with the rank of *phra*, the next lower rank of *luang* going to his deputy.1 It would appear then that a troop typically consisted of a few hundred able men, with an overall population six to eight times as large.

Slaves

The slaves forming the lowest social class were too few in number to be incorporated into the revenue system. (Chart 4.) Unlike the Thai, who collected a fixed tax per slave from the slave owner, the Lao had no definite revenue policy towards slavery. Some towns collected a levy from the owners, some did not, and slaves sometimes were not even registered along with other classes of the peasantry.2 The Lao could become slaves by selling themselves to masters of their own choice, entering the class of 'debt slaves' which was common also in Thailand.3 By repaying his debt or purchase price, the slave became free again. The trade in 'life slaves', consisting largely of people captured in raids on hilltribes villages, centred on Attapu and Champasak. Life slaves were rare as far north as Nakhon Phanom, where most was debt slavery.4

There were proportionally fewer slaves in the Lao states than in Thailand. The subsistence level economy of the region did not foster the expansion of slavery as a source of agricultural labour. Life slaves tilling the padifields were of less value in the Lao towns than in Thailand because there

was no export market for crops. The Lao evidently did not sell themselves into slavery merely to escape

1. TNA R5M62.1/26/365: Maha Amat to Chakkri, 26 Mar. 1889. Siworarat to Maha Amat, 4 Jan. 1889.

2. TNA RSPS25/319: Phakdi to Bamrap, 20 July 1884. MAE Pavie 33: Malglaive, 'Essai', 23 Aug. 1891.

3. TNA R5PS25/13: Phakdi to Bamrap, 23 July 1884.

4. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhon', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

taxation, as Thai peasants were wont to do.1 Finally, the Lao recognised no equivalent of 'prisoners of war' slavery. The Thai regarded as slaves all people (including the Lao) carried off to Thailand during wartime for resettlement, whereas the Lao regarded them simply as peasants.2 If the Thai system had been adopted, many of the satellites along the Mekong would have been populated entirely by slaves.

l. A. Rabibhadana, The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period. Cornell University South-east Asia Program, lxxiv, 1969), p. 118

2. TNA R5M1.3/8/28: Raphi to RV, 17 July 1902.

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Chapter Eight: Thai Expansion in the Mekong Basin, 1883-1890

When the treaty of 1867 was concluded, dividing the Khmer states between France and Thailand, the French had no knowledge of the Mekong basin north of the cataracts below Sithandon.1 The map of the Mekong and body of information gathered by the de Lagrée-Garnier mission published soon afterwards did stir some adventurous sentiment for opening the region to exploration and trade. But Cochinchina was opposed to any official involvement in the interior so long as the French position elsewhere remained unclear. The governor at Saigon explicitly forbade a French scientific mission in 1869 from discussing the question of a protectorate over Champasak similar to that over Phnom Penh, although the Champasak prince himself had first suggested the possibility.2 No support was given by the colony to extensive exploration of the Forest Khmer States, Ubon, Champasak, Stung Treng, and Attapu carried out during 1875-1877 by the naturalist Dr. Jules Harmand,3 whose mission was declared by the governor to be 'completely useless from the viewpoint of the interests of the colony'.4 During the 1870s Bangkok filled her treaty obligations to allow travel in the interior by supplying Saigon with a quantity of blank passports which the colonial government then issued at its own discretion. By the early 1880s when numerous consular cases began to arise--limited largely to Asiatic subjects of treaty powers, as few Europeans yet ventured into the central Mekong basin--the Lao governors and princes were simply ordered to refer to Bangkok all cases involving foreigners.5 The development of French interests in the interior naturally had to await the establishment of commercial bases in more accessible areas already under French influence and, more significantly, the establishment

1. SOM Indochine Cl0(79): instructions to de Lagrée, 25 May 1866.

2. SOM Indochine C10(218): Ohier to Marine, 22 June 1869.

3. SOM Indochine Cl0(125)/600: Contre-amiral to Marine, l0 Aug. 1875.

4. SOM Indochine Cl0(125): gouverneur to Marine, 6 May 1875.

5. TNL R5/58/13: edict 29 to Nan, Luang Phrabang, and Champasak, 1881; edict 31 to 69 governors, 1881.

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of firm and exclusive French political power over the neighbouring states through new agreements with the Khmer principality, Vietnam, and China.

Only in 1883 did an official interest in the Lao states begin to take shape. In the middle of that year the French had been doing battle in Tonkin with remnants of the Chinese 'Black Flags' who, together with bandits and other rebels, were called 'Hô' by the Thai. Widespread Hô pillaging in 1875 and 1876 had been put down by a Thai military expedition sent by way of Luang Phrabang and Nongkhai. A new outbreak of attacks in 1883 threw Bangkok into a panic, which rapidly abated when it was realised that only minor incursions had been made, and that the Hô were not

actually threatening Thai dominated administrative centres. A hastily conceived plan for a major military expedition to be led by the Minister of the North himself was set in motion, but quickly abandoned in favour of a new type of mission: political investigation with a view towards future planning. Confiding in his uncle the Minister of the North, the king admitted:

> 'I feel that the significance of the military expedition which you would have undertaken in the Lao states would not have been very great. What does remain as most important is to organise provincial affairs.'1

The king noted further that the French themselves had weakened the Hô, who were fleeing into upper left bank territory partly claimed by Thailand; and that if the French were to 'follow in pursuit to suppress them, there is nothing to impede this, because it is a land with no owners to govern it'.2 The king concluded that no army should be sent--only a mission to gather information on existing conditions for use in administrative planning. The mission to be led by the minister himself was to be put off in order to give Bangkok time to investigate what needed to be done. Stressing the political implications of his own mission projected for 1884 or 1885, the minister dismissed the internal problems of banditry and a recent sharp decline in revenues as relatively unimportant for the moment.

1. TNA R5PS25/19: RV to Bamrap, l0 Dec. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS25/24: RV to Bamrap, 13 Dec. 1883.

> 'But the matter of my going to see the frontiers along the Mekong is very important. I shall have to examine both banks [of the Mekong] and regulate provincial affairs definitively along the limits of our frontiers where they meet [Vietnam], to provide us with argument for dealing with the French in future.'1

He felt that this mission had to be carefully planned and executed, as it would take many years to accomplish its aims. The king agreed, noting that Lao administration had become 'like a rusty engine which cannot be used'. Attention to internal affairs would be limited of necessity to making the old machine function smoothly once again. Administrative reorganisation could be put off until a later time.2 A mission under Phraya Ratchaworanukun was therefore despatched to Nongkhai in the early months of 1884 to investigate the upper left bank situation. But before any of the information gathered by this mission was received, French activities in Cambodia suddenly jolted Bangkok to consider that the Thai might no longer have the several years necessary to assert their domination over the left bank.

In June 1884 a convention was signed in Phnom Perth providing for a French resident commissioner to Cambodia. An article in *The Straits Times*, strongly criticising the French move as a straightforward annexation of the protectorate which seemed to contravene the provisions of the 1867 treaty with Thailand,3 had a profound effect on the Thai which assurances from the French consul could not alleviate. Already worried at the implications of the 1883 convention with Hué, the Thai were shocked by the French action in Phnom Penh with its extraterritorial implications, and the uncertainty as to where the French might act next.4 The king declared that it was now clear that Thai domination along the eastern frontiers would be threatened in future, that

attention to provincial affairs could no longer be postponed, and that Bangkok must act immediately to organise everywhere along the frontier bordering on French

1. TNA R5PS25/25: Bamrap to RV, 14 Dec. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS25/28: RV to Bamrap, 17 Dec. 1883.

3. *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1884.

4. TNA R5PS25/187: Phanuwong to RV, 5 July 1884.

possessions.1 Late in 1884 after the monsoons the governor of Phichai was despatched to Luang Phrabang with a small army to reinforce the Ratchaworanukun forces in the upper left bank region. Early in 1885 James McCarthy of the royal map department was sent on a mission to survey the whole of the upper left bank with a view towards formulating a clear territorial claim. And in February 1885 Phraya Maha Amat (Run Siphen), a deputy in the Ministry of the North, was posted to Champasak as resident high commissioner to carry out border organisation in the south-east.

Events of 1885 completed the setting which brought the Thai into conflict with the French along the frontiers for the next eight years. Threatened not only by the Black Flags and bandits of Tonkin, the French were also embroiled from 1881 to 1885 with the Chinese government over tributary rights in Vietnam. By 1885 when China withdrew her troops and signed a treaty leaving France unchallenged in Vietnam, and in Vietnam's dependencies--and deferring border delineations from the Gulf of Tonkin westward towards the Lao states to a joint commission--the urgency of the need to do something about their weak position in the upper left bank states was driven home to the Thai.2 Immediately following the 1885 monsoons armies were despatched to Luang Phrabang under the commander Waiworanat, who was to reinforce the existing troops there, and to Nongkhai under Prince Prachak, who was to act as a temporary resident commissioner dealing with the Phuan State and the middle left bank.

A French report of early 1885 on the interior of Indochina claimed for France parts of the left bank in the Lao states up to the Mekong river. This report, and a massive study of the potential for French expansion in Indochina which followed it--basing a claim for French rights to the whole of the left bank Lao states plus the Forest Khmer states on ethnic and historical arguments3--stuck in the minds of the Thai, and

1. TNA R5PS25/188: RV to Phanuwong, 6 July 1884.

2. The text of the treaty of 9 June 1885 between France and China is published in G. Hertslet (ed.), *Hertslet's China Treaties* (3rd ed., London, 1908), i, 296-300.

3. J. de Lanessan, *L'Expansion coloniale de la France* (Paris, 1886), pp. 500-501.

became even more alarming when the author was appointed governor general six years later.1 At the end of 1885 the Thai foreign minister objected strongly to a French proposal to place a consular

agent at Luang Phrabang as foreboding a realisation of the ideas set forth in the report.2 Anxious to place agents in the Lao states to gather commercial information and observe the activities of Thai commissioners there (not to mention the British advance towards the upper Mekong as a result of the late 1885 annexation of upper Burma), the French foreign minister had already designated Auguste Pavie--a Frenchman with several years experience in provincial Thailand as a telegraph department employee--as vice-consul for Luang Phrabang even before the question of his appointment was settled in Bangkok. At the insistence of the Thai, the French consul was authorised to sign a convention allowing the establishment of a vice-consulate, analogous to a recent convention for the British vice-consulate in the Mûang principalities.3 Although the French convention was never ratified, Bangkok was satisfied for the moment that it ensured French recognition of Thai sovereignty over the principality. Ultimately it served only to provide a means by which French agents were placed in Luang Phrabang and allowed to explore widely throughout the Lao states. Pavie was delayed in Bangkok during the middle of 1886. And by the time he departed, following the monsoons, Bangkok had despatched resident commissioners to Luang Phrabang,4 to Chiang Khwang in the Phuan State,5 and to Khamkoet in the Kadin basin.6

This line of commissionerships at Luang Phrabang, at Nongkhai (with subordinate commissioners at Chiang Khwang and Khamkoet), and at Champasak (with subordinates at Stung

1. TNA R5M59/6/29: Thewawong to RV, 20 May 1891.

2. MAE CC Bangkok 6/35: Kergaradec to Freycinet, 25 Jan. 1886.

3. MAE CC Bangkok 6: MAE to Kergaradec, 27 Jan. 1886. *Parl. Papers* 1884, lxxxii: treaty with Siam, signed at Bangkok 3 Sept. 1883.

4. TNL R5/79/20: Phonlathep to Sutcharit, 6 Oct, 1886.

5. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK4: Suriyawongsa to Prathum, l7 Apr. 1887.

6. TNA R5M59/l: memo. on despatch no. 24, 25 Sept. 1890.

Treng, Khukhan, Ubon, and other minor posts) was created just as the French began in earnest to explore the Lao states. In three successive September birthday speeches from the throne, Rama V had announced (1) in 1884 that the watershed of the Mekong should be considered as the natural border between Thai and French possessions,1 (2) in 1885 that all Lao people should, as a cognate of the Thai race, be governed by Bangkok,2 and (3) in 1886 that Thai domination should extend beyond the watershed to include the entire Phuan, Huaphan, and Sipsong Chuthai states since the Thai armies had already suppressed the Hô in this region and begun to extend civilian administration over them.3 Small units of Thai soldiers proceeded to scour the left bank, sweeping away any resistance encountered among the local populace in the process of suppressing the Hô and occupying the new ‘borders’ defined by Thai surveys. In the upper Da river basin where the French had already been active for some years, and where Thai actions were strongly opposed by the local elite, an agreement was made in late 1888 whereby the Thai withdrew across the watershed from Dien Bien Phu, leaving the Sipsong Chuthai in French hands, in exchange for a French guarantee not to enter the Huaphan while border negotiations were under way. Elsewhere

the French were neither immediately aware of Thai activities nor able to attempt any opposition other than setting up their own border posts opposite the Thai camps.

From 1887 to 1893 insignificant incidents arose constantly along the watershed west of Hué and in the Phuan State, were magnified out of all proportions by an alarmist colonial press, and used to keep up constant diplomatic pressure on Bangkok. In early 1893 the French government took firm action to resolve the territorial disputes. Several hundred troops sent to occupy the lower and middle left bank areas displaced the Thai troops and, with the exception of one incident, ejected them from the left bank without firing a single shot. Thai counter-attacks were immediately organised. But the matter came precipitously to a close in Bangkok

1. MAE Asie 81: note, Kergaradec, l7 Jan. 1885.

2. Rama V, 'Speeches', p. 41: speech, 21 Sept. 1885.

3. Ibid., p. 48: speech, 2l Sept. 1886.

itself when the Thai fired upon two French gunboats, which had disregarded a Thai refusal of entry into the Chao Phraya river and had attempted to anchor in the estuary as allowed by treaty rights. An ultimatum was sent by Paris demanding reparation for the attack, and a renunciation of all Thai claims to territory on the left bank. The ultimatum was accepted, a formal treaty incorporating the terms was signed in October, and Thai involvement in all parts of the left bank came to an end.

Oiling the Machinery

Before examining the results of the treaty and the new administrative policies in the Lao states which it necessitated, one should examine from an internal point of view the impact of the early resident commissionerships on those Lao states retained under Thai authority. The first extension of direct Thai control over a Lao state was made in Ubon. The imposition of the 'foreign' prince Phrom as governor over the old Ubon ruling family in 1866 has already been discussed. In the 1870s members of the old family had been appointed to the posts of *ratchawong* and *ratchabut*--the latter, of course, having wide powers over taxation. It was soon apparent that the two families could not govern harmoniously. Bangkok responded weakly at first to mutual accusations sent by the two cliques on numerous occasions, expressing the king's displeasure at subordinate officials who did not obey their superiors.1 Despite regular admonition from Bangkok the rulers in Ubon and its satellites were unwilling to reconcile their differences; and for lack of co-operation, the town fell further and further behind in its tax collecting.

Finally in the middle of 1881 the three contenders arrived in Bangkok making accusations against each other for the administrative disorders that had arisen. Deciding that there would be no end to the quarrels otherwise, Bangkok announced that the *ratchawong* and *ratchabut* would be detained in the capital indefinitely. Prince Phrom was ordered to return to Ubon and collect all his tax arrears, with a warning

1. TNL R5/57/15: Chakkri to Ubon, 19 Jan. 1878.

> ‘to act with magnanimity and justice towards the elders and relatives of the *ratchawong* and *ratchabut*, not to show malice or oppression, causing them to report to and upset in any way the *ratchawong* and *ratchabut*.’l

Upon arriving home Phrom clashed immediately with the old elite by attempting to arrest a satellite governor for administrative irregularities. After failing to gain any cooperation in collecting taxes at the end of the year from the *ratchabut*’s brother--who had become the new leader of the opposition--Phrom tried again in the middle of the next year to exert his authority over the peasants of the old family, only to be met with armed resistance.2

A second attempt was made by Bangkok to intervene and sort out the rivalry in early 1882, When the *ratchabut* in Bangkok refused to order his supporters at home to cease all resistance, he was thrown into prison. Phrom and. his adversaries were then instructed to proceed to Bangkok, leaving the *uparat* to administer alone.3 The orders noted that Phrom was incapable of governing. It was clear that he would not be allowed to return home again; and he declined to go.

In addition to the chaos in Ubon, there was rivalry between the Lao rulers of Saenpang, and the local Khmer elders and peasantry, which had caused another large reduction in revenues.4 Administration in Attapu was also in disorder. And in Champasak a nagging case of injustice brought by a French trader against the prince had been pending for several years.5 The Minister of the North considered sending a lesser ministry official, Luang Phakdi (That), on mission to deal with everything. But it was soon found necessary to send a high ranking deputy in the ministry, Phraya Sisinghathep (Run Siphen), on an urgent mission to the Khmer provinces. It was decided that he could deal best with the Lao states as well.6 Arriving in Battambang in November 1882, however,

1. TNL R5/80/4: Chakkri to Ubon uparat, 20 June 1881.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon6: Phrom to Sisinghathep, 20 Jan 1882.

3. TNL R5/80/4: Chakkri to Phrom, 8 Mar., 1882.

4. TNA R5PS9/244: Sisinghathep to Bamrap, 26 June 1883.

5. TNA R5PS9/36: Sisinghathep to Seniphithak, 3 Dec. 1882.

6. TNA R5PS9/24: RV to Bamrap, 21 Oct. 1882.

Run was delayed for several months settling local affairs, and nearly renounced his tour to Champasak and Ubon because of illness and fever among his entourage.

In the meantime Bangkok had second thoughts about the deteriorating situation in Ubon, and decided to send That after all, first to ensure that Phrom and the Ubon elders heeded new orders to go to Bangkok, and then to remain as a supervisory commissioner to see that Ubon tax arrears were collected.1 That was accompanied by two dozen soldiers in case he encountered any resistance.2

Run was able to proceed.to Champasak finally in April 1883, where. Prince Yuttitham yielded under mild pressure and agreed to award damages claimed by the French trader.3 Yuttitham, who

had barely been aware of the Thai commercial agreements, was given a printed copy of Thailand's treaties to use in dealing with foreigners. Run reported that Yuttitham seemed amenable to the judicial restrictions which had to be placed on him, but voiced particular concern that he would be incapable of maintaining relations with foreigners in the manner that Bangkok desired.

> 'It is apparent from the statements of the princes, the elders, and the people that a lot of them have objections towards subjects of foreign nations. It would be a disadvantage for the present Champasak prince to continue to govern the land because he is a stupid man with insufficient knowledge. But the princes, elders, and people love him very much, because he is generous and kind. '4

Run spent the next few months settling affairs in the Champasak region, and investigating complaints from towns in the Don basin and from Ubon satellites along the Mekong.

Soon after That's arrival in Ubon in May, his soldiers became involved in brawls with the local Lao. Phrom took the opportunity to write immediately to Bangkok and to Run at Champasak requesting they be recalled.5 Exasperated by the resistance of the Ubon elite, Bangkok sent confidential

1. TNL R5/80/14: Chakkri to Phrom, 28 Mar. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS9/118: RV to Bamrap, 25 Mar. 1883.

3. TNA R5PS9/161: Sisinghathep to Bamrap, 25 Apr. 1883.

4. TNA R5PS9/164: Sisinghathep to Bamrap, 24 Apr. 1883.

5. TNA R5PS9/191: Phrom to Sisinghathep, 30 May 1883.

instructions to Run to follow up quickly the orders sent to him several months earlier--to remove the conflicting parties from Ubon and install That as supervisory commissioner--add-ing that he should, investigate how well That had been carrying out his orders, and giving him the freedom to organise other affairs in Ubon as he judged appropriate.1 Run arrived in Ubon near the end of July. In a frantic attempt to retain his post, Phrom presented him with a general report on his administrative organisation and a proposal to increase Ubon levies to nearly double the current level. Run ignored the report--and the bribes that were undoubtedly offered--and set out for the Khmer provinces in late August.3 Phrom was taken to Bangkok, where he was to act as a 'consultant' on Ubon affairs until he died several years later.

With a view towards administrative planning, Run compiled a lengthy report on litigation, concerning internal territorial disputes, peasant control, and taxation in the lower Chi and Mun region--some of which had been pending for nearly ten years.4 Once the chief Ubon officials had been removed from power, all effective authority was invested in That. He set about immediately to carry out the king's interim policy of making the rusty machinery of Lao administration function so that revenues could be pumped at their former rates into the treasury.

That's mission to Ubon was to set up a 'model' commissionership for other towns to imitate later.5 He took only a few Thai officials with him; and the successes of his mission were due to his personal abilities alone. His instructions from the king were a carefully formulated plan to bring complete authority into the hands of the commissioner, while

1. TNA R5PS9/251: Chakkri to Sisinghathep, 21 Aug. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS9/259: Phrom to Sisinghathep, ca. July-Aug. 1883.

3. TNA R5PS9/249: Khathathon to Chakkri, 9 Sept. 1883.

4. TNA R5PS25/40: Sisinghathep to RV, 23 Dec. 1883. For the backgrounds and resolution of these peasant-control disputes, refer to Chapter Thirteen.

5. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon42: Phakdi to Chakkri, 24 Jan. 1891.

preserving the Lao system intact.1 General administration was to be 'centralised' to the extent that he was to have monthly meetings with town elders to discuss all affairs; and a general report was to be submitted to Bangkok every third month. He was given sole authority to revise the registers of peasants, send a yearly census to Bangkok, and collect all taxes. Arrears were to be collected gradually; and it was emphasised that this should be done without causing hardships. He was directed to grant fixed annual shares of taxes to town elders. Finally, the commissioner was to create a special high court in which he would sit as judge with final authority. After a strict warning against exceeding the powers invested in him, accepting bribes or engaging in peculation, or surrounding himself by a coterie of favourites, he was exhorted with a reminder of the trust placed upon him and the far-reaching effects of his mission which the king envisaged.

> 'In order to carry out this mission the commissioner must use the greatest of his abilities to maintain himself as a person respected and held in awe so that the Lao will feel affection towards him--as though towards their own parents--as one of their elders. The man who is to be commissioner should take note and understand that this mission is not the traditional sort of mission which has existed in the past. It is an important mission of a new sort, in which His Majesty has made the decision to organise affairs in the eastern Lao towns from this time onward. The future successes or failures in all of the Lao towns depend most importantly on this mission, because this is the first time to build up for Bangkok the roots of important powers and benefits. If the first roots are unsteady or are ruined in any way, absolutely everything which is to be done later will be endangered and resisted. The success of failure of this mission lies solely with the commissioner who will carry it out.'2

In view of the fact that the decision for this centralisation programme was taken well before the French treaties in Hué and Phnom Penh even came into question, the determined attitude evident in it is striking. By contrast it was only a year later that the first commissioner was finally sent to attempt internal reforms in the troubled Mûang principalities,

1. TNA R5PS9/128: Chakkri to Phakdi, 8 Apr. 1883.

2. TNA R5PS9/128: Chakkri to Phakdi, 8 Apr. 1883 (His Majesty's Instructions to the Commissioner).

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where British commercial interests had been active and often in conflict with local elites for decades; and that unsuccessful mission ended after a year's trial.1

The creation of the various Thai commissionerships has often been interpreted as a reaction to French intervention 'in Tonkin and Annam, which was certainly a factor to be considered. But the placement of this first resident commissioner in a Lao state came when it did as the outcome of internal problems. Even so, the plan already foresaw the use of the Ubon post as a basis for extending direct control by Bangkok over the surrounding region.

To increase That's status and give the commissionership an aspect of greater permanence, he was given a much more important sounding title in 1885 and promoted to an exceptionally high rank, becoming 'Phraya Ratchasena'. Orders were sent at the same time for all commissioners and subordinates to build permanent wooden offices, residences, treasuries, and granaries to replace the Lao buildings of woven elephant grass in every town where a commissionership was to be set up.3 That himself appropriated Prince Phrom's residence for official use in Ubon. By 1888, however, the only town to have constructed new buildings was Khemmarat.4 And outward appearances of permanence were slow in arriving.

The impact of the Ubon commissionership was felt most strongly through the fiscal authority wielded by That. A policy requiring triple taxes (6 baht per able man) at intervals until all arrears had been paid in full was systematically implemented over a period of several years. Receipts were given to the peasants to shield them against fraud and to help in compiling accurate registers. The cases of arrears in Ubon and three nearby satellites were examined immediately; and That set about to collect as soon as Phrom had departed.5 By the end of the year he had taken in

1. N. Brailey, 'The Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement in Western Laos' (University of London Ph.D. thesis 1968), pp. 283-284.

2. Amorawong, 'Annals', iii, 335.

3. TNL R5M2.12kai.Ubon3: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 8 Apr. 1886.

4. TNA R5M57/25/2: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 20 Dec. 1887.

5. TNA R5PS25/5: Phakdi to Chakkri, 11 Oct. 1883.

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more than 80,000 baht representing the taxes on more than 13,000 men for the years 1874-1876. A close inspection of the registers revealed that more than 10 per cent of liable men were being concealed by the elders, allowing That to wring out a proportional increase of nearly 9,000 baht for the treasury.1 The following year triple taxes (for the years 1877-1879) were collected again.2 Triple taxation was extended in 1885 to other Ubon satellites once the extent of their arrears had been determined: Phimun was ten years in arrears on cardamom levies, Trakanphutphon eight

years, and Chanumanmonthon had sent none since its founding six years earlier.3 Obviously one could not triple the harvests to conform to the edicts; so commutations were collected in specie. After a year's pause, triple taxes were collected from Ubon again in 1886, at which time That fixed the water-of-allegiance ceremony coinciding with the local new year (late March or early April) as the official tax-collecting-and-remitting period to be observed henceforth in all places.4

Increases in revenue to Bangkok inevitably reduced the incomes of the Lao official class as their tax collecting procedures became subject to increasing scrutiny. At the height of the rivalry among the elite, the governors of the satellites had been giving small allowances from the levies only to the highest officials, and withholding shares altogether from most of the elders, provoking lesser officials to protect themselves by hiding large numbers of peasants to guarantee their incomes.5 The commissioner fell back upon the customary division of labour by announcing that one-third of the peasants would be reserved for the upkeep of the official class, but with significant differences: the shares came from the local treasury instead of directly from the peasants, and a fixed amount was given to each official

1. TNA R5PS25/173: Phakdi to Chakkri, 21 May 1884.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/25;Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

3. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/23,28,31 : Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/5: Ratchasena to Chakkri,. 8 Apr. 1886.

5. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/18: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 10 Dec. 1887.

by the commissioner according to a scale of remunerations he had drawn up.1 Additional restrictions had already been placed on the official class when too many of their relatives petitioned for tax exemptions (a total of 5,000 for Ubon plus three satellites alone).2 Four categories for exemptions were designated by That--(1) the four keepers of the law, (2) adjutants and senior elders, (3) junior elders and the sons of aristocrats, (4) bhikkhus--and his decision to collect taxes at a uniform rate from everyone else holding no official post was upheld by Bangkok.3 The plan meant a substantial loss in income for junior elders, as the minimum annual share of the levies was to be only 3 baht. (See Table 5: the minimum considered appropriate by the Lao a few years earlier was 16 baht.) Officials continued to derive some income from their service peasants, although several years later when the peasants themselves were struggling for a living under conditions near to famine, even the highest officials became so hard pressed they found it necessary to seek loans from the treasury to make ends meet.4

The commissioner's authority, initially confined to Ubon, began within a year to extend over neighbouring towns. Once he began to investigate accusations brought by lesser officials, he found it necessary to arrest the Suwannaphum *ratchabut* on numerous charges of murder, and the *uparat* for inciting internal dissension. He placed his own candidate--the Phanomphrai satellite governor--in charge of Suwannaphum administration;5 and announced that he was bringing all Suwannaphum taxation under his personal control at the 'request' of the local elders.6 His actions were firmly backed by Bangkok through an edict which added Suwannaphum officially to the

commissionership--justified on the grounds that local variations in tax collecting should be suppressed in favour

l. Ibid. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/31,34: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 11 Dec. 1886.

2. TNA R5PS25/319: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 July 1884.

3. Ibid. TNA R5PS25/332: RV to Bamrap, 15 Sept. 1884.

4. TNA R5M1.4/1: Wisetphakdi to Phakdinarong, 20 June 1891. TNA R5M1.4/1/25: Phakdi to Chakkri, 4 July 1891.

5. TNA R5PS25/185: Phonphithak to Bamrap, 29 Apr. 1884.

6. TNA R5PS25/173: Phakdi to Chakkri, 21 May 1884.

of the uniform method of the commissioner--and which extended his authority to Khamthongyai as well.1 Khemmarat--situated along the route to Ubon's left bank satellites, with its own satellites clustered among those of Ubon and Khamthongyai--soon fell under the expansion. Regarding with suspicion Khemmarat's assertion that it had only 200 levy peasants, That inspected in late 1884 for hidden peasants and found that the true number was at least seven times as great. Inspections were carried out in Khamthongyai as well; and the policy of triple taxation was extended to both towns.2 Four years later while investigating taxation in Mahasarakham, it was discovered that the governor had withheld more than 25,000 baht. Although he agreed to pay the full amount in stages, That abruptly relieved him of his responsibilities by extending the fiscal control of the commissionership and the new tax collecting methods to Mahasarakham and its satellites.3 (Map 9.)

The judicial powers which the commissioner exerted were largely confined to peasant control and taxation. His attempts to enforce royal law in day to day affairs were blocked initially by the elders, who evaded his instructions by professing total ignorance of Thai laws.4 Nonetheless, he set a precedent within two months of his installment by judging personally more than thirty cases in Ubon.5 That's role as a court of appeals judge allowed him to act as arbitrator in difficulties among the elite, settling some cases himself and referring others to the ministry. But it was not yet possible to set up any sort of provincial court system. The only additional judicial power taken away from the Lao was authority over subjects of treaty nations.

In spite of his limited resources, That carried out his instructions to the letter. Arriving in Ubon with a simple and straightforward programme, he implemented it gradually through the Lao elite. A man of resolute action, he did not

1. TNA R5PS25/210: Chakkri to Phakdi, ca. 18, July 1884.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon3/33: Phakdi to Chakkri, 20 Jan. 1885.

3. TNA R5M57/25/19: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 22 Nov. 1888.

4. TNA R5PS25/8: Phakdi to Chakkri, 11 Oct. 1883.

5. TNA R5PS25/87: Phakdi to Chakkri, 31 Oct. 1883.

hesitate to extend his authority over wider and wider areas as opportunities presented themselves, seeking and getting approval from Bangkok afterwards. When a French agent visited Ubon in early 1888 he was highly impressed by That personally, as a man unusually amenable to modernisation, and by. his success in reorganising local administrationo1 He was a man of means, not prone to peculation or accepting bribes. The absence of a large official entourage--especially Thai soldiers, placed on the local populace no heavy burden for their upkeep, and gave little occasion to incite strong anti-Thai sentiments which arose elsewhere. The admirable progress he was making in Ubon, however, suffered a severe reversal during the final year of his tenure, the causes of which derived partly from changes in foreign policy begun in 1885.

1889 Policy of Expansion

The appointment in February 1885 of Phraya Maha Amat (Run Siphen) as high commissioner to Champasak2 heralded a new policy towards the Lac states which, by the end of the year, was to bring the entire eastern frontier under the supervision of a line of military commissioners. Posting a supervisory commissioner did not appear initially a radical departure from earlier policy. Run, who went out with the new title of Phraya 'Maha Amat', was the same Phraya 'Sisinghathep' who spent a year 1882-1883 settling affairs in Battambang, Champassak, and Ubon. Up until 1885 the post of the Phraya Maha Amat, a deputy in the Ministry of the North, had been loosely charged with extraordinary affairs in all the Lac and Khmer states as indicated in Map 8, while his counterpart, the Thai governor of Phichai, was charged with overseeing affairs in the Luang Phrabang principality. The presence of either as non-resident commissioner was required only on rare occasions. The ostensible reason for sending the new Maha Amat was to deal with outlaws operating, along the border below Manophrai and Stung Treng together with Prince Sivotha, rebel half-brother of King Norodom. Although

1. MAE Asie 81: Saintenoy, 'Voyage à Stung Treng, Bassac, et Oubone (oct. 1887-janv. 1888)'.

2. TNL R5/80/20: memo., 15 Feb. 1885.

the bands had been active for several years, Bangkok had not felt compelled to take action until the 1884 Phnom Penh convention authorised the presence of French resident commissioners in Cambodia and gave them the power to maintain order. With visions of French troops converging on the border, Bangkok hastily despatched edicts enjoining governors to prevent the local Khmer populace from supplying aid to the rebels.1 Shocked by the sudden extension of French authority in the direction of Thai-dominated territory, the king felt that Thai intervention to improve the administrative conditions of the frontier states could no longer be delayed.2 The French had just signed a treaty with China in May 1884 providing for the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Tonkin and giving up Chinese suzerainty over Vietnam--leaving the French free to expand at will. By the end of August, however, following a clash between Chinese and French troops for which Peking refused reparations, France was at war with China; and the struggle in Tonkin was renewed. Thailand gained a brief respite in which to plan.

Serious attention was turned at first towards the Hô bandits occupying the Phuan State and controlling parts of the Huaphan and Sipsong Chuthai towns. The armed expedition planned in late 1883 had been cancelled in favour of a fact-finding mission by the survey department, led by its British director James McCarthy.3 The resulting report received the following year proposed that a thousand-man army with artillery be sent by way of Nongkhai to establish itself at the deserted Phuan capital of Chiang Khwang and destroy the nearby Hô stronghold across the watershed at Chiang Kham, thus bringing the entire Phuan State and surrounding towns under Thai control.4 Accepting only parts of the recommendations, Bangkok despatched a small army under the Phichai governor to Luang Phrabang to assist the

1. TNA R5PS25/211: RV to Yuttitham, ca. 18 July 1884.

2. TNA R5PS25/188: RV to Phanuwong, 6 July 1884.

3. Damrong, 'Collected Historical Papers, Part 24: Records of the Hô Suppressions, (Bangkok, 1922), pp. 12-13.

4. TNA R5M59/11: 'Report of a Survey on the Route to Chiang Kham made by J. McCarthy for Prince Dit', 1884 (in Thai).

Phraya Ratchaworanukun army based at Nongkhai and already in pursuit of the Hô at Chiang Kham.

No agreement was reached immediately on how to organise a commissionership for the Cambodian borders. In the middle of January 1885 Rama V and his uncle the Minister of the North were still debating who to appoint and whether or not to include the western Khmer towns (Battambang and Siemreap) in the projected high commissionership, in view of the fact that Bangkok might intervene more effectively herself by telegraphic communication to Battambang, whereas the seat of the commissionership at Champasak would be more than a fortnight away.1 At the same time Rama V took the curious step of seeking a meeting with the governor of Cochinchina, which took place on an island at the Cambodian frontier to coincide with the king's tour of eastern coastal towns at the end of January 1885--the first official contact between Bangkok and the Saigon regime in the fifth reign.2 The most important issue sounded out by the king concerned the Thai-French border north of Cambodia.

During the next few weeks a final plan for the Champasak commissionership was drawn up, and Run was chosen to go out to supervise administration in a circumscription much reduced from that of previous Maha Amats. (Map 9.) All affairs concerning foreigners were placed in his hands; and he was given the power to remove and replace any governor at his discretion in order to enforce his authority. His foremost task was to be a. general survey to provide a basis for adjusting the borders, and to set up border posts in appropriate places.

> 'Furthermore, Phraya Maha Amat is to order the governors and elders of those frontier towns adjacent to the vassal towns of Phnom Penh and Vietnam to go out and survey the connecting borders, in whichever districts that are part of the kingdom of Bangkok, to see whatever there is of importance--mountains, forests, canals, or whatever important things--that could be a basis for the boundaries of the country. They are to make maps

fixing the indications of the borders so that these will be definite for the future. If, in any district, they

1. TNL R5/80/23: Bamrap (?) to RV, ca. 10 Jan. 1885.

2. Rama V, 'Letters of His Majesty King Rama V's Journeys' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1923), p. 11: RV to Bamrap, 30 Jan. 1885.

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feel that a border checkpost ought to be set up with someone stationed there to inspect and administer affairs and guard against dacoits entering and leaving across the frontiers, they are to arrange to set up checkposts to guard the borders of the country firmly.'1

Upon arrival Run set about immediately to order maps prepared of the southern frontiers of Stung Treng, Champasak, and Manophrai. One of his first acts was to establish a Mekong border post by adjusting the Champasak borders southward along the right bank and creating the new satellite Tharaboriwat opposite Stung Treng.2 Having delegated his tasks to subordinates, Run settled down to the good life of a highly privileged official, interrupted only by a brief military expedition to Khemmarat necessitated by events in Annam.

From the middle of 1885 Bangkok was paying close attention to Vietnamese activities in the upper Banghian basin. Just at the moment the war between France and China came to an end--with China confirming her renunciation of claims over Vietnam and withdrawing her troops from Tonkin--open revolt against the French erupted at Hué. The emperor Ham Nghi fled with his chief minister into the mountains of the Banghian region; and Run was ordered in September 1885 to take his small force to camp at Khemmarat and investigate any Vietnamese fleeing across the mountains. He arranged in early 1886 for subordinate commissioners to go to the left bank satellites (Phong, Phlan, and Lamnao) of Ubon and to Phuwadon and Salawan to set up armed border posts, prepare maps, and supervise local affairs.3 After tightening controls over the existing administration and confirming, that the French would not send troops across the mountains, Run retired to Champasak. By this time a second high commissioner had arrived on the Mekong at Nongkhai.

The army sent to attack the Hô had arrived in the Phuan State early in 1885. After an unsuccessful assault on Chiang Kham in which the commander Phraya Ratchaworanukun was wounded, it was decided to withdraw to Nongkhai for the

1. TNL R5/80/22: Chakkri to all Lao and Khmer governors, 27 Feb. 1885.

2. TNL R5/271(old)/2: edict, 28 July 1885.

3. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon l: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 8 Apr. 1886.

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monsoons and appeal to Bangkok for reinforcements. The McCarthy recommendations of the previous year were reconsidered and, at the end of the monsoons, two armies consisting of a thousand soldiers plus two battalions of artillery were led out of Bangkok under the command of

the king's half-brother Prince Prachak and Chamun Waiworanat (Choem Saeng-chuto).1 The Waiworanat expedition proceeded by way of Luang Phrabang towards the Huaphan and Sipsong Chuthai states, and established Thai control along the principal routes into Tonkin in advance of the arrival of the French 'vice-consul'. The Prachak forces joined Ratchaworanukun at Nongkhai in January 1886.2

Posting both men was a bold step. After several years of hesitation Bangkok had finally taken the decision to make an exclusive claim over the upper left bank states, plus the Kadin basin (Khamkoet town) which was to be included in Prachak's sphere of action. Following closely upon the January 1885 de Lanessan report (which proposed French territorial claims westward to the Mekong in some places) and the British advance into upper Burma, Thailand saw no alternative to a demonstration of her claims other than a direct occupation of the left bank states, for which the disorders caused by the Hô provided a ready justification. The instructions given the commanders by the king himself declared that the mission was to symbolise a purely internal affair--neither the French nor the Chinese should have any right to intervene. Surveys by McCarthy were to be an integral part of the mission; and progress reports were to be despatched to Bangkok fortnightly. A warning was added that since the purpose of the mission was to restore order and tranquility, the armies were to be strictly forbidden from engaging in the plundering and ravaging typical of previous expeditions.3

Calculations that France could not take any action in the upper or middle left bank regions proved correct. The French consul had returned to Bangkok in June 1885, after an absence

1. MAE CP Siam 9/9: Kergaradec to Freycinet, 6 Nov. 1885.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK1/l0: Sisena to Bamrap, 1 Feb. 1886.

3. TNA R5M64/1: H.M. instructions to Prachak and Waiworanat, ca. 8 Nov. 1885.

of more than one year, with instructions to keep the question of the Thai frontier foremost in mind, but to open discussions with Bangkok only on the matter of a vice-consulate for Luang Phrabang.1 News of the departure of the expeditions provoked a discussion in Paris on the necessity of investigating the situation, with the Quai d'Orsay considering that the question of delimitations might be raised immediately in order to forestall Thai occupation.2 The placement of Pavie as vice consul at Luang Phrabang had to be given priority, however, so that information might be gathered; and although Pavie arrived in Bangkok in March 1886, the Convention incorporating the terms authorising the vice-consulate was not signed until May, by which time Pavie's departure had to be delayed further because of the approaching monsoons. And even then, the exequatur was refused until the exchange of ratifications--which never took place. (Pavie was thus never officially recognised by the royal government as a consul.) Meanwhile the government of Cochinchina had informed Paris that the situation in Vietnam immobilised French troops and prevented their re-deployment for any reason.3 By the time the French could give attention to the Thai frontiers, the Thai were already entrenched, as a result of decisions taken throughout 1885, in all places where territorial rights were in question. The commissioners posted to Champasak, Nongkhai, and Luang Phrabang were already creating armed border stations along the frontiers given them to survey. And in November 1885 Thai troops had camped on disputed territory on the

Khmer coast east of Chanthaburi,4 thereby closing the last border gap where French activities might be expected. This expansion policy in the course of 1885 thus initiated what may be termed the 'occupation stage', the first of several stages of administrative change which brought the Lac states increasingly under the direct control of Bangkok.

1. MAE CC Bangkok 6: Freycinet to Kergaradec, 26 June 1885.

2. MAE CP Siam 9: Freycinet to Galiber, Nov. 1885.

3. MAE CC Bangkok 6: Bert to Kergaradec, 31 Mar. 1886.

4. MAE CP Siam 9: Kergaradec to Freycinet, 26 Nov. 1885.

Characteristics of the Occupation Stage

By its very nature the occupation stage was temporary and passed quickly. Commissioner-commanders and their subordinates were posted with a minimum of soldiers only to the strategic towns. After destroying the Hô stronghold and installing resident commissioners at Chiang Khwang and Khamkoet, Prachak withdrew from Nongkhai in March 1887 and returned to Bangkok, leaving only his deputy commissioner Phraya Suriyadet (Kat Singhaseni), a commander with the rank of captain, and about fifty Thai soldiers. The ranks were filled out thereafter by conscripting more than 500 Lao peasants to serve in rotation.1 About 500 more Lao served at Chiang Khwang,2 largely to provide the commissioner and few border guards with supplies, Run went out to Champasak with his son, two royal pages, two subordinate commissioners, a few petty officials, about 400 peasants to provide services--and only a dozen rifles--although the emergency in Hué prompted Bangkok to send him four more subordinate commissioners and 400 rifles in the latter part of the year.3 The large entourage was taken for logistic purposes; so Run had few Thai soldiers at his command.

The presence of Bangkok officials who were resident (as opposed to 'temporary, special') commissioners was required as a demonstration of Thai control. With the exception of That, they were not prepared to undertake internal reforms. While assuming a posture of superior status over all local officials, the commissioners interfered very little in local administration. Neglect of internal affairs is evident in the fact that no commissioner was placed at Nakhon Phanom even though local officials were not considered capable; and Suriyadet himself never bothered to go that far down-river.5 The chief preoccupations were the frontiers and gathering information.

1. MAE Pavie 27: Massey, journal, 21 June-17 July 1890.

2. TNA R5M59/7/18: D to RV, 6 June 1892.

3. TNL R5/80/22: memo. 29 Aug. 1885. R5/84/7: the *Wennai* to Singhanat, 7 Oct. 1885.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK9/53: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 19 Dec. 1890.

5. MAE Pavie 34: Lefèvre-Pontalis, 'Le Mékhong', July 1890.

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Run did not go out with instructions to undertake significant internal reforms. A letter from the king to Prince Yuttitham, explaining in terms of foreign affairs the necessity for placing the commissioner over his principality, gave careful assurances that there would be no change affecting the local elite.1 The powers assumed by the high commissioner during the next several years were limited mainly to activities related to the borders, foreign subjects, disputes among the elite, and active enforcement (although not very successful) of the existing prohibition against the montagnard slave trade.2 In Nongkhai the Thai laws restricting slavery continued to be ignored.3 Run did prevail upon Yuttitham to turn over the revenues from the local opium trade--a central government monopoly in theory--to the state.4 But Suriyadet did not interfere in local revenue collecting at all, except for making requisitions (charged against levies due to Bangkok anyway) to supply his own men and the border posts. The 'circumscription' of the Nongkhai post shown in. Map 9 was not an administrative circumscription. Indeed, Run was occasionally called upon as senior commissioner to settle disputes in Suriyadet's sphere as well as his own. Suriyadet's authority in this wide region of the right bank was exercised almost exclusively in terms of demanding rice and beasts of burden for the left bank. While exercising direct control over the border officials, the commissioners allowed the old elite to rule internally, issuing to the peasants whatever orders were necessary through the local officials.

The burden of maintaining the commissionerships under the usual system of living off the land naturally fell hardest upon the peasantry. During his six years at Champasak Run imposed a special annual tax (unauthorised by Bangkok) of one or more baht per able man to provide for the upkeep of his entourage, gave each of his subordinates ten to twenty

1. TNA R5M57/29: H.M. instructions to Yuttitham, 7 Aug. 1885.

2. MAE Asie 81: Saintenoy. 'Voyage à Stung Treng, Bassac et Oubone', Oct. 1887-Jan. 1888.

3. TNA R5M59/2: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 21 Jan. 1890.

4. TNA R5M1/1/30l: Maha Amat to Chakkri, 1 May 1888.

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Lao servants, and required all the towns to provide oxen, pigs, fish, salt, and Other foodstuffs regularly to feed them--practices which interfered with the livelihood of most.1

The Nongkhai commissioner was less heavy-handed, although his soldiers did stir up some disagreeable incidents with the local people.2 The Lao, who were accustomed to visits by armies, did not regard the situation as an abnormal one. Both commissioners maintained the posture of military commanders. Run was addressed as 'Commander of the Armies, in charge of national affairs'.3 And until 1890 the Nongkhai post was referred to, even in correspondence with Bangkok, as the 'Nongkhai Camp'. The popular idea that the Thai would eventually withdraw--as they had always done before--was perhaps reinforced by the failure of Suriyadet to build any permanent buildings until 1891 to serve as offices.4 The scavenging system nonetheless had its limits; and a complete reform in the means of supporting the commissionerships was hastened by the breakdown of the old system during 1890 and 1891.

The revenue reforms undertaken by That at Ubon during his first six years had provided a sound basis for financing the border operations. When Bangkok decided to make good its claims that the watershed east of the Mekong was the limit of Thai rule, Ubon had to shoulder the additional cost of placing subordinate commissioners in the upper Banghian in early 1889, supplying corvée to build a road for easier access into the region, and providing porters and supplies to create a line of guard posts in the mountain passes.5 Responsibility over the whole Banghian basin would have posed, a difficult logistics problem for Ubon in the best of times; but the situation was aggravated almost immediately

1. TNA R5M62.1/34/l14: D to RV, I Oct. 1892. M62.1/34: proclamation, 22 Mar. 1892.

2. H. Warrington Smyth, *Notes of a Journey on the Upper Mekong, Siam* (London, 1895), pp. 8, 77.

3. TNA R5M62.1/26/9: Phanom to Maha Amat, 2 May 1889.

4. TNA R5M59/5/157: RV to Rattanabodin., 19 June 1891.

5. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK7/91: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 11 Apr. 1889. M62.1/31/2: Ratchasena to Phithak, 25 Apr. 1889. M2.12kai.Ubon6/48: Phakdi to Ratchasena, 10 Mar. 1889.

by a drought during the middle of 1890, which reduced the rice harvest by more than half and created au acute shortage in all towns from Ubon down to Stung Treng.1 By early 1890 peasants from the worst affected areas were going, to the upper Mun and Chi river towns where the harvests were better in order to buy rice. Under famine conditions it was customary for taxation to be suspended in order to give relief. But faced with the necessity of filling the granaries in order to supply the border guards, That ordered special requisitions of rice,2 thus competing with the peasants for what little stocks were available. When some peasants began to emigrate from Khemmarat, a subordinate commissioner was sent to rally them, but succeeded only in making matters worse by demanding impossibly high requisitions and administering public punishments to elders who resisted.3 Nothing was done to alleviate the distress of the peasantry; and That continued to follow orders issued the previous year. Petitions against him were sent by local elders,5 but dismissed by Bangkok as merely local resistance to the authority of the commissioner. A second drought the following year finally broke the tolerance of the populace--a third of the fields could not be planted at all, seed rice was consumed, peasants were selling their animals and moving away--but That continued to use local levies in order to buy rice for the border posts.6 It was not until early 1891 that the commissioner asked Bangkok to authorise relief measures to assist the needy.7

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon6/26: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 26 Nov. 1889.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon6/27: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 16 Jan. 1890.

3. TNA R5M62.1/26: Khattiya to Maha Amat, 15 May 1890; résumé of dispatches, 26 Aug. 1890.

4. MAE Pavie 34: Lefèvre-Pontalis, journal entry for 6 Aug. 1890.

5. TNA R5M62.1/30: memo., ca. Aug. 1890.

6. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon6/8: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 24 Oct. 1890.

7. TNA R5M2.12kai.Ubon6/35: Phakdi to Chakkri, 14 Jan. 1891.

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In May 1891 officials in Bangkok were struck by the full realisation of the chaos arising: more than 7,500 people had emigrated from Ubon and Khemmarat alone.1 Finally accepting the Lao petitions as valid complaints, the king was fearful that since it was already well known that the Lao hated and feared the commissioners, the French might try to take advantage of the situation in order to stir Lao sympathies further against Thailand.2 Bangkok could not act immediately for lack of sufficient details; so it was decided to order That to Bangkok for consultations. But at that juncture he had already been serving in Nakhon Ratchasima for several months on a special mission. And the deterioration of order in Nakhon Ratchasima, too, made his advice doubly necessary. In order to appreciate fully the gravity of the situation in 1891, however, one must go back a decade to the appointment of the last High Lord Governor.

The Nakhon Ratchasima Commissionership, 1887-1891

Phraya Kamhaeng (Mek) the governor of Nakhon Ratchasima 1867-1881 had died while in Bangkok answering charges made against him for not suppressing banditry effectively and for squeezing the officials of his satellites. His satellite governors had been clamouring to be transferred away from Nakhon Ratchasima jurisdiction and given town status directly under the ministry; but this was opposed by the king on the grounds that it was crucial to the defence of the kingdom to maintain Nakhon Ratchasima as a strong military centre with a large number of peasants at its disposal.3 Passing over potential local candidates already holding high office, Bangkok immediately appointed a new Phraya Kamhaeng --Im, a member of the ruling family, but serving in Bangkok--and sent him up to put down the banditry plaguing the town and to restore the fortifications of the citadel.4 He never came to terms with the bandits; and slipped into the

1. TNA R5M59/3/5: Sisinghathep to Sonnabandit, 2May 1891.

2. TNA R5M59/3/22: RV to Rattanabodin, l0 May 1891.

3. TNA R5PS6/26: RV to Bamrap, 13 June 1878.

4. TNL R5/65/35: Kamhaeng to Chakkri, 1 Mar. 1883. M2.12kai.NR4/6: Kamhaeng to Chakkri, 14 Apr. 1885.

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ways of his predecessor by demanding excessive fees from the elders, oppressing the populace, and causing a great deal of emigration.1 He ‘had come ostensibly to make a quick fortune from this lucrative post’2 rather than to provide the strong administration that Bangkok desired. By the middle of 1885 he had become embroiled in a struggle for power against his first cousin Phraya Suriyadet (Kat) and his great-aunt’s son Phra Phakdinuchit (Ruang), both of whom already held two of the highest posts at the time of his appointment. He was accused of trying to force his opponents out of office entirely, confiscating their property, pocketing revenues collected for

public construction works, falsifying granary reports, and allowing rice stocks to fall dangerously low3--serious accusations in view of his mission and the fact that Nakhon Ratchasima was expected to give full support to Prince Prachak's expedition the same year. Suriyadet was ordered to Nongkhai with the Nakhon Ratchasima auxiliaries as Prachak's deputy commander; and his departure was highlighted by a squabble with Kamhaeng over the means of preparing the mission.8 Numerous accusations and counter-accusations flew to Bangkok during 1886, while the rivalry in Nakhon Ratchasima led to further breakdown in order. The town itself was attacked by a large band of armed men; and monastic properties were plundered. Finally at the end of the year Phra Phiren, a departmental chief in Bangkok, was designated to go out to remove the governor and other offending parties, and remain as supervisory commissioner.

During the next several years Phiren concentrated upon investigations into the cases against Kamhaeng and his rivals, logistics for the Nongkhai commissioner, construction of permanent office buildings and the telegraph line to Nongkhai, pressing local officials for tax arrears, and settling the

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR3/3: Phiren to Chakkri, 28 Nov. 1887.

2. Aymonier, 'Une Mission en Indochine', 343.

3. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR4: two despatches, Phakdi to Chakkri, 22 Dec. 1885; despatch, Suriyadet to Chakkri, 17 Sept. 1885.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR4: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 10 Nov. 1885; Kamhaeng to Chakkri, 14 Nov. 1885.

backlog of litigation. A small provincial militia was formed to deal with bandits;1 and a local official was appointed as subordinate commissioner to Nangrong in an attempt to halt the export of stolen cattle through the town (a principal occupation of bandits). The officials in charge of the transit impost stations were themselves profitably engaged in registering stolen cattle for export; and simply ignored the commissioner's orders.2 Through his unwitting use of corrupt and oppressive officials to go out to deal with bandits with whom they themselves were in league, Phiren made little progress.3 Having once been rebuked for not informing Bangkok of a rice shortage and widespread emigration caused by a drought in 1887--and also not enjoying a high rank--Phiren was hesitant to act firmly with local officials or act without specific instructions from Bangkok for fear of provoking further emigration and being berated for it.4

He sent a Nakhon Ratchasima elder in mid-1889 to remove the three highest officials at Rattanaburi for withholding taxes and resisting his authority. But the elder returned home after a few months and refused to go back, leaving the satellite in a chaotic state. As Rattanaburi was nine days' journey away and too far for Phiren to supervise, he appealed to Bangkok in the middle of 1890 to place a strong, permanent commissioner there.5 The king responded by ordering That, who had been successful in suppressing bandits at Ubon, to go to Nakhon Ratchasima to serve temporarily.6 But at this juncture, Bangkok was already on the point of reorganising the patchwork of commissionerships in the Mekong basin.

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR3/44: Phiren to Chakkri, 6 Dec. 1888.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR6/6: Phiren to Chakkri, 21 Apr. 1889. M2.12kai.NR3/10: Phiren to Chakkri, 24 May 1888. M2.12kai.NR3/27: Phiren to Chakkri, 11 Aug. 1888.

3. TNA R5M46/1/5: Sanphasit to RV, 16 Nov. 1891.

4. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR3/18: Phiren to Chakkri, 16 0ct. 1887. M2.12kai.NR6/60: Phiren to Chakkri, 13 Mar. 1889. TNL R5/80/2: Chakkri to Phiren, 27 Apr. 1889.

5. TNA R5M2.12kai.NR6/1: Phiren to Chakkri, 21 Apr. 1890.

6. TNA R5M46/1/1: Phiren to Chakkri, 21 Apr. 1890, minute by RV, 27 June 1890.

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Chapter Nine: Resident Commissionership Plans, 1890 and 1891

When the decision was made in the middle of 1890 to place the commissionerships on a permanent basis and enlarge the powers of the commissioners, the ostensible reason was to bring greater efficiency to the earlier system which had required all serious disputes and questions concerning foreigners to be referred either to Bangkok or to Maha Amat (Run).1 Although Run was given a limited number of towns to supervise directly when he first went to Champasak, he was also high commissioner over Ubon and, after the departure of Prachak in 1887, over the entire sphere of the Nongkhai command post as well. In Nakhon Ratchasima a single large town and its satellites provided a ready made territorial basis for a commissionership. But the failure to provide clear jurisdiction had been the most glaring weakness of the Lao commissionerships. Uthen, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan, and the adjacent left bank region all fell loosely under the supervision of both Suriyadet and Run as indicated in Map 9. The division of the left bank came to be fixed at the secondary watershed between the Bangfai and Banghian only after several subordinate commissioners, sent out separately by Suriyadet and Run early in 1889 to organise border posts up to the cordillera watershed, got into a dispute over their respective authority.2 The Chi basin towns came variously under the Ubon commissioner or Nongkhai commander; nonetheless these towns in the interior, like the Forest Khmer States, were largely ignored.

The first task in improving the system was to give a fixed and manageable circumscription to each commissioner. The four towns where commissioners already resided were therefore declared in 1890 the seats of four new commissionerships, each with authority over a specified number of towns. The Nongkhai command post became the seat of the 'Northern Lao' Commissionership, Ubon the seat of the 'North-eastern Lao' Commissionership, and Nakhon Ratchasima the seat of the 'Central Lao' Commissionership. A separate 'Eastern Lao'

1. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK9/2: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 28 Apr. 1891.

2. TNA R5M2.12kai.NK7/91: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 11 Apr. 189

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Commissionership was created at Champasak for a resident commissioner subordinate to the high commissioner in order to leave the latter free to deal with frontier affairs. As shown in Map 10 the powers of the Nakhon Ratchasima commissioner were extended to Phukhiao and Chonnabot, and less than a year later to encompass the lower Sak river basin in order to bring under the commissioner's jurisdiction the whole area worst affected by banditry.1 The jurisdiction of the Ubon commissioner was greatly expanded by adding to it the Forest Khmer town of Sisaket (thus placing the route from Nakhon Ratchasima to Ubon under only the two adjacent commissioner-ships), all the towns of the upper Chi basin easily accessible from Ubon, and the entire Banghian basin. The Nongkhai and Champasak commissionerships were correspondingly reduced in size. Bangkok's intention to place the commissionerships on a permanent basis was made emphatic by informing each town by edict of the new arrangements and issuing the commissioners with seals of office, comparable to those always presented to governors as the foremost symbols of their authority to wield power in the name of the state.

The exact roles to be given the commissioners in internal affairs, and the means of implementing the programme, remained a subject of debate among the princes in Bangkok, where the central administration itself had been undergoing drastic change subsequent to the introduction in 1888 of an entirely new system of ministries on a trial basis. For a year and a half following the August 1890 announcement of the commissionership system, there was a lull in Thai activity in the Lao states. The French consul general had departed early in 1889, leaving only a chancelier in charge of the legation. Bangkok did not expect to take up negotiations for a delineation until the return of Pavie, who was absent from Bangkok between November 1890 and June 1892, passing much of his time in Paris preparing maps and reports on the frontier situation. The new resident commissioner for Champasak arrived at his post in mid-1890; but received no instructions except to keep Bangkok informed of everything

1. TNA R5M46/1/17: Phiren to Chakkri, 5 June 1890. M46/1/12: Rattanabodin to RV, 4 May l891.

that happened and await specific orders.1 During late 1890 Run was pressed to complete all the maps he had originally been sent out to prepare. He turned affairs over to the resident commissioner in November,2 spent a year in Bangkok advising the king on frontier affairs, but was then posted to Battambang as high commissioner to the western Khmer towns.3 The Ubon commissioner That had departed on mission to Nakhon Ratchasima in December 1890, leaving his son in charge during the whole of the following year. Only in Nakhon Ratchasima were any significant internal changes attempted under the provisional commissionership plan.

The Nakhon Ratchasima Experiment, May 1891-March 1892

Dissatisfied with the achievements of Phiren at Nakhon Ratchasima, Bangkok decided to send someone with status sufficiently high to enforce his authority, give him the necessary military support to come to grips with the disorders, and allow him to formulate a programme for internal reform. When the new commissionerships were announced, Prince Sanphasit was designated to go on mission to Nakhon Ratchasima to restore order; but until Sanphasit arrived That was to stop to assist there on his return to Bangkok.4 For the remainder of the year Sanphasit was sent on a grand tour of Singapore, Burma, and Vietnam to observe various aspects of colonial administration.5 During the months after his return, he and the king decided upon a vast programme of action which he would try out during his one year stay in Nakhon Ratchasima, using the results of the experiments in order to plan reforms elsewhere. At the same time Sanphasit was to act as chief of local military operations, supervising an army commander with authority independent of the territorial restrictions that had hampered earlier officials, to suppress bandits throughout the commissionership, pursue them into neighbouring towns, and send all prisoners to be gaoled

1. TNA R5M62.1/28/462: Sommot to Phitsanuthep, 15 Feb. 1891.

2. TNA R5M62.1/29/24: Rattanabodin to RV, 13 June 1891.

3. *RKB*, viii/50 (7 Mar. 1892), 451.

4. TNA R5/80/28: Chakkri to Phiren, 2 July 1890.

5. TNA R5M2.14/10l: Sommot to Chit, 13 Sept. 1890.

in Nakhon Ratchasima alone awaiting judgement from the commissioner.1 His final orders were approved in April 1891. He went out with 125 soldiers and an entourage of 168 subordinates, and finally arrived at his post the following month.

Rather than act through the corrupt local elite who had been the great stumbling block for Phiren, Sanphasit circumvented them entirely by sending his own subordinates out with soldiers to deal with banditry, prepare a general ‘census, and take inventories of beasts of burden and weapons.3 The satellites and outer towns of the commissionership were divided into five military districts; and a commander with the rank of lieutenant or major was placed in charge of each. (Map 11.) Two companies of soldiers and 500 peasant auxiliaries carried out a massive campaign against cattle thieves across the mountains into the Sak river basin, apprehending 350 bandits° During his first two months in residence Sanphasit was inundated by nearly 300 civil plus 200 criminal cases to judge,4 adequate evidence of the confidence of provincial people in getting justice from a commissioner of extraordinary rank. Criminal labour was employed in the town itself to construct offices, a residence for the commissioner, gaols, army barracks, officers’ houses, and a military mess, and to widen and improve roads and waterways. Bypassing the local elders Sanphasit appointed a royal page as ‘paymaster’ responsible for receiving revenues, preparing monthly corvée lists, and keeping all records. At the village level each group of ten houses was told to elect a headman, upon whom was placed the brunt of the burden for local administrative affairs: to know the exact number of houses, beasts of burden, oxcarts, weapons, orchards, and padifields in his village; to record the movements of people, goods, and commercial animals; to issue internal passports at a minimal fee and arrest any stranger not possessing one; to

1. *RKB*, vii/45 (Feb. 1891), 408-409. TNA R5K13.2/7/84: Surasak Phalatsada, 2 Mar. 1891.

2. TNL R5/80/36: Chakkri to Phiren, 21 Apr. 1891. M2.12kai.Ubon6/3: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 30 May 1891.

3. TNA R5M46/1/5: Sanphasit to RV, 16 Nov. 1891.

4. TNA R5M46/l: file of cases for May-June 1891.

decide all litigation involving small sums of money; and to submit a general report every year with an estimate of local taxes due.1 Although threatened with imprisonment or public flogging for consorting with bandits themselves, the headmen were offered cash incentives as well for capturing criminals. Sanphasit soon discovered the principle--basic to later reforms--that providing sufficient incomes to local officials brought a large measure of order to rural areas. Governors and elders were perfectly capable of keeping bandits in check if they no longer felt it a financial necessity to permit disorder in anticipation of the shares of booty and legal fees it brought them.3

Unlike earlier missions that requisitioned and used local levies free of restraints, the funds for the 1891-1892 mission, providing adequate incomes to the entire entourage, were to come exclusively from revenues owed to the state--and the commissioner was made accountable for all expenditures. Beginning 1891 tax collecting powers were taken away from governors, elders, and troop

leaders, and invested solely in the high commissioner. Out of expected revenues of 120,000 baht budget of 28,000 was allocated for the salaries of the commissioner and his subordinates, nearly 26,000 for the army, and the surplus was to be remitted to Bangkok.4 The continuing presence of the army, although accounting for nearly half the budget was found essential to enforce the tax collecting powers of the commissioner as well as maintain order.5 Sanphasit was well prepared for the military aspects of his task, having received an extensive military education and travelled to Burma to study the recent British occupation in two successive years prior to being posted to Nakhon Ratchasima.6 His brief experiment

1. TNA R5M46/1/1: Phiren to D, 13 Apr. 1892. R5M46/6/8: Prasit to D, 22 Mar. 1895.

2. TNA R5M46/1/3: Prasit to Phitthayalap, 29 Mar. 1892.

3. TNA R5M46/3: Sanphasit to D, 20 Aug. 1891.

4. TNA R5M46/1/3: Chakkri to Phiren, 22 Apr. 1891. M46/1/33: Phiren to Chakkri, 29 Aug. 1891.

5. TNA R5K13.2/11/876: RV to Phanuphan, 24 Jan. 1893.

6. Damrong, 'A Biography of Prince Sanphasittiprasong, in Rama IV, 'Collected Proclamations of Rama IV' (ed. WNL, Bangkok, 1923), v, 7-8.

showed clearly for the first time that an army properly commanded and adequately paid could be used for constructive purposes in provincial administration. His successor Phra Prasit, who assume control as commissioner in April 1892, was instructed to continue the broad policy of administrative reform along the lines laid down by Sanphasit, and especially to develop the headman system as the basis of administrative control over the peasantry which was, ultimately, to replace the old system of elders and troop leaders.1 Shortly after Sanphasit returned to Bangkok, the new minister of Defence indicated that Bangkok would no longer need to maintain an official of exceptionally high rank there commanding many thousands of able men as in the past.

> 'It was formerly arranged for Nakhon Ratchasima to be the important centre for the "Central Lao" Commissioner. Later the powers of the commissioners were divided up among the various outer districts. The Central Lao Commissionership thus became unimportant. One must [now] consider Nakhon Ratchasima as simply nothing more than one of the outer towns.'2

Attention was turned instead to fortifying the Thai position in the Lao states themselves.

The Sovereign High Commissionerships Plan, July 1891

The same month that Sanphasit had arrived at Nakhon Ratchasima, Bangkok was aroused from the lull in frontier affairs by the appointment of de Lanessan, the well known advocate of French expansion in the Mekong basin, as governor general of Indochina. The foreign minister made an urgent appeal to the king to send Prachak back to Nongkhai to strengthen frontier defences before de Lanessan could have time to act.3 And in spite of some reservations about appearing to provoke French hostility, the king immediately made the designation.4 The urgency which the king felt is

obvious in his instructions that Prachak should depart as soon as possible in order to arrive at his post before the monsoons.

1. TNA R5M46/1/12: D to Prasit, 20 June.1892.

2. TNA R5K13.2/11/2030: Phanuphan to RV, 22 Nov. 1892.

3. TNA R5M59/6/29: Thewawong to RV, 20 May 1891.

4. TNA R5M59/6/67: RV to Prachak, 23 May 1891.

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But it was another month before the cabinet finally met to discuss the commissionerships in general, and propose candidates formally for all posts.1 And up until July when the new plan was announced, the king had still not agreed to all details of the proposals.2 Nor had the changes been explained to anyone in the ministry of the North. The elderly minister himself was regarded by the king as old fashioned, and had become a cypher in administration excluded from all important decisions. The new missions had to be worked out in minute detail by the king and princes involved. The king even had the minister of foreign affairs, rather than the deputy minister of the North, draft the necessary provincial edicts, observing that 'men with mentalities like that of (the deputy minister) are incapable of comprehending the matter fully'.3 Further delays were caused by the budgets to be allowed Prachak, and to Prince Phichit (full brother of Sanphasit) who Was designated to replace Run at Champasak.4 Thus it was not until the end of the year that the two were able to depart, each arriving at his post early in 1892.

The general 1890 plan for four resident commissionerships was confirmed in the July 1891 proclamation designating the two princes.5 But the Ubon and Champasak commissionerships were now to be governed together by Phichit under the designation of the 'Lao Kao'6 Sovereign High Commissionership. Prachak assumed authority in Nongkhai over the 'Lao Phuan' Sovereign High Commissionership, which encompassed the existing commissionerships at Nongkhai, Chiang Khwang, and Khamkoet. Two additional high commissionerships were foreseen in the plan: one for Luang Phrabang together with the Huaphan states (which had not yet taken shape by the time the left

1. TNA R5M2.3/4: cabinet minutes, 28 May 1891.

2. TNA R5M2.3/4/209: RV to cabinet, 29 June 1891.

3. TNA R5M2.3/4/361: RV to Thewawong, 14 Aug. 1891.

4. TNA R5M59/12/69: Sisinghathep to Phoem, 16 Aug. 1891. M59/12/25: Sisinghathep to Chongraksa-ong, 22 Sept. 1891. M2.3/4/146: Thewawong to RV, 11 Aug. 1891.

5. TNA R5M2.12kaiNR1: proclamation, 29 July 1891.

6. Meaning obscure. Probably 'Indigenous Lao' (i.e. those of Wiangchan and Champasak origins), to distinguish this area from the Nongkhai area, which had recently been resettled by people from the Phuan State.

bank was ceded to France), and another for the five Mûang principalities. Final decisions on the latter were deferred, as neither was considered urgent in 1891. Bangkok was concerned above all with the disputed areas along the middle left bank; and of the fifty-one officials sent out to all the northern and eastern frontiers during the first year of the plan, fourteen went to Nongkhai and twenty-one to Ubon.1

Prince Phichit, February 1892-December 1892

Phichit arrived at his post in February 1892 with full powers equal to those of a minister of state.2 After receiving a general appraisal of conditions in the commissionership, the king wrote reassuringly:

> 'I have confidence in you, to the extent of giving essentially carte-blanche to your opinions alone in every official matter.'3

Phichit had already gained some experience as a special commissioner on a not too successful mission to the Mûang principalities in 1884, and was earnest, open-minded, and inventive in his outlook on provincial reorganisation. His tenure was too short for him to accomplish much internally. His efforts had to be devoted primarily to the borders; and for this task he had inherited a muddled state of affairs from his predecessor.

Upon his arrival he found the situation to be far from what Bangkok had been led to believe. He had expected to see orderly progress towards firm Thai control as a result of Run's six years in residence; but instead he found that most Thai officials had been more concerned with enriching themselves quickly than with establishing a commissionership.

> 'The place is brimming with petty officials--just a bunch of bloody bribes-takers who are accustomed to eating from the government revenues and drinking from the blood of the people.'4

Its reports lashed out against his predecessor for having misled Bangkok to believe that he was accomplishing something more than an old fashioned military occupation.

1. TNA R5M2.3/4: D to RV, 5 Aug, 1892.

2. TNA R5M62.1/34: D to Phichit, ca. 1 July 1892.

3. TNA R5M62.1/34/569: RV to Phichit, 5 Oct. 1892.

4. TNA R5M62.1/32: Phichit to Thewawong, 28 Feb. 1892.

> 'Ever since I came out I have encountered nothing but spoliation, until my sight has been blurred by it. I do not know what's what. Everything I gaze upon or hear of is wrong. I am unable to find even a single thing to praise as being rather good, or say that he (Run) did acceptably well. And when one examines the causes of the lot of misdoings, practically all of it was caused by our own ministry administration....

> ‘Phraya Maha Amat is a truly evil man. In all my life I have never read about or heard of or encountered anyone who could act so wickedly in his master’s service, to the point of ruining everything without any charity or fear or shame at all. One cannot find a single example of true and straightforward devotion to government affairs other than for his own remuneration. I felt all choked up inside. I never expected an evil person could be evil to this extent. Even were I to exhaust my vocabulary and the dictionary in writing to you, I could not find satisfactory names to call this evil man which would be equal to his true wickedness.’1

The corruption and oppression which Phichit encountered seemed incredible. He immediately halted the heavy requisitions made by Bangkok officials for their upkeep, noting that the Lao elders themselves had been retaining most of what they collected for this purpose, and had thus brought the populace near to revolt.2 Unaware of the situation until Phichit’s first reports were received, Bangkok could only reply weakly with assurances of confidence that Phichit’s presence would be able to relieve the hardships imposed on the peasants.3

Phichit was also faced by hostility from the elite of Champasak, where news of the commissionership plan was greeted with an uproar of disapproval.4 The plan not only subordinated the princes to the local resident commissioner, posted there in addition to Phichit himself, but also tended to absorb the principality into an administrative area along with ordinary towns of inferior status. When Phichit arrived he moved his headquarters to Ubon, adding further insult, and

1. TNA R5M62.1/32/3: Phichit to D, 9 June 1892.

2. TNA R5M62.1/34/2: Phichit to RV, 15 May 1892.

3. TNA R5M62.1/34: D to Phichit, ca. 3 Aug. 1892.

4. MAE Pavie 32: Lugan to Pavie, 2 May 1891.

was soon advised by the local Buddhist patriarch that

> ‘One could almost say that a rebellion has broken out. One cannot treat Champasak as a mere dependency of Ubon. It has its full complement of princes, junior and senior elders. The Bangkok official class, both military and civilian, have all the power. For these reasons the elders cannot administer the people satisfactorily. I have observed that various people are at odds with one another.’1

More friction flared up when Phichit attempted to forbid the renewing of debt-slave contracts.

Forced to ignore the discontent of the elite for the moment, however, Bangkok’s greatest concern was French intervention. It was hoped that Phichit could gradually bring about improvements through measures designed to relieve the peasants of oppression and divert their sympathies away from the French.3 But a French consular report concerning Phichit’s departure for his post doubted his prospects for success.

> ‘Il a manifesté de très bonnes intentions à l’égard des populations qu’il doit gouverner. Malheureusement, comme tous les princes siamois, il a la charge d’une famille

> extraordinairement nombreuse, et par suite de grands besoins d'argent. La forces des choses le conduira à chercher des ressources dans le pays, et je ne sais si les bien-faits de son administration compenseront pour les habitants les nouvelles charges que sa presence va leur imposer.4

The moment of arrival for the large princely suite (numbering more than five hundred, including women), just when the area was recovering from two years of famine, was hardly an auspicious one. The removal of the administrative seat to Ubon helped to shift the onus away from Champasak, but did not remove it. And one doubts that the salaries granted to Thai officials--even if paid with any regularity--were sufficient for their families and entire household staffs as well.

1. TNA R5S8.4/4/5: Wichit to Phichit, 29 Aug. 1892.

2. MAE Siam 16/4bis: Pavie to MAE, 11 June 1893, annexe, Dombret to Pavie, 28 Mar. 1893.

3. TNA R5M62.1/34: D to Phichit, ca. 30 June 1892.

4. MAE Siam 12/33: Lorgeou to Ribot, 12 Dec. 1891.

5. TNA R5M57/10/l0l: Phichit to RV, 22 Nov. 1892.

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Border defences were found to be in complete disarray. Phichit discovered that officials whom Run had 'sent' to organise armed posts had merely despatched junior officials along with a few servants to stay in villages along the borders--and then reported their missions accomplished. Some had never even gone to places where they said they had been. And to make matters worse, some were forced to engage in commerce or intimidate nearby villagers and montagnards to make their living. The Lao army auxiliaries sent by local governors consisted of either physically unfit peasants or troublesome slaves--half of whom had died or deserted--forming a force that seemed 'more pitiable than fearful'. Phichit predicted--accurately, as the events of April 1893 were to prove--that the 'army' would flee if threatened with attack. It was obvious that his efforts had to be devoted entirely to creating the border defences which Bangkok had earlier thought already existed, and finding some way for the border post officials to bring local populations under their control without causing any great upheaval.1 The whole process of studying and surveying the frontiers had to be recommenced. Earlier reports and maps were considered unreliable; and the French were already far more knowledgeable about their own claims to particular places than were the Thai.

> 'We are being overtaken by events, as the French have always been coming to organise affairs here themselves. Before very long, we shall have to do exactly as they dictate. We will' not be able to argue with them because, in truth, we really do not know what's what. If they say something about a certain place, we follow suit and talk about it. But the place must be where they say it is, and [the situation] as they say it is. When all information is collected and set down [on paper], it will have to be a matter of letting them chose at their pleasure what they will take. If we ask them merely not to take too much, then it will work out. We will have losses of this sort generally everywhere; and really we will be able to bear it.'2

By the end of 1892 Phichit had sent his own men out to place soldiers in every district along the frontier.3 But

1. TNA R5M62.1/34/2: Phichit to RV, 15 May 1892.

2. TNA R5M62.1/34/l: Phichit to RV, 15 May 1892.

3. TNA R5M62.1/33/151: D to RV, 5 Jan. 1893.

his activities were viewed by the French as a new policy of aggression. Within a month of Phichit's arrival, the governor general became alarmed by the movements of Thai commissioners and soldiers around the watershed above the Banghian basin, and cabled Bangkok in protest.1 Phichit himself was well aware that the sympathies of border peoples were not with Bangkok, and that the Thai position there was tenuous. In response to the French colonialist press campaign of 1892 for action to support French claims over much of the left bank, Phichit observed with resignation:

> 'For one thing, if one were to speak truthfully about these border towns under dispute, we are at a disadvantage there because the populace have been closely associated with--and submissive to--their [the Vietnamese] side more than our side. Even though we can keep restraints on them for the moment, it is not a trustworthy situation at all.'2

No earlier commissioner ever dared speak so frankly about the Thai position on the left bank. Anyone less than a prince and confidant of the king would, under similar circumstances, have parroted back (from ministerial edicts) only the phrases that he knew the king desired to hear: that the borders were 'tightly guarded' and that the border peoples were 'loyal subjects' of the crown.

During his brief stay in Ubon, Phichit frequently expressed dismay at the hardships he had to suffer.

> 'There is nothing about the condition of the people of this state--from religion and administration all the way down to popular customs--to consider as good or praiseworthy. Even their clothing and food are coarse, and serve to point up the impoverishment of the consumers, making themselves appear much more pitiable. It would appear that nearly every single kind of oppression and fraudulent practice that man can do against man exists in this place.
>
> 'Even though I am a prince, it is like being a lord in hell. It would be better to be a slave in heaven, or a mere peasant in the human world.'3
>
> 'There are only impoverished and indolent people among the populace--uncivilised and of vile character. One can hardly associate with anyone, either

1. MAE Siam 13/38: Lorgeou to Ribot, 5 Mar. 1892.

2. TNA R5M62.1/33: Phichit to Phakdinarong, 24 Oct. 1892.

3. TNA R5M62.1/32: Phichit to Thewawong, 28 Feb. 1892.

> peasant or aristocrat alike. It is as though the only "human" beings here are those who came out together from Bangkok, which is one particularly extreme annoyance.1

Unwilling to accept the full reponsability for wielding the powers given him, Phichit made several requests to return to Bangkok to discuss basic changes that might be undertaken in the commissionership. It was finally decided late in 1893 that a prince with more experience in suppressing disorder and instituting change should replace him. Sanphasit was chosen and assumed office in December 1893. By this time, however, fundamental changes had been made in the structure of the central government; and the ministry was preparing to embark on a new programme of action in the interior.

The Thesaphiban System

With the two sovereign high commissioners in place at the beginning of 1892 to govern between them all the borders where Bangkok expected difficulties with France, a strong minister to supervise them was still needed. The king regarded the North as the slowest of all ministries. The elderly minister who had served since 1886 was a great inconvenience to the development of the new plan, and would simply have to go. On 1st April 1892 a new cabinet confirming the experimental system of ministries along strictly functional lines was formed. The old Ministry of the North was suppressed--with the minister shunted to a sinecure--and a 'Ministry of the Interior' replaced it. In the shuffle which followed, thirty year-old Prince Damrong was shifted from Public Instruction to the Interior, a post which he was to retain for more than two decades.

Under the new 'Thesaphiban' system of provincial administration which Damrong introduced, the kingdom was divided into administrative 'circles', each of which had a 'superintendent commissioner' at its head. The Lao states and other towns of the plateau remaining under Thai control from 1893--which maybe termed collectively the 'north-east' of the modern kingdom--were already divided into three commissioner-ships which formed the territorial basis of three circles.

1. TNA R5M57/10/101: Phichit to RV, 22 Nov. 1892.

The right bank portion of the old 'Lao Kao' Sovereign High Commissionership became the new 'Isan' Circle with headquarters at Ubon. The right bank portion of the 'Lao Phuan' Sovereign High Commissionership became the new 'Udon' Circle, with its headquarters at newly founded Udon town.1 Nakhon Ratchasima became the headquarters of the 'Nakhon Ratchasima' Circle. It was not until 1897 that the whole kingdom had been divided into fifteen circles, all still sorely lacking trained personnel for even the most essential posts.

The administrative structure underwent constant change as the Interior ministry attempted through trial and error to find a bureaucratic structure which could be applied uniformly throughout the kingdom. The Thesaphiban system as it evolved under Damrong has been examined at length by several historians, most notably: Chakkrit Noranitiphadungkan, 'Prince Damrong and the Ministry of the Interior' (Bangkok, 1963), Sutcharit Thawonsuk, 'The Life and Work of Prince Damrong

Rachanuphap', 3 volumes (Bangkok, 1964), and Tej Bunnak, 'The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892 to 1915' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis 1968). The development of provincial administration described in these works proceeded as rapidly in Nakhon Ratchasima as in any of the circles in central Thailand. Officials dealing with all general administrative affairs came under the direct control of the superintendent commissioner. The nineteen towns and satellites within the circle were divided into four military provinces each headed by a military commissioner. The towns of the Sak valley attached to Nakhon Ratchasima since 1891 were separated again in 1899 to form the new Phetchabun Circle. And once the seat of the Nangrong commissioner was moved to Buriram,3 the territorial pattern was fixed with

l. 'Isan' and 'Udon' will be used for simplicity. Udon headquarters was at the village of Makkhaeng, which was not given town status until April 1908 (TNA R5M59/41/210: D to Sommot, 27 Apr. 1908). The two circles were known, respectively, as the 'Lao Kao' and 'Lao Phuan' circles up to June 1899 (*RKB*, xvi [1899], 140: proclamation, 5 June 1899), and then as the 'North-eastern' and 'Northern' circles up until Jan. 1901 when the Thai terms were Sanskritised to 'Isan' and 'Udon' (*RKB*, xvii/44 [27 Jan. 1901], 620: proclamation, 21 Jan 1901).

2.*RKD*, xv/48 (26 Feb. 1899), 508-511.

3. TNA R5M2.5/3/41: D to RV, 1 Aug. 1901.

the three provinces (Nakhon Ratchasima, Chaiyaphum, and Buriram) which have existed ever since. Ultimately the circle superintendent's duties were limited to supervising the province governors (and through them the district officers), gaols and prisons, the circle gendarmerie, public health affairs, and the public prosecutor's office, whereas the various ministries had 'officers' (the term 'commissioner' being suppressed in 1913l) to carry on the work of Agriculture, Communications, Education, Finance, Justice, Public Works, and Defence. (Refer to Table 7 for a full list.) Not every post would have been filled in every circle and province; and the scheme should be regarded here only as a model towards which the bureaucracy of each circle was evolving.

The Thesaphiban system as described in general works dealing with the entire kingdom was hardly applicable to the outer circles Isan and Udon, where policies related to foreign affairs, defence, and the economy severely restricted freedom of action by the Bangkok government almost to the end of the reign of Rama V, and continued to distinguish the Lao circles in many ways as exceptions to general rules until the very end of the absolute monarchy. The heads of the circles had different roles and far greater powers at first than their counterparts elsewhere. The most extensive changes were brought to Isan during the tenures of Sanphasit as Sovereign High Commissioner (1893-1910) and Phraya Sithamma as superintendent commissioner (1910-1912). The Thesaphiban bureaucratic system took shape in Udon under. Prachak as sovereign high commissioner (1892-1899), and under Prince Wattana (1899-1906) and Phraya Sisuriyarat (1906-1914) as ordinary superintendent commissioners. The two outer circles underwent numerous territorial changes up until the end of the absolute monarchy, at which time the circle level bureaucracies were abolished and the provincial governors were placed directly under the control of the Interior. Never quite reaching the stage of. full integration into the national administrative system, however, the Lao circles lagged behind

1. TNA R6M2/6/2: D to RVI, 3 Apr. 1913.

those of central Thailand in a ‘transition’ stage of four decades. The greatest curbs on Thai action during this period derived from the treaty of 1893 and the policies it necessitated along the frontier.

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Chapter Ten: National Integrity: Relations with France along the Mekong

At no point along the Thai-dominated portion of the Mekong had the river itself ever been a boundary. From the Chinese frontier to the sea every principality, town, and satellite exercised authority over its peasants settled along both banks. Pavie, who had returned to Bangkok in 1892 as consul-general, urged the Quad d'Orsay to negotiate in terms of a French claim over the natural ethnic and political entities within, the Mekong basin rather than in terms of the Mekong itself, which

> 'n'est la séparation ni d'une seule principauté, ni d'un seul canton, ni d'un village. Tous les chefs ont des terres sur les deux rives du Fleuve. En théorie, cette division est commode, mais dans la pratique je ne crois pas qu'it serait facile à celui chargé de la délimitation ou de l'organisation de se mettre d'accord avec les chefs des différents territoires et de les mettre d'accord entre eux, chacun devant perdre une partie de son apanage.'l

However, the entire left bank was itself far more than the French government had ever expected to gain in any negotiated settlement. The certainty of British objections precluded demands in the upper Mekong for any of the trans-Mekong Shah States, or even the small right bank strip belonging to the Luang Phrabang principality. And Paris was unwilling to put forward a claim on the western Khmer provinces because France had already recognised Thai sovereignty there by treaty in 1867. The Mekong as a convenient geographical point of reference was a political expedient for the moment. But it was not to become a national boundary.

Thailand renounced all claims to territory on the left bank--which may henceforth be called 'Laos'--and to the islands of the river. France, on the other hand, did not in any way recognise Thai sovereignty over the right bank. Foreseeing the possibility of further French claims, the Thai plenipotentiary tried to insert a reference in the 1893 treaty to the right bank peoples explicitly as 'Thai subjects' in place of the neutral French term 'inhabitants'--

1. MAE Siam 13/40: Pavie to Ribot, 29 Dec. 1892.

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but without success.1 The legal basis for the demarcation of the border between Thai and French possessions was finally pieced together in three stages: the reconsti.tution of the Luang Phrabang and Champasak principalities as a result of the cession of their right bank territories to France in the convention of 1904; the cession of the Great Lake basin Khmer towns to France in the treaty of 1907; and the provisions in the 1925 treaty (and its 1926 convention) that the thalweg of the Mekong wherever appropriate would be recognised as the border.2 Although there was still no formally recognised border for the north-east after the 1907 treaty, the French had no further occasion for putting forward a claim on the remainder of the right bank or to reunite with Cambodia the Ehmer speaking area south of the Mun river. The period from 1893 to 1907 was one of constantly strained relations between Bangkok and Paris; and for at least part of this time the

Thai were in danger of being ejected by force from the Mekong basin, although the territorial integrity of Thailand proper was guaranteed in several ways.

Joint commissions fixed the western borders between Thai possessions and British Burma all the way to the Mekong in the 1890s. British commercial interests in the Muang principalities and in Thailand proper, along with German shipping interests which overtook those of Britain in the late 1890s, precluded annexations west of the Mekong watershed. Thai possessions in the Malay peninsula up to 11º N. were guaranteed from 1597 by a secret Thai-British convention. Britain and France moreover agreed in an 1896 declaration, after several years of talks on the need for a buffer zone

1. MAE Siam 17: Devawongse to Le Myre de Vilers, 1 Oct. 1893.

2. The Thai French treaty signed at Bangkok 3 Oct. 1893, convention signed at Paris 13 Feb. 1904, and treaty signed at Paris 21 June 1907 are published in P. Duke, *Les Relations entre la France et la Thailande au XIXe siècle* (Bangkok, 1962, pp. 283-297. The Thai-French treaty signed at Paris 14 Feb. 1925 and convention signed at Bangkok 25 Aug. 1926 are published in F. Sayres (ed.), *Siam: Treaties with Foreign Powers 1920-1927* (Norwood, Massachusetts, 1928), pp. 49-116. The British-French agreement signed at London 15 Jan. 1896, the British-Thai secret convention signed at Bangkok 6 Apr. 1897 and the British-French declaration signed at London 8 Apr. 1904 are published in Aitchison (ed.), *A Collection of Treaties*, xiv, pp. 170-172, 172-173, 181-189.

between their colonial possessions, to guarantee the territorial integrity of Thai possessions in the Chao Phraya basin.

There was little foreign commercial interest in the northeast, however, to provide any basis for similar guarantees there. The government of the Straits Settlements and the Foreign Office in London resisted the idea of a territorial guarantee for all of Thailand--especially one which might include European powers other than Francel--and France had no desire to enter into further territorial guarantees until all questions still outstanding from the 1893 treaty were settled. The Thai efforts came to naught partly for lack of concessions to offer either power and partly because king and cabinet felt that Germany, and perhaps Japan, should be parties to an international agreement on Thailand2--proposals which neither London nor Paris could accept.

A new guarantee did appear in the French-British declaration of April 1904, but in a form which confirmed Thai fears that no help could be got from Britain. As part of the general entente with France, in which the Thailand question was given only minor consideration .by London, Britain conceded, over Thai protests, the French desire for a formal agreement that ‘the two Governments Shall each have respectively liberty of action in their spheres of influence’. The Thai foreign minister regarded the expression ‘spheres of influence’ as particularly offensive, especially because of its connotations in reference to the division of African territories.3 The declaration nonetheless provided a small measure of security with ‘the two Contracting Parties disclaiming all idea of annexing any (Thai) territory’. As there was almost no interest by any other power in the north-east, the agreement Was little more than a formal recognition of the status quo.4 It demonstrated to Bangkok that French colonialist pressures had been subordinated to

1. For details see C. Jeshurun, ‘Lord Lansdowne and the “Anti-German” Clique at the Foreign Office’’ *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, iii/2 (Sept. 1972), 229-246.

2. TNA R5T6ang(England)4: RV to Rolin-Jaequemyns, July 1901.

3. TNA R5T6/12: Devawongse to Westengard, Aug. 1909.

4. TNA R5T6/12: Paget to Devawongse, 15 Apr. 1904.

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the government and that French disclaimers of any intention to annexe her sphere to Indochina were indeed genuine.1

Up to this juncture there was real danger of further armed conflict along the Mekong. While the Quai d’Orsay and Thai foreign office were tediously seeking new agreements which would end the long series of disputes over interpretations of 1893 treaty provisions and restore friendly diplomatic relations, the French Ministry of Colonies continued at least until 1902 to press the government for a settlement by armed intervention and aunexation of the whole Mekong basin.

The north-east was the poorest of all Thai possessions; and French entrepreneurs could have little hope of converting the French ‘sphere’ from theory into reality without excluding all competitors, including the Thai. Any commercial incentives for a straightforward annexation were dampened effectively by the political realities of Laos itself: the central Mekong was impoverished and would be an economic liability for whoever attempted to govern it. Making observations on the commissionerships plan of 1891, the Thai foreign minister admitted that the Lao states had never been of sufficient economic value to justify the extension of direct Thai administration there; and even in 1891 Bangkok had no alternative, other than to pay the costs itself for the administration, or else lose control.

> ‘Our difficulties with France will be numerous because the Lao states have slipped out of our control. And any benefits for Thailand to be created there by applying our present technological knowledge just cannot be forthcoming. It is therefore a necessity for us to make plans to engulf these Lao states first ourselves.’3

Whereas the prospects for economic development in the north-east were known to be poor, the richer western Khmer towns of the Great Lake basin were an entirely different proposition.

1. TNA R5T6/12: Strobel to Devawongse, 13 Apr. 1904.

2. SOM Indochine A30(103): Rousseau to Colonies, 24 May 1896. MAE NS Siam 2: Doumer to Lebon, 3 July 1897, annexe. MAE NS Siam 24/54.Klobukowski to Delcassé, 28 May 1902. MAE NS Siam 24/55: Klobukowski to Delcassé, 6 June 1902.

3. TNA R5M2.3/4/146: Thewawong to RV, 11 Aug. 1891.

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Having made several suggestions during earlier negotiations that Thailand cede the Khmer towns as part of an overall settlement, the Quai d’Orsay no longer believed by 1904 that they might be

given up. But early in 1906 Thailand gave twelve months' notice of her intentions to name negotiators to discuss treaty revisions concerning the tariff.1 Paris took the opportunity to propose a final settlement on all outstanding questions; and the resulting treaty in 1907 provided for a Thai cession of her Khmer provinces in exchange for the return of two border towns previously ceded to France, plus French renunciation thereafter of extraterritorial privileges for French Asiatic subjects. (Maps 14-15.) In spite of the fact that the Mekong border of Udon and Isan circles had never been formally recognised, Paris regarded the treaty of 1907 as the definitive boundary arrangement, and attempted to find ways of convincing the Thai that French territorial ambitions were fulfilled.2 Having gained the richest provinces for Indochina by unifying most of the Khmer states, the Quai d'Orsay was content to leave Thailand to deal with the poorer Lao states of the right bank, and regard the territorial question at an end.

> 'Pour ceux gui assignaient l'absorption de tout le basin du Mékong comme terme des ambitions de la France, ce traité laisse bien de regrets. On ne saurait les partager. Le moment ou nous pouvions absorber le Siam était passé. Le traité de 1907, en réglant à l'aimiable une querelle vieille de 40 ans, a préparé entre la France et le Siam une ère de relations amicales....'3

While the 1907 treaty completed the foundations for the restoration of normal diplomatic relations, it had little to do with the north-east, where a basis for settling the nagging problems of internal security and economic rivalry had already been reached. The 1904 convention itself did not pretend to place relations between Thailand and France on a new basis, but was the necessary complement to the 1893 treaty (a hastily constructed instrument based upon ultimatum rather

1. MAE NS Siam 52: Louis, memo., 22 Feb. 1906.

2. SOM Siam 110/242: Pichon to Colonies, 12 June 1907.

3. SOM Siam 108/571: Pichon to Colonies, 22 June 1908, annexed 'Note sur la Question du Siam'.

than negotiations), and was designed to settle questions specifically related to the Mekong which the earlier treaty had opened.

Crisis of Authority

The ultimatum and treaty provided for a strip of land 25 kilometres wide on the right bank running the entire length of the Mekong, from which all armed forces were excluded. 'This restriction on Thai sovereignty, which encompassed all Thai possessions in the Great Lake basin as well, permitted local authorities alone to exercise police functions. (Map 12.) Conceived as a kind of buffer which would protect French possessions, subjects, and commerce from harrassment by the Thai army, this demilitarised zone was a means by which the government of Indochina hoped to maintain an effective occupation of Laos with few troops at minimal expense, while bringing the newly acquired territories gradually under French authority. No thought was given to the problem of maintaining order within the zone itself° A similar arrangement, with complementary zones on both. sides of the river where British and French possession met, was discussed in late 1893 but quickly discarded. Close examination of the question made it clear that any such zone would

become a haven for bandits and dissidents beyond the control of either side. From the very beginning Thailand could not have been expected to cope with the problem either°

Until Indochina had placed French officials in Laos and was able to create some form of administration there--a process which dragged on for a decade and more--the task of reporting on the execution of treaty provisions fell to a succession of authorities. Pavie was temporarily appointed ‘commissaire général’ for Laos while still retaining his consular post. He made a tour of the frontier during 1894, returning to Bangkok for a few days before setting off again for the upper Mekong to deal with British-French boundary questions. His role in this final mission, like his earlier ones, was limited to gathering information; and a regular member of the diplomatic corps arrived in Bangkok in August 1895 to replace him only a few months after he completed his tour.

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The treaty excluded all government forces from the zone. However, Thai officials never moved from place to place without armed escorts--traditional symbols of high rank as well as necessary for safe conduct through the bandit ridden rural areas--and interpreted the treaty as not including them. A Thai official in a Lao town had little hope of exerting any authority unless he had personal guards as a symbol of prestige and also to act as a threat against any resistance. This attitude was viewed by the French as a violation of the treaty; and Pavie on his 1894 tour was much annoyed at not being able to treat with the local officials who were supposed to be in authority, but instead having to deal only with Thai commissioners whom he found everywhere. Pavie was provided with an escort of commissioners and soldiers--which the Thai regarded as a mark of courtesy, but which Pavie described as a violation of the treaty and a sign of bad faith.

> ‘J’ai partout rive droite constaté inéxecution et violation traité. Nulle part autorités locales n’ont été informées termes traité par suit résultat actes contraire de toutes sortes. Dans tous les centres de la rive droite j’ai constaté la présence d’officiers et de fonctionnaires siamois qui après la signature du traité se sont substitué aux autorités locales Laos et assistés de soldats et d’agents exercent formellement toute l’autorité et la police.’l

The stipulation that Thai armed forces be excluded in favour of local authorities was interpreted by the French in the widest sense to mean that Lao elites alone were entitled to exercise full powers in their own towns. The French argument that Thai commissioners should not enter the zone was strengthened by the ambiguity that had always existed between military and civilian functions in the bureaucracy, and the fact that most, if not all, commissioners held some sort of rank in the army. (Both Prachak and Sanphasit were brigadiers.2) Pavie accordingly Sailed down the Mekong declaring publicly, that Thai officials had no authority anywhere in the zone, going so far as to order them to leave. Unaware that France might object to the continued presence of resident

1. SOM Siam 57: cab1e, Pavie to MAE, 8 Aug. 1894.

2. TNA R5Kh19/125: biographical sketch of Prachak, Aug. 1901. Damrong, ‘Biography of Sanphasit’, v, 9-10.

commissioners exercising ‘civilian’ duties, Damrong became increasing worried at Pavie’s high-handed actions, assuming him to be completely misinformed or else purposely trying to create complications.1 The commissioners did comply with Pavie’s demands to withdraw soldiers still remaining in the zone in violation of the treaty.2 But Bangkok stood firm in her interpretation that the treaty did not prohibit civilian commissioners from entering the zone, with encouragement from London to instruct her commissioners to yield only to force in the event French authorities attempted to expel them.3 Authorities in French Laos subsequently refused to deal with anyone other than local governors, inciting the local elites to resist all Thai attempts to exert direct control.

The Lao viewed the exodus of Thai soldiers from the zone as a sign of extraordinary weakness never before witnessed along the Mekong, especially in view of the arrival of numerous French agents not only on the left bank but also to police the river and establish commercial agencies .in important right bank towns. The appearance of two French gunboats on the central Mekong made the profound impression on the Lao that the French had calculated.4 The government of Indochina despatched French officials to fill the posts of ‘commercial agents’ at Paklai, Nongkhai, Uthen, Nakhon Phanom, Khemmarat, Mukdahan, and Champasak provided for in the treaty. Their instructions were vague and, in the absence of French commercial interests anywhere, they naturally regarded their ill-defined roles as something beyond commerce. The agent at Nakhtn Phanom felt certain that he had been sent to oversee the execution of the treaty;5 and most agents followed Pavie’s lead by encouraging local officials to refuse to recognise the Thai authority in the zone.6

1. TNA R5M2.21kai4/686: D to Sommot, 1 Jan. 1895, annexe.

2. SOM Siam 57: Pavie to MAE, 14 Aug. 1894.

3. TNA R5F20Udon5: deBunsen to Thewawong, 13 July 1895.

4. G. Siimon, ‘Haut Mékong’, *Revue maritime et coloniale*, cxxvii (Mar. 1896), 429.

5. SOM Asie Orientale 61/lO: Lejeune to GG, 26 Sept. 1895.

6. MAE Siam 25/31: Defrance to MAE, 2 May 1896.

Until regular vice-consuls were appointed in 1897 to Udon and to Ubon, the commercial agents attempted without authorisation to fill political rôles as they saw fit:

> ‘certains agents purement commerciaux montrent actuellement un zèle parfois intempestif et réclament des autorités siamoises des facilités qu’ils s’imaginent inhérentes au rôle politique qu’ils se croient sans fondement autorisés a jouer.’l

The new French minister who arrived in 1895 knew nothing of the instructions given to the agents, and immediately asked the Quai d’Orsay to arrange with the Colonies to order them to cease trying to exercise consular functions. The question was supposedly settled early in 1896,3 but the agents continued to act contrary to instructions. Finally in 1899 the governor general agreed to do away with them--observing that both they and the Thai commissioners along the Mekong, in acting against instructions, were at the root of the frequent incidents along the river--and at the same time

agreeing to accept the presence in the zone of Thai commissioners with authority limited to civilian affairs.4

The enforcement of their authority even in some places outside the zone, however, posed a dilemma for the commissioners. Elders in one village north of Loei decided to seek a transfer of jurisdiction to the French under assurances that the village would be raised in status to a town. When they set up armed guard posts, Damrong ordered Prachak to suppress the movement at all costs, but peacefully if possible, as the villagers would simply flee into the zone if troops were to approach.5 Thai officials managed to enter the village, take hostages, and withdraw. The villagers then complained to the French agent at Paklai, who was inaccurately informed that the village was in the zone and also part of Luang Phrabang territory. As Indochina was supporting the sovereignty of the Luang Phrabang prince over his right bank lands--on the

1. MAE Siam 20/13: Pilinski to MAE, 7 Feb. 1895.

2. MAE Siam 23/51: Defrance to MAE, 16 Dec. 1895.

3. MAE Siam 24/4: MAE to Defrance, 4 Jan. 1896.

4. TNA R5T12khwai6: minutes of interview between Rama V and Governor General Doumer, 18 Apr. 1899.

5. TNA R5M2.21kai19/1150: Rat to Sommot, 24 Dec. 1896.

argument that he was the ‘local authority’ to whom the treaty applied--the French agent took a small force of Luang Phra-bang men to seek proof of Thai interference in the village° The agent was then attacked by soldiers despatched by Prachak, and fled for his lifeo1 Repercussions from the incident, which nearly brought Bangkok to blows with Indochina, were muffled partly because Rama V was in the midst of a tour to Europe (and Damrong was wary of taking further action, suspecting a French trap which would be followed by a humiliating withdrawal of the king’s invitation for a state visit to Paris2), and partly because the governor general had just been instructed that armed intervention was to be avoided for the time being.3 It was not, however, an isolated event.

Other clashes on the right bank opposite Luang Phrabang had earlier led the Colonies to place a special military force on alert and prepared to march for a period of almost one year, in case the government decided on armed intervention.4 Lao peasants on the right bank--as in the case of the Loei villagers--frequently attempted to employ the traditional means of escaping authority by declaring themselves under the jurisdiction of someone new. When a village opposite Sithandon resisted right bank authorities by insisting they belonged to the French town, Sanphasit ordered the local officials to arrest all dissidents, and imprisoned them in Ubon.5 Many elders and peasants from the right bank--15,000 in the first three years according to one estimate6--simply moved to French territory and severed ties with the right bank altogether,7 while others shifted back and forth effectively escaping both Thai and French authority. The administrative difficulties created for the two outer circles by the zone were naturally unequal. All of Udon’s large towns except Sakon Nakhon were situated on the Mekong itself, and thus subject to the special regime. The only two important centres

1. SOM Siam 66/1473: Doumer to Colonies, 23 July 1897.

2. TNA R5M2.21kai33/6: D to Prachak, 29 June 1897.

3. SOM Siam 68: Hanotaux to Colonies, 5 May 1897.

4. SOM Siam 68/109: Colonies to MAE, 7 Feb. 1897.

5. TNA R5M1.4/25/456: Rat to Sommot, 14 Jan. 1899.

6. MAE Siam CP 25: 'Note pour le ministre', 26 July 1896.

7. MAE CP Siam 25/43: Defrance to Hanotaux, 30 May 1896.

on the Mekong remaining under Isan were Khemmarat and Champasak.

The month following the signing of the 1893 treaty Prachak withdrew to the village of Makkhaeng about fifty kilometers south of Nongkhai. Although the village was an isolated one surrounded by forest, lacking all amenities and demeaning to the status of a sovereign high commissioner, Prachak chose the site purely on considerations of defence: it lay astride the telegraph line; it could be supplied by surrounding towns; and as Prachak suspected that Nongkhai would be the first objective of any French attack on Udon circle, he would be close enough to organise resistance in an emergency.1 Udon was scarcely more than a camp for commissioners and soldiers during its first decade and a half, during which time it was still officially regarded as 'Makkhaeng village'. Offices and barracks had the appearance of only temporary constructions which could be abandoned at any time.2 The small town which grew up there owed its existence entirely to the administrative offices and army garrison; and its unimportant position on the regional trade routes plus a chronic water shortage prevented it from becoming an important town in its own right.3 In 1907 it was finally decided to make Makkhaeng the permanent headquarters for the circle.4 Its name was changed officially to 'Udon', the same name as the circle, in 1908. Only then did the government undertake to build permanent structures there.5

Prachak felt that the presence of a high ranking commissioner near to the Mekong was vital to the continuation of Thai control over the towns along the river. The commissioner was still regarded by the Lao very much as an old fashioned commander: they were willing to bow to his authority for a time, thinking he would eventually return to

1. TNA R5M59/12/67: Prachak to D, 17 Nov. 1893. M59/12/414: D to Sommot, 18 Nov. 1894, annexe.

2. MAE NS Siam 31: Colonies to MAE, 25 Nov. 1905.

3. Nakhon Sawan, 'Report of an Inspection Tour to Isan and Nakhon Ratchasima Circles during December 1926' (Bangkok, 1927), pp. 55-56.

4. TNA R5M2.14/17/3504: Sisahathep to Sommot, 2 Jan. 1907.

5. TNA R6M28/1/15: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910.

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Bangkok as all had done before him, and leave them to govern in the traditional way. The Lao along the Mekong had already felt relief to see the Thai forced to withdraw into the interior after nearly ten years' continued presence in Nongkhai. Bangkok agreed with Prachak that a withdrawal to a more amenable site such as Nakhon Ratchasima would appear to the Lao as a further retreat, and make them even more hostile than they already were.1

Faced with the difficulty of maintaining order in the zone without the use of soldiers, Prachak initiated a policy of employing commissioners in the zone in a passive role to play the Lao one against the other. He reasoned that stirring up hatred against the French would be an effective means of ensuring that Thai authority did not deteriorate further. The real danger was that the Lao were uncommitted to either side, and willing to accept the 'French as overlords equally with the Thai. Prachak wrote with reassurance to Bangkok about the policy,

> 'which I have been carrying out regularly these days ever since the Treaty was agreed upon. Along the banks of the Mekong I have arranged to indoctrinate the "monkeys". That is to say, I have ordered the supervisory commissioners to act as "hermits" and conduct themselves in such a way as to find approval from both the black and the white monkeys. Whenever the black monkeys are about to bite, the hermits will make use of the white-monkey forces. If the white monkeys bite, the hermits will be able to use the black-monkey forces, thus evading the treaty article which states we will not take police forces from other towns to use in these towns [in the zone]. Matters are thus settling to normal. And regardless of whether they are divided up or not, if the Lao people still do not realise the threat of French aggressiveness, then we cannot be sure at all which group of Lao will really be a source of strength to us. At this time I see actually two towns--Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom--which have a hatred for the French, having seen the aggressiveness of the French priests as examples. They are thus resigned to making themselves stricter than other towns in administrative matters. Other than these two, all are willing to become the subjects of whoever will be their masters.

1. TNA R5M59/12/l: Rama V to Prachak, 26 Nov. 1894. M59/12: Prachak to RV, 2 Jan. 1895.

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> 'And we shall not abandon the 25 kilometre zone as we have the Khmer towns [of the Great Lake basin], because it is clear that once the French come there and make it their practice to chase away our commissioners and not allow them to be involved in affairs, the French will take it for granted that the zone is the same as the Khmer towns, which are under the protection of both, sides.'l

This policy, however, did not work so well as Prachak at first led Bangkok to believe.

In one incident, a small contingent of Thai arrived at Nongkhai from Udon, and began to urge the Nongkhai. elders to lead a movement against the French agent. The Lao, however, would agree only to follow suit if the Thai led the way. After several days of hesitation, the commissioner was forced to make a humiliating withdrawal, leaving the Lao to reflect upon the role the Thai were covertly trying to make them play. The effect was clear: within a few days seventy families

appeared at the agency requesting to register as French protégés. Prachak was then forced to fall back on intimidation, arresting anyone who assisted or appeared too friendly towards the French2--a tactic which he shared in common with Sanphasit.3 Damrong himself authorised the harassment of people attempting to pass Thai guard stations, set up all along the zone, as an indirect means of exerting authority.4 Prachak wrote confidentially to the king with a note of despair in reference to the hostility which the Lao had always felt towards occupying forces.

> 'It is difficult to say whether the fate which our' predecessors have determined for us is good or bad, so much so that the rural people--the Lao--believe nothing; and inasmuch as we have no trust in the French, the Lao likewise have none in us.'5

The authorities of Indochina, in turn, were wary of Prachak in particular, suspecting that if difficulties were to arise

1. TNA R5M2.1/22/69: Prachak to D, 1 Nov. 1894. The allusion to hermits purposely confounding monkeys is drawn from popular Thai tales.

2. SOM Siam 63/9: de Montpeyrat to GG, 16 Oct. 1895.

3. SOM Siam 65: Simon to GG, Jan. 1895.

4. TNA R5M2.1/22/64: D to RV, 15 Dec. 1894.

5. TNA R5Bl.1kai(miscellaneous)4: Prachak to RV, 4 Apr. 1895.

while the French were organising the newly acquired territories, he would certainly be involved.

> 'Nous ne devons pas oublier en effet que nos agissements sont surveillés de très près par le vice-roi de Nongkhai, frère du roi de Siam, notre adversaire le plus nettement hostile et le partisan avoué de l'alliance anglaise. ...Les autres vice-rois et (commissaires) semblent pour le moment avoir accepté le fait accompli.'1

For a time neither the Thai nor the French recognised the presence of the other in the zone. No positive action could be taken on the spot; and all disputes had to be referred to Bangkok and Indochina. The situation allowed the Lao elite an unprecedented degree of independence to frustrate officials by passive resistance. A break-down in the appearances of clear authority produced a sense of uneasiness for the peasantry. Most of them probably did not comprehend the imposition of three separate regimes on the former Mekong bank townships, especially the distinction between the zone and the hinterlands of the right bank. Nonetheless, the Thai gradually regained the upper hand. After 1899 civilian commissioners were no longer opposed by the French in the zone towns. But attempts to make rapid changes around the turn of the century were suddenly halted in 1902 by a violent rebellion in which Khemmarat was burnt and Ubon threatened, and which was put down only with difficulty after the arrival of the Thai army.2 Bangkok was more worried that the French might send troops into 'the zone than with the restrictions, placed on Thai army operations against the rebels there, as Damrong indicated in instructions to Sanphasit concerning a French proposal to allow Thai troops there temporarily on condition that French soldiers assist them.

1. SOM Indochine A30(99)/12: Chavassieux to Colonies, 28 Apr. 1894.

2. For general accounts of the rebellion, refer to: Damrong, ‘Historical Anecdotes’ (Bangkok, 1944), pp. 306-311; Tej Bunnak, ‘The 1902 Holy Men’s’ Rebellion in the North-east of Siam’, *Social Science Review*, vi (June 1967), 78-86 (in Thai); Tej Bunnag, ‘The Provincial Administration of Siam’, pp. 271-281; and Phaithun, ‘Administrative Reforms in Isan Circle’ (Prasanmit College of Education M.Ed. thesis 1972), Chapter Four.

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> ‘The very best way that we can meet this problem of the French troops is to have the matter brought to Bangkok for time wasting deliberations. You hurry at that end to complete the arrangements for suppression--which I trust you are already carrying out at this time--or at least do enough to give us some assurance before we reach any agreement. Then we seize the moment to say that everything is already in order and that we do not wish to send forces into the 25 kilometre zone. That will be the end of this problem.’1

The convention of 1904 did not restore full sovereignty over the zone, as Thailand was still bound to maintain no fortifications or armed forces there (an arrangement which was extended to a 25 kilometre strip on the French bank in the 1926 convention). But France did accept in 1904 that Thailand could exercise police authority in the zone. And it was only from this juncture that the Lao circles could begin to introduce a centralised administration into many of their towns.

1. TNA R5M2.18/3/15: D to Sanphasit, 11 Apr. 1902.

Chapter Eleven: Introduction of the Thesaphiban System to the North-East

Maps 12 to 21 illustrate the territorial changes imposed upon the old Lao town system between 1893 and 1932, and the evolution of a uniform system of administrative headquarters leading up to the modern system of provinces. These maps are self-explanatory, and are provided for reference only. Each represents an important stage in the process of converting the old administrative system based on peasant control into a new one based on strict territorial limits. The reader is advised to note:

(a) the changes in international and internal boundaries from 1893 to 1907 leading to the definitive formation of the circles (especially the western border of Udon and the southern border of Isan);

(b) the selection of a few widely separated centres for Thesaphiban province and district administration;

(c) the elimination of clusters of towns and satellites (summarised in Map 18);

(d) the gradual creation of province boundaries within each circle;

(e) changes in nomenclature (e.g. from ‘town’ to ‘division’ to ‘province’) as well as changes in place

When the Thesaphiban system came to an end after the reduction of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the circle bureaucracies were abolished, leaving local administration to the fourteen provinces formed during the first two decades of the twentieth century in place of the twenty-six old towns and sixty-six satellites in the same geographical area.

Nakhon Ratchasima circle, divided into three Thesaphiban townships (later called ‘provinces’) by the turn of the century, underwent the least territorial change. Phetchabun and the other towns of the Sak valley were disannexed in 1899 to form a separate circle. Nakhon Ratchasima was quickly made to conform to the 1897 Provincial Administration Act, which laid the legal foundations for the Thesaphiban system, and take its place as an ‘inner’ circle, during a time when the act could not yet be applied to the ‘outer’ circles Udon and Isan.

‘Division’ System in Udon Circle, 1901-1907

A firm decision was taken during a meeting in December 1900 by Damrong, Sanphasit (Isan sovereign high commissioner), and Prince Watthana (Udon superintendent commissioner) to begin implementing parts of the 1897 Act in the Lao circles from 1901. Circle headquarters was to have a bureaucracy consisting of a chief clerk, physician, administrative commissioner, justice commissioner, finance commissioner, manpower commissioner, prison warden, and four

inspection commissioners. Circle gendarmeries were also to be created. Each circle was divided into five 'divisions', with five important towns designated as headquarters, where the division bureaucracy (commissioner, clerk, judge, and revenues and manpower officials) were to reside. (Map 13.). The other towns were designated as 'subdivision' headquarters; and they, along with their satellites, were to be given functions equal to those of districts in central Thailand. The Lao town officials (lord governor, *uparat, ratchawong, ratchabut*) were to be retitled with their nearest Thai equivalents (governor, *palat*, *yokkrabat*, etc.) which had been adopted as standard Thesaphiban nomenclature. The recommendations presented to the king for approval predicted that the changes would be superficial at first--pursued gradually as soon as external relations with France and internal conditions permitted--and would not reach below the level of subdivision headquarters.

> 'In district and commune administration we shall have the commissioners in both circles make assessments, and apply the Provincial Administration Act to whatever extent they feel it can be suitably applied in keeping with the customs of those towns.'1

All previously instituted taxation--including the old levies--was abolished, and replaced from 1901 by a uniform capitation tax of four baht per able man.

The division commissioners were to supervise the Lao governors and preside over a transition period in the administration of the Lao towns, during which the powers of the local elites would be reduced and assumed by division headquarters and its agents. Damrong expected resistance against

1. TNA R5M2.1/8: D to RV, 31 Dec. 1900, and minutes of meeting, 12 Dec. 1900.

the commissioners by the Lao aristocracy, but did not feel it important, as the only alternative he foresaw for them was emigration to French territory. He felt it essential that the commissioners concentrate upon affairs concerning the peasants: a contented population would forestall resistance and help to weaken the elite.1

In Udon circle the new plan calling for only five commissionerships initially relieved some pressure formerly exerted on the Lao. A double tiered form of administration with a Lao governor plus a Thai commissioner had been imposed upon thirteen towns from the time of Prachak's return in 1892 to Nongkhai.2 (Map 11.) Most of the commissioners were army officers; and their presence, like that of the commissioners under Ubon and Champasak, imposed a burden on the local populace. From the eve of his departure from Bangkok, Prachak's chances of success had been viewed by the French as poor:

> 'Leur succès dans cette entreprise dépendra de la ligne de conduite qu'ils adopteront. S'ils se montrent humains, généreux, justes, prudents et zélés pour le bien public, ils peuvent s'attacher des tribus qui ont la même origine, les mêmes coutumes, la même langue, la même religion. Ils arriveront certainement au résultat contraire, s'ils procèdent par la violence, et s'ils s'inspirent des vieilles maximes de rapacité, de ruse, et de tyrannie....
>
> 'A en [l'attitude de Prachak] juger par la manière dont il a rempli une première mission dans la même contrée, et par ce qu'on sait de son caractère, on peut prévoir qu'il usera de

> séverité plutôt que de douceur. S'il en est ainsi, les sympathies et les espérances des populations se reporteront infailliblement de notre côté.3

From an English point of view he seemed devoted to the tasks set for him--one of which was to stimulate commercial activity in preparation for the economic impact the railway was expected to have on the region--but he attacked his problems with more zeal than discretion.4

1. TNA R5M52/4/48: D to RV, 6 Aug. 1901.

2. TNA R5M59/7/12: Wichit to D, 13 Mar. 1892.

3. MAE CP Siam 12/27: Lorgeou to Ribot, 1 Oct. 18911.

4. H. Smyth, *Five Years in Siam* (New York, 1898), i, 222-223

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> 'Prince Prachak is a reformer; he is very keen in "reforming the Laos", but is grieved to find that they don't want to be reformed. He says--what is very true--that their work is always desultory (one month they plant rice, another they go fishing, another they wash gold in the sands), and that they will not settle down into trades.'1

Even the king viewed Prachak's handling of the Lao as too strict, in great contrast to Sanphasit, whom he regarded so lax in his application of administrative changes that affairs sometimes slipped out of hand, and unrest arose in some Isan towns.

> 'Prince Sanphasit, on the one hand, is apparently resigned to a philosophical approach, and is not very enthusiastic about keeping a close watch on affairs. Prince Prachak, on the other hand, tends to favour too much those men with radical ideas based on insights in responding to situations. How could these commissioners be regulated so that they will both strike a happy medium?'2

The following year Prachak was transferred to Bangkok. He was unpopular with other princes;3 and after two years he retired from government service altogether.4

It was the intention of both the king and Damrong likewise to recall Sanphasit. But after a year of unsuccessful attempts to find a lesser ranking official better suited to administrative needs, it was agreed to retain him as sovereign high commissioner.5

Prachak withdrew from Udon in 1899 with his entire entourage of officials.6 There was as yet no independent bureaucracy under the command of the Interior ministry, which was plagued by a chronic shortage of trained personnel; and when a high ranking commissioner moved from place to place, his entire clique of client-subordinates went with

1. H. Smyth, *Notes on a Journey on the Upper Mekong, Siam* (London, 1895), p. 78.

2. TNA R5M2,21kai63/6: Sitthisan to Phrom, 24 Nov. 1898, minute by RV, n.d.

3. MAE NS Siam 2/52: de Panafieu to Delcassé, 15 Dec. 1900.

4. TNA R5K19/125 : biographical sketch of Prachak, Aug. 1901.

5. TNA R5M2.3/173: D to RV, 22 Nov. 1899 and 3 Dec. 1899. M2.3/34/500: D to Sommot, 12 Feb. 1900.

6. TNA R5M2.3/167/57: Watthana to D, 4 Oct. 1899.

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him. Prince Watthana alone--who had served since 1892 as deputy to Prachakl--was left in charge under the standard Thesaphiban title of ‘superintendent commissioner’. With almost no experienced subordinates, he had to begin anew to find his own men to fill the posts left vacant.2 Watthana was reluctant to accept the Udon post from the beginning, and frequently requested to be recalled.3 Damrong regarded him as only an interim appointee until the minister himself could find time to inspect the circle personally--considered the essential prerequisite to any final planning decisions--noting with resignation that. although. Watthana was even less popular than Prachak; he was, at least, not despised.4 Nonetheless, by 1905 Watthana completed the organisation of circle level bureaucracy according to plan.5 But little progress was made under the division system towards centralisation at province level.

The division system hardly existed except on paper. Kaen-thao’s Lao governor was made acting division commissioner for Loei;6 but was considered incompetent, never given the authority to undertake significant changes, and replaced by a Thai at the earliest opportunity after the division system ended.7 A resident commissioner of low rank at Khonkaen was simply redesignated as acting division commissioner there;8 but he also undertook little reform.. The old Lao governor of Khonkaen co-operated with Watthana, who felt he was sufficiently capable of reforming the town administration and increasing revenues; and so he was left in office with real powers.9 In Udon division the deputy to the superintendent

1. TNA R5M59/7/3: Suriyadet to D, 25 Apr. 1892.

2. TNA R5M2.3/195/29: D to RV, 26 July 1901.

3. TNA R5M2.3/196/80: Watthana to D, 8 Aug. 1904. M2.3/196/l03: D to RV, 16 Aug, 1906.

4. TNA R5M59/41/253: D to RV, 27 June 1902.

5. MAE NS Siam 31: Colonies to MAE, 25 Nov. 1905.

6. TNA R5M2.3/198/389: D to RV, 25 Feb. 1904.

7. TNA R5M2.3/205/138: D to RV, 23 July 1908.

8. TNA R5M2.3/199/231: D to RV, 25 Nov. 1904.

9. TNA R5M2.3/30/37: D to RV, 8 May 1900.

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commissioner acted as division commissioner.1 But little was expected from him: he had been switched from his Nakhon Ratchasima post with his Udon counterpart, because Nakhon Ratchasima was thought to require someone more intelligent and better able to administer than Udon.2 The major administrative changes took place in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom divisions only.

Late in 1902 Watthana proposed to begin reorganising the smaller towns and satellites by appointing ‘subdivision commissioners’, with powers equal to Thai district officers, to supervise all the Lao governors and elders.3 Damrong was opposed to the plan--which amounted to a return to Prachak’s original concept of a Thai commissioner plus a Lao governor for each town, wasting precious personnel in places where local administrative needs did not justify it--and advised Watthana to continue only to maintain order, gain the confidence of the aristocracy by assuring them of sufficient revenues, and try to keep the peasantry content.4 The question of how to deal with the towns was referred to Rama V, who was in favour of adopting something similar to Dutch or British colonial administration.

> ‘I had once thought about the administration of these Lao towns when you first brought the matter up. But there was no opportunity for me to say anything, and I forgot about it. Up to now it has been neglected. I think that if we arrange for the Lao to administer themselves in the same way that the prominent peoples of the East Indies do--with commissioners to inspect and superintend as the Residents, Assistant Residents, and Controllers do--this would waste few government officials. The Lao would be able to control themselves. But whether or not it can be done, I cannot say. I am just giving you something to think about.’5

Even at this late date there was remarkable uncertainty in

Bangkok as to what direction Thai administration in the Lao

1. TNA R5M2.3/203/269: D to RV, 12 Dec. 1907. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug. 1908), 194.

2. TNA R5M2.3/198/149: D to RV, 23 July 1903.

3. TNA R5M59/4/2584: D to Sommot, 23 Jan. 1903.

4. TNA R5M59/4l/48: D to Watthana, 22 Jan. 1903.

5. TNA R5M59/41/211: RV to D, 24 Jan. 1903.

circles might follow. A colonial system would have ruled out (or at least delayed) attempts both to centralise local administration in the Lao circles and to integrate the region in other ways into the kingdom.

The first appointment of a division commissioner made with a view towards creating functioning divisions did not come until April 1903, when Phraya Sunthonnurak, experienced in dealing with French consular officials in central Thailand, and deemed most suitable for the Nakhon Phanom post, was designated.1 He immediately found that there were no foreign affairs of importance, and that administration was in complete disorder.2 In a series of reports Sunthon recounted his inspection tours during the ensuing year to more than 150 communes and villages, reporting On affairs of every nature: administration, justice, commerce, and foreign relations. His was the first critical examination of local administration of great depth and with a view towards a centralisation policy. As a first step he indicated he would treat all the old towns and satellites henceforth as mere districts, while allowing them to retain the style of ‘towns’.

The king was disturbed at Sunthon’s initial report concerning conditions in the four divisions (Khonkaen, Udon, Sakon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom) he had visited on route to his post, and

pointed out to Damrong that commissioners earlier sent out seemed, not only to have acted independently of responsible controls, but also to have done nothing in many places to bring about improvements in administration. Damrong was ordered to hasten his efforts to change this situation.4 Damrong himself was surprised by some of Sunthon's revelations, but admitted that the quality of Thai officials previously posted to Udon aud Isan had been very poor, which meant that the information reported to him left much to be desired. As he had no personal knowledge of the situation, a decision on centralisation would have to be

1. TNA R5M2.3/198/22: D to RV, 24 Apr. 1903.

2. TNA R5M59/4l: Sunthon to Sisahathep, 30 Aug. 1903.

3. TNA R5M59/4l: Sunthon, four 'Inspection Reports', Dec. 1903, Jan. 1904, May 1904, May 1904.

4. TNA R5M59/41/250: RV to D, 17 Dec. 1903.

delayed until he himself could visit the outer circles. He added, however, that he was determined to send better and higher ranking officials there in future, in spite of protests from the treasury that the salaries of existing officials were already straining the budget.1 They could not be sent all in one go; and the essential posts of the division level bureaucracy would have to be filled piecemeal over a certain period of time.2

Little progress had been made thus far, except to place division commissioners at Loei, Khonkaen, Sakon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom headquarters to begin creating the division level bureaucracies. In selecting Phraya Sisuriyarat, an experienced superintendent commissioner from an inner circle to replace Watthana in 1906, Damrong decided that a strong, but not very new, policy would have to be adopted.

> 'The administration of Udon circle requires not a skilled and experienced man to organise affairs according to the centralisation plan as in the inner circles, so much as someone who will how to organise affairs according to the temperament and likings of the peasant population.'3

Damrong concluded that this was an appropriate moment to hasten the centralisation process, not by forcing the Lao to conform to a standard plan dictated by Bangkok, but by allowing the superintendent commissioner to proceed gradually by trial and error according to local conditions. The decision was hardly different from that of 1900, although more determined. It is clear that the centralisation process was delayed not only by caution towards France but also because of the neglect and incompetence of Interior officials employed, and was aggravated by the severe shortage of trained personnel and the difficulty of providing them with adequate salaries. Damrong had little confidence in his subordinates (with the exception of Sanphasit) and felt that he alone as minister would be sufficiently capable and qualified to plan the centralisation of the outer circles. Indeed, once he was able to visit UdOn and Isan, the process proceeded quickly.

1. TNA R5M59/41/333: D to RV, 24 Dec. 1903.

2. TNA R5M2.3/199/130: D to RV, 12 Aug. 1904.

3. TNA R5M2.3/201/309: D to RV, 28 Mar. 1906.

Administrative Centralisation in Udon Circle

Damrong finally found the time (nearly two months during December 1906 to February 1907) required to make his long anticipated inspection tour of the Lao circles. It included all the division headquarters of Udon, with the exception of Loei; and he visited Roi Et division in Isan as well. It gave him what he considered his essential, first hand, working knowledge of the region. Unfortunately Damrong did not follow his original plan to make an extensive tour of the other three Isan divisions, but cut short his itinerary in order to return to Bangkok, not wishing to miss the gala ceremonies for the king's departure on a trip to Europe.1

Even while in Nongkhai in January 1907, Damrong announced in a speech that the ministry intended to do away with the double tiered system of Lao governors and Thai commissioners, henceforth treating all as a single national elite. During 1907 and 1908 most of the remaining Lao governorships were suppressed. The governor of Nongkhai died in 1908, and his functions were assumed by a mere district officer.3 Most governors were simply retired, and replaced by district officers from outside the local elites: Nakhon Phanom,4 Uthen,5 Kamphawapi,6 Kamutthasai,7 Phannanikhom,8 Waritchaphum,9 Mukdahan,10, Chaiburi,11 Nongsung, 12 Renu Nakhon,13 and Akatamnuai,14 all in swift succession. The Manchakhiri governor was removed on charges of corruption, and replaced by the former commissioner as district officer.15 The former

1. TNA R5M2.l4./17/223: D to RV, 15 Nov. 1906.

2. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug, 1907).

3. TNA R5M59/41/189: D to RV, 4 Sept. 1908.

4. TNA R5M2.3/196/61: D to Regent, 3 July 1907. *Thesaphiban*, vii/41 (Aug. 1909), 155.

5. TNA R5M2.3/203/31: D to Regent, 22 June 1907.

6. TNA R5M2.3/203/16: D to Regent, 25 Apr. 1907.

7. TNA R5M2.3/203/15: D to Regent, 25 Apr. 1907.

8. TNA R5M2.3/196/86: D to Regent, 5 Aug. 1907.

9. TNA R5M2.3/196/85: D to Regent, 5 Aug. 1907.

10. TNA R5M2.3/203/l0l: D to Regent, 9 Aug. 1907.

11. TNA R5M2.3/206/11S: .D to RV, 20 June 1908.

12. *Thesaphiban*, v/29 (Aug. 1908), 181.

13. *Thesaphiban*, vi/32 (Nov. 1905), 53.

14. *Thesaphiban*, vii/42 (Sept. 1909), 192.

15. TNA R5M2.3/203/14: D to Regent, 24 Apr. 1907.

governor of Kaenthao, who had been acting as. division commissioner for Loei, was sacked for incompetence, and replaced by a commissioner from an inner circle.1

The effect of the changes, particularly from the point of view of the lawcourts concurrently taken out of the hands of the commissioner and placed under the. Ministry of Justice, was immediately evident to the French, whose new minister in Bangkok reported:

> 'Les deux provinces laotiennes de Oudon (Ban D'ua Makeng) et de Isan (Oubone) situées au nord-est et à l'est de Bangkok, en bordure du Mékong, jusqu'ici soumis à une organisation assez rudémentaire et rattachées à Bangkok par des liens encore assez lâches, sont décidement entrées dans le systême général siamois'.2

By 1910 the superintendent commissioner of Udon was able to report that all the unimportant small towns and satellites had either been converted into district offices, or abolished and combined with neighbouring districts; and that officials from district officer level upwards were either Thai, or else had been trained for their posts by qualified Thai officials. A few Lao governors who were not considered entirely capable had been redesignated as district officers, but were given capable deputy district officers to ensure that affairs went smoothly.3

As Sisuriya pressed reforms to a conclusion, the old Lao towns were all suppressed; but the commissioners were retained as part of a bureaucratic level which had the appearance of being superior to the level of the old towns, while the select old towns which served as division headquarters were given the status of 'Thesaphiban townships'. The latter now had 'township commissioners' with authority over the new district offices in the territory that had previously formed the 'divisions'. The 'division' system formally ended in December. 1907 when the names of the five divisions (Udon, Namhûang, Phachi, Sakon Nakhon, and That Phanom)--names given for the loose collections of towns they incorporated--were changed to conform to the names of the towns where

1. TNA R5M2.3/205/138: D to RV, 23 July 1908.

2. MAE NS Siam 4/161: de Margerie, to Phichon, 24 Sept. 1908.

3. TNA R6M28/1/16: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910.

headquarters were situated (Udon, Loei, Khonkaen, Sakon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom, respectively). This was possible only because Bangkok now felt assured that the elites of the other old towns (those that had become mere districts) would no longer resist the obvious loss of old style town status.1

In 1913 this confusing terminology was clarified somewhat by suppressing nationwide the term 'commissioner'--which implied a temporary official2--and renaming the Thesaphiban town 'commissioners' as Thesaphiban town 'governors'. The 'superintendent commissioners' were similarly renamed 'circle superintendents'. And in 1916 the process was completed by redesignating all Thesaphiban 'townships' as 'provinces' uniformly throughout the kingdom, with the 'town' (or 'township') governors becoming 'province' governors.3

The Nongkhai governorship disappeared when the last Lao governor died in 1908o It was soon found, however, that Udon headquarters alone was unable to administer efficiently its districts along the Mekong banks. Udon was two days from Nongkhai; and Nakhon Phanom, the next nearest provincial centre, was seven days downriver. A centre with higher status was needed on the Mekong for administrative efficiency, security, and dealings with the French at Wiangchan. Nongkhai was therefore upgraded in 1915 to the status of a Thesaphiban township; and bureaucrats were sent out to fill the posts of governor, judges, revenues officer, etc.4 It was given both of Udon township's Mekong bank districts, Thabô and Phonphisai, to govern. (Map 19.) And in 1917 the formation of the modern Province, with its long, thin strip of land stretching along the Mekong, was completed by transferring the district of Chaiburi (whose offices had been shifted upriver from the old site in 1914 to a point halfway between Nongkhai and Nakhon Phanom) to Nongkhai province for reasons of better communications.5

l. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to RV, 26 Dec. 1907.

2. TNA R6M2/6: proclamation, 4 July 1913.

3. TNA R6M3.2/39/5: Surasi to RVI, 5 May 1916.

4. TNA R6M3.2/25/116: Maha Amat to RVI, 20 Feb. 1915. M3.2/25/194: Maha Amat to Prachin, 11 Mar. 1915.

5. TNA R6M3.2/20/l19: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914. M3.2/41/30: Surasi to RVI, 12 Dec. 1916, minute by RVI, Mar. 1917.

In Sakon Nakhon the old township and most of its satellites formed a ready territorial basis for the modern province. Two of its satellites were transferred to Nakhon Phanom as subdivisions under the division system: Phothiphaisan was suppressed in 1907 under Kusuman,1 and the latter was in turn suppressed in 1914 under Nakhon Phanom district.2 Champachonnabot was divided up in 1907 and absorbed by neighbouring districts.3 And in 1914 Waritchaphum also was reduced to commune status, and combined with Phannanikhom district,4 thus completing the transformation from Sakon Nakhon town and its seven satellites to the modern province with four districts. (Maps 12, 13, 15, 17, 19.)

In the Nahon Phanom division, the Mukdahan satellite of Phalukakhoraphum was abandoned when most of the old elite had died out and the others moved upriver with their peasants in search of better padilands.5 The powers of Mukdahan and its other satellite Nongsung were weakened from 1903 when the division commissioner began to take advantage of rivalry and disputes over peasant jurisdiction, actively seeking to widen existing schisms. He created an unofficial subdistrict office at Nakae village, and announced that anyone not wishing to remain under the old elites might move there.6 Nakae gradually increased in importance to the detriment of the other two centres; and in 1917 was finally made district headquarters, absorbing old Nongsung entirely.7

Of Nakhon Phanom's four former satellites which had become subdivisions, Atsamat was combined with Nakhon Phanom district in 1907, and Ramrat with Uthen.8 In 1914 Akatamnuai district was combined also under Uthen;9 and the headquarters of Renu

1. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to Prachin, 18 July 1907.

2. TNA R6M3.2/20/119: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914.

3. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to Prachin, 18 July 1907.

4. TNA R6M3.2/20/119: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914.

5. TNA R5M59/41: Sunthon, 'Inspection Report', Dec. 1903, Pp. 30, 35-36.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

7. TNA R6M3.2/42/164: Surasi to Prachin, 8 Mar. 1917.

8. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to Prachin, 18 July 1907.

9. TNA R6M3.2/20/119: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914.

Nakhon district was shifted to That Phanom village, which was raised to district status in 1917 when the old satellite names of numerous districts were changed to conform to the names of the places where district headquarters were actually situated.1 (Maps 12,13,16,17,19.) In 1914 Chaiburi district headquarters, which was felt to be too close to Uthen, was moved upriver to provide a new and much needed administrative centre for an isolated stretch of the Mekong.2 And the former townsite of Chaiburi was absorbed into Uthen, completing the formation of Nakhon Phanom province with its-five districts from the four Lao towns and eight satellites.

The resident commissionerships at Khonkaen, Phuwiang (a satellite removed from Nongkhai control by a resident commissioner in 1892), and Chonnabot were combined in the 1900 division plan, along with Khonkaen's satellite Manchakhiri, as four subdivisions under the control of the 'Phachi' division commissioner residing at Khonkaen. (Map 13.) To these were added Namphong in 1907 and Phon in 1914--both raised from commune status--to complete the six districts of modern Khonkaen province.3 District administration was first made to conform to standards in the province, however, through the efforts of an energetic ministry official appointed in 1913 as governor.4 No significant reorganisation at district level or above was undertaken in Udon circle after 1917, by which time the government were able to turn their attention more closely to commune level administration, and re-adjust the sizes of those considered inappropriate for efficient administration.5

The Problem of Data

The transition towards the provincial system in Isan lagged far behind that of Udon. By 1907 few Thai officials had been

1. TNA R6M3.2/42/164: Surasi to Prachin, 8 Mar. 1917.

2. TNA R6M3.2/20/119: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914.

3. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to Prachin, 18 July 1907. R6M3.2/20/119: D to RVI, 9 Mar. 1914.

4. TNA R6M10/2/2: Khamrop to D, 29 Jan, 1915.

5. *Thesaphiban*, xxv/135 (July 1918), 99-100: proclamation, 16 May 1917.

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posted there, and almost all administrative functions remained in the hands of the Lao elite, whose titles were merely changed from 'lord governor' to 'division commissioner' or 'district officer'.1 The extremely light regime was due in part to the shock of the 1902 peasant uprising which momentarily threatened the very existence of the Thai administration. The uprising was a messianic one, led by 'holy men' numbering in the tens. It began thee previous year in French territory, and spread to Isan circle, where there was already widespread discontent due more to droughts and other natural calamities than to political changes. Although reforms carried out by the Thai were not the major causes, the rebellion demonstrated clearly that changes would have to be made slowly and with great caution in order to prevent a recurrence. As late as 1907 when the first effective changes were being planned, the king warned Damrong and Sanphasit to proceed with great caution, lest another outbreak occur.2

Damrong regarded Sanphasit's administrative role as a purely provisional one of keeping order, and he gave no firm instructions to proceed with centralisation until after 1907. The king's view of Sanphasit's laxity in administration has already been noted. It was only after his successor Phraya Sithamma assumed control in 1910 that Thesaphiban standards were first applied bit by bit at province level in Isan.3 Sanphasit's tenure 1893 to 1910 was the longest of any circle chief. In proposing early in 1910 that the king recall him, Damrong offered three arguments to suggest that his mission was at an end.4 Only the first--that relations with France had been settled--was a straightforward one. Damrong's assertions that during 1909 Isan. had been reorganised to conform to Thesaphiban standards, and finally that all pending administrative difficulties would be resolved during 1910, were true in only the barest superficial sense. Little bureaucratic change had yet taken place, other than

1. SOM Siam 106: Bernard to Beau, 25 Jan. 1907.

2. TNA R5M57/l4/27: RV to D, 28 Dec. 1907.

3. TNA R6M3.2/7/118: D to RVI, 15 Mar. 1912.

4. TNA R5M2.3/207: D to RV, 10 Feb. 1910.

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appointments to the four newly created governorships and to the judicial posts recently created under the Ministry of Justice. Damrong was simply calling for the end of the sovereign high commissionership, and 'the substitution of an ordinary superintendent commissioner subordinate to himself. He was nonetheless mindful of the need for a 'vigorous' replacement who could continue to maintain order firmly while carrying out the centralisation plan. By this time, Nakhon Ratchasima had regained its traditional position as the stronghold of Thai administration in the north-east. (Refer to Chapter Thirteen.) Damrong felt that the superintendent commissioner there would be capable of providing any support, in the event of unforeseen resistance to the

government, required by the new Isan superintendent commissioner, who was chosen especially because of his reputation as a tough administrator.

> 'Phraya Chasaen governs Nakhon Ratchasima Circle, which is an important one "domineering" Isan and Udon circles. This is, then, a suitable arrangement.'1

The documentation on Sanphasit's tenure is surprisingly sparse. In contrast to the wealth of information on Udon for the same period, one knows little of what was going on in Isan, other than from the orders sent out by the ministry and the occasional summary reports submitted by Sanphasit. Apparently his analyses of Isan conditions and his general instructions were communicated verbally during trips to Bangkok in 1900, 1907, and 1908. Almost all responsibility for planning and implementing reforms of even the most basic sort had to be left in his hands alone, because of Bangkok's total ignorance of how the Lao might react to them, as the king indicated when Sanphasit proposed simple measures to improve internal security.

> 'the character and disposition of the people of the Lao towns are distant from our own, and we cannot make accurate estimations about them.'2

It was clear that reorganisation would depend solely on the sovereign high commissioner's knowledge and abilities.

1. *Ibid*.

2. TNA R5M57/9: Sanphasit, proclamation, 1 Apr. 1900, minute by RV, n.d.

Bangkok could make broad plans for higher level bureaucratic structures where only the elite were concerned; but the means of implementing plans which touched upon the peasantry was a difficult problem requiring intimate knowledge of local conditions. On the eve of the 1902 rebellion, Damrong remarked to the king that he approved Sanphasit's work in general, but complained that he did not inform the ministry adequately of what he was doing.1 The reports on Udon circle received, from late 1903 (at which time Damrong despatched the first division commissioner to Nakhon Phanom) and in 1904 (when Watthana made a general inspection tour of Udon), were the first of their kind to meet Bangkok's needs for comprehensive reporting with extensive data gathered for the purpose of political reorganisation and economic development. They unfortunately had no parallel in Isan circle.

From the beginning of the Thesaphiban system, an annual conference of superintendent commissioners was held in Bangkok. It was partly a forum for discussion on problems of implementing a standard form of administration; and provided Damrong with an opportunity to explain in detail the decisions and policies of the government, adding any confidential information which could not be included in general correspondence. Udon was represented regularly from 1907 either by the superintendent or a deputy commissioner.2 Isan was first represented in 1908 when Sanphasit himself attended,3 but regularly represented only under his successors.

Refinements could not be made in broad administrative plans until Bangkok possessed quantitative data to evaluate the needs of each circle and make adjustments where necessary. Beginning 1905 Udon was able to submit statistics concerning its revenues.4 And Udon began in

1906 to compile census statistics for future planning: total population (it was then the most populous in the list), population by

1. TNA R5M57/14/360: D to RV, 22 Mar. 1902.

2. *Thesaphiban*, iv/22 (Jan. 1908), 113-114.

3. *Thesaphiban*, vi/33 (Dec. 1908), 55-56.

4. *Thesaphiban*, vii/37 (Apr. 1907), 3-31: register of circle revenues, 1902/3-1907/8.

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occupation, number of households, beasts of burden, etc.1 By this time all circles--with the exceptions of Isan and Phayap (which encompassed the old Mûang principalities)--were providing the government with such statistics. At the 1910 Thesaphiban conference Damrong introduced a lengthy standard form for annual reports to be submitted thereafter by the superintendent commissioners, covering every imaginable aspect of administration and government services.2 Ail circles, without exception, prepared annual estimates beginning 1902 for the amount of padiland under cultivationo3 When an estimate of the whole Isan population was finally compiled as a result of the 1910 general census, the circle was found to be the most populous (at 1.4 millions) of all, and two and one-half to five times as populous as the purely Thai circles.4 In the 1910 census Isan made estimates for the first time of households, beasts of burden (the most significant source of cash income for the peasants), ox-carts, and boats, but still was not able to provide data. for such categories as occupations.5 As census data was considered prerequisite to many adjustments that had to be made for administrative efficiency--confirming that many small towns and satellites temporarily given district status were too small to justify retaining a district officer for them, and should be combined with neighbouring districts, and that many communes were too large and should be divided among two or more commune headmen--as well as for efficient revenues management, Udon was in a position to improve administration only as a result of its limited surveys of 1904-1907, and Isan only after the first nation-wide census in 1910. Even at this juncture the necessity of obtaining accurate data was a concept difficult to introduce,

1. *Thesaphiban*, vii/38 (May 1909), 36-52: census statistics for 1906/7 and 1907/8

2. *Thesaphiban*, x/56 (Nov. 1910), 118-137.

3. *Thesaphiban*, xiii/73 (Apr. 1912), 20: register of padilands, 1902/3-1908/9.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xiii/special (Aug. 1912), 334.

5. *Thesaphiban*, xiii/special (Aug. 1912), 250-346: census statistics for 1910.

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because of the suspicion among the peasantry and elite alike that censuses (traditionally a register of able men) could have only one purpose: to tax them more heavily and demand more corvée from them.

The 'Division' System in Isan, 1901-1907

When Phichit arrived as sovereign high commissioner in 1892, he created a system of 'ten commissionerships for the fourteen towns which ultimately remained in Isan circle.1 (Map 11.) Some of them were retained by Sanphasit. But the expansion of a Thai-controlled bureaucracy into the Isan towns did not come until after 1907. And in contrast to Udon, much greater use was made of the Lao elite in the new bureaucracy.

The circle was divided under five division commissioners at Ubon, Sisaket,2 Surin, Roi Et, and Champasak from 1900, when the decision was taken to create the division system for the Lao circles. (Map 13.) The old towns in each division were given 'subdivision' status. By 1907 these rudimentary provisions were still in force. (Champasak, of course, was ceded to France in 1904.) Members of the Lao elite were recruited for appointment as 'Ubon Division Commissioner' and lesser division officials.3 The Thai resident commissioner at Roi Et was simply retitled 'Roi Et Division Commissioner'.4 But he was given no new responsibilities; and the post was later given nominally to the old Lao governor.5 Resident commissioners at Suwannaphum and Mahasarakham continued their old role of supervising the existing Lao elites.6

1. TNA R5M62.1/33/136: D to RV, 30 Dec. 1892.

2. 'Sisaket' will be used throughout to avoid confusion. The commissioners (and later 'governors') maintained headquarters at Sisaket. But the division (and later 'province') was called 'Khukhan' after the town with highest status. The province name was changed to 'Sisaket' officially only in 1938. (Buddhist Committee, 'Sisaket Province' p. 2.)

3. Damrong, 'Accounts of Various Travels, Part 4: A Trip to Nakhon Ratchasima, Udon, and Roi Et Circles in 1906-1907' (ed. TNL, Bangkok, 1969), pp. 54-55.

4. TNA R5M57/17/1325: D to Sommot, 13 Oct. 1905.

5. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug. 1907), 240.

6. *Ibid*., 243-244.

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The Forest Khmer towns under Isan were divided into two divisions with offices at Sisaket and Surin. A Khukhan elder who had earlier become 'senior advisor' was restored to power as nominal 'Sisaket Division Commissioner'. On the eve of the 1902 Uprising Sanphasit cabled Bangkok that the Khmer was not entirely capable of maintaining order, even though he was one of the two most dependable local officials in the circle, and ought to be replaced immediately by an experienced Thai.1 Once the emergency had passed, however, the division was left as it was, with the old Khmer elite remaining in power. The old elite were needed partly because of their abilities and willingness to co-operate in implementing basic changes, and partly to deal with Khmer peasants and troublesome elders in the remaining territories south of the Dong Rak mountains until that area was completely ceded to France.3 The archives mention few appointments for either of the Forest Khmer divisions, and suggest that little effort was made there parallel to that in Udon to implement the division system. Sanphasit interfered as little as possible in the affairs of the Khmer towns. And it seems significant that Surin and Sisaket were the only two provincial level administrative centres in the entire north-east from which Damrong received no officials during his tour.

Even before the 1902 uprising Sanphasit was reluctant to press forward with the reforms envisaged by the division system. He regarded the Lao as incapable of reorganising themselves under the system, and felt the only alternative was to find commissioners who would be sensitive to local attitudes and customs. Damrong agreed with his assessment that

> 'the officials whom he will need to employ should be "domesticated" rather than agile and clever, because he feels hesitant that the new type of "clever" official would take strict command over the people as though training monkeys to perform.

1. TNA R5M57/14/360: D to RV, 22 Mar. 1902.

2. TNA R5M57/14/6866: Khukhan governor to Sanphasit, 10 July 1901.

3. TNA R5M2.25/26/67: D to Sommot, 7 June 1899. M2.25/13/60: Sisahathep to Sommot, 18 Apr. 1901. M2.25/13/3309: D to Sommot, 15 Nov 1906.

> This would cause discontent. And he feels that deep dissatisfaction has already spread through the circle.'1

One need only compare Sanphasit's allusion to training monkeys with that of Prachak (pp. 164-165 above) to appreciate the difference in approach of the two towards, provincial administration. In contrast to the Udon case, Sanphasit rejected the use of really qualified men initially, regarding Thesaphiban standards as too radical a departure from the Lao system of administration. Only after reforms had been tried out in Udon with success did Bangkok feel sufficiently secure to apply them likewise to Isan.

The 'Deputy Superintendent' System in Isan, 1908-1916

Towards the end of 1907, following Damrong's inspection tour which had taken him only to Roi Et division in Isan circle, Sanphasit conferred with Damrong in Bangkok and agreed upon a plan of action to take the first effective steps towards centralisation in Isan circle. It was agreed that revenues were large enough to permit the gradual development of a bureaucracy, which Bangkok wished to create at the least possible expense. Nonetheless, preferential salaries would be given to all Thai commissioners sent out; otherwise the Interior could not hope to induce qualified and reliable men to accept posts in such an isolated area. Ail significant problems which would likely meet with popular resistance would be put off until a later time. In particular, no new forms of taxation would be introduced, although a 'revenues commissioner' would be sent to take charge of the existing levy system (already paid as a uniform capitation tax), deemed the cheapest and easiest method of collection among the Lao. And all the tiny satellites need not be abolished for the moment. The commissioners could be given the authority to lower them to district or commune status, as appropriate, by reducing the powers of the elite. A civil service school was to be established in Ubon in order to train sons of the local elite, who would be appointed to regularly salaried positions

1. TNA R5M57/14/360: D to RV, 22 Mar. 1902.

according to their abilities and become part of the circle bureaucracy.1

The two most important features of the plan were set in motion from April 1908: training civil servants in the circle itself, and appointing four Thai officials with powers equal to those of provincial governors to take charge of the existing divisions in Isan circle and begin transforming them into simple provinces.2 The plan was basic to dismantling the sovereign high commissionership by removing all essential powers from $anphasit's personal control: giving the four commissioners charge of all administrative affairs at province level, placing revenues under a separate Interior department, and creating an independent judiciary under the Ministry of Justice. Suitable appointees, who were experienced governors from inner circles, were designated early in 1908, and reached their posts at Ubon, Sisaket, Surin, and Roi Et by the middle of the yearo3 It was predicted that a transition period of at least ten years would be required for Isan administration to be made to conform to inner circle standards.4

The proclamation announcing the reforms for Isan circle officially redesignated the 'divisions' as 'provinces'; but the chief official for each was to be titled 'Deputy Superintendent'.5 It should be noted that the term 'Deputy Superintendent' was employed concurrently in Udon and in the inner circles for the second highest circle bureaucrat, who acted as a general assistant to the superintendent commissioner, and not in the unique Isan circle sense of a provincial 'governor'.

The term 'province' was not at this time regarded as a standard term for the Thesaphiban system. The provincial headquarters in Nakhon Ratchasima and Udon circles were

1. TNA R5M57/14/24: Sanphasit to D, 19 May 1908.
2. TNA R5M2.3/203/304: D to RV, 8 Jan. 1908. M57/14/121: Sisahathep to RV, 3 July 1908.
3. Tej, 'The Thesaphiban System of Administration: Revolution or Evolution?', *Social Science Review*, iv/3 (Dec. 1966), 63 (in Thai).

4. *Thesaphiban*, v/25 (Apr. 1908) 3-6: proclamation, 4 Feb. 1908.

still called Thesaphiban 'townships' after the traditional term. It was only in 1916 that Rama VI decided to use 'province' as the standard term nationwide in t reference to an Interior ministry proposal to restore the term 'township' uniformly.1 The deputy superintendents of the old Isan circle were retitled as province 'governors' at the same time. And the circle level post of deputy superintendent (in its ordinary sense) was established soon afterwards.

Roi Et Circle, 1912-1926

Sanphasit was able to do very little for Roi Et during his tenure. In 1900 he made a general inspection tour of the principal towns along the Chi river, pointing out regulations in the provincial administration act to governors and other officials, and accepting court cases to judge, as no government judges had yet been sent there.2 Upon his return to Ubon he sent out proclamations exhorting officials to follow correct administrative procedures, and offering a wide range of ideas and suggestions on how better to deal with banditry and litigation.3 The first general census esti-

mated the province's population at 625,000--greater than that of any Thai circle. Damrong thus proposed in 1912 to take Roi Et--then the worst governed province of the north-east--and raise it to circle status, subdividing it into Roi Et, Mahasarakham, and Kalasin provinces. (The remainder of old Isan circle was then renamed 'Ubon Circle'.) It was agreed that although an additional budget of 80,000 baht annually would be required in order to create the necessary bureaucracy, Bangkok could hope to recoup the increase in expenditure within a few years as a result of improved revenue management which the new circle would be able to implement.4

Upon his arrival in June 1912 the first superintendent commissioner Prince Thamrongsiri found little sign of the Thesaphiban system in Roi Et circle. District offices had

1. TNA R6M3.2/34/83: Maha Amat to RVI, 3 Dec. 1915. M3.2/39/5: Surasi to RVI, 5 May 1916.

2. TNA R5M57/9/8: Sanphasit to D, 1 July 1900.

3. TNA R5M57/9: proclamation, 1 Apr. 1900.

4. TNA R6M3.2/7/118: D to RVI, 15 Mar. 1912.

not been built. The Lao elite did not yet exercise the functions set for them, still hoping to return to the old Lao system of administration. And there was no one in the circle capable of retraining them. They refused to perform their duties or accept litigation without the customary fees, in addition to those prescribed by law. Many did not keep revenue records, and were prone to misappropriating funds. Thamrongsiri admitted, however, that as the government salaries were insufficient for a livelihood--and district budgets did not meet all their administrative costs--one should expect them to turn to illegal means of increasing their incomes. By this time only the governors of Roi Et and Kasetwisai remained in office (both now called 'district officer'), although nine other towns and satellites were still headed by 'district officers' chosen from the old elite. Thamrongsiri felt that three of them ought to be sacked, seven (including the two governors) were respected men who could be upgraded by placing capable deputies under them, and only a single one was really capable of his office. The rest of the posts were vacant. There was still considerable popular resistance against the regular inspection of communes expected of district officers, as the populace feared corvée and requisitions. The district officers were incapable of maintaining security, partly because their jurisdictions were too large. Suwannaphum district alone was more populous than some whole provinces in Thailand proper. (Thamrongsiri proposed, unsuccessfully, that it be raised to province status to meet administrative needs.1) By 1912, however, Roi Et had nearly arrived at its definitive arrangement of districts; and only a few territorial changes were permitted during the next few years.

Some adjustments in the territorial jurisdictions of districts were later found necessary owing to the arbitrary ways in which district borders were initially aligned. In the absence of adequate census data or surveys, many decisions at first had to be mere guesswork. Settling a dispute in 1899 between Chonnabot and Mahasarakham over certain villages along the right bank of the Chi river,

1. TNA R6M20/4/60: Thamrongsiri to D, 25 Aug. 1912.

Damrong admitted the existing maps did not provide enough details on which to base a decision. So he arbitrarily declared a small stream as the boundary, hoping that each town would feel it had received a fair share.1 The king approved, with minor reservations:

> 'it is to be feared there will be further disputes over the area above [the stream]. But this may be avoided because there is hardly anyone settled there. Since it is just forest land, I feel this will be alright.'2

The approach was still the old *ad hoc* one of settling individual disputes over peasants. Bangkok felt no compulsion yet to fix boundaries in a definitive manner. Circle level administration itself was still in a state of flux, and scientific surveys did not seem worthwhile.

When Roi Et circle was created, the Chi river was made the boundary between Kalasin and Roi Et provinces. Selaphum, on the left bank of the river only about thirty kilometres from Roi Et, fell under the jurisdiction of Kalasin; and local officials soon began to complain of the two-day journey upriver to the province offices and court. Selaphum aud its villages along the lower Namyang stream to the east were therefore transferred to Roi Et province after two years.3 (Maps 17 and 19.) By this time the district offices of Thawatburi in Roi Et province had been shifted slightly north to Dindaeng commune (renamed 'Dindaeng District' in 1917), while the old site had been re-established as 'East Roi Et' district (renamed 'Saengbadan District'4 in 1913). In 1913 the territories of these three districts still were not clearly defined. The Interior thus suppressed tiny Din-daeng, giving three of its communes to Saengbadan. The fourth commune, plus two each from Selaphum, Kamalasai, and Kutchinnarai, were separated to form the new district of Phonthong, to provide an administrative centre for the central Namyang stream basin.5 This was the last significant

1. TNA R5M2.1/13/69: D to RV, 11 Nov. 1899.

2. TNA R5M2.1/13/31: RV to D, 12 Nov. 1899.

3. TNA R6M3.2/19/769: Maha Amat to Prachin, 21 Feb. 1914.

4. No relation to old Saengbadan satellite, which was abolished and combined with Sahatsakhan district.

5. TNA R6M32/51/9: Surasi to RVI, 30 Oct. 1919.

structural change at district level during the period of centralisation. (When Kalasin province was abolished in April 1932 as part of a campaign to reduce government expenditure, its province level bureaucracy disappeared; but its five district offices merely became part of the enlarged Mahasarakham province. In October 1947 Kalasin was restored to province status.)1 The name-changing process continued, however, most notably in the late 1930s when many district names were changed back to the traditional town or satellite names. New district offices, created in addition to those of the Thesaphiban system, did not begin to appear until the 1950s.

Ubon Circle Territorial Modifications

As shown in Map 15, little progress had been made towards centralisation in Isan by 1907 except to designate the thirteen old towns as 'subdivisions'. (The fourteenth, Phulaenchang, was hardly more than a village, and left to fade away as its officials died.) The appearances of uniform local administration were created only in the final years of Sanphasit's tenure, as indicated in Map 16. Every town and satellite was then given the status of 'district', with its governor or other highest Lao official designated as 'district officer'. In an attempt to provide better local administration for heavily populated areas, many new administrative centres had already been created even by 1900, and given Sanskritised names ('North' Ubon, 'East' Yasothon, 'West' Kalasin, etc.).2 (Maps 16 and 18.) North Surin was created to govern the portion of the Rattanaburi population transferred to Surin from Buriram province. Part of Sanphasit's mission was to make preparations for the future arrival of the railway; and. the new districts of East and West Sisaket, and South Ubon, were intentionally established along the approximate route of the railway in order to provide nuclei for future commercial centres.

The final stages of district level reorganisation in Ubon circle began in 1912, with the reduction of old satellites

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/1 (1932), 62. Buddhist Committee, 'Kalasin Province', pp. 9-10.

2. TNA R5S12/13/4: Sanphasit to Wachirayan, 12 Aug. 1900.

whose administrative work was insufficient to justify district status. Senang1 and Chanuman became sub-districts; and tiny Suraphin was reduced to a mere commune.2 In 1913 all of Sanphasit's district names were de-Sanskritised and the old names restored--in numerous cases to new districts having no relation to the old satellites that had been suppressed.3

As part of the attempt begun in 1916 with the adoption of the term 'province' to standardise all nomenclature, more than thirty district names in all three Lao circles were changed in 1917 to conform to the names of the communes where the offices were situated, including modifications of the names of all districts where provincial headquarters also were situated.4 The total changes to 1917--before the old town names were discarded--are summarised in Map 18. The only major change in the districts of Ubon circle after 1917 was the transfer of the Forest Khmer district of Det in 1928 from Sisaket to Ubon province.5

The North-east Viceroyalty, 1922-1926

The new superintendent to Udon circle in 1922 was given the additional title of 'Viceroy of the North-east Region', with supervisory powers over the superintendents at Roi Et and Ubon.6 A plan for creating viceroys for various regions of the kingdom directly responsible to the king was announced in 1915, a few months after Damrong retired, as part of a trend towards weakening the powerful office of the Interior minister.7 A general report submitted by the viceroy after his initial inspection tour indicated that administrative

1. The left bank satellite Senang was re-established on right bank territory of the parent town Ubon after 1893 by part of the old elite and peasants.

2. TNA R6M3.2/9/47: Maha Amat to RVI, 23 May 1912.

3. TNA R6M3.2/15/239: D to Prachin, 1 Sept. 1913. M3.2/16/269: D to RVI, 13 Sept. 1913.

4. TNA R6M3.2/42/164: Surasi to Prachin, 8 Mar. 1917, annexe.

5. TNA R7M4.3/1/388: Boriphat to Mahison, 30 Nov. 1928.

6. TNA R6M3.1/170: proclamation, 1 Aug. 1922.

7. *Thesaphiban*, xx/116 (Dec. 1915), 54: proclamation, 10 Nov. 1915.

affairs were satisfactory; internal security was well maintained; laudable Progress was being made in developing the national bureaucracy, provincial education, and a communications network; and that the most significant function of the viceroy would be his dealings with the French.1 The appointment came soon after a 1920 agreement with France concerning co-operation on policing the Mekong; and as the post controlled almost the entire Mekong frontier with Indochina, it placed the viceroy on a par with the French Resident Superieur of Laos (significantly, residing at Wiangchan, only two days travel from Udon); and it gave him full powers over the expanding relations with the colony.2 The initial report submitted in glowing terms to the king was, however, far from an accurate estimation of the true internal situation.

The office of the north-east viceroy existed only from 1922 to March 1926, and had little effect on Lao circle administration, partly because the viceroy was yet another in a series of reluctant office-holders. He was an unfortunate choice: even as superintendent commissioner at Nakhon Ratchasima (1908-1913) he was constantly on sick leave in Bangkok, easily accessible by train. And having returned to the capital as a deputy Interior minister in 1913, he had little enthusiasm for the distant Udon post. He ended his first report to the king by complaining of his long history of illnesses--with reference to the isolation and unhealthful aspects of Udon, and his aged mother in Bangkok--obviously hoping to be transferred back to a post at court. Rama VI, however, could find no post suitable to an official of his rank; and supposing he was asking indirectly for retirement, approved a pension for him.3 The viceroy hastily offered excuses for his earlier report, indicating that he did not wish to retire and would retain the post.4

The Interior minister agreed to keep him, partly because there was no one to replace him. The minister hoped that

1. TNA R6M3.1/191: Ratchanukun to RVI, 25 June 1923.

2. *L'Eveil économique de l'Indo-chine*, 23 Nov. 1924.

3. TNA R6M3.1/191/81: Mahithon to Ratchanukun, 30 June 1923.

4. TNA R6M3.1/191/63: Mahithon to Yommarat, 3 July 1923.

his direct supervision of the superintendents and governors would help to bring about an improvement in administration, as the work of some province governors and of both superintendents at Ubon and Roi Et (in office since 1912 and 1914, respectively) was not considered satisfactory. The minister wished to have a strong viceroy on hand to deal with all extraordinary affairs, help to upgrade existing officials, and oversee affairs in provinces where governorships were vacant until capable men could be found for all posts. He also hoped to put a stop to the old practice of rushing into appointments with poorly qualified men, which had produced poor results in past administration of the outer circles.1

Attitudes towards Lao Province Posts

Progress in improving the bureaucracy during the next, and final, decade of the absolute monarchy was painfully slow. The interior had been grappling since the 1890s with the problem of producing educated and trained bureaucrats in sufficient numbers for the increasing numbers of circle, province, and district posts that were becoming available. But in spite of enticements offered to men accepting posts in distant provinces--promises of rapid promotion, free housing, medical treatment, lengthy leaves of absence, guaranteed pensions, etc.--most Thai were reluctant to serve there. The Thai official class was convinced that

> 'absence from Bangkok and the immediate precincts of the Court meant sure neglect and official oblivion, and that for a man of ambition to immure himself in the jungle was mere foolishness.'2

Damrong hesitated to transfer high officials, unless they volunteered, to the Lao circle posts, which he himself acknowledged as 'isolated and inhospitable'.3

A post in a Lao circle was regarded almost as a temporary exile. One prince whose behaviour Damrong termed 'naughty' was sent to Ubon, on the premise that the hard life he

1. TNA R6M3.1/191/63: Yommarat to Mahithon, l2 July 1923.

2. W. Graham, *Siam: A Handbook of Practical, Commercial, and Political Information* (London, 1912), p. 254.

3. TNA R5M2.3/201/309: D to RV, 28 Mar. 1906.

would have to endure among the Lao would induce him to reform himself so that he could return to Bangkok.1 A badly behaved and thieving royal page was threatened with banishment to an Udon post as punishment. The governor of Buriram offended the queen-mother, who insisted that he be punished; and Damrong agreed to make him commissioner to Kalasin instead.3 Damrong was reluctant to accept one prince to a ministry post because 'his disposition and behaviour are still somewhat improper', and thus sent him to Ubon, where he became deputy governor.' He later became governor to Sisaket, and was shunted around from governorship to governorship in the outer provinces--where he and a coterie of friends maltreated the populace, embezzled, became

addicted to morphine, and made themselves thoroughly despised by the peasantry--until no superintendent would accept him and he had to be retired.5

The image of Lao circle posts as signs of disfavour--and their frequent use as a dumping grounds for unwanted and uselessmen--served to ensure that the administration of the Lao provinces could not improve. The first prince ever to visit Loei, who was also one of the last ministers of the Interior under the absolute monarchy, referred to the province (the most isolated in the kingdom by that time) as the 'Siberia' of Thailand.6

Greater Nakhon Ratchasima Circle, 1926-1932

During the first year of the seventh reign, the king found it imperative to make drastic reductions in the lavish budgets of his predecessor, part of which entailed the suppression of the Ubon and Roi Et circle bureaucracies. From

l. TNA R5M2.3/19/217: D to RV, 23 Jan. 1897.

2. TNA R5M2.3/24: Norarat to RV, 20 Jan. 1895.

3. TNA R5M2.3/211/62: D to RVI, 20 June 1912.

4. TNA R5M2.3/205/158: D to RV; 31 July 1908. *Thesaphiban*, vi/32 (Nov. 1908), 52.

5. TNA R6M3.1/168/39: Rat to Chakkrapani, 14 June 1922.

6. Nakhon Sawan, 'Report of an Inspection Tour to Lomsak, Loei, and Phetchabun Provinces in Phitsanulok and Udon Circles during April 1927' (Bangkok, 1927), pp. 16-17.

April 1926 the provinces of both circles were placed under the authority of the circle bureaucracy of Nakhon Ratchasima.1 It was also proposed to make further reductions in expenditures by suppressing the province level bureaucracy in Kalasin, although because of poor communications this was not found to be administratively possible until 1932. Justification offered in the proclamation announcing the amalgamation of these and other circles--which included the Malay populated circle in the far south, and the Mûang populated circle in the north, although none of the purely Thai circles--was that improved communications had rendered the circle bureaucracies less important than before, and the circle superintendents were no longer needed to supervise affairs as closely as in the past. The real reason for the change in Ubon and Roi Et was apparently the fact that their superintendents had come to be of little value unequal to the expense of maintaining them.

For the use of high officials, telephone and telegraphic communications were indeed available in the north-east by the turn of the century. And airplanes were in regular service from 1922 to Roi Et and Ubon.3 But the railway had just begun operations only as far as Surin, the first province inside Ubon circles4 and did not reach Ubon town until 1930.5 It was argued that thanks to co-ordinated planning by the viceroy, all important centres except Loei could be reached, at least with difficulty, by automobile.6 The principal networks of roads were, however, never much improved by the government. It was expected that the railway would ultimately fill most internal transportation requirements, and that road construction should be limited to a network of

1. TNA R7M4.3/1: proclamation, Mar. 1926.

2. Siphichai, ‘An Inspection Tour to the North-east in 1926’ (Bangkok, 1971), pp. 16, 24-25. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/1 (1932), 62.

3. Ministry of Commerce, *The Economic Conditions of Northeastern Siam* (Bangkok, 1932), p. 4.

4. TNA R7P6/3: memo., 1 May 1926.

5. SOM Agence des colonies 281/487: Rougni, memo., 2 Apr. 1930.

6. Siphichai, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

feeder routes to the stations. Even the Nakhon Ratchasima superintendent himself had to admit eventually that roads were very poor--many could not be used at all during monsoon months--and that the principal centres of the north-east were largely cut off until the railway reached them.1

The removal of some essential services such as superior courts of justice to distant sites placed an undue burden on the populace. It also placed an impossible strain on circle officials, who suddenly had to cope with the affairs of 3.3 million people, exactly one-third (33.2 per cent) of the entire national population, squeezed now into a single circle that was five to ten times as populous as the Thai circles.3

It may be true that the Lao circles were the poorest. But they were paying their way; and the suppression of circle administration was not one of simply making the circle budgets balance. The capital always had priority in expenditures. The same year Bangkok reluctantly agreed to ‘invest’ in the first Roi Et budget, in hopes of gaining greater revenues from the circle, a budget 70 per cent as large was allowed for a single, gala royal ceremony.4 The central government was in fact making a substantial profit from its administration of greater Nakhon Ratchasima circle, where per capita expenditure in 1928/9 was a pittance at 0.28 baht, and total expenses were only 22.9 per cent of total revenues.5 More than three-quarters of the revenue collected was absorbed into the central treasury. In the absence of state services--other than a few schools, and security maintained by the gendarmerie and army--little could be returned to the Lao provinces except in the form of salaries for bureaucrats (the best paid of whom were from central Thailand). By comparison,

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/11 (1931), 788.

2. TNA R7M2/5/8: Yukhon to Mahithon, 8 Apr. 1926.

3. *Thesaphiban*, xxx/6 (Mar. 1932), 338.

4. TNA R6M16.2/3: correspondence concerning the white elephant, August 1911-March 1912. Total cost to the Treasury for consecration ceremonies was 56,000 baht, which did not include the *time* devoted to preparations by thousands of officials. See p. 189 above for Roi Et’s budget of 80,000 baht.

5. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/6 (1932) 338; xxxi/12 (1932), 875-876.

Bangkok had drained away only two-thirds of official tax revenues from the Lao states under the old system, and in fact probably had received less than half of what was collected.

The Lao circles suffered much administrative neglect because of disinterest after Damrong left the ministry of Interior. One of the final general reports from the superintendent of greater Nakhon Ratchasima circle summed up the progress with a note of resignation: out of the five sections of provincial administration then in existence, each with officials under its own ministry, he felt that only the. Interior bureaucracy was well organised. Many revenues, public instruction, agriculture, and military officials were still not fully capable of their duties, and a continuing ‘inconvenience’ to general administration.1 In order to appreciate more fully the qualitative changes accompanying the centralisation of administration and revenues, however, one must examine the array of services (many of which were not financed by revenues) created on the initiative of the new bureaucracy and discussed in chapters thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen below.

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/12 (1931), 868-872: Phraya Phetda, annual report, 27 Dec. 1929.

Chapter Twelve: Reduction of the Aristocracy

The aristocracy was removed from its position of supremacy in a deliberate but gentle manner during the transition to administration by the bureaucracy. Complete uncertainty surrounding the future of the Thai position in the Lao circles followed the debacle of 1893. Unable to respond to an 1895 request by the Nakhon Phanom governor for fresh appointments to four satellite governorships, the king proposed to postpone such decisions until some policy concerning the future of the numerous small towns and satellites could be formulated.1 Bangkok had the authority to issue a decree abolishing the Lao system of administration at a stroke--but not the means to implement it. Any such decree would have served only to heighten apprehension among Lao office-holders fearful of losing their privileges. So long as French Laos continued to maintain the façade of the old system, the Thai had no choice but to follow suit. The 1897 Provincial Administration Act which set the course for the Thesaphiban system was thus planned and enacted, like most of the new laws appearing around the turn of the century, with no intention of immediate use in the Lao circles. Bangkok expected to apply its provisions selectively as conditions permitted. Even its most basic premises--such as the creation of a few provinces by grouping together the numerous existing administrative centres--were expected to meet determined resistance.

Damrong was distressed in the mid-189Os by the possibility that the Lao elite of certain towns might attempt to join the French; and proposed that the important towns be subdivided so that no large piece of territory could fall into French hands. Prachak, however, stressed the need for caution. It seemed better for the time being to foster a sense of security among the Lao elite by upholding their faith in the familiar *status quo* under Thai rule.

> 'Even if the towns are small ones, we must be careful of the sensibilities of many people. And it will be difficult to know how to do this.

1. TNA R5M59/21/55: D toRV, 28 May 1895. M59/21/35,RV to D, 12 June 1895.

> 'Another matter, when we divide them up, it is to be feared they will be in turmoil and at loggerheads with one another--and will catch us also up in their ire--because it is characteristic of the Lao to defend their territories at the cost of life and limb. Were any other town to lay claim upon their lands, everyone in the town would help to defend it almost to the point of engaging in battle. Things have been thusly for a very long time. They will not agree to give up their lands--not a single *rai* [0.16 hectares] or even less--to another town.
>
> 'If we do re-divide the territories of the towns, it will probably be done only in theory, because of the fact that we already have re-divided them to this or that extent, and have appointed their highest officials. But those formerly holding power in the towns refused to

> accept them. What can we do about it? We cannot take in the police. We cannot take in the army. There is only one way in which we can exercise power consistently. The Pope in Rome threatens excommunication from the [Catholic] church. So long as they [the Lao] maintain their 'faith' [in the political *status quo*], then they will probably abide by it. Once they do not maintain the 'faith', then they will resist somewhat. Once we expel them from the 'faith', they will take up another 'faith' [i.e. attempt to join the French administration]. The Pope still has the power to prevail upon other countries to take up their armies to fight against the countries which resist the [Catholic] faith. We are surely unable to do likewise, except to work together of one accord to break up and clear away the underbrush, bathed in our sweat instead of water, and set our faces towards something new, probably succeeding thanks to His Majesty's Transcendent Virtues. So long as the treaty remains in force, it would be best not to wheedle.'1

Acknowledging that he had already encountered firm resistance to his attempts at re-aligning territorial boundaries and appointing local officials without approval from the elders, Prachak felt that territorial reforms should not be carried out until the zone restrictions were abolished. Bangkok concurred, on the premise that if changes were attempted everywhere at one go, and resistance were to arise, then all would be lost. In the meantime, Prachak planned to whittle down the territories of some large towns, and then observe local reactions. If no serious obstacles appeared, he would continue.

1. TNA R5M2.1/22/69: Prachak to D, 1 Nov. 1894.

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Damrong and the king agreed that many changes would have to be deferred in order to maintain the allegiance of the elite. Bangkok would have to promote a sense of calm continuation of the *status quo*, ordering commissioners to treat the elders with justice in order to gain their respect.1 Although changes would be undertaken away from the zone at first, the king insisted that the outward appearances of Thai supremacy over the zone be asserted in spite of restrictions.

> 'Setting up transit posts must be done in an unusual manner, so that it will not create any disturbance, as though erecting a doorpost and making a door. The transit posts are a traditional means of fixing the limits of the kingdom. This might appear to be a withdrawal by us if set up outside the 25 kilometre zgneJ, and then provoke a quicker organisation by the French in the 25 kilometre zone. It would be well if it is done so that it appears that these are merely local "security" posts for controlling banditry according to. custom.'2

But even in the hinterlands where the Thai had a relatively free hand, efforts at drawing reasonable boundaries for the modern provinces were often blocked by villagers and their elders stubbornly clinging to the old diffuse ties with distant towns, and refusing to submit to the authority of people in their towns of residence.3

Rivalry among the elite of Phukhiao, the only independent Lao town to be placed under Nakhon Ratchasima circle, provided local schisms which gave the Thai a ready opportunity to intervene directly. The old governor at first resisted the authority of Thai commissioners, attempting to assert his independence. Late in 1897 he and his clique attempted to flee to Wiangchan. But they were reported to the commissioner by their rivals, apprehended before they reached the Mekong,

and sent to Bangkok for imprisonment.4 The rival clique succeeded in its bid for control, but in the process found itself left with powers greatly curtailed from those enjoyed by the previous governor.

1. TNA R5M2.1/22/64: D to RV, 15 Dec. 1894.

2. TNA R5M2.1/22/59: RV to D, 20 Dec. 1894.

3. TNA R5M57/17: Sitthisak to Phakdinarong, 25 Oct. 1905.

4. TNA R5M46/8: D to Sommot, 20 Dec. 1897 and 5 Jan. 1898; D to RV, 22 July 1898.

In Udon Prachak was forced to make sparing use of repressive measures. Imprisonment could mot be used widely: it would have caused too much disturbance. The cases of some imprisoned aristocrats were taken up by the French; and under pressure Prachak occasionally had to release one, who them invariably emigrated to Wiangchan. Prachak proposed to find some excuse to sack the acting governor of Nakhon Phanom, whom he suspected of French sympathies, and replace him by his younger brother, whom he could better keep under his thumb. Damrong, however, advised Prachak to find ways of gaining the loyalty of such officials ‘so they could be used to serve national interests.1 Nonetheless, the acting governor moved across the river a couple of years later--perhaps frustrated by the king’s refusal to confirm his candidates for satellite posts already mentioned--placing the Thai in a delicate position, because his authority continued to be recognised by the Nakhon Phanom peasantry.2

Financial Security

Bangkok never doubted that to the Lao elite a sense of financial security was the *sine qua non* of acceptability of any formula for reform. The earliest resident commissionership proposals included a comprehensive plan to divide the Lao towns into four categories according to size and importance, with a scale of generous salaries for all high officials.3 The innumerable governors and elders--far in excess of administrative needs of the little towns--were often unable to collect revenues adequate to maintain themselves, and were thus compelled to squeeze the peasantry in compensation.4 It was hoped that a salary system could come to grips with the most unwieldy aspects of Lao administration. The original plan, however, was too ambitious for limited Lao circle revenues; but its principles were nonetheless applied wherever possible.

1. TNA R5M59/17/47: Rat to Sommot, 5 May 1894.

2. SOM Indochine A30(l07)/7: Tournier to GG, report for June-Aug. 1902.

3. TNA R5M2.3/4: cabinet minutes, 11 June 1891.

4. TNA R5M2.3/4/181: RV to Cabinet, 24 June 1891.

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It was Prachak's intention on his arrival to share local revenues with high officials so long as they lived, and then give ordinary salaries to the next generation.1 Although half of Nongkhai revenues were pledged thereby, the share of the elite was frozen at rates for 1892, whereas the government's share was expected to increase annually as methods of tax Collection were improved.

The commissioners placed in each town were initially able to take only nominal fiscal control. Resistance by the Lao elite residing along the frontier regularly reminded Bangkok of the need for tact and reassurances. The open conflicts around Kaenthao in 1897 especially worried the king.

> 'I just wonder whether or not this revenue which we are giving to the Lao will be sufficient. It would be well if it were enough for them to live comfortably.'2

The resident commissioner was giving 5 per cent of revenues to the headmen who collected it, and divided the surplus equally between the government and senior town officials.3 The arrangement not only satisfied the elite, but also proved successful for the treasury. The commissioner was able to collect more than five times the revenue formerly reported to Bangkok, in spite of restrictions.

> 'He arranged to collect some revenue in the 25 kilometre zone because the people in those areas are loyal, and also could be intimidated, allowing him to put all the revenue collecting in good order.'4

Even though only one or two local officials seemed capable and trustworthy, the king instructed Prachak to continue to find ways to patronise and reassure all of them, to forestall the spread of any opposition.5

Saaphasit's treatment of the Isan circle elite prior to the 1902 uprisings is obscure. Only afterwards was Bangkok informed by the patriarch that in almost every town under Sanphasit's regime the control of the elite over the

1. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 17 Mar. 1892.

2. TNA R5Kh13.2/15/35: RV to D, 19 June 1898.

3. TNA R5Kh13.2/15/87: D to Sommot, 14 June 1898.

4. TNA R5Kh13.2/15/104: Rat to RV, 2 Nov. 1898.

5. *Ibid*., RV, minute, n.d.

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peasantry had been waning in proportion to their control over finances, because they were unwilling to expend their personal incomes and the services of their peasants in attending to duties for which there was no compensation.1 Government budgets were notoriously inadequate for what was expected of local officials. One enterprising governor was discovered operating a gambling house--absolutely forbidden in the outer circles--in order to get revenues to supplement his meagre official budget.2

Just at the time the Thai were trying to reduce the Lao official class to a bare minimum, and bring legal affairs and revenues firmly under ministerial control, the French were still maintaining the

old satellite system undisturbed. Suwannakhet (Map 15), created along with its twelve satellites by the French opposite Mukdahan, provided large numbers of posts for the aristocracy, who were allowed to retain their traditional sources of revenue as well as peasant services. The Mukdahan governor, in awkward contrast, was no longer able to serve as patron to his own official class, who were growing restless and moving across the Mekonge3 Taxes and services--never before demanded from the official class--were imposed by some independent minded commissioners on the right bank elite. One Renu Nakhon elder moved with indignation across the river, followed by 200 peasants; but was soon afterwards enticed back by appointment as 'deputy public prosecutor, to Renu Nakhon, which restored his privileges and some of his revenues.4 When these general problems came to Bangkok's attention, Damrong ordered that all such cases be investigated, and that special status and compensation be given to former elders.5 The first division commissioner to Nakhon Phanom was accordingly sent out with orders to encourage re-immigration, by indulging the elders with

1. TNA R5M57/15: Yanrakkhit to Sanphasit, 29 Aug. 1902.

2. TNA R5M2.3/203/l15: D to Regent, 6 Sept. 1907.

3. TNA R5M59/41: Sunthon, 'Inspection Report', Dec. 1903, pp. 21-25.

4. TNA R5M59/41/24: Watthana to D, 21 May 1903. M59/41l/801: D to Sommot, 27 July 1903.

5. TNA R5M59/41/444: D to Sommot, 14 June 1903.

nominal posts as well as tempting the peasants with resettlement assistance and temporary tax exemptions.1 In the early 1900s, along with French tax increases and tightening administrative control which rendered the left bank a less attractive alternative to the Thai regime, the problems of comparative status mad emigration tended to resolve themselves.

A revenue sharing scheme was devised and implemented by Sanphasit, providing fixed percentages of revenues collected from the new districts to the Isan elite. In 1911 nearly 700 men were receiving varying shares (totalling l0 per cent) of the revenues from fourteen districts. Care was always taken to represent the shares as 'salaries' granted them by the state out of the circle treasury, in order to suppress the idea that the elite were entitled to support from the taxes of their former peasants. Beginning in 1912 this system was ended; all useless officials were given pensions; and those who had found places in the bureaucracy were given salaries at the standard rates.2

The new circle administration in Roi Et--the former division of Isan where the least progress had been made--nonetheless had to retain a percentage system until district level revenue collecting could be developed. The village headmen were given 3 per cent of what they collected; and a further 2 per cent was given to the chief headmen for inspecting against fraud and tax evasione3 Revenues to the treasury were thus gradually increased by reducing expenditure on the official class to a bare minimum, and improving the methods of collection, but not by imposing new or higher taxes.

The policy of maintaining light taxation in the outer circles was calculated to keep the peasantry content and forestall any possibility of popular movements in support of the old elite. Difficulties

which arose in the few inner provinces where Lao peasants were subjected to the relatively heavy Thai fiscal regime demonstrated that Bangkok's continuation of the special arrangement for the outer circles was the wisest course until central government control could be

1. TNA R5M59/41/1938: D to Sommot, 21 Dec. 1903.

2. TNA R6M26/1/98: D to RVI, 13 Jan. 1912.

3. TNA R6M20/4/60: Thamrongsiri to D, 25 Aug. 1912.

established at every level.1 The capitation tax of four baht per able man was retained in fact through the 1920s. And with a few minor exceptions, such as the state opium monopoly, no other taxes (including duties on trade with Laos) were imposed on the Lao circles.

Status

The impact of Thesaphiban reform on the aristocracy was cushioned by fostering a continuing sense of status among office holders. The division and deputy superintendent commissionerships had to be represented as a new level in the official hierarchy, interposed between the towns and the sovereign high commissioners, in order to make them acceptable. If Bangkok had suddenly and openly declared that Roi Et or Surin or any of the other towns destined to become province headquarters were to be given status higher than that of their neighbours, little co-operation could have been expected from the elites of any other towns. The powers of all the old governorships had to be reduced uniformly and made equal to those of district officers as a first step. Only afterwards, when the Lao were accustomed to the idea of Thai commissioners residing in certain towns, could Bangkok selectively 'restore' the governorships in the twelve modern provincial towns by acknowledging the commissioners as Thesaphiban governors in reality. During the transition the outward appearances of the old governorships from the local point of view were preserved. But the ceremonial aspects of relations between the governors and the king were suspended.

The traditional means of honouring local elites were replaced by a few new ones. Extensive use was made of the custom, begun early in the fifth reign, of awarding medals to Lao officials who provided special services to the crown.2 Prachak requested a royal order of merit for the Nongkhai *ratchabut*, partly as a reward for helping to train local men for the army and partly to manipulate existing rivalries to his advantage. Other Lao men did not actively

1. TNA R5M52/4/l: Phetcharat to D, 17 July 1901.

2. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 10 Apr. 1892.

seek such honours; but it was obvious they would work harder for Prachak in hopes of receiving similar orders of merit just so that their status relative to their rivals would not seem diminished.1 When family names (especially those bestowed by the king himself) became popular in the sixth reign, aristocratic families of towns such as Nongkhai, Roi Et, and Kalasin were permitted to add

the prefix ‘na’ (similar to the French ‘de’) to their town names, thus assuming the family names ‘Na Kalasin’, ‘Na Roi Et’, and ‘Na Nongkhai’.2

Bangkok avoided the delicate problem of withdrawing the old titles of office formally--a step which would have caused alarm unduly. No proclamation was issued. Men who were already confirmed in office were allowed to retain their titles for use locally, although divested of many of the powers and duties that went with theme The term ‘governor’ (*phu wa ratchakan mûang*) was used in place of the traditional ‘lord governor’ (*chao mûang*) throughout the kingdom from 1900 for the sake of uniformity.3 This new term implied a far less powerful office; and it was intended to indicate that the office-holder was a temporary (and no longer a lifetime) appointee. Bangkok did not insist on its strict application so long as the old elite remained in office. Even in ministry publications a Lao was sometimes called ‘governor’ on one page and ‘lord governor’ on the next,4 while in fact Bangkok considered the same man a mere district officer.5

Adding to the confusion of calling the old elite (whose powers during the transition were limited to district level functions) by their Thai equivalents (terms which had been adopted as the standard Thesaphiban terms for province level officials), Bangkok devised temporary names for province level officials in the Lao circles. The Thesaphiban governors were therefore called ‘division commissioners’ or ‘deputy superintendent commissioners’; and Thai officials exercising district level duties were termed ‘subdivision

1. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 17 Mar. 1892.

2. *RKB*, xxxi/1 (1914), 14 and 64.

3. TNA R5M2.3/188/80: D to RV, 23 June 1900.

4. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug. 1907), 190 and 191.

5. TNA R5M2.3/203/16: D to Regent, 25 Apr. 1907.

commissioners’, in order to distinguish them from the remaining elite of the Lao towns. By introducing new and unknown terms, Bangkok made the downgrading of high Lao offices to either district or commune status a subtle process.

One familiar practice retained temporarily was the upward shift of existing officials to the next highest post whenever a vacancy occurred.1 As the lower level positions were vacated, they were gradually filled by minor district or commune level officials holding standard Thesaphiban posts. In the transition one therefore finds mixed lots of officials. Three years before it became a mere commune, the satellite Atsamat still retained its town level governor and deputy governor, but already had its full complement of commune level officials: chief headman, revenues officer, clerk, and constable.2 The lesser offices were filled generally by appointees who were not members of the local elite, but had been trained for their work elsewhere in the circle.3

The discontinuation of the old titles of office--especially that of the lord governor, which had been specific for each town--helped to break the prevailing concepts of the official class. ‘Phraya Prathum’--the ‘Lord Governor of Nongkhai’, an indigenous aristocrat whose powers were solidly based upon his family’s wealth and control of the local peasantry, appointed for life by right of birth to a post with almost unlimited authority--was ultimately replaced by the new ‘Governor to

Nongkhai', an outsider, permanent member of the national bureaucracy, who was supposed to govern with restricted authority and expected to be transferred elsewhere after a fixed term in office.

The significance of the aristocracy as an institution faded along with its automatic right by birth to office. The prefix *thao*, which every aristocrat added to his name, was never abolished. In 1899 a proclamation, fixing the relative status of Lao officialdom within the Thai hierarchy, assigned the aristocrat a nominal status equal to that of

1. TNA R5M2.3/30/44: D to RV, 15 May 1900. M2.3/199/337: D to RV, 27 Mar. 1905.

2. TNA R5M59/l: Sunthon, 'Inspection Report', Jan. 1904.

3. TNA R5M2.3/203/319 : D to RV, 21 Jan. 1908. M2.3/205/l18: D to RV, 22 June 1908.

commune headman.1 But the government ceased to recognise any privileges at all for the next generation. And the term *thao* simply disappeared from official use after the turn of the century. Aristocrats seeking places in the national bureaucracy were probably well advised to refrain from keeping it: use of the title was one of the few ways in which their Lao origins could be identified automatically. Villagers nonetheless continued to recognise the social standing of the aristocrats, and call them *thao*.2 The fact that the term does appear occasionally in later years, in reference to local officials without ranks or titles,3 may indicate that few sons of aristocratic families did in fact enter civil service once the government ceased to patronise them actively; but more likely indicates that the term itself ceased to be used with any regularity in government offices after there ceased to be any official privileges attached to

Appointments

Once the circles themselves were in a position, to engage in regular recruitment and civil service training, the commissioners were instructed to select sons of the old elite wherever possible to be trained for posts in the new bureaucracy, so that they would not feel dispossessed. The commissioners had always been willing to give appointments to co-operative Lao officials who had received Thai training. The son of the Phuwiang governor served Prachak for several years in Udon, learning new administrative procedures, and became governor on his father's retirement.4 Prachak kept the son of the old Nongkhai governor and senior advisor at Udon for a period of 'training' after 1893. He was allowed to return home as nominal governor; but Prachak never trusted him, and with good reason. He resided awkwardly close to French headquarters at Wiangchan, where he

1. *RKB*, xvi (1899), 197: proclamation, 14 July 1899.

2. Niwat, 'The Laotian Thai of the North-east' (Bangkok, 1969), p. 167.

3. *Thesaphiban*, xiv/79 (Oct. 1912), 9; xv/86 (May 1913), 75.

4. TNA R5M2.3/30/35: D to RV, 7 May 1900.

immediately established contact upon returning home, complaining of the loss of his traditional powers and volunteering to provide a small army to assist any. French effort in driving the Thai out.1 Wary of inciting any incidents so close to the French resident, the Thai made a special effort to placate the Nongkhai elite.

One brother of the new governor was accepted as a royal page for training, and then given a salaried post in the government school at Udon.2 Another, also a former page, was given successive appointments as telegraph operator at Nongkhai, town adjutant (concurrently receiving a flattering title based on his father's), commissioner to Mukdahan, and district officer to Phen.3 During his 1907 tour Damrong investigated the old Nongkhai families already represented in the bureaucracy; and ordered the superintendent commissioner to find suitable posts for a larger number of them.4

In order to give the old elite a sense of importance, Bangkok led them to believe that Nongkhai had the highest status of any town in the circle.5 Little by little, however, its territory was whittled away. Upon Prachak's arrival in 1892 control over the satellite Kamutthasai and Phuwiang deep in the interior was relieved informally by placing, a commissioner there. After Prachak moved to Udon in 1893, the nearby satellite Kumphawapi was placed under a commissioner. Territory upriver from Nongkhai came under Prachak's direct control when the village of Thabo was given town status in the process of resettling left bank families there.6 In 1907 the remaining territory of Nongkhai, except for the small strip of land along the Mekong adjacent to the town proper, was taken away and converted into Phen and

1. SOM Siam 63/675: Laos commandant to Hanoi Bureau, 23 Oct. 1895. MAE CP Siam 24/7 (annexe 22): Montpeyrat to GG, 1 Nov. 1895.

2. TNA R5M59/34/103: D to Sommot, 16 June 1898.

3. TNA R5T2so49: Prachak to D, 11 July 1897. TNL R5/24(old)/5: appointment edict, 1898. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug. 1908), 229. TNA R5M59/41/210: D to Sommot, 27 Apr. 1908.

4. TNA R5M59/41/194: D to RV, 10 Sept. 1908.

5. TNA R5M59/31: Prachak to D, 5 Mar. 1897.

6. TNA R5T2so3/505: D to Thewawong, 22 Nov. 1897.

Banphû districts, thus completing the territorial transformation of Nongkhai from the most powerful town of the region to an ordinary district.

Even in his general district level reorganisation scheme of 1907, Damrong took care to allow Nongkhai (and neighbouring Phonphisai, which enjoyed a similar special position) to retain nominal 'town' status.1 When the governor died the following year, Damrong advised that no proclamation needed to be issued demoting the town to a 'district'. In his last years the governor had become a mere 'puppet'; and a Thai district officer had been posted there already to take charge of administration.2 The king agreed it was better to leave the town to fade away into obscurity than to announce the *fait accompli* openly.

> ‘The reduction of Nongkhai from a town to a district ought to be carried out. But its ruling family has some assiduous members. They ought to be patronised. Do not let them become greatly disheartened.’3
>
> ‘One ought to hold the appraisal of circumstances above ceremony, and one ought to hold success above the method. If nothing is to be lost, it ought to be done.’4

With no announcement and no fixed date for the change--either of which might have led to spontaneous protests--the governorship of Nongkhai disappeared without fanfare.

Like the elite at Nongkhai, a few governors with personal contacts in Bangkok were able to secure places for their sons in the royal pages corps. The king had heartily agreed to Damrong’s proposals, made on assuming his Interior office, to reform the entire procedure of recruitment by limiting new appointments for lesser provincial posts to the royal pages, whom he felt alone would have sufficient education and experience for the new bureaucracy.5 There was no examination for entry into the corps--sponsorship by princes and high officials had always sufficed. A Thai official in the Lao circles had no difficulty getting his son placed, in the

1. TNA R5M2.1/9: D to RV, 26.Dec. 1907.

2. TNA R5M59/4l/194: D to RV, 10 Sept. 1908.

3. TNA R5M59/4l/121: RV to D, 5 Sept. 1908.

4. TNA R5M59/41/126: RV to D, 12 Sept. 1908.

5. TNA R5M2.3/4: D to RV, 5 Aug. 1892.

corps, and then appointed near to himself if he wished.1 But inevitably most Lao boys were excluded. A European legal adviser inspecting the Lao towns in 1897 was appalled at the attitude, prevailing among the Thai in the provinces, regarding the Lao as an inferior breed. Confronting Damrong with the obvious--that the ‘Laos have always been systematically kept away from government service’--he urged that a wiser policy would be to suppress such ethnic distinctions among Thai subjects, and to train young Lao men adequately so they could be posted to the provinces on an equal footing with their Thai counterparts.2 Regular recruitment of Lao into the bureaucracy nonetheless had to await central planning; and a general plan for provincial recruitment and training even in the inner provinces was not formulated until 1903.3

The evidence concerning Lao aristocrats who became part of the national bureaucracy is sparse. One native of Ubon who was educated in a Bangkok monastery became a teacher in the civil service school of the Interior ministry, was given a post in Ubon, then transferred to serve in Udon as a minor commissioner, and later became the first district officer to Phonge4 An important post in a Thai circle was fouled for one of the Champasak princes who was trained in Bangkok.5 The two cases are special: the prince was under Damrong’s personal patronage, and the Sangha of Ubon had unique ties with monasteries in the capital. For most Lao men there seems to have been little opportunity to gain access to the national bureaucracy until after provincial education had been developed as an avenue to the schools of Bangkok.

Damrong made a practice of shuffling bureaucrats of equal status among various provinces throughout the kingdom in order to give them wide experience. Thesaphiban province posts--including the deputy governors, public prosecutors, and revenues officers--were filled from the national elite

1. TNA R5M2.3/140/145: D to RV, 21 Jan. 1899.

2. TNA R5M1/14: report of the legal adviser, 31 May 1898.

3. TNA R5M2.6/2/155: D to RV, 27 July 1903, annexed 'Outline of Ideas concerning Provincial Civil Service Training'.

4. TNA R5M2.3/195/29: D to RV: 27 July 1901. M1/19/386: D to RV, 31 Mar. 1902. M59/41/210.D. to Sommot, 27 Apr. 1908.

5. TNA R5M2.3/201/8: D to RV, 20 Apr. 1905.

and were, from the beginning, part of the mainstream of Interior bureaucracy. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that the old elites were broken up by absorbing them into the national bureaucracy, and then posting them to distant circles.

It was nonetheless common practice to shuffle officials from place to place within the individual Lao circles to disperse cliques. Damrong and Sanphasit created the civil service school in Ubon with a view towards training the sons of the aristocracy to take places in a circle-wide (but not 'national') bureaucracy. The idea of the civil service School established at Udon headquarters likewise in 1907, with the local district officer and circle officials as teachers, was appealing to the local elite who were encouraged to send their sons to study for placement in posts within the circle.1 Civil service training in the Lao circles aimed especially to placate the old elite by assuring their sons that places in the bureaucracy would be reserved for them, while at the same time it helped to suppress nascent cliques.

> 'In making these arrangements and appointments, there is one thing which must be stipulated, and that is: not to allow men from a Certain town to serve as officials in that town, in order that we may bring to an end, and eradicate, the accepted notion that' they are "dynastic" rulers of that town, carrying on a family heritage.'2

Damrong and Sanphasit were cautioned by the king to beware of the mood of the Lao elite in making such radical changes in the basis of appointments. The king feared that one could not predict the reactions of the aristocracy; and that another revolt, or perhaps an 'opposition' party, might arise against the policy.3

Damrong took the director of the royal pages school along with him on the 1907 tour to assess the needs of the Lao circles.4 Civil service training using the inner circle

1. TNA R5S5(kai-baimai)6/l03: D to Prachin, 27 Apr. 1907.

2. TNA R5M57/14/285: D to RV, 27 Dec. 1907.

3. TNA R5M57/14/27: RV to D, 28 Dec. 1907.

4. *Thesaphiban*, iii/17 (Aug. 1907), 173.

model was first begun in Isan in 1908, when a former teacher from the pages school began courses of instruction. In the first examination given in April 1909, the 15 (out of 86) trainees who passed were immediately put to work with census taking duties. In two subsequent examinations 2 of ll candidates qualified for province civil litigation posts, and 3 of 22 for deputy district officer posts. The next year examinations were set for existing officials in Ubon province alone, revealing that 11 of 40 deputy district officers and 3 of 52 district clerks were qualified for their work by national standards.1 Damrong did not expect excellent results at first. In proposing the school he admitted that it would be at least a decade before significant results were obtained.2

Each district was encouraged to give some informal, administrative training to about ten unsalaried local men, some of whom could expect eventually to gain one of the lowest posts in a government office.3 When district administration reform was begun in Roi Et circle, the superintendent commissioner selected a number of local clerks with experience in the three Thesaphiban branches (general administration, justice, revenues) to train as deputy district officers,4 with a view towards employing them later to replace the old elite still holding nominal district posts.

The replacement of the aristocracy in Isan circle did not get under way until well into the sixth reign. As officials of the old generation died or retired, they were replaced gradually by Lao officials from other towns who were better qualified than their predecessors and who, in their home posts, were in turn replaced by the new generation of circle bureaucrats produced by the local civil service school. The school had little initial impact beyond Ubon province. District administration in Roi Et circle had yet to be created when the first superintendent commissioner arrived. The first application of the policy to create a circle

1. TNA R5M2.6/2/678: D to Sommot, 18 July 1910.

2. TNA R5M57/1.4/291: D to RV, 1 Jan. 1908.

3. *Thesaphiban*, v/31 (Aug. 1908), 18.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xiv/84 (Mar. 1913), 208.

bureaucracy from the local Isan elite came in 1910, with a complete shuffling of five district officers in Surin province.1 The following.year three district officers in Ubon province were shuffled,2 plus two others in 1915.3 By 1915 the Ubon circle superintendent was able to report that he had displaced the native aristocrats in all but one of the twelve districts in Ubon province.4

In 1908--when the first four deputy superintendent commissioners were appointed to Ubon, Sisaket, Surin, and Roi Et--the Isan circle administration officer, whose duty was the development of a standard form of administration along Thesaphiban lines, was switched with his more experienced Ratchasima counterpart.5 It was his responsibility to reform district level administration; and he was faced with not one but three distinct policies.

District administration in Ubon province, although not far advanced, was more firmly in the hands of commissioners than elsewhere, as the area administered was based on Ubon town, under the supervision of commissioners for a quarter century.

The Khmer provinces (Surin and Sisaket) posed a separate problem, especially difficult to integrate into a circle bureaucracy because of language and cultural differences. Under the traditional system of administration based on control of peasants, Lao and Khmer were able to live interspersed among one another without the one ever coming under the control of the other. Bangkok could not abruptly begin shifting Khmer officials into Lao areas, or visa versa. The Khmer had to be treated as a separate elite, shifting local officials among the Khmer districts alone.

The lack of documentation on the towns of the middle Chi valley, up to the time Roi Et circle was founded, is striking. The towns were never effectively subjected to the control of commissioners. As they were shielded against French influence by their isolated geographical position deep in

1. *Thesaphiban*, viii/46 (Jan. 1910), 196.

2. *Thesaphiban*, xi/63 (June 1911), 92.

3. TNA R6M3.1/59/164: Maha Amat to Prachin, 17 Aug. 1915.

4. Bunnag, 'Provincial Administration', p. 365.

5. *Thesaphiban*, v/27 (June 1908), 88-89.

the interior of the north-east, as well as by the little economic interest they presented, they could be neglected with little inconvenience so long as internal security was maintained. Sanphasit refused in principle to accept unqualified commissioners or dishonest governors for Roi Et, insisting that poor administration would be worse than no change at all. The elite were held at bay until Bangkok could upgrade the area to circle status, and send suitable administration officers to begin the process of creating an intra-circle elite. The 'acting district officer' of Roi Et --probably the last of the Lao governors to retain even a nominal place--was finally retired in 1915, and replaced by someone from another district.2

The power to appoint officials to the lowest provincial posts, was assumed by the superintendent commissioners at first, acting in the name of the king. Ideally all appointments to regularly salaried posts from district level upwards should have come from the king, accompanied by royal diplomas. Care was taken in all public documents to make appointments appear to derive solely from the king himself, although he merely sanctioned decisions already made by commissioners and approved by Damrong.3 In 1926 Rama VII decentralised the bureaucracy--and scattered the responsibility for provincial appointments to relevant ministries--by announcing that all appointments below the level of province governor no longer need be brought to the king's attention.4 In the Lao circles, however, the 'depersonalisation' of appointment procedures began more than a decade earlier when Damrong retired.

Bangkok seems to have shown little interest in appointments even at the highest levels from the mid-1910s. Phraya Chon, who replaced Sanphasit in Isan, departed at the beginning of 1912 to act for the Nakhon Ratchasima superintendent. His duties were assumed by the deputy superintendent, Phraya

1. TNA R5M57/9/8: Sanphasit to D, I July 1900.

2. TNA R6M3.1/45/28: Maha Amat to Prachin, 5 May 1915. M3.1/53/102: Interior to Prachin, 17 June 1915.

3. TNA R5M2.3/196: RV to D, 22 Mar. 1903. M2.3/201/41: D to RV, 22 May 1905.

4. TNA R7M2/5/8: Yukhon to Mahithon, 8 Apr. 1926.

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Wiset, who was confirmed as superintendent commissioner the following year when Phraya Chon died suddenly at Nakhon Ratchasima. And Phraya Wiset (later retitled Phraya Sithamma) was left at Ubon until the post of circle superintendent was abolished in 1926. Roi Et likewise had only two superintendents. Prince Thamrongsiri spent two years organising the circle; and was succeeded by his deputy, who remained until the post was abolished. In Udon, Watthana,s successor Phraya Sisuriya (Pho Netipho) remained until he died in 1914, and was replaced by another Phraya Sisuriya (Suk Ditsayabut). The next superintendent--the reluctant viceroy (1922-1926)--was perhaps the only inspired appointment of the lot. The first of his two successors had been governor of Nakhon Phanom province for fourteen years; but had no experience from elsewhere to bring with him.

District Administration

Thai historians have tended to view the Thesaphiban governors as the direct heirs of the Lao governorships, probably because a single term (*phu wa ratchakan*) was used for both. This may be true for governorships of central Thailand; but it is not for the Lao provinces. After the division system was decided upon in 1900, Bangkok regarded Lao governors everywhere as nothing more than district officers. One should consider the district offices as the natural continuation of Lao town administration. The bureaucracy at province and circle levels was a Thai creation. It had never existed before. The critical test of success for the Thesaphiban system must therefore be sought in the reorganisation of administration at district level.

If population is used as a criterion, then the north-eastern districts were among the least efficiently administered in the kingdom. Table 8 shows that the average number of people per district in 1910 was significantly higher in Udon and Isan than in the Thai circles. (The figures are, moreover, underestimated by about l0 per cent, because the 82 districts involved were soon after reduced to 75-) The district officer in Isan was responsible for more than twice as many people as his counterpart in some Thai circles.

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The ideal district level structure towards which the Thesaphiban system was evolving was made flexible to meet local needs, but consisted of about seven men plus trainees.1

The district officer himself was the only one who required an official class rank: *khun* or *luang* (the two lowest) sufficed. The ‘first deputy district officer’ (a general assistant charged with regular

inspection tours) and the second deputy (charged primarily with office work, if appointed at all) usually had none. These three plus the district revenues officer formed the 'district council' which wielded all effective powers.2 The other regularly salaried employees consisted of a registrar, constable (or gendarmerie commander), and clerk. As education and military conscription were extended to the provinces, education and recruitment officers were accordingly appointed to various districts as required to help alleviate some of the district officer's burdens. The communes and villages--at which level there were no salaried government posts--remained under the leadership of local Lao elites.

In terms of numbers alone, the implications for the numerous Lao official class seeking places in the bureaucracy are clear. The forty kinds of posts in the Thesaphiban provincial bureaucracy are listed in Table 7 according to a seven tiered hierarchy ranging from the status of circle superintendent down to the lowest district official. Included is an estimate of the absolute maximum number of government officials (just over 900) for the three Lao circles together, assuming that every province and district had its full complement of education, agriculture, public health, and military recruitment officer--which it did not. (Compare p. 206 above: in 1912 there were 700 semi-pensioned members of the old elite in Ubon province alone.) Chart 5 is a diagram of the Thesaphiban bureaucratic structure compared with that of the old Lao town elite which it superseded. The old structure--represented as a broad, flat pyramid because of its large number of high-status posts for

1. *Thesaphiban*, v/31 (Oct. 1908), 18.

2. *Thesaphiban*, ii/7-12 (Oct. 1906-Mar. 1907), 3-7; xxxii/4 (1932), 340.

each of the seventy-nine towns and satellites, and its loose lines of authority--is replaced by an entirely new concept--represented as a contracted, pointed pyramid because of its greatly reduced number of high and low status posts, and its clearly hierarchical lines of status and authority. The horizontal lines along which Lao authority was oriented, keeping the highest officials in relatively intimate contact with the peasantry, are radically transformed into vertical lines, allowing officials with all effective powers to remain isolated and have relatively little contact with the people they were supposed to govern. Because of limitations of education and experience, it was difficult for the Lao to qualify for posts above the level of deputy district officer. The new generation of Lao officials thus had to be squeezed primarily into the two lowest bureaucratic levels. In theory this should have amounted to about two thirds of salaried positions. But due to lack of training, as well as an absence of funds to support the government, services many of these offices were supposed to represent, several hundreds of them were probably never filled at all.

The majority of those who would have found places among the junior elders of the towns merely settled for unsalaried prestige as commune and village headmen, if they retained any positions at all. In terms of their traditional tax collecting and peasant control roles, this level was the natural heritage of the lesser elders. The village headmen came to represent the elite of local village origins, whose positions contrasted strongly with that of the district bureaucrat who was supposed to supervise them. District officials and village headmen were supposed to act together to provide the vital ties between government and peasantry. But the link never fulfilled expectations.

To meet the initial problem of setting up district offices, Damrong adopted a trial and error policy which allowed officials some flexibility in adjusting procedures to local conditions.

> 'One has to contend with setting up some district office or other successfully according to the' desired model, and then have the other districts copy it. District level administrative organisation has thus quickly materialised.'1

1. TNA R5K13.2/14/204: D to RV, 13 Oct. 1900.

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The basic weakness in the system--the fact that district officers did not fully comprehend the active role intended for them--soon became apparent. District officers in Nakhon Ratchasima tended to stay in their offices rather than go out to inspect, help to organise village affairs, and make regular contact with headmen.1 The district of Nakhon Ratchasima town was felt to be the worst administered one in the circle, partly because of the old elite: 'influential persons could easily give their own advice on affairs', effectively blocking changes. Finally, in transferring the Nakhon Ratchasima circle administration commissioner, an incompetent prince who was blamed for the failures, the superintendent commissioner determined in 1906 to 'plant' active, educated, and energetic men in key district posts to help upgrade officials.2 One might suspect that local administration was most advanced in the district where the governor or superintendent resided, and tended to decline in proportion to distance from their headquarters. The Nakhon Ratchasima case indicates this was true only in the sense of maintaining order and collecting taxes, but not in terms of the active (and previously unfamiliar) role the district officers were expected to play in helping the peasantry benefit from other aspects of government.

The Udon superintendent commissioner claimed that during the period 1907 to 1910 he had made all districts conform to Thesaphiban standards.3 But one can accept this only in the sense of two traditional duties of local officials: security and revenues. After his 1907 tour Damrong laid a plan with a view towards these limited results. He designated for each district officer a fixed territory in which the officer could reasonably be expected to inspect and oversee absolutely everything, paying close attention to leakages from revenues collected by the elite.4 The plan worked with remarkable success. In 1908 Udon remitted 350,000 baht (surplus over

1. TNA R5M2.14/18: Norarat to D, 18 July 1903; D to RV, 27 July 1903.

2. TNA R5M2.14/19: Chasaen to D, 5 Mar. 1906.

3. TNA R6M28/1/15: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910.

4. TNA R5M59/41/1323: D to Sommot, 18 Feb. 1908.

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circle expenses) to the central treasury--75 per cent more than the previous year. Damrong demonstrated that by tightening existing government controls, one could increase efficiency in those duties already familiar to local officials. However, the justice and general administrative duties supposed to be assumed by district officers posed a far more difficult problem.

District officers often supposed that their roles were suppressive in nature, rather than creative. The crown prince explained in a report--published in the Thesaphiban journal for the instruction of provincial officials in general--that during his recent provincial tours he had

> 'attempted to point out the duties of the district officers, and how they should act. That is, they should set themselves up as provincial "fathers". They should not think of themselves only as agents of the state, whose duties are merely to apprehend wrong-doers and place them in gaol. I hope this has been well understood by them.'2

Part of the difficulty in the Lao circles was the failure to define precisely the powers of district officers. Bangkok did not expect to impose on them the restrictions of the 1897 act until the districts began to function roughly according to the standard. At the 1912 superintendents, conference--where Udon, Ubon, and Roi Et were all represented--a revision of the old act in respect to the duties of district and village officials was agreed upon.3 When it was finally issued, the 1914 Provincial Administration Act (which remained in force to the end of the absolute monarchy) was supposed to be applied uniformly in all three Lao circles.4 The 1914 act was a compromise between the originally formulated plan and the difficulties the government had subsequently encountered in trying to implement it.5 It expanded the powers and responsibilities of the district officer widely with reference to suppressing crime, to advising and

1. TNA R5M59/41/1279: D to Sommot, 10 Feb. 1908.

2. *Thesaphiban*, v/29 (Aug. 1908), 143-144: Wachirawut to D, 30 Jan. 19008.

3. *Thesaphiban*, xv/88 (July 1913), 203-249.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi (1914), 229-274: text of the 1914 Provincial Administration Act.

5. Bunnag, 'Provincial Administration', p. 362.

aiding the populace in improving their means of gaining a livelihood (essentially giving him the duties of an agricultural extension agent), and exhorting him to look after public welfare in general. His judicial powers were increased to give him authority to judge minor criminal cases and decide civil cases involving sums up to 200 baht.1 In theory the district officer was to act as learned advisor and mediator. But the men in the Lao circles generally lacked the training and experience required to take on such roles.

It was difficult for Bangkok to break their prevailing indifference towards their jobs. The Nakhon Ratchasima superintendent commissioner observed that his district officers carried out their so-called inspection tours by going around and declaring to headmen: 'There isn't anything to report--correct?'--and then going home.2 He added that most of them were not acquainted with the headmen, did nothing to encourage improvements in the villages, and showed little enthusiasm for anything other than their salaries. Supposed to meet monthly with the province governors, district officers generally felt the meetings a waste of time.3 The Interior minister admitted there was likewise little enthusiasm among headmen for their required monthly meetings with district officers, especially as there was often nothing on the agenda except the inevitable.

> 'It appears as though these summonings of the commune headmen to monthly meetings amount to a summons [by the district, officers] to solicit payment of taxes.'4

Denouncing the perfunctory way in which the district officers often carried out their duties--correct in form, but devoid of content--the minister began exhorting them in 1917 to cultivate relations with the headmen, widen their contacts, and explain laws and government policies in order to make them meaningful to the villagers. But on provincial tours in the early 1920s the king observed that district officers still

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxii/4 (1932), 342.

2. TNA R5M2.14/16: Kamhaeng to D, 1 Sept. 1905.

3. TNA R5M2.14/20: Ratchasena to D, 1 Mar. 1908.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xxv/135 (July 1918), 97-98: edict, 15 May 1917.

tended to act oppressively because villagers were still generally ignorant of the advantages of new laws and regulations; and he could only reiterate that the responsibility for the problem ought to be accepted by the district officers.1

The absolute monarchy never succeeded in making the district office a channel of communication to the Lao villages. A general inspection tour of the enlarged Nakhon Ratchasima circle in 1926 revealed once again that government policy tended to be transmitted through the official hierarchy down to the district officers--where it died. If a plan formulated by the ministry were unsuited to a particular area, the district officer nonetheless made the perfunctory announcement to headmen. The headmen understandably tended to ignore the advice of aloof district officials.2 It was admitted that Bangkok had always sent out officials with no real qualifications, assuming the region would be easy to administer because the peasants were so ignorant. The report expressed the hope that the government would attempt--once internal and foreign affairs had settled down--to change this attitude, to provide several times the numbers of officials previously used, and train them to fill the much needed role of 'public relations' officials in order to make the government more comprehensible to the peasantry. It was felt that the singular kind of tough official skilled only in suppressing bandits and keeping the populace in awe previously sent to the area was no longer needed.3

The futility of these hopes for many areas of the northeast, especially in view of declining central government interest, is suggested by recent anthropological research. In one part of modern Mahasarakham investigated, villagers regarded the provincial bureaucracy with a measure of anonymity, although members of the old ruling families were still widely known.4 The local district officer was a Thai held in low esteem by the villagers. After fourteen years

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxix/153 (Dec. 1925), 249, 260.

2. Siphichai, 'Inspection Tour', pp. 51-52.

3. *Ibid*., pp. 59, 65.

4. C. Keyes 'Peasant and Nation. A Thai-Lao Village in a Thai State' (Cornell University Ph.D. thesis 1966), p. 85.

of service in the region he could not speak the Lao language. His powers were hardly kept in check by the province officials; and it was not unusual for him to demand foodstuffs from villagers for personal use. (Requisitions, except under a state of emergency, were abolished in 1921.l) From a local point of view ‘the district officer is a person to be both feared and avoided’.2

The district office failed to take on the dynamic role expected of it. The officer was an artificial creation who took physical possession of the place and powers formerly held by the town elite, without providing a socially acceptable equivalent to the old leadership. He was an alien without social status. The anonymity and temporary nature of the bureaucracy prevented the rise of a working relationship--be it paternalistic or whatever--so that the peasant no longer knew exactly what his relationship would be or how the official would treat him. Under these circumstances, it was the headmen of village (and sometimes also aristocratic) origin who exercised real authority.

Village Administration

The Thesaphiban system was in operation for a decade before Bangkok reached a firm decision on the definition of a village. As part of his 1891 experiments Sanphasit sent local elders around Nakhon Ratchasima circle to ‘delineate’ villages (on the basis of an assumption that about ten houses constituted the average village) and to oversee the selection of headmen by the villagers.3 Damrong adopted the idea of ten households per village, and ten villages per commune, in his 1897 act; but soon had to abandon the plan in favour of ‘natural’ villages, because too many large ones were being broken up unnecessarily into smaller units to meet artificial standards.4

In an effort to create a village headman system in the north-east to supersede the old system of elders and troop

1. TNA R6K2/24: Military Requisitions Act of 1921 (text).

2. Keyes,’Peasant and Nation’, p. 92.

3. TNA R5M2.14/14: Phromma to RV, 4 Sept. 1896.

4. Bunnag, ‘Provincial Administration’, p. 351.

leaders. Sanphasit’s work was continued by his successor who ordered individual villages to select headmen under supervision by the circle administration commissioner.

> ‘In appointing village headmen and commune headmen, the people of each area are to assemble and chose someone who resides in that area and is agreeable to the subdivision district officer. The administration commissioner must witness the proceedings. To be specific, in order to hold the post a man must be resourceful and have some general knowledge of official matters, and must be literate in Thai also.’l

A ministry edict of 1896 fixed the process by which headmen should be selected everywhere. Villages were to make their preferences known to the governor, who would then ‘appoint’ the man officially. The headmen from all the villages in a commune were then to select one of their number

as commune headman, who would likewise be appointed.2 The first evidence of such selections in the Lao circles--indeed, the first evidence of any attention paid to village level affairs by Bangkok officials--was the Nakhon Phanom division commissioner's tours to more than 150 villages in 1903 and 1904, in which he presided over the elections of some headmen.3

The procedure for selection of village headmen soon fell short of expectations. Because men who were not really qualified tended to seek the posts wherever military conscription was already introduced, as a means of escaping government services, the Interior had to invest the commissioners in Nakhon Ratchasima with sole authority to appoint only those candidates considered suitable.4 The district officers, and sometimes governors, who presided over the selections came to be regarded by the villagers as the source of authority by which the headmen were appointed. Villagers were tending to select the headmen of the district officer's choice regardless of their own preferences. These headmen often

1. TNA R5M2.14/62: Prasit, 'Regulations Concerning the Circle Administration Commissioner, 5 Oct. 1894.

2. TNA R5M2.5/l: lesser seal edict, 1896.

3. TNA R5M59/41: Sunthon, 'Inspection Reports' Dec. 1903, Jan. 1904, May 1904.
4. TNA R5M2.8/3/329: D to RV, 30 Sept. 1902. M2.8/3/151: Nakhon Chaisi to RV, 1 Dec. 1902.

proved highly unsuitable from everyone's point of view. Thus in 1916 Bangkok began trying, although with limited success, to curb the abuse of influence by forbidding the district officer from voicing any opinion concerning the choice.1

No suitable place was ever found in the bureaucracy for the headmen. In an effort to provide some means of support for them, the government exempted all headmen in 1896 from taxation and corvee.2 Headmen in the Thai circles were compensated for their duties by reductions in government revenue taxes. Such taxes were not collected in the Lao circles, where the headmen were compensated instead by a system of rewards for the capture of criminals and seizure of contraband goods such as opium and spirits smuggled from French territory.3 Headmen also received a share of certain government fees they helped to collect, giving them a financial incentive to bring villagers requiring internal passports or animal registration certificates to the district office for payment.4 Bangkok recognised the pressing need to pay all these local officials; but because of a lack of revenue sufficient for the vast numbers of headmen involved, it was felt no salaries could be given to them.

When the duties of headmen were fixed in the 1914 Provincial Administration Act, the Interior acknowledged that more would have to be done by the government to support them. Compensation was extended the next year to all village constables, physicians, and school teachers by making them, as well as the headmen, exempt from the capitation tax.5 Proposals for incorporating the headmen into the bureaucracy and giving them salaries were put forward at the Thesaphiban conferences in 1919 and again in 1923, but rejected both times.

1. Ministry of the Interior, ‘Report of the Twenty-second Annual Conference of Circle Superintendents’ (Bangkok, 1917), pp. 13-14.

2. TNA R5M1.3/1/135: D to RV, 20 Oct. 1896.

3. *Thesaphiban*, viii/44 (Nov. 1909), 115.

4. TNA R5M1.3/3: ‘Schedule of District Legal Fees’, Aug. 1897.

5. *Thesaphiban*, xix/108 (Apr. 1915), l: edict, 25 Feb. 1915.

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> ‘In reference to the government’s intention to help improve the benefits to the village headmen, the superintendents resolved that if they were given salaries, the headmen might tend to feel like “officials”, isolated from the people. This was contrary to the basic intention of the Act. It was felt better to think of ways in which they may receive compensation in return for their efforts in carrying out their duties.’1

The question of other forms of compensation was raised periodically at the conferences. In 1923 it was decided that the problem could be met in several ways: ensuring that expenses incurred in the line of duty were reimbursed, increasing their prestige through granting them official class ranks and titles, and increasing their law keeping authority over villagers.2 Headmen were occasionally rewarded by trips to Bangkok, and presented with medals and awards by the king for unusual services.3 But the question of the welfare of headmen was regularly deferred by the Interior up to the end of the absolute monarchy, on the grounds that it was too difficult to arrange equal treatment for all five thousand commune headmen and fifty thousand village headmen throughout the kingdom all at once.4

1. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/4 (1931), 298.

2. *Ibid*., 298-299.

3. TNA R5M2.3/197/345: D to RV, 18 Oct. 1902.

4. *Thesaphiban*, xxxi/4 (1931), 299-300.

Chapter Thirteen: Military Service in the North-east

The shift in legal status away from the old concept of Lao peasants as levy or service units bound to the local official class, and towards a new concept of individuals owing services to the central government alone, broke the final bonds between the peasantry and the elite. The term 'peasants' (*phrai*) was dropped from official usage at the turn of the century, and replaced variously by 'villagers' (*chao ban*), the 'rural people' (*khon phûn mûang*), or simply the 'populace' (*ratsadôn*). The change was effected by legislative means, in particular through three acts relating to conscription, slavery, and corvée. Proclamations along these lines were contemplated in the early 189Os, but had to await the formation of the Ministry of Defence and its Department of Military Operations, along with the Gendarmerie Department of the Interior ministry. It was only in the early 1900s that the structure of central government departments had been modified sufficiently to serve as a basis for sending officials out to the circles to begin harnessing the nation's manpower under a uniform system. It was also not until the turn of the century that the government was able to disengage the Lao peasantry from the troop leaders and elders sufficiently to begin replacing the old system of peasant control by a new one based upon finite territories.

The Residence Principle in Local Administrative Control

When Bangkok first began to expand the Lao town system in the nineteenth century, some new towns created out of the territories of existing ones were ordered to make clear delineations of their borders so that all peasants fell under the authority of one specific town. Lists of geographical features (mountains, streams, etc.) useful in delineation were sent out, with the suggestion that if two towns had a dispute over their common border, 'let them seek a compromise through give and take, as though they were elder and younger brothers'.1 The details of the solutions were left entirely

1Thesaphiban, xix/ll2 (July 1915) 126-127: edict, 17 Aug. l~3.

to the towns themselves. There was nothing to distinguish the earliest towns and satellites from a territorial based system of administration, especially in cases where the peasants of one town had no contact with their neighbours. Also, when the evacuations of the left bank were carried out, peasants were allowed a free choice of their new towns of residence.

This policy worked adequately until the late fourth reign, by which time population growth and migration among towns had brought large numbers of peasants from separate towns into close contact, and drawn the elders of many towns across the boundaries of other towns in pursuit of their peasants. In order to settle disputes over non-resident peasants (those registered in one town, but resettled in a second town), the first minister of the North under Rama V issued an edict confirming the policy of free choice, interpreting the earlier law to mean that the officials of the

town where the peasants requested to be registered should have sole authority over them.1 This ruling provided a legal basis for the nonresident troops, originally intended to ease oppression caused by some officials and allow their peasants to transfer freely to any other town. But the peasants and troop leaders tended to use their transfer rights as a means of escaping taxation and services altogether by registering far from the places they actually inhabited. The results were endless disputes, disorder in registration, and a decline in revenues in some places to one-third the usual rates by the 1880s.2

The first commissioner to Ubon was ordered to prepare a general report concerning peasant-control quarrels among the nearby towns outstanding from the previous decade. Then the second minister of the North under Rama V issued a new edict cancelling the first, with the intention of preparing the way for a strictly territorial based policy of administration. The Champasak prince, however, resisted the new proposals because large numbers of his peasants resided in surrounding towns. During a visit to Bangkok in 1885 he persuaded the king to reverse the decision. Objections from the minister

1TNL R5/57/4: Chakkri to Rattanawongsa, 26 Jan. 1874.

2TNA R5PS25/25: Bamrap to RV, 14 Dec. 1883.

followed; and a compromise was finally reached whereby the governor of the town of registration retained the right to collect taxes, but relinquished (to the governor of the town of residence) all authority over litigation and police matters.1

The complex provisions of this new edict were not enforced everywhere, and merely led to further administrative chaos. Peasants continued to seek transfers freely from town to town; and troop leaders continued to entice away the peasants of neighbouring towns by promising to require less in taxes than the peasants usually paid. The peasant groups did not have to migrate in order to escape the jurisdiction of their town of residence, but merely to declare that they had switched their registration elsewhere.2

The law also impeded efforts for a general census begun in 1885, as no town would undertake the responsibility for taxing peasants that were in dispute. In an attempt to fix the residences of migrant workers who did not remain permanently in any one place, the principle of matrilocality was tried in Ubon,

> ‘because their fathers are males, and in every single town they wonder about as non-resident peasants and cannot be fixed with certainty. The mothers are females, tend to remain in their homes at fixed town domiciles, and do not care to wander about to any other towns in an unsettled way.’3

But the application of this criterion was not widespread.

In 1888 the Nakhon Ratchasima commissioner proposed another means of ending local disorders by issuing identification papers to all troop leaders for distribution to their peasants, and later bringing all men who had no papers under the direct control of the commissioner.4 He was at least successful in forming a local police force from the ‘unclaimed’ peasants, providing a basis for

Sanphasit's bandit suppression experiments and for the rapid introduction of conscription into the circle a few years later. But by the end of

1TNA R5M1/l: Sisinghathep to Sawat, 4 Aug. 1885 and 7 Aug. 1885.

2TNL R5/8/26: Chakkri to Prathum, 26 Sept. 1887. TNA R5M~7/~5/~: Ratchasena to ~i~aowaphmn~, ~O De~. 1887-

3TNA R5M2.12kaiUbon3/18: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 24 May 1888. 4TNA R5M2.12kaiNR3/9: Phiren to Chakkri, 24 May 1888.

the 1880s the non-resident troops were still blocking the census;1 and the census project in its original form had to be abandoned.

A fresh effort to enforce a residency principle was undertaken in 1890 when Nongkhai and Uthen were ordered to prepare a new census--significantly, to include a list of all local households as the basis--and absorb all residents into their own registers. Other towns were ordered to reduce their registers by an equivalent number. To simplify tax collecting, the levies in the two towns were suppressed; and each adult male was required to pay instead a capitation tax of three and one-half baht.2 Once the new system had taken a firm hold in a few towns, it was introduced gradually to the others.

In 1892 when Damrong took office he insisted that the only solution to the constant turmoil engendered by overlapping jurisdiction was to govern strictly by territory instead of through the troop leaders.3 Orders were despatched immediately to the Nakhon Ratchasima commissioner to begin reducing the levy, service, and other classes of peasants to a single, uniform category, with village headmen and district officers taking the place of the old group and troop leaders, as the natural extension of the experimental headman system which Sanphasit had already initiated there.4 General orders were sent to the Lao commissionerships at the same time to proclaim that fixed territories would henceforth become the basis for administration, and that all peasants and elders residing in a certain town would come fully under the authority of that town whether they wished to do so or not.5

Under the new territorial system the headmen and other lesser officials assumed gradually the basic functions of

1TNA R5M62.1/26/16: Pra~han to Maha Amat, 19 Feb. 1889.

2TNA R5M59/4/35: Suriyadet to Rattanabodin, 29 Oct. 1890. R5 M2.1.2k ~aiNK~4/7: Wuttha to Rattanabodin, 1 Nov. 1890. TNL R5/lO/28: Chakkri to Siworarat, 21 June 1890.

3TNA R5M62.1/34/20: D to RV, l0 June 1892.

4TNA R5M46/1/12: D to Prasit, 20 June 1892.

5TNA R5M46/4/15: D to Sommot, 21 July 1892. M46/4/302: RV to D, 25 July 1892.

the group leaders and lesser town officials through whom services and taxes were formerly received.1 In order to make the headmen completely independent of the troop leaders during the transition, the government exempted the headmen in 1896 from all ordinary obligations to the state, including services which the troop leaders were still demanding from them.2 In addition to the obvious advantages of a territorial system of administration through headmen, the dissolution of the troops also led directly to the formation of a national army. Regular conscription had not yet been tried out in Thailand proper; but in Nakhon Ratchasima it was already becoming common in the 1890s.

The Military Role of Nakhon Ratchasima

In placing sovereign high commissioners at Nongkhai and Ubon, Bangkok expected to shift the centre of military power out to the Mekong itself, and ceased to regard Nakhon Ratchasima as singularly important. The restoration of Nakhon Ratchasima to its position of military pre-eminence in the north-east was the symbol of Thai determination to build defences adequate to meet any further aggression by the French.

After the defeat of 1893 it was immediately decided that the army of Nakhon Ratchasima must be strengthened. Secret orders were sent to Prasit to acquire for the government all land within the walled town itself, repair existing fortifications, and begin transforming it into a fortress town once again.3 Fifty men--the first force to be regularly salaried --were given military training immediately and posted to all important towns and mountain passes leading from French territory.4 Damrong emphasised in his instructions that all administrative and commercial development projects in Nakhon Ratchasima must be subordinated temporarily to the expansion

1TNA R5M1/20: Prince Ui to Sisahathep, 5. Jan. 1903.

2TNA R5M1.3/1/135: D to RV, 20 Oct. 1896, annexed edict.

3TNA R5M46/6/319: D to RV, 24 Oct. 1893. M46/6/745: D to Prasit, 24 Oct, 1893.

4TNA R5K13.2/13/287: D to RV, 26 Sept. 1893.

of the army. By 1896 using light conscription Prasit had built up a force of more than 600 men--the largest provincial unit in the kingdom--which he then proposed to increase to 1,300 and organise as a proper battalion, with a mobilisation capacity (including reserves) of 4,000 men-1 The following year the Nakhon Ratchasima garrison began to expand rapidly under a general defence scheme which the king had commissioned early 1896 as a reaction to the Franco-British declaration2.

The first inspection by anyone from the department of military operations came in 1900. It was headed by Prince Chira, one of the king’s favourite sons, who had been educated in Britain and at the Danish military academy before returning to become Chief of the General Staff in 1898 at age twenty-one. Chira appraised the Nakhon Ratchasima army organisation up to 1900 as deplorable, reporting that a general scheme of military organisation ‘may be considered as non-existent’. To

fill out the ranks, peasants were taken at random and subjected to permanent duty with no provisions for rotation, and often posted too far from home to be ~able to depend upon their families to supplement their inadequate wages. During the planting and harvesting seasons, those who were refused leave simply deserted by the hundreds.

Declaring that ‘no condition could be more miserable’, Chira introduced some ameliorative measures immediately: a fixed time of three years for active service plus six years on active reserves, the creation of garrisons in Chaiyaphum and Buriram provinces to allow men to serve near home and facilitate communication with the reserves, and orders for recruitment officers to be placed eventually in every administrative centre in order to treat conscripts as individuals.3 The new organisation called for a 200-man force at Chaiyaphum and another at Buriram, and for Nakhon

1TNA R5K13.2/14: Ministry of Defence, ‘Proposals for Organising the Army in Phitsanulok, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Prachinburi Circles’, May 1896.

2TNA R5K13.2/14: RV to D, 28. Jan. 1896.

3TNA R5K13.2/14: Chira to RV, 8 Oct. 1900.

Ratchasima 400 infantry, plus a l00-man artillery company and. a company of mounted infantry.1 Chira received prompt authorisation to try out the proposals, with a view towards extending them eventually to inner circle divisions as well.2

Nakhon Ratchasima conscription had proceeded thus far by depending on the Lao and Khmer peasant groups that had been subject to corvée and wartime conscription for generations.3 Existing effectives were less than half the numbers Chira proposed; and in order to increase them, while bringing about wider and more equitable means of selection, a provisional conscription act was drafted for application beginning 1902.4 Within three years, when the national Conscription Act was issued (and enforced at once in Nakhon Ratchasima circle), Nakhon Ratchasima was one of two garrisons in the kingdom with full division strength, at around 2,000 men.5 It also had a ~OO-man gendarmerie force, with some gendarmes posted to every district, plus four Danish officers managing a gendarmerie training school.6

In abolishing the old system of rotations in favour of a system of reserves in 1900, Chira introduced the idea of annual training for reservists.7 The first large scale manoeuvres took place in 1906 when 9,000 men were assembled from the one circle alone at the large military base already constructed south of the town.8

By 1910 when a French general and specialist in Asian military affairs was invited to Nakhon Ratchasima to view manoeuvres, Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima alone in the kingdom had two full regiments each; and Nakhon Ratchasima was characterised as ‘la division de fer’ comparable to Nancy.9

lTNA R5K13.2/14: Chira to RV, 8 Oct. 1900.

2TNA R5K13.2/l~/204: D to RV, 13 Oct. 1900.

3MAE NS Siam 42/17: Pellegrini to Delcass~, 2 Jan. 1903.

4TNA R5K13.2/5: memo. on the 1902 provisional conscription act, Aug. 1901.

5TNA R5K13.2/31: Chira to RV, 27 Aug. 1904.

6MAE NS Siam 42/17: Pellegrini to Delcass~, 2 Jan. 1903.

7TNA R5K13.3/5/20: Chira to RV, 27 Aug. 1901.

8MAE NS Siam 3: Paillard to Riffault, 28 Mar. 1906.

9MAE NS Siam 4/12: Lefaivre-Pontalis to Pichon, 7 Feb. 1910.

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Reporting that the kingdom had more than 10,000 men in the standing army, plus reserves and about 8,000 gendarmes, the general felt that the Thai armed forces should be regarded as a serious factor in the security of Indochina. If the army were to act in concert with a naval power such as Japan, with whom Thailand had been cultivating a special rapport since the turn of the century, there was a real danger for France.

> 'L'appoint d'une armée siamoise serait également précieux pour la défense de la Cochinchine et même de Saigon dont les fortifications sont actuellement indéfendables par suite de leur étendue beaucoup trop considérable pour nos effectifs. Seul le Cap Saint-Jacques est en état de se défendre par ses propres moyens.'1

Although the efficiency of the Thai army remained in question, it achieved its vital purpose. Henceforth the French felt it necessary to cultivate Thailand as a friendly neighbour at all costs.

Distrust of Lao Forces

Little could be done towards instituting conscription in the Lao towns while the Thai position there remained uncertain. In the absence of a nationality law, Bangkok was faced with a continuing failure to reach agreement with the French over the question of proteges. Although it was accepted in principle by 1897 that former residents of new French territories would cease to have French protection at the third generation, Bangkok had no idea of the numbers of people who might still be involved with the French. The forced evacuations of the middle left bank had continued into the 1850s; and a large proportion of the Nongkhai region population consisted of Phuan who had been resettled there only in the late 1870s. Until a political settlement could be reached, accompanied by assurances that consular agents would not be instructed to seek registrants actively and in large numbers, Bangkok accepted that any announcement of general conscription in the Lao towns would lead only to disorder and precipitate

1MAE NS Siam ~/ll: Lef~vre-Pontalis to Pichon, 3 Feb. 1910, annexed memo., Beyli~ to Lef~vre-Pontalis, 3 Feb. 1910.

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a movement to escape the law by acquiring French papers.

(In the 1904 convention France formally renounced her claims to jurisdiction over all Lao, Khmer, and Vietnamese people who had settled in Thailand *before* their homelands became subject to French rule.)

An equally important factor was the intransigent suspicion towards the Lao, and the fear of a Lao army, prevalent at court. Lao forces had always been regarded merely as untrained auxiliaries to support armies sent out from Bangkok or other Thai towns. In reply to an early proposal by Prachak to begin conscripting a Lao army at Nongkhai, the defence minister agreed on condition that the best weapons be given to 'the Army units stationed in Bangkok and in various towns, which are considered as Thai soldiers', whereas the Lao irregulars should be armed with the poorest quality rifles

> 'because we ought, to let the outer towns, such as those which are tributary states, use weapons inferior to those of the capital and of those towns which are Thai.'1

This attitude, which would appear pure foolishness from a modern military viewpoint, was in keeping with the low position in the natural order of things to which the Lao towns were assigned. During the 1893 crisis when Phichit was appealing for rifles to arm thousands of local conscripts at Ubon, the king replied expressing a deep distrust of Lao loyalties.

> 'There are quite a lot more men than weapons. Another matter, one does not know whether the Lao in general can be trusted to bear arms well, or when the buggers might just discard them. That would be a waste of weapons. I feel the [best quality] Mannlicher rifles ought to be used only by Thai soldiers, or by Lao men who can be trusted.'2

Phichit had second thoughts about the reliability of the Lao when a supporting army appeared at the Ubon garrison.

> 'One thousand men have arrived from Nakhon Ratchasima. But they are Lao and Khmer, who are numerous already in the Lao-Kao

1TNA' R5K13.2/10/363: Phanu to RV, 29 May 1892.

2TNA RSF17/1/89: RV to D, 2 May 1893.

> commissionerships. I ordered the 300 Thai men alone to be divided off from them, and retained as our comrades. The others I sent back to continue serving in the inner towns.'1

Thai misgivings about using Lao soldiers even in the gravest circumstances were regarded in a humorous vein by the Lao themselves, who boasted that the Thai were afraid to put them in the front lines of battle because they would flee to the French, and dared not put them in the back lines because they would fire from behind upon the Thai.2

In the mid-1890s both Prachak and Sanphasit put forward~ suggestions for creating Lao circle divisions for the army. Prachak conscripted about 2,500 Udon men on a monthly rotating basis for guard duty, and another 5,000 for corvée. In 1897 he proposed to convert his arrangements at little cost into a system of home guards in a dozen administrative centres where the Lao could serve and receive military training one month a year, thereby building up a vast number of reserves with minimum disruption to the peasantry.3 Sanphasit at the same time was drafting conscription

regulations suitable to conditions in Isan, and proposed to use them to build up a Lao gendarmerie in order to allow part of the Thai army to be withdrawn.4

Rama V rejected the plans outright. Noting that Thailand had trained and armed a local force in Luang Phrabang, only to give it up to the French in 1893, he could not rule out the possibility of a repetition of the loss in the event of a new French offensive. Old fears also came sharply into focus.

> 'I have thought up one objection to the matter of having the Lao as soldiers everywhere all over their country, similar to the case of Thai soldiers in the inner towns. I surmise that if we organise these Lao soldiers to the point of becoming large military units and if, a long time in the future, they are well organised, trained according to custom, and inevitably incited to become daring, they

1TNA R5F18.1/3: Phichit to D, 9 July 1893.

2SOM Asie Orientale 61/7: Dombret to Pavie, 15 Aug. 1893.

3TNA R5K13.~/14: Prachak and Narit to RV, 25 Mar. 1897.

4TNA R5K13.2/14: Ministry of Defence, 'Proposals for Organising the Army', May 1896.

> might be able to wage war by themselves. The bloody Lao consider themselves a separate race from us. Would they be loyal to us; or would they rise up in mutiny? That is to say, could there not be a military revolt?'l

Admitting, however, that order could not be maintained by the few Thai soldiers that Bangkok could afford to keep in the Lao towns, he suggested the creation of small police forces of trusted local volunteers, who needed to be paid very little since the Lao had no sense of the value of money anyway.

> 'I understand from Luang Salawithan that the Lao are not interested at all in money, because they have no place to spend it. If one offers them the choice of a penny or two farthings, they'll take the two farthings. We shall perhaps be able to find men to volunteer for service the same as the English hire the Indians or the French hire the Vietnamese.'2

The king regarded the use of the Lao much as the colonial powers regarded their native troops--as a hired force to maintain internal security among themselves. He preferred to leave external defences along the frontier weak until the Thai army could be expanded to the point of using it to form the basis for Lao circle divisions.

Lao Gendarmerie

The formula to which the king finally agreed in the 1896 scheme called for gendarmerie forces in Udon and Isan under the command of the commissioners, which would be supported by three army divisions in Nakhon Ratchasima, Prachin, and Phitsanulok circles. (Map 14.) This first programme for creating standing armed forces in the provinces was formulated solely in terms of meeting the military threat posed by the French. It encompassed every circle facing French possessions, and

nothing further. The minister of Defence advocated the creation of a standing army equal only to that of the French in order to satisfy Thai defence needs fully.

> ‘Our immediate neighbours do not have enough soldiers to start a major war with us on short notice. In the event that they engage in a

1TNA R5K13.2/14: RV to Narit, 25 Mar. 1897.

2Ibid.

> major war with us, they would have to bring reinforcements from distant lands, which we shall necessarily know about in advance, and have many days in which to prepare for resistance.’1

As the gendarmerie forces were increased, the minister felt that the Thai soldiers from Nakhon Ratchasima--400 of whom had remained at Ubon since 1893--could be returned home, leaving only a small garrison of central Thai soldiers in each of the Lao circles.

Prachak began immediately to organise a 200-man gendarmerie for Udon, spurred along by the armed clashes in 1897 involving the French agent near Loei.2 Within five years all but 80 Thai soldiers were withdrawn from Udon.3 At the end of 1900 when the ‘division’ system was decided upon, Watthana and Sanphasit both agreed in principle to place the circle gendarmeries on a regular basis.~ A few months later Udon gendarmerie headquarters was formally established.5

Sanphasit, however, failed to respond. Moreover, there were not many Thai soldiers remaining in Ubon when the 1902 uprisings began. Sanphasit had about 200 Lao auxiliaries under arms; but the king was already feeling uneasy about their loyalties before the worst became known.6 Ultimately the rebels were brought under control by sending 500 soldiers from the Nakhon Ratchasima garrison.7

Most of the Thai had been withdrawn again by the end of the year when another round of attacks--this time in French territory--made a recurrence on the right bank seem likely. It was agreed, however, that the 200 Thai soldiers remaining at Ubon would be sufficient for security.8 Damrong felt reassured not only by the successful mobilisation of the new Nakhon Ratchasima garrison, but also by the fear which the

1TNA R5K13.2/14: Ministry of Defence, ‘Proposals for Organising the Army’, May 1896.

2TNA R5M2.21ka~33/27: Prachak to D, 4 June 1897.

3TNA R5M2.18/ll/217: RV to D, 3 Dec. 1902.

4TNA R5M2.1/8: minutes of Interior meeting, 12 Dec. 1900. 5Rama V, ‘Speeches’, p. 173: speech, 21 Sept. 190lo

6TNA R5M2.18/3/9: RV to D, 4 Apr. 1902.

7TNA R5M2.18/3/6: D to Sanphasit, 6 Apr. 1902.

8TNA R5M2.18/ll/217: RV to D, 3 Dec. 1902.

superiority of Thai weapons had instilled in the Lao.

> '[Sanphasit] says that the people in the rural areas tend to believe very much in magic and incantations. They do not comprehend very well the power of weapons. If some old machine guns of poor quality are still available, it would perhaps be well for your majesty to authorise him to borrow one of them, with about 2,000 rounds of ammunition, to keep on hand to show off to the foolish people. This will cause them to talk among themselves enough to keep them just a bit in awe.'1

Ten Browning automatic rifles were promptly sent.2

Damrong and Prince Chira, the chief of army operations who took command of the Nakhon Ratchasima garrison during the emergency, produced a plan early in 1903 for the creation of a regular armed force for Isan. Stressing the need to make the existing budget support the expense of a 600-man garrison--to be maintained for national defence as well as to suppress any future rebellions--Damrong proposed that Sanphasit be given full authority to try out a newly drafted conscription law (already introduced the previous year in Nakhon Ratchasima) to whatever extent possible. Men were to be taken only from certain towns, retained for training and service during a short, fixed period of time, and released in large numbers every year to return home as reserves.3 It was decided, therefore to revive the original 1896 plan; to defer the formation of a full army division until conscription became widespread; and to build up a local gendarmerie as the predominant armed force in Isan circle, using the gendarmerie of volunteers, and its favourable image, as a gentle means of introducing the idea of compulsory military service. The Gendarmerie Department, founded within the Interior ministry in 1897, employed Danish officers as instructors and inspectors in each circle. In August 1903 the first Danish officer arrived at Ubon to begin regular training for local gendarmes--but not without resistance from Sanphasit, who accepted him only after receiving reassurances that he could easily be

lTNA R5K9/139/35: D to RV, 9 Apr. 1902.

2TNA R5K9/139/5: Sisahathep to Thep Arachun, 12 May 1902.

3TNA R5K13.2/25/27: D to RV, 27 Apr. 1903.

recalled.1 Criteria for accepting volunteers into the Ubon army were improved; and the soldiers were granted monthly salaries of ll baht, including a special 'hardship' allowance for serving in an outer circle.2

The Udon army meanwhile was expanded by 1905 to one infantry battalion of three companies consisting of seven Thai officers, 150 Thai non-commissioned officers and soldiers, plus 300 Lao soldiers, compared with 80 Lao gendarmes under a single Thai officer in the Udon gendarmerie.3 Isolated Loei province was made a special case, following the cession of adjacent right bank territory (Map 14), in order to prevent tension from arising with the French and among the populace; and the army was withdrawn altogether, replaced from 1905 by a gendarmerie unit.4

Universal Conscription

The national Conscription Act was proclaimed in 1905. It was not immediately enforced in the Lao circles, where the commissioners were still experimenting with some of its provisions. It is significant that the act was issued in the same year as the Slavery Abolition Act, because both taken together made military service mandatory for most Thai subjects. Only the bureaucracy, the Sangha, foreign subjects, and the hilltribes minorities were exempt.

Regular conscription into the armed forces was first undertaken in the Lao circles by the gendarmerie, not by the army. Regulations for the Lao circles based on the general conscription act were announced in 1908, making all men aged eighteen to twenty-five liable in theory to conscription for two years of gendarmerie service in their home towns. Few men were to be taken at first. It was hoped that eventually each district would have 20 gendarmes, and each commune one or two. Conditions of service and selection were designed to weigh lightly on the peasants: the method of selection

1TNA R5M2.21kai94/1437: D to Sommot, 26 Sept. 1903.

2SOM Siam 106: Bernard to Beau, 25 Jan. 1907. TNA RSM57/l~/3: Thammasan to Chakkrapani, ll Aug. 1908.

3MAE NS Siam 31: Colonies to MAE, 25 Nov. 1905.

4TNA R5K13.2/29: D to Sommot, January 1905.

was left to the commune headman, and men were not only salaried generously (at ll½ baht per monthl) but also their fathers were exempted from taxation and corv~e for the two years of service.2 Men on active duty were lodged in relatively luxurious government buildings and received uniforms and other amenities.3 An additional special proclamation exempted Lao migrant workers from military service while they were residing in the inner circles, where the general conscription act was already coming into force.4

In 1908 Sanphasit began to apply these first conscription regulations lightly in Roi Et province (later ‘circle’),5 extending them to the other three provinces the following year.6 They were applied from 1909 in Nakhon Phanom province,7 and extended to other provinces in Udon circle between 1910 and 1913.8 Finally in 1914 the Gendarmerie Conscription Regulations were declared to be fully in force throughout both Lao circles, with the exception of Loei province, where resistance to conscription obliged the government to continue taking only volunteers, and to pay them higher salaries than elsewhere.9

The Lao gendarmerie units of both Lao circles formed the composite ‘lOth Gendarmerie Corps’, unlike other circles with a single corps each. The Udon half of the Lao gendarmerie corps was linked to the Phetchabun circle corps to form the ‘5th Gendarmerie Region’, while Isan and Nakhon Ratchasima together formed the ‘4th Region’. The reasons for this arrangement evidently were the sensitive Lomsak and Loei area to the west, and the Khmer area south of the Mun river, each of which was best placed under a single command,

1TNA R6Ml0/3/4: Maha Amat to RVI, 23 Mar. 1915.

2RKB, 24/special (19 Feb. 1908), 1240-1244.

3SOM NF 835: Pellegrini to Delcass~, 15 May 1903.

4TNA R6K7/2/46: Chira to RVI, 27 Mar. 1911.

5TNA R6Ml0/2/4: Khamrop to D, 9 Feb. 1915.

6TNA R6Ml0/2/3: Khamrop to D, 25 Feb. 1915.

7TNA R6Ml0/2/3: Khamrop to D, 24 Jan. 1915.

8TNA R6M10/2/2: Khamrop to D, 25 Dec. 1914.

9TNA R6Ml0/3/4: Maha Amat to RVI, 23 Mar. 1915.

rather than divided arbitrarily according to circle boundaries, in order to regulate the movement of people across what, to the Lao and Khmer, still seemed non-existent borders.

The Udon superintendent commissioner began in 1910 to plan the transformation of the circle garrison into a proper army division. He proposed to continue gendarmerie conscription alone for a year or two longer, so the peasantry would grow more accustomed to the idea of regular military service, and then undertake army conscription in districts far from the Mekong, so as not to cause panic among the populace by extending it everywhere at once.1 The following year the Defence ministry created the post of 'recruitment officer' for each of the Lao circles in order to begin registration and investigate local attitudes towards army conscription; and began to employ the gendarmerie conscription regulations for conscription into the army as well,

> 'because in accordance with the regulations for conscripting men into the gendarmerie, we might be indulgent to their nature and do things quietly. Once this had been implemented so that the people's feelings have become amenable to the military Conscription Act, we can then give notice that the Act will be applied from that time onward.'2

Assuming all went smoothly, the ministry planned the gradual withdrawal of Thai soldiers, until each ethnic group formed one-half the new division.

In Udon and Isan there were still only 'regimental commanders' in 1910 for the meagre infantry forces.3 But over the next two years, as regular conscription was introduced, the army units of the Lao circles were combined and transformed into the 'l0th Army Division', unique because all other divisions in the kingdom were confined to a single circle.4 Two years after Roi Et was upgraded to circle status, division headquarters was moved from Ubon to centrally situated Roi Et town; and the division took the following form:5

1. TNA R6M28/1/15: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910.

2. TNA R6K7/2/46: Bhira to RVI, 27 Mar. 1911.

3. TNA R5K13.1/88/39: Nakhon Chaisi to Sommot, 26 Aug. 1910.

4. TNA R6K1/l4/57: Chakkraphong to Prachin, 2 Sept. 1912.

5. TNA R6K3/82/43: Bodin to RVI, 20 Oct. 1914.

Roi Et:	Division Headquarters
	Special Battalion
	20th Infantry Regiment
Ubon:	10th Artillery Regiment
	10th Infantry Regiment
Udon:	10th Cavalry Regiment

The Roi Et garrison alone at this time was composed of about 1,000 men.1 (In addition, there were 170 active and 260 reserve gendarmes in Roi Et circle.2) The three divisions of Prachin, Nakhon Ratchasima, and the Lao circles formed the '3rd Army Corps' for the defence of the French frontier.3

In 1926 under the budget restrictions imposed by Rama VII the Lao division headquarters was suppressed and combined under Nakhon Ratchasima into a single division, encompassing all of the north-east.4

The spread of military conscription was followed closely by the Corvée Act in 1913, which regulated the earlier, nearly unrestricted powers of the commissioners to use forced labour for official purposes.5 This act was supplemented in 1921 by the Military Requisitions Act which defined precisely the conditions under which government officials might make demands on private property (especially beasts of burden, vehicles, and foodstuffs).6 Unlike central Thailand, however, the Lao circles made regular and extensive use of corvée up to the end of the absolute monarchy, partly because it was regarded as a better alternative to higher taxation in order to finance public works in the impoverished region.

1MAE NS Siam l0: Garreau to Lef~vre-Pontalis, report of a tour, 27 May-12 July 1916.

2TNA R6M10/2/4: Khamrop to D, 9 Feb. 1915.

3The Bangkok Times Weekly Mail, 8 Dec. 1911.

4TNA R7K1/13/2: Bodin to RVII, 7 Apr. 1927.

5Thesaphiban, xvii/97 (Apr. 1914), 44-46.

6TNA R6K2/24: text of the Military Requisitions Act, Oct, 1921.

Chapter Fourteen: Provincial Education

The programme for setting up provincial schools to provide the common people with a means of obtaining a minimum of education, derived from an 1898 proclamation setting forth provisional regulations for the reorganisation of the Buddhist Order nationwide, with special reference to education.1 Instruction by educated bhikkhus in the monasteries had always been the principal source of village education; and every young man was expected to spend at least one lenten season in the Order for the great merit it brought to him and his parents. As the treasury could not support the cost of constructing and operating more than a handful of provincial schools, Bangkok seized upon the tradition of monastery education as a means of introducing compulsory education in a way that would be readily acceptable to the peasants, and cost little. A Sangha hierarchy parallel to that of Thesaphiban administration was created—and given its legal basis in the 1902 Sangha Administration Act—linked at every level with the bureaucracy on matters of secular education. (Refer to Chart 6.) Circle, town, and district patriarchs were appointed for each of the Thesaphiban headquarters, with an abbot of one local monastery designated as counterpart to the commune headman to be responsible for all commune religious and education affairs.

Although no one was appointed for Udon circle until the end of the fifth reign, patriarchs for Nakhon Ratchasima and Isan were sent without delay. Each began making a census of the Order and monastic properties, designating local ecclesiastical dignitaries to fill posts in the new hierarchy, and urging the monasteries to send bhikkhus to Bangkok to train as teachers so they could return home and set up schools for general lay education.2 Within a year rough censuses of the Sangha in the two circles were prepared, including lists of all monasteries offering any sort of

1. TNA RSS16/l: proclamation, 19 July 1902.

2. TNA R5S12/4/18: Wachirayan to RV, 20 Nov. 1901.

education.1 When the programme was initiated, Nakhon Ratchasima already had five schools with a total of five teachers instructing 137 schoolboys. Isan had 46 schools, 71 teachers, and nearly 2,200 schoolboys.2 And the ministry of Public Instruction was already supplying government textbooks. The situation in Isan was thus already in good order, allowing the circle to be brought immediately into the scheme along with the Thai circles.

Progress in education during the late 189Os in Ubon was the result of unofficial work by an exceptionally talented bhikkhu, Phra Yanrakkhit (known as Phra Wichit Thammapani prior to 1899). Phra Yah was sent first to Champasak as town patriarch. He returned to Bangkok after a few years, taking Lao bhikkhus to study in the monasteries there; and persuaded the king to abolish the post because of the insignificant number of monasteries in the Champasak area.3 In 1897 he proposed to take Lao bhikkhus studying in Bangkok, along with several thousand government textbooks and printed Pali texts he had acquired, out to Ubon to found a Pali school for religious

studies. High ecclesiastical authorities in Bangkok refused to co-operate, and the Ubon patriarch expressed doubts about Yan's abilities. Nonetheless, the Public Instruction ministry agreed to aid him once the school was in operation.4 One government school with two Bangkok officials as teachers had already been opened in 1891 with assistance from Damrong, then Public Instruction minister.5 With the co-operation of Sanphasit, Yah managed to set up two schools immediately in Ubon and Phana, and began to plan others, training teachers and planning a curriculum for the purpose of making Thai a widely understood language.6 This effort was especially important in towns such as Khukhan, whose Khmer governor co-operated

1. TNA R5S12/4: registers of schools and monasteries for 1898/9 and 1899/1900.

2. Ibid.

3. TNA RSS8.4/4: Wichit to Wutthikanbodi, 16 Dec. 1894.

4. TNA R5S8.4/4/149: Phat to Sommot, 9 Mar. 1897.

5. TNA R5M2.12Ubon8/2: Phakdi to Chakkri, 17 Apr. 1891.

6. TNA R5S12/13/49: Wachirayan to Sommot, 30 May 1900.

fully in arranging for the local monastery to employ someone to teach the Thai language from official government texts.1

When the provincial education programme was decided upon in 1898, Yan was given a place on the Royal Ecclesiastical Council and designated as 'Education Officer' for Isan circle.2 And when the Sangha Administration Act was issued in 1902, he was promoted to the post of circle patriarch.3 Upon his return to Ubon in 1900 with his new appointments, he announced the government's intention to create a Sangha bureaucracy parallel to civilian administration.4 By the middle of 1901 he had completed the enormous task of dividing the circle's two thousand odd monasteries into appropriate administrative units, and had appointed patriarchs and other officials to all but three posts.5

Limiting his personal efforts at first to schools in the immediate vicinity of Ubon, Yan nonetheless appointed an abbot in each 'division' headquarters to serve as 'supervisor of education'. In 1902 he began to make inspection tours to the other divisions; and after his 1903 visit to Roi Et, he proposed that the treasury grant salaries to teachers in schools that were well managed.

> 'I cannot yet fix a rate of financial assistance to give the [school] managers and teachers, because I am still groping for a way towards progress. Everything is just experimental, because there are only a few patriarchs who show promise of progress. It is difficult to find teachers who are both knowledgeable and have adroit dispositions agreeable to the students. There are hardly any students who are yet really intent upon gaining knowledge. One cannot yet consider [education in] Roi Et Division as advanced.'6

Unfortunately during the next year a less active patriarch replaced him in Isan.

The ministry finally sent a trained 'Public Instruction Commissioner' in 1906 to form a circle education committee

1. TNA R5M57/14/6866: Phraya Khukhan to Sanphasit, 10 July 1901.

2. TNA R5S12/7/39: Wachirayan to RV, 28 0ct. 1898, annexe.

3. TNA R5S16/1: two proclamations, 19 July 1902.

4. TNA R5S12/18: Yan, inspection report, 8 Sept. 1900.

5. TNA R5S12/59/3: Wachirayan to RV, 25 June 1902, annexes.

6. TNA R5S12/59: Yan to Public Instruction, 15 Mar. 1903.

for the purpose of inspecting monasteries and planning schools according to government standards throughout Isan.1

During the next three years the number of schools selected for government support fluctuated at just under thirty—some newly designated, some old ones closed—providing instruction to about 2,000 students.2 Ubon tended to remain the centre of education in the circle, with 15 out of 27 government schools in 1908; and many boys went there even if their own towns had schools. Government supported ‚demonstration' schools built cheaply with corv3e labour were-set up early in the sixth reign in each of the provincial towns for limited numbers of boys to receive higher education and instruction in basic military drilling, and to facilitate the rapid spread of the national Boy Scout movement.3

The earliest efforts to organise the Udon Sangha were made in 1909 when the first circle patriarch was sent out.4 No hierarchy yet existed; and Udon was the last circle in the kingdom to bring the Sangha Administration Act into forceo5 Few Udon bhikkhus had ever gone to Bangkok monasteries to study. Unlike Isan—where the Thammayut sect founded by Rama IV was strong, and where many Lao bhikkhus educated to advanced levels in Bangkok had received royal ecclesiastical appointments and returned home—Udon monasteries had few contacts in the capital.6 The Udon patriarch made a general inspection tour early in 1909, designating respected abbots in each town as patriarchs and subpatriarchs.7 But he accomplished very little~ The patriarchs of most circles (including Nakhon Ratchasima and Udon) were

1. TNA R5S12/59: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 24 Dec. 1907.

2. TNA R5S12/59/14: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 27 Jan. 1907. S12/59: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 27 Dec. 1908. S12/59: Satsanadilok to Sanphasit, 19 Dec. 1909.

3. TNA R6M10/24/4: Khamrop to Damrong, 25 Feb. 1915. R6M10/2/3: Khamrop to D, 9 Feb. 1915.

4. TNA R5S12/8/222: Wichit to RV, 1 Dec. 1908. S12/8/229: Wichit to Sommot, 4 Dec. 1908.

5. TNA R6M28/1/15: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910. Rama V, 'Speeches', p. 257: speech, 21 Sept. 1909.

6. Damrong, *Accounts of Various Travels, Part 4: A Trip to Nakhon Ratchasima, Udon, and Roi Et Circles in 1906-1907* (ed. TNL, Bangkok, 1969), pp. 62-63.

7. TNA R5S12/60: Ratchamoli to Wisut, 21 June 1909.

Thai who resided in Bangkok, and merely visited the provinces once a year.

> 'As Phra Thepwethi, the Patriarch for Udon Circle, considers that the distance from Bangkok to that circle is very far, and the territory is large as well, he cannot go out and organise things every-where. He cannot really organise things effectively because it is on the frontiers of the kingdom. There are ways for bhikkhus to slip away into other districts. Expenses given by the king for the tours are insufficient.'

Isan patriarchs on the other hand resided in Ubon (perhaps because they were native Lao); and managed day to day affairs in both Ubon and Roi Et (where a separate circle patriarch was eventually appointed in 1922).2 Udon patriarchs had no contact with most of the monasteries they were supposed to supervise; and felt that annual tours, which were their only functions in the circle itself, were costly and unproductive. Thai ecclesiastical authorities were reluctant to accept responsibility for the isolated area. And in 1914, at the Udon patriarch's request, his post was abolished. By the time the Sangha Administration Act was applied in Udon, however, Sangha reforms no longer seemed urgent because much of the responsibility for education had already been shifted to the Interior bureaucracy.

Commune Education

During 1908 and 1909 the responsibility for developing schools in the communes was transferred to the Interior ministry, leaving only those district schools offering higher education under Public Instruction. The burden fell upon the district officer to form an 'education committee' in each commune consisting of the commune headman,' abbot,' and commune physician, and try to achieve the limited goal of literacy for all boys.3 Damrong instructed Sanphasit in

1. TNA R6S14.1/11/49: Wachirayan to Phra Sadet, 2 Oct. 1914, minute.

2. TNA R6S10/11/41: Wisut to RVI, 11 May 1912. S14.1/47/1: Wutthikanbodi to Chakkrapani, 5 Apr. 1922. The Ubon and Roi Et circle patriarch posts were suppressed in 1926 when greater Nakhon Ratchasima circle was formed.

3. *Thesaphiban* viii/44 (Nov. 1909), 80-81.

February 1908 that all boys of suitable age should be required to attend schools of whatever sorts were available.1

Education was in principle to be limited to males for cultural reasons. The bhikkhus acting as teachers were unaccustomed to instructing girls, and indeed, were forbidden by their vows from coming into physical contact with any female.

> 'As for girls, we cannot yet require them to attend schools, for the reason that the bhikkhus tend to find it disagreeable to accept girls for study in the monasteries.'2

Parents themselves objected to placing boys and girls together in the same classrooms. The education committees were nonetheless urged to find places wherever possible for girls to study;

and many small schools for girls with women teachers were founded privately. When compulsory education for all children was introduced in the 192Os, both sexes generally had to attend primary schools together for lack of separate facilities. But some higher level schools exclusively for girls were set up throughout the north-east.3 Even for boys education was not yet systematically organised by the 1920s. And circle superintendents were still pressing district officers to initiate the creation of schools and find ways of making the villagers accustomed to the idea of education.

> 'Organising education will of necessity have to be done with alacrity in places such as Ubon circle, which is on the frontiers of the kingdom and adjacent to French territory. The superintendent Phraya Sithamma perceives, clearly the necessity of education. Even though there is not yet any compulsory education law or education poll tax, he has still tried to point out to the people a lot of ways in which to collect money in support of education, to establish schools, and to induce boys and girls to go to school. This is a good way to prepare the way for applying an education act.'4

The district officer clearly played an important role in helping to found both state and commune schools. Damrong's initial instructions, concerning the commune education

1. *Thesaphiban* v/25 (Apr. 1908), 5: edict, Damrong to Sanphasit, 4 Feb. 1908.

2. *Thesaphiban* viii/44 (Nov. 1909), 81.

3. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 827.

4. TNA R6S4/23/8: Thammasak to RVI, 15 Dec. 1920.

Committee system which was to develop the local schools, made it clear that the responsibility for supervising education would fall upon the district officers.1 During the sixth reign the pattern continued: throughout the north-east responsibility for founding and finding local means of financing the commune schools fell upon the district officer. District level bureaucrats were always obliged to set an example by making personal contributions to schools funds.2

It was not until 1920 that the post of 'district education officer' was created to relieve the district officer of education responsibilities by providing trained specialists to inspect schools, advise abbots, assist patriarchs, and collect funds, thus providing a basis for financial and administrative control over local schools in advance of the 1921 Primary Education Act.3 (There are unfortunately no archive references to such officials in the Lao circles, if any were ever appointed.)

Nakhon Ratchasima responded to the commune education programme rapidly. The superintendent commissioner saw the conversion of existing facilities an easy task, and felt certain such schools could be arranged even in isolated places where no monasteries yet existed,

> 'because monasteries in Nakhon Ratchasima circle are not difficult to build. One just clears the forest and builds, a few *kutis* [dwellngs for the bhikkhus], finishing in a few days.'4

The superintendent commissioner, governor, district officer, province patriarch, and district patriarch all went around and assembled villagers to explain the purpose of the education plans and announce that all boys would be required to attend school. During the first few months that the

commune school programme was applied to Nakhon Ratchasima in 1910, education committess were formed in 61 per cent of

1. *Thesaphiban* x/55 (Oct. 1910), 4-5: Chasaen to D, 3 Aug. 1910.

2. TNA R6S4/1: file on North-east schools in the sixth reign.

3. TNA R6S10/28/5: Thammasak to RVI, 23 May 1920.

4. *Thesaphiban* x/55 (Oct. 1910), 4: Chasaen to D, 3 Aug. 19l0.

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the 209 communes.1 The results in Nakhon Ratchasima were highly praised by the king in a letter published in the *Thesaphiban* journal, expressing the hope that Nakhon Ratchasima would set a fine example for other circles to follow.2 The quality of schools was undoubtedly poor. But time was required to prepare scho$1rooms everywhere and accustom villagers to the habit of sending children to school.

On the basis of the Sangha census, all monasteries were divided in 1908 into four categories according to the potential of the bhikkhus and other teachers: (a) qualified for government salaries, (b) capable of providing classroom instruction, (c) able to tutor small groups, or (d) incapable of teaching. Udon and Isan had 9 and 24 schools, respectively, in category one receiving government aid, not unfavourable in comparison to a nationwide average of 19.4 schools per circle. (Refer to Table 9.) It was the monasteries in categories two and three which posed the greatest problem for the Lao circles, because it was this middle group which the Interior expected to provide most elementary education. Large numbers of boys were indeed already studying in the Lao monasteries, but were concentrated in only a few of them, because more than 90 per cent of all monasteries in each circle fell into category four (compared with 53.7 per cent nationwide) where no education at all was offered. The greatest discrepancy between central Thailand and the Lao circles was category three, because the vast majority of bhikkhus in the villages were not capable of giving informal instruction. It was the strong tradition of individual Thai bhikkhus providing instruction to a few novices and other boys that Damrong expected to convert into a system of village schools. But the data suggests that the tradition was very weak in the Lao circles, making the commune education plan less suited to them.

1. *Thesaphiban* x/55 (Oct. 1910), 4-7.

2. Ibid., 2: RV to D, 18 Aug. 1910.

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Udon Government Schools

The earliest schools in Udon were created by bureaucrats without assistance from patriarchs or the Public Instruction ministry. The school founded at Nongkhai around 1890 (like the one at Ubon of the same date) was designed to train civil servants. It was moved to Udon after 1893; and someone from the royal pages school was sent out to teach.1 Schools were set up in numerous districts of

Udon on the initiative of commissioners and district officers, although the Udon school alone was receiving government support when the first Public Instruction commissioner arrived in 1906. During the next two years he and two teachers trained by the ministry set up ten more government schools in the provincial towns, and began to train local men as teachers to go out in turn and create district schools.2 Up to 1910 all 130 schools in Khonkaen province, for example, were organised in the monasteries by local initiative at no expense to the treasury.

The superintendent commissioner praised Khonkaen education as the most advanced in the circle then, suggesting that the government begin offering financial assistance by supplying textbooks.3 But throughout the sixth reign the Khonkaen demonstration school was the only one in the province to receive government support.4 By 1915 there were demonstration schools also in Udon (where 20 girls were studying) and Mukdahan to provide higher education and serve as models for the districts to copy.5 And by the end of the sixth reign the circle had a teachers' training school.6

Financing the Schools

The original plan, formulated in 1898 by Damrong and a prince patriarch, foresaw no possibility of direct government

1. TNA R5M59/34/103: D to Sommot, 16 June 1898.

2. TNA R5S12/60: Ratchamoli to Wisut, 21 June 1909. R6M28/1/15: Sisuriya to D, 9 Oct. 1910.

3. TNA R6M28/1/23: Sisuriya to D, 19 Dec. 1910.

4. Siphichai, *Inspection Tour* p. 47.

5. TNA R6M10/2/2: Khamrop to D, 29 Jan. 1915.

6. Siphichai, *Inspection Tour*, p. 45.

aid to any but the government demonstration schools providing higher education in the largest towns. It was accepted that provincial education would have to be developed at the lowest possible cost to the treasury. Demonstration schools could be copied widely by local initiative; and at most the government would be able to supply some textbooks.1 Various means were found to encourage and support local schools indirectly, because the training and paying of teachers were far beyond the government's resources.

Commune schools depended almost solely upon local efforts and financial support at first. Private teachers, registered with a Public Instruction official and giving instruction to at least ten students, were exempted from taxation and military service.2 Damrong ordered the superintendent commissioners to press villagers to build schools instead of monasteries as a way of making merit for not only the religion but also public benefit.3 Beginning in 1911 large numbers of these commune schools were started throughout Isan.4 Bangkok laid down the principle that schools should not attempt to compete with monasteries for the meagre donations that peasants could afford.5 The close connexion between monastery and school was thus a financial necessity.

During the late 1910s the local education commissioners in all four north-east circles were active in collecting voluntary contributions to pay the salaries of teachers and expenses of schools.6 Villagers were well prepared for the Primary Education Act of 1921 which decreed that education

be compulsory for children aged 7 to 14, that everyone should be literate by the age of 14, and gave the district officers the responsibility to ensure that all children attended Schools, to establish schools where none yet

1. TNA R5S12/7: D and Wachirayan, 'Proposals concerning Provincial Education', 24-25 Sept. 1898.

2. *Thesaphiban* viii/44 (Nov. 1909), 107-108, 112-114.

3. TNA R6S9.1/140/508: D to Prachin, 16 Aug. 1911.

4. TNA R6S4/22: file on Isan circle schools, 1910-1913.

5. *Thesaphiban* ii/7-12 (Oct. 1906-Mar. 1907), 137.

6. R6S4/7, 21, 24: files on Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon, Roi Et, and Udon education in the sixth reign.

existed, and to collect an 'education tax'.1 Villagers were thus given a choice: create and manage their own schools, or else the district officer would step in and do it for them. In Nakhon Ratchasima circle, where all forms of revenue taxes had been introduced, providing relatively large revenue to the circle treasury, the education tax was only one baht per adult male; it was two baht in the Lao circles, where the special fiscal regime remained in effect.2 Each province or district was required to use its own revenues by the act to finance the schools; and thus those districts with the least revenue tended to hinder progress.3

The north-east Sangha proved less capable in general of adapting to the needs of centralised education even at the most elementary levels.

> 'At the present time there are still few bhikkhus or novices who have enough knowledge of written Thai to teach at the lowest level of education in provinces such as those of Nakhon Ratchasima circle. Most are men who have some knowledge of writing, but do not understand methods of teaching.'4

A report from Nakhon Ratchasima, published in the *Thesaphiban* journal as an example of how to inspect and encourage the commune schools, illustrates the problems facing the bureaucrats.

> 'We felt that the knowledge of the [bhikkhu] teacher to be disturbing as we observed him teaching. His writing was incorrect; and he was unable to teach mathematics at all. The handwritten book used for reading was a book of poems.... When we opened it and looked at the texts, we had to admit that nearly the whole book was incorrectly copied. We suggested that for teaching he use books which are printed, such as the [Interior ministry's] *Pathom Ko-ka*; and that when he has the students read, it would be better to use printed books. As for the writing we instructed the teacher in this on the spot. We feel he will no longer write incorrectly. As for mathematics, he guaranteed he would teach the subject.'5

1. TNA R6S2/10: Primary Education Act, Sept. 1921 (text).

2. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 832-833.

3. Ibid., 832.

4. *Thesaphiban* xii/71 (Feb. 1912), 744.

5. *Thesaphiban* xii/64 (July 1911), 109-110.

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Obviously the strictest words of caution, and the sincerest promises, could not transform men into suitable teachers. Expansion proceeded too rapidly in the north-east after the act was applied; and even teachers salaried by the government were never adequately trained.1

Appraisals of the quality of provincial education indicated that by the late 192Os education had not made much impact.2 It was only in 1924 that an agricultural school was founded in Ubon, and later another for Roi Et circle, to begin providing practical education useful to farmers, and to train men in agricultural sciences to go out as teachers to the commune schools.3 By the end of the decade in greater Nakhon Ratchasima circle an estimated 86 per cent of all boys and 80 per cent of girls aged 9 to 14 were able to attend schools: 46 government supported plus 1,347 monastery/private plus 9 Chinese schools.4 Statistically the education programme was a great success, especially during the reign of Rama VII when large numbers of district schools were built or rebuilt throughout the north-east using corvée labour, local contributions, and education tax funds.5 But the failure to raise standards lay partly in the fact that villagers were never convinced of the desirability of education.

Objectives of Provincial Education

The underlying weakness was the necessity, due to the problem of financing, of depending on local interest to improve the quality of education. The government was slow to stir up interest by making the advantages of education clear to the villagers. Even in Bangkok education was seen only in utilitarian terms: for either commerce or entry to the civil service.6 In approving the 1898 plan, the king

1. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 834.

2. Siphichai, *Inspection Tour*, pp. 10, 12.

3. Ibid., pp. 12, 20.

4. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 828-829.

5. TNA R7S4/18, 21, 39, 71, 80, 81, 98, 101, 102, 119: files on North-east schools construction, 1927-1932.

6. Campbell, *Siam in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 245-246.

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specified that it was for the benefit of the common people only; and he did not expect village students to fill any of the vast numbers of posts being created in the bureaucracy.1

Nonetheless, most provincial schools supported by the government up to 1908 were in fact civil service preparatory schools.2 Damrong and the commissioners made plans generally with the civil service in mind, in an effort to create a practical and truly indigenous form of education by using Public Instruction textbooks written for the express purpose of preparing men for basic clerical work in government offices, and authorising chief provincial bureaucrats to act as examiners. From the point of view of students and villagers, education was initially regarded solely as a means of gaining bureaucratic posts. As the numbers of poorly trained graduates began to exceed demand, however, Damrong advocated restraints on higher education in the circles, and cautioned officials against expanding the schools too rapidly, so that provincial unemployment would not increase.3

During 1906-1908 when the Interior was preparing to take over all elementary education, the king was particularly anxious to extend education to all provincial children so that they

> 'can study and gain knowledge suitable for their personal circumstances, within the shortest time possible in which this can be organised.'4

The ostensible reasons for mass education were always framed in similarly vague terms. Protracted debate on the means by which villagers could be convinced of the usefulness of education seems not to have arisen.

As the primary education plan got under way, provincial officials were instructed to concentrate upon the limited objective of literacy; and told that more elaborate goals for education would be formulated later.5 Literacy, however, was

1. Chao Phraya Phrasadet, *Correspondence between Chao Phraya Phrasadet and King Rama V, 1894-1899* (Bangkok, 1963), ii, 152: RV to Phrasadet, 21 Jan. 1899.

2. *Thesaphiban* vi/36 (Mar. 1909), 120-121.

3. *Thesaphiban* iv/23 (Feb. 1908), 189-191.

4. *Thesaphiban* vi/36 (Mar. 1909), 120-121.

5. *Thesaphiban* x/57 (Dec. 1910), 242-243.

narrowly defined.. The 1898 plan laid down the principle that official efforts should be limited to schools teaching in the Thai language alone.1 Preparing to initiate the commune schools plan, the government announced to the 1906 superintendent commissioners conference that

> 'In circles where two languages are used—such as Phayap, Udon, and Isan in particular—the local language may be taught if schools wish. But we will consider the Thai language as the medium of instruction which will be supported by the government.'2

This argument was specious, because only one language was in common use in the Lao circles. The government was circumspect in admitting publicly what the patriarchs were reporting confidentially.

> 'The Lao and Khmer alphabets form the only background for education in this circle [Isan]. Only the sons of governors and elders, or the permanent members of the Sangha, are able to

> read and write in the Thai alphabet. During the period of only the last ten years, many more commissioners than previously have been going out from Bangkok to administer the provinces. People have gradually accepted the Thai alphabet more. But even so, they still accept it in only the large towns. I estimate that 1 or 2 per cent of the able bodied men in this circle can read and write Thai. Only one or two in a thousand know any mathematics.'2

It was quickly made evident, however, that a knowledge of Thai as the national language would be pressed upon villagers through the school system.

The government argued it was essential that the Thai language and alphabet be used exclusively in Lao circle schools so that, as a minimum, the Lao language spoken there would be induced to become more like Thai, declaring moreover that the Lao and Khmer alphabets

> 'have no structure and hardly act as a basis for education at all. When the teaching of the Thai alphabet becomes widespread, these [Lao and Khmer alphabets] will decline of their own accord.'4

1. TNA R5S12/7: Damrong, 'Proposals concerning Provincial Education', 24 Sept. 1898.

2. *Thesaphiban* ii/7-12 (Oct. 1906-Mar. 1907), 138.

3. TNA T5S12/18: Yan, inspection report, 8 Sept. 1900.

4. *Thesaphiban* vi/36 (Mar. 1909), 124.

In the Muang principalities and the Malay provinces where government control was still weak and where there were strong attachments to the Muang and Arabic alphabets, the government had to permit both Thai and the local languages to be used concurrently. But in the north-east the intention was to carry out total suppression of teaching in the local languages,1 for the obvious political reason of weakening the stronger language and ethnic links that existed between north-easterners and French subjects across the border, than between north-easterners and the Thai.

Officials of the Lao circles were regularly exhorted to enforce the use of Thai as the goal of primary education.

> 'in Udon and Isan circles the study of the Thai alphabet has spread and become popular among the people. You are to assume that requiring the use of the Thai alphabet exclusively everywhere is another important point [of education].~

In spite of government claims, the use of Thai at the beginning of the sixth reign in the Lao circles was neither widespread nor popular. Its only appeal was the fact that it was a prerequisite for government service. Of course, increasing numbers of men were compelled to learn it because it was the language of the army and gendarmerie, whose officers were generally Thai. But the unique difficulty of the Lao circles is shown in the following census data measuring rates of 'literacy' (meaning 'ability to read Thai') when the commune schools were begun.

'Literacy' rate in 1911[3]	Circle
23.1	Ayutthaya (Thai)

17.2	Nakhon Ratchasima (Thai, Lao, Khmer)
5.4	Isan (Lao, Khmer)
2.7	Udon (Lao)

The dramatically low rates for the Lao circles inevitably meant that education along the eastern frontier would proceed at a slower rate than elsewhere. The vast majority

1. *Thesaphiban* vi/36 (Mar. 1909), 124-125.

2. *Thesaphiban* x/special (Nov. 19l0), 244-245.

3. Adapted from 1911 census data in *Thesaphiban* xviii/108 (Mar. 1915), 184, 200, 240, 244.

had to be taught the language as well as the means of reading it.

The Khmer Sangha was required from the very beginning to use Thai as the medium of instruction.1 The use of Khmer was forbidden in the schools, even though both teachers and students spoke Khmer as their native language.2 (The same regulation was later applied to the Lao.) At first Khmer leaders who resisted were summarily dismissed, and replaced by Thai speaking men. The Khmer patriarch of one district was not only unable to speak Thai, but also unwilling.

> 'The bhikkhu Tua—the district patriarch of Prakhonchai—is excellent. However, when one prods him on to speak Thai, he just will not play along. When speaking to anyone who is Thai, he must have a bhikkhu next to him to act as interpreter—very like a foreigner. I am thus still in doubt about having him play along with us in education affairs.'3

Within a few months the government announced that this 'excellent' patriarch—and the Khmer patriarch of the provincial town—were being removed from office because they were 'not diligent' in their education duties.4 In spite of strict repression, the government never came to terms with the Khmer over the problems of language. In 1926 a general inspection tour revealed that the provincial offices in the Khmer speaking region still had to use interpreters because many Khmer refused to speak Thai. The report added with optimism, nonetheless, that no schools actually taught the Khmer language.

> 'From this alone one can see that a lot has already been done administratively to make them realise they are "Thai" people. If we do more to develop schools, and if communications with Bangkok in future become more convenient, these people will probably feel more and more that they are "Thai". The Boy Scout movement as well tends to be very helpful towards this end.'5

1. TNA R5S12/10/150: Phat to Sommot, 25 Nov. 1899.

2. *Thesaphiban* xi/71 (Feb. 1912), 270.

3. *Thesaphiban* xi/61 (Apr. 1911), 13: Anurak (education inspector) to Chasaenbodi, 12 Sept. 1910.

4. *Thesaphiban* xi/61 (Apr. 1911), 4: Chasaen to D, 16 Nov. 1910.

5. Nakhon Sawan, *Report of an Inspection Tour to Isan and Nakhon Ratchasima Circles during December 1926: Sections Relating to Political Affairs and General Descriptions* (Bangkok, 1927), pp. 5-6.

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The tour confirmed that the government's most important, but unpublicised, education goal had been reached. The administrative effort to make all Khmer and Lao alike feel that they were 'Thai' nationals had been successful; and more schools and better communications with the capital were all that seemed necessary to complete the process of tying together the old Thai kingdom and her remaining frontier dependencies into modern Thailand.1 The frontier itself gradually receded in the view of north-easterners. In the early 1900s the people of Nakhon Ratchasima town spoke of 'Laos' as a land situated a few days march north or east.2 By the 1920s the people of the north-east regarded 'Laos' as a country situated beyond the Mekong.

A closely related objective of education was the introduction of the concept of good citizenship. The prince patriarch who worked intimately with Damrong on the education programme from the beginning advocated the widest possible use of the Sangha as a means of teaching good conduct as well as for the political potential that could be derived.

> 'An important point is that it is a means of binding the people and the government close together.'3

The Sangha was a convenient and highly respected institution lending an aura of legitimacy to government efforts which might have met popular resistance if made through secular authority alone. As part of the effort to establish closer contacts between officials and villagers, the Interior decreed in 1917 that a respected bhikkhu should always be present whenever visiting officials assembled the villagers (usually in the monastery itself) to explain new laws or government plans.4 The bhikkhu not only added his unique moral authority, but could act as advisor to the villagers after the officials had gone. The government attempted to

1. Siphichai, *Inspection Tour*, p. 5.

2. MAE NS Siam 42/17: Pellegrini to Delcassé, 12 Jan. 1903.

3. Wachirayan Warorot, *Autobiographical Accounts* (Bangkok, 1924), p. 415.

4. *Thesaphiban* xxv/135 (July 1918), 105: edict, 19 May 1917.

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introduce simple, practical reforms through the monasteries and their schools—such as sanitation regulations and better personal hygiene habits.1 Lao villagers were even encouraged to help improve and maintain roads because the commissioners suggested it was meritorious work which would 'allow bhikkhus to pass conveniently'.2

Central control over the Sangha had its practical aspects, too. The new Sangha administration provided Bangkok with a valuable source of information on local conditions, independently of the civil bureaucracy, as bhikkhus had means of gaining far more intimate insights into the conditions

of the common people than their civilian counterparts. Limited numbers of bhikkhus were designated as ‘ordinators’ by patriarchs and Sangha inspectors for Nakhon Ratchasima (from 1901), Isan (1907), and Udon (1909) to question each candidate carefully before permitting him to enter the Order, so that bad elements and men seeking to escape government service could be barred from taking shelter in the Sangha.3 Unscrupulous bhikkhus were regularly defrocked; and abbots and patriarchs were chided and threatened with reprimands for allowing anyone attempting to evade the law to enter the Order.4

The first new French minister of the sixth reign was struck by the preoccupation with the question of education among the Bangkok princes, all of whom seemed convinced that durable reforms depended entirely on the national education system.5 The causes of this optimism are clear. Damrong had recently announced to a superintendent commissioners conference that

1. *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 5 Apr. 1898. *Thesaphiban* xi/64 (July 1911), 119.

2. TNA R5M57/14: Chindarak to D, 5 Feb. 1902.

3. TNA R5S12/31: Thepmuni, inspection report, 28 June 1901. S12/49/l4: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 27 Jan. 1907. S12/60: Ratchamoli to Wisut, 21 June 1909.

4. TNA R6S10/12: report of the Patriarchs’ Conference, 8 Nov. 1913. *Thesaphiban* viii/45 (Dec. 1909), 144-145: edict, 10 Nov. 1909.

5. MAE NS Siam 5/53: Lefèvre-Pontalis to Poincaré, 27 July 1912.

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> ‘Textbooks are an important basis in education, for the reason that if the government wish the people to have any sort of knowledge—even ultimately to have certain traits and dispositions—the power of the government lies in writing textbooks for teaching children.’l

Knowledge and social behaviour alike could be imparted through an education programme carefully tailored to central government requirements. Damrong himself conceived of school training in ‘correct behaviour’ as a means of promoting nationalism, teaching the principles by which a society remains a happy one, extolling the uniqueness of the Thai as an independent nation in the midst of enslaved peoples, and creating thereby a sense of unity and love for king and country.2

The idea was not just a passing fancy. The last superintendent of greater Nakhon Ratchasima circle reported that the three means by which the character of the north-eastern people had been shaped actively by the government was through the body of Buddhist scriptures, the school system, and vocational training.3 Religion and lay education properly administered offered the power to mould the attitudes of the masses to desired standards.

The 1898 plan for provincial education was not unconnected with the scheme for developing the armed forces set in motion the previous year. The government debated the possibility of requiring the existing monastery schools to provide basic military instruction and attempt to instill a military spirit against the common enemy in order to facilitate the expansion of the army.~ Although the proposals were suppressed temporarily while the comprehensive plan for provincial education was

being formulated, the character of north-eastern schools demonstrates clearly that crude military training was a principal objective of the education system.

1. *Thesaphiban* x/57 (Dec. 1910), 245.

2. TNA RSS12/7: Damrong, 'Proposals concerning Provincial Education', 24 Sept. 1898.

3. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 841-842: Phetda, annual report, Dec. 1929.

4. MAE NS Siam 1/27: Defrance to Hanotaux, 15 Mar. 1897, annexes.

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During his general tour of the north-east, Damrong was greatly impressed by the military aspects of the schools he visited everywhere.

> 'His highness visited That monastery and examined the school which the division commissioner has set up. There were bhikkhus as teachers, and 109 students all wearing identical shirts, trousers, and hats. They practised marching in formation and saluting in orderly military fashion.'1

Deciding on the spot that local schools would be of incalculable benefit to the army, he cabled the Public Instruction ministry while still in Nakhon Ratchasima to send a commissioner out at once 'to create a plan for education in the schools which will fit in with military affairs'.2 At the end of his tour circuit two months later, he met the newly arrived commissioner at Nakhon Ratchasima, and gave him general instructions which were incorporated two years later into the formal commune education committee scheme, stressing the importance of the military aspects of his task.

> 'Furthermore, in Nakhon Ratchasima the military conscription act is already enforced. Every young man must, as a matter of course, serve the government as a soldier. Teachers ought to be advised to train their students to march in formation and salute in military fashion as well.'3

The Boy Scout movement was introduced early in the sixth reign as an integral Part of provincial education. Whenever officials came to visit, schools were expected to have their neatly uniformed scouts on parade to demonstrate their skills at military drills. The scouts—whose Thai name the 'Tiger Cubs' had obvious associations with the 'Wild Tigers' formed about the same time by Rama VI as an elite military corps fiercely loyal to king and country—gained instant popularity. Both movements were oriented towards arousing sentiments of duty, obligation, and moral discipline towards society, and were considered the best means of introducing patriotism to the peoples of the north-east.5

1. *Thesaphiban* iii/17 (Aug. 1907), 189.

2. TNA RSM2.14/17/3529. Sisahathep to Sommot, 19 Dec. 1906.

3. *Thesaphiban* iii/17 (Aug. 1907), 246: Damrong, instructions to Nai Kuai (Nakhon Ratchasima Public Instruction Commissioner), 1 Feb. 1907.

4. TNA R6M10/2/3. Khamrop to D, 9 Feb. 1915. *Thesaphiban* xiv/79 (Oct. 1912), 10.

5. H. Cucherousset, *Quelques informations sur le Siam* (Hanoi, 1925), pp. 49-50. Siphichai, *Inspection Tour*, p. 59.

Chapter Fifteen: Implications for Social Unity in the Integration Process

For most of the nineteenth century the Lao towns lacked a centre which could serve as a focal point for the region. The Thai capital came closest to filling this need from a cultural and linguistic point' of view. Most towns had easier access, however, to Vietnam; and all except the westernmost ones would have found it easier to travel to the Great Lake of Cambodia, and downriver to the South China Sea, than make the arduous overland journey to Bangkok. The French hoped this geographical tendency to face away from central Thailand could be turned to the commercial and political advantage of Indochina. But French hopes never materialised, partly because the other peoples of Indochina were far more alien to the Lao than were the Thai and, most important, because the Thai were always a few steps ahead of the French in creating a system of communications. By the time Wiangchan was restored as an administrative and cultural centre, the division of the Lao states was diplomatically irreversible; and political centralisation on the right bank had proceeded too far to make any popular reunification movement possible. In the meantime Bangkok pressed ahead with the first Thai railway line, under construction from 1892 and finally opened to Nakhon Ratchasima in 1900.

Except in the immediate vicinity of Nakhon Ratchasima, the railway had little immediate impact on the economy of the north-east. It did, however, succeed in what was originally intended: provide rapid communication across the Dong Phraya Fai mountains to allow easy movement of officials and soldiers into previously isolated areas, and ensure that the trade of the entire central Mekong basin would continue to favour Bangkok over alternative cities and ports which the French were developing. The Thai government had to afford a railway because of its wide political value, whereas French commercial firms limited to economic considerations alone could not act likewise. A major concession to France in the 1904 convention was the Thai agreement to seek French financing and technical assistance in the event that foreigners

became involved in any railway extension or other commercial works undertaken in the north-east. There were numerous French schemes before and after World War I to create a network of long rail lines linking Nongkhai, Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Ubon with Phnom Penh and Saigon, and short ones linking left bank commercial centres with Vietnamese seaports across the cordillera. But Thailand showed no interest; and none was found economically feasible by the French.

After a pause of a quarter century, Bangkok began to extend the north-east railway line to the Mekong with government capital and personnel. Between 1926 and 1930 one route was opened in sections across the former Forest Khmer states to Ubon. Decrees of 1923 and 1930 approved a second line to Khonkaen and on to Nongkhai; but only a short segment was completed by the absolute monarchy.1 Existing roads within the region were repaired and maintained mostly by local initiative from the mid-1920s, under the policy of developing roads principally as feeder

routes to the railway stations in order to ensure economic advantages to the state railways. The railway made possible the export of rice, timber, live stock, and other bulky goods requiring cheap transportation for profitable trading. Although economic growth was to come later, at least the foundations for it were laid by the absolute monarchy. In addition to these practical reasons for making Bangkok a centre of gravity, the Thai bureaucracy also saw its mission in the Lao provinces in terms of endowing the Lao with the benefits of Thai culture and organisational ability.

The Thai Mission Civilisatrice

The tasks which the Thai felt they must undertake for the Lao from the late nineteenth century might be summed up simply: to prepare the Lao to adopt the Thai way of doing things. A process of assimilation which included the obliteration of many facets of Lao culture was the natural

1. Thai Ministry of Commerce, *The Economic Conditions of North-eastern Siam*, p. 5.

extension of this policy.

No one questioned the fact that Thai manners, official ceremonies, and elaborate court language and etiquette were superior to the Lao equivalents. The government itself was unabashed in expressing its sense of Lao inferiority in its late nineteenth century edicts.

> 'In the eastern Lao and Khmer towns, which are small ones, the people are uncivilised, needy, impoverished, and know nothing of affairs or manners.'1

By such statements the Thai meant simply that the Lao did not know Thai custom or Thai law. It was generally accepted in the bureaucracy by the turn of the century that Thai standards must prevail everywhere. Bangkok nonetheless did not expect to impose suddenly or wholly the high standards of the capital. Even the inner provinces required much reform in this respect. Ideally the Lao should be familiar with customs and procedures, at the same time knowing and keeping their place in relation to the commissioners, in order to facilitate administrative change. The Lao had to be re-educated to respect Thai law and customs, abandoning their own traditions wherever there was any conflict of interest.

People from the capital always regarded themselves as far more sophisticated than provincials in general. The French consul at Nakhon Ratchasima, preparing a Bastille Day reception, noted that the superintendent commissioner

> 'avait en soin de ne laisser venir que des fonctionnaires amenés par lui de Bangkok et aucuns des mandarins locaux, pour lesquels les siamois de la capitale affectent le plus grand dédain.'2

The way in which the Thai regarded the Lao was not fundamentally different. The Lao were ignorant and uncultivated, to be treated with contempt.

Sanphasit did not look to the Lao as the source of frontier troubles in the late 1890s, but rather laid the blame for stirring up difficulties upon the French alone for misinforming these impressionable, ignorant, and unintelligent people. He regarded most Lao as incapable of reasoning well,

1. TNA R5M2.12khai57: edict to all Mekong towns, 4 Dec. 1884.

2. MAE CPC Khorat 1/11: de Coulgeans to MAE, 16 July 1895.

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and thus unable to govern themselves.1 The millenarian character of the 1902 uprising served to confirm the opinion that only the Thai were fit to rule, because

> 'the populace of [Isan] circle are uncivilised and stupid. They have not yet attained the ability to behave according to the established customs and practices of the inner towns.'2

Prince Phichit regarded the Lao with even greater disdain, declaring that many seemed almost subhuman. (Refer to the quotation on page 149 above.) Less harsh critics realistically accepted that the basic needs of the Lao were satisfied by growing paddy and catching fish, and that the peasants were satisfied to live by their proverb 'No cravings on a full stomach, no distances when asleep, no fatigue in laziness'.3 Prachak regarded his Udon Lao staff as somewhat stupid, always assuring him that they understood his instructions and intentions perfectly, when in fact they understood nothing.4

It would appear that 'inability to comprehend' or 'inability to express oneself' was often confused with an obvious Lao failing: inability to speak Thai. A chief of the Gendarmerie department reported after a 1914 tour to Udon that he had inspected Lao gendarmes and

> 'questioned them about their guard duties. They could give only rough answers, because the people of this circle are stupid and do not speak lucidly.'5

Understandably the bureaucrats did not condescend to learn provincial dialects.

Bangkok had great difficulty in tempering the harsh attitudes of provincial agents to its paternalist policies. Rama VI observed in the 1920s that many officials were exercising authority without accepting or even recognising the responsibilities towards the villagers that should have accompanied it. In the administrative principles which he laid down, the king emphasised that a government official

1. TNA R5M57/5/1: Sanphasit to RV, 26 June 1898.

2. TNA R5M57/14/360: D to RV, 22 Mar. 1902.

3. TNA R5M57/14/1: Chindarak to D, 17 July 1900.

4. TNA R5M59/12: Prachak to RV, 2 Jan. 1895.

5. TNAR6M10/2/2: Khamrop to D, 25 Dec. 1914.

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> 'ought not to consider himself a master who can tread upon and treat the people as servants. It is the king's desire for him to govern the people as his children.'l

Nonetheless, one official who became a province governor in the seventh reign could still report, after seventeen years of service in the north-east, with clear disdain toward the populace, that

> ‘a rather large proportion of them are ethnically Lao, who are still lacking in civilisation, and are unambitious and narrow-minded.’2

It is striking that many officials, who undoubtedly acted in Thailand proper with the unique politeness and modesty of manner characteristic of the Thai in general, should have acted in such arrogant and intolerant fashion, assuming such haughty attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

From the turn of the century the suppression of the term ‘Lao’ was undertaken as a matter of policy. In 1891 the minister of Foreign Affairs argued successfully in favour of emphasising Rama V’s claims of sovereignty over all Lao people by attaching the name ‘Lao’ to the ‘Lao-Phuan’ (Nong-khai) and ‘Lao-Kao’ (Ubon) commissionerships.3 In 1899 these names were changed to ‘Northern’ (Udon) and ‘North-eastern’ (Isan) circles, to remove the old imperial implications. And in conformity with the decision, Sanphasit decreed that the government would no longer recognise the right bank Lao as a people separate from the Thai.

> ‘Henceforth, whenever a census is taken, or in the event that the people come on business where one must use printed official forms, officials of each branch of administration in every large or small town in the North-eastern [Isan] circle are to discharge their duties in a new way: by entering the words “Thai National under Thai Protection” in the spaces for nationality in all cases. They are absolutely forbidden to write down the words “Lao” “Khmer”, “Suai”, “Phu-thai”, and so forth in the nationality spaces as has been done previously.’4

1. *Thesaphiban* xxix/153 (Dec. 1925) 249: Rama VI, ‘Principles of Administrative Policy’, July 1923.

2. Siphichai, ‘Inspection Tour’, p. 58.

3. TNA RSM59/6/29: Thewawong to RV, 20 May 1591.

4. Quoted in Toem, ‘The Right Bank of the Mekong’ (Bangkok, 1956), ii, 120.

From a practical point of view it was hoped this policy would circumvent the problem of Lao claims to French protection just because they were Lao. In the early censuses of the western Khmer provinces, the government attempted to include the Khmer also under a single ethnic category along with Thai and Lao.1 But this proved untenable, and had to be abandoned when the government sought to give precise definitions for ethnic classifications in the 1904 general census.

> ‘Because most of the people who reside in the kingdom tend to be ethnically mixed, it would be difficult in general to divide them into quite clearly defined ethnic groups.
>
> ...There are also some other groups of people—the Khmer and the Mon in particular. These people for the most part are merely descendents of people of those ethnic groups who entered the kingdom to live hundreds of years ago and have become intermarried with the provincial peoples through whom their blood-lines are transmitted. And their dress is indistinguishable from the Thai dress. It would be difficult to distinguish them any other way; so the distinction has been fixed that any group of people using a certain language for normal communication are to be listed as belonging ethnically to that language.’2

It was on the basis of language affinities also that Damrong gave instructions for the term 'Lao' to be dropped from official use altogether.

> 'But there is one point on which no division can be made: that is, to divide the Lao from the Thai. Because in distinguishing Lao from Thai—even according to what is understood by everybody—there is no basis. If one speed, s of languages, the Lao and Thai language are the same. They differ only in pronunciation and some vocabulary, which are differences from the old and new forms of the language. ...If one speaks according to the facts about which many scholars have definite knowledge at the present time, the people whom we call "Lao" at the present time are really Thai and not Lao, and even consider themselves as Thai. ...Because of the fact that it is impossible, as well as useless and unrealistic, to separate from the Thai a group of "Lao" as stated here, in this detailed census we have thus listed them all entirely as "Thai".'3

This decision laid the legal basis for absorbing the Lao

1. TNA R5M2.19/2/1681: D to Sommot, 26 Feb. 1896.

2. *Thesaphiban* i/2 (May 1906), 88-89.

3. Ibid., 89-90.

populace at a critical time just prior to the promulgation of Thai citizenship laws.

The policy was applied immediately to Lao officials in order to assimilate them into the rapidly expanding bureaucracy, as Damrong announced during the north-east tour.

> 'Before departing [from Nongkhai in January 1907] Prince Damrong made a speech to the officials pointing out the administrative changes to be made in Udon circle. That is, unlike previously, there will no longer be any supervisory commissioners to oversee the [Lao] town governors.

And the government will not allow any official to consider himself either Thai or Lao. The government will have them consider themselves all of the same ethnicity, according to the true situation. And one must consider the knowledge and ability required for one's rank as greater and more important than ethnicity or family.'1

During the next two decades the government attempted to stir up a sense of common loyalty in the outer provinces, pointing out to the people the successful role of the Chakkri dynasty in unifying the Thai and frontier peoples int6 a strong and independent nation against common enemies, developing a communications and transportation network connecting everyone with Bangkok, and promoting economic development for the common good in the provinces.2

The concepts of nationality and loyalty to the crown were spread especially through the expanding primary education system and the armed forces. But the attitudes towards the Lao and other provincial people prevalent among provincial bureaucrats proved a formidable barrier to the success of the policy. After extensive provincial tours Rama VI published an article in the Thesaphiban journal setting forth the principles of administration which officials seemed to neglect most. He forbade the continued use by Thai officials of language insulting to various

ethnic groups, and ordered them to cease making distinctions between ‘us Thai’ and ‘them’. He denounced the persistence of old attitudes in the new national elite.

1. *Thesaphiban* i/2 (May 1906), 89-90.

2. TNL (ed.), *Records of King Rama VII’s Journey through the Northern Provinces and Chiangmai in 1927* (Bangkok, 1927), pp. 21, 37.

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> ‘There are some officials entrusted to provincial administration who still do not understand. In their behaviour and language they hold themselves to be a faction apart from the provincial people. They make references to ethnic distinctions and to religion, as in calling the North-east Thai and the Northern Thai by the name “Lao”. This prevents intimacy and harmony.’1

Such admonition did not deter an Interior deputy from continuing to make precisely the same distinctions, at least in his private reports on a Mekong visit the following year.

> ‘In those towns the populace live in impoverished conditions, and they appear to be blithering idiots as well. Their level of education is still lower than our own.’2

In public statements officials got around the problem by avoiding the word ‘Lao’ and merely calling the north-easterners by other names, such as ‘Northern Thai’3 A ‘Lao problem’ did persist in Thailand beyond the end of the absolute monarchy. But under the policy of assimilation it had to be masked, allowing no official recognition of it.

The second major characteristic of the Thai policy was cultural assimilation. This was especially noticeable in religion, as Rama V took great pride not only in being the sole independent Buddhist monarch, but also in the claim to be thereby the only ruler capable of supporting correct practices. Explaining this theory to Lao bhikkhus sitting for the Pali examinations in Bangkok, he pointed out that the Lao religion had decayed into ‘an aberrant and distorted’ form of Buddhism, and urged the Lao to go in large numbers to study in Bangkok as a remedy.4 Just as the Thai Sangha had attempted to purify itself in the nineteenth century through internal reform movements and establishing wide contact with the modern sources of Buddhism in Ceylon, so also Bangkok saw it her duty in turn to help the degenerate Lao Sangha. Various decrees forbade the most obvious malpractices.

1. *Thesaphiban* xxix/153 (Dec. 1925), 218-219: Rama VI, ‘Principles of Administrative Policy’, July 1923.

2. TNA R7M4.1/6: Ratchasena to RVII, 23 Aug. 1926.

3. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 841.

4. Rama V, ‘Speeches’, pp. 65-66: speech, 16 Feb. 1889.

> ‘Members of the [Isan] Sangha should not engage in unseemly behaviour such as ... joking with women, sleeping under the same roof with women, eating at unappointed times, killing animals, smoking opium or hashish, drinking intoxicating liquor, engaging in (various types of) gambling, and dressing in laymen’s clothing.
>
> ‘As for religious affairs [in Nakhon Ratchasima circle], the practices of the Sangha deviate from the Dharma Vinaya. ...The teachings are greatly distorted. Many of the bhikkhus in this circle are Lao and Khmer. It is difficult to train them in devotional practices, even beginning with the principles of ordination.’2

Correctness in religion naturally meant conformity with Thai practice.

The principal means used to uplift the Lao Sangha were public education and the absorption of the Sangha into a strict hierarchy controlled from Bangkok. One of the major arguments for provincial education in Nakhon Ratchasima was its implications for ordination which, without prior education, tended to become a useless ritual.

> ‘If the men who enter the Sangha in future have previously been educated, they would likely be able to study Buddhism better. They would not likely enter the Sangha to no purpose—as is generally the case now.’3

Numerous Pali schools were established by north-east patriarchs early in the twentieth century, but never officially encouraged. It was felt that an improved level of Buddhist practices in frontier provinces could be better achieved by establishing close contact with Bangkok monasteries instead, sending men to study in Bangkok and be re-ordinated by bhikkhus known to be competent.4 Legitimacy was thus made to derive from the Thai Sangha, with its Supreme Patriarch and the king as spiritual leaders.

1. TNA R5S12/59/14: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 27 Jan. 1907.

2. TNA R5S12/13/91: Wachirayan to RV, 26 June 1900.

3. *Thesaphaban*, xii/71 (Feb. 1912) 260: Suriyarat to D, 21 Sept. 1911.

4. Nakhon Sawan, ‘Report of an Inspection Tour to Isan and Nakhon Ratchasima Circles during December 1926’, p. 56.

The Royal Cult in the North-east

During the late nineteenth century while the ceremonial relations between the Lao aristocracy and the court were being suppressed, the government was seeking to make the king a popular figure widely known among the peasantry. The fifth reign custom of celebrating the king’s birthday was introduced in 1881 to Nakhon Ratchasima by the new governor, who had observed it while serving in Bangkok.1 In 1885 portrait sized royal photographs were carried by the commissioners to Ubon and Luang Phrabang, along with edicts instructing the governors to arrange birthday celebrations hence forth.2

The despatch of numerous royal photographs was partly to show the French which frontier towns Bangkok claimed; and accordingly the military mission proceeding up the U River to Dien Bien Phu in 1886 left them to be displayed prominently in administrative centres.3 Others arrived in 1889 for the Nongkhai, Phuan State, and Khamkoet commissioners' offices.4 Maha Amat (Run) decreed in 1887 that all Mekong basin towns under his supervision (from Nongkhai to Stung Treng) should arrange annual celebrations, and have everyone

> 'bow their heads all in unison towards Bangkok, making an obeisance to his majesty the king.'5

After the permanent commissionerships were established, new photographs and an assortment of worship paraphernalia were sent to various headquarters in time for the 1892 celebrations. The French were quick to take note of the first birthday processions with photographs of the king and queen carried on palanquins surmounted by royal umbrellas,6 observing also that in spite of orders from the commissioners some

1. TNA R5PS6/336: Mahanuphap to RV, Sept. 1881.

2. TNA R5M2.12kaiLP8/2: Mahin to RV, 22 Sept. 1885. M2.l2kaiUbon3/6: Ratchasena to Chakkri, 12 Oct. 1885.

3. TNA R5M2.12kaiLP8/6: Mahin to RV, I May 1887.

4. TNA R5M2.12kaiNK5/84: Suriyadet to Chakkri, 24 Feb. 1889. 5TNA R5M2.12kaiNK4/3: Prathum to Chakkri, 24 Sept. 1887.

6. MAE Pavie 30: Cogniard, 'Renseignements sur Lakhone', Aug.-Sept. 1890.

towns did not bother to take any notice of the occasion.1

Peasants were led through familiar Sangha rites to pay homage to the king, by having large numbers of bhikkhus to chant and receive the midday meal and gifts in the king's name at such occasions.2 Beginning in 1906, after the Isan Sangha had been centralised, all bhikkhus in the circle were required to assemble in their monasteries on the king's birthday for special chanting.3 Reverence for the king was easily confounded in the eyes of simple peasants with general Buddhist worship. Prachak built a monastery in Nongkhai, and requested the Royal Household minister to send a special Buddha image of proportions equal to Rama V to use for worship there.4 It was believed that the king, more than any other man in the kingdom, possessed sufficient merit to attain buddha-hood. After the death of Rama V this theory was popularised by referring to him as the 'Royal Buddha', asserting that he had surely attained nirvana because of his great works. He was thus given a symbolic place in any public occasion which required a mixture of solemnity as well as merry-making, such as the opening of a new school.

> 'They [officials] decorated the school and grounds with foliage and flags. They then set up a statue of the Royal Buddha above the altar for worship. They invited seven bhikkhus to chant sacred verses. In the evening there was entertainment....'5

Such ceremonies took advantage of the propensity of rural people to revere almost any sort of spirit or deity in addition to the Buddha, encouraging a sense of devotion and duty to the state by presenting the king and his ancestors as objects for worship.

Even in the late fifth reign images of all five Chakkri kings were used for official occasions (such as the water of allegiance ceremony) in the Lao provinces requiring religious sanction.6 From 1906 all headmen and provincial soldiers

1. MAE Pavie 30: Dugast, journal, 9-15 Sept. 1890.

2. TNA R5M46/4/96: Prasit to D, 26 Sept. 1892.

3. TNA R5S12/59/14: Satsanadilok to Wisut, 27 Jan. 1907.

4. TNA R5S13/3/32: Chaiyan to RV, 4 May 1893.

5. TNA R6S4/97/45.'Thammasak to Prachin, l0 June 1916.

6. TNA R5M59/28/436: D to Sommot, 11 June 1895.

were required by law to take the water twice yearly; and a new list of monasteries officially approved to conduct the ceremonies was drawn up.1 The last ceremony under the absolute monarchy took place in April 1932.2 But the custom seems to have lost much of its mystical significance in later years; and references to it after the fifth reign are sparse.

Bangkok attempted to develop some new customs to link the monarchy and the provinces. Beginning in 1889 the Rattanakosin era (based on the advent of the Chakkri dynasty in 1782) replaced the old chula sakkarat era (based on 639 AD) in the official calendar, asserting Bangkok as the centre and the Chakkris as the beginning. But this era was abandoned in 1913 in favour of the 'Buddhist' era (based on 543 BC). A lasting symbolic tie was introduced at Rama VI's coronation by using water from the Mekong in the Hindu rituals, and invoking the power of the most ancient and revered Lao stupa at Nakhon Phanom in the Buddhist rituals.3 The king's prestige as foremost protector of the Buddhist faith helped to stir up national pride in the provinces towards Thailand as the only independent country of the region. Bangkok also took advantage of old royal customs such as the annual ploughing ceremony (supposed to bring suitable rainfall and abundant harvests) to make them truly popular customs. Rama VI had special Buddha images cast for distribution to each province, along with a printed volume of rain-making incantations, so that rain-making ceremonies could be held everywhere. The minister of Agriculture explained that he was sponsoring the project because he was

> 'desirous of having the [recent] abundant harvests continue through devotion to the Three Sacred Buddhist Gems as well as the power of the deities and the Transcendental Virtues of His Majesty the King, who is of great sublime merit.'4

From the local point of view, reporting simple projects was the principal means by which villagers themselves began to develop contact with central authority. The pattern of

1. *Thesaphiban* ii/7-12 (Oct. 1906-Mar. 1907), 41-42.

2. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/1 (1932), 57.

3. Buddhist Committee, *Nakhon Phanom Province*, p. 17.

4. WNL (ed.), *Incantations for the Royal Ploughing and Rain-making Ceremonies* (Bangkok, 1925), p. 'kai'.

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public works such as roads and bridges in the late fifth reign was simple: district officers organised village corvée for a project, and then wrote to the king announcing that the finished work was presented 'to his majesty' (rather than for the less glorified ideal of public use alone).1 Rama V took great interest in such work, especially the construction of monasteries and schools; and always directed the Royal Secretariate to send replies praising local efforts of this sort. But early in the sixth reign the prince patriarch announced that the king no longer wished to have such trivia brought to his attention.

> 'I have seen dedication reports to the king which are without substance. To the point that even the bhikkhus, spending not very much money to repair the *kutis* in which they themselves live, will make dedications to the king. Having collected not very much money to engage a teacher to give instruction in the Buddhist scriptures to just five bhikkhus or novices, one makes a dedication to the king. Having done some good work or other, it is well to think of one's king with devotion. But making dedications of this sort to the king is somewhat too much, making bits and pieces out of dedications to the king. It is rather tasteless as well.'2

This intimate and paternal link with the people, which began to develop at the critical point when the aristocracy was finally disappearing, was not maintained, partly because the sheer volume of correspondence grew unmanageable. In breaking the link, however, Bangkok isolated herself in the eyes of villagers. A government with which one had no ritual communication was one with which one could feel little other rapport. Of no intrinsic value, the correspondence momentarily filled a function of incalculable value as a symbol of national unity as well as the monarch's intimate concern for his people.

The great flaw in the effort to extend the royal cult to the Lao provinces was the king's absence. The king made his first visit to Nakhon Ratchasima when the railway opened at

1. See for examples TNA R5M24.1/18: file on Udon Circle public works construction, 1901-1910.

2. TNA R6S10/12: report of the Patriarchs' Conference,

8 Nov. 1913.

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the turn of the century.1 But no absolute monarch ever visited a Lao province. In Thailand proper the royal monasteries provided occasions for the king to visit (or at least send personal representatives) annually to conduct ceremonies, present gifts to the bhikkhus, and be seen by the people. But no such monastery under royal patronage was established in the North-east.2 The monarch finally broke with the tradition of not entering the territory of the old vassal states by

visiting the northern principalities in 1927. Inexplicably a unique opportunity was passed when the Ubon railway was opened in 1930. An official convoy carrying numerous bhikkhus and a special Buddha image sent by the king was received in elaborate ceremonies at every station along the route.3 But the king declined to participate, and instead sent a personal representative.4 It was only in 1955 that Rama IX made a grand tour of every province of the north-east, becoming the first monarch to venture beyond Nakhon Ratchasima.5

Shift of Popular Loyalties

The changing attitudes of the peasantry towards the bureaucracy and central authority cannot be documented in as straightforward a way as its converse. The villagers had no indigenous spokesmen. And lesser officials tended to avoid reporting grievances, out of fear of appearing to have failed in their duties.6 One can only attempt to imply the growth of a sense of responsibility to the state by examining the ways in which state efforts were seen by the peasantry to offer them benefits and improve the quality of village life. The vital criteria are, of course, agricultural services.

1. TNA R5M46/6: RV to Prasit, 22 Mar. 1901.

2. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/12 (1931), 836.

3. SOM Agence 281/487: Rougni, memo., 2 Apr. 1930.

4. TNA R7P5.2/3: memo., Mar. 1930.

5. Homronran, *His Majesty's Visit to the People in the North-east Region during November 1956* (Bangkok, 1956), pp. 7, 219.

6. TNA R5M2.25/36/827: D to Sommot, 31 July 1903.

Crop failures added greatly to the unrest leading to the 1902 Isan uprising. Only a year later the circle patriarch began warning Bangkok of a new drought and its consequences: farm animals were dying, cholera was spreading, and famine conditions were forcing bhikkhus to desert the monasteries. Bangkok was powerless to act promptly; and the king wavered with indecision.

> 'Even though famine has actually arisen, it would be difficult to alleviate, because it would be beyond us to be able to send rice.'1

The next month Saphasit revealed that the rice shortages were the greatest ever known. Most fields could not be planted, many people had died of starvation, banditry was becoming rife, and mass emigration had begun.2 The mainstays of society—monasteries, padifields, administration—were already badly shaken. And further social breakdown could easily lead to more uprisings. Finally the king decided that

> 'on this matter we must find a way to provide some assistance. If we do nothing, it is to be feared that difficulties will arise during many years to come.'3

But as he was on the point of taking steps to arrange relief, both Lao circle chiefs announced by telegram that the monsoon rains had begun to fall, and gave assurances that crops would be abundant after all.4 The next day Rama V changed his mind.

'I think we need not arrange anything. Even if we did, it would not be in time.'4

In the few cases where government granaries were opened to provide relief, rice was given specifically to prevent emigration to French territory.6 Bangkok did recognise the need for agricultural planning by the provincial bureaucracy; but positive action was not possible until the administration

1. TNA R5M2.25/36/327: Sommot to D, 1 Aug. 1903.

2. TNA R5M2.25/39/1413: D to Sommot, 24 Sept. 1903.

3. TNA R5M2.25/39/166: R5 to D, 25 Sept. 1903.

4. TNA R5M2.25/39/1458: Sisahathep to Sommot, 30 Sept. 1903.

5. TNA R5M2.25/39/186: RV to D, 1 Oct. 1903.

6. TNA R5M2.25/35/774: D to Sommot, 23 July 1903. M2-25/35/290: RV to D, 25 July 1903.

was sufficiently centralised. One thus finds official disaster relief (usually for droughts, floods and rice shortages in wide areas, but eventually for individual victims of fires, etc.) appearing only after about 1910.

When droughts reduced the 1910 rice crops in Isan, and in both Lao circles the next year, the government took the traditional precautions: forbidding the export of rice from any province, and trying to make official granary stocks available to the most hard pressed towns.1 Rice requisitions in the Lao towns were abolished in 1900; but the 1913 Thesaphiban conference, recognising that the government must take the initiative over a peasantry that never thought beyond subsistence level planting, determined to create a new system of reserves for future relief.2 The Rice Control Act of 1919 provided further powers just in time for the 1920 Udon shortages.3 The Interior also reduced or suspended the capitation tax in any district whenever there was a crop failure, an effective policy initiated during the 1911 shortages and used regularly thereafter.4

The government rapidly committed itself to guarantees of land ownership for the peasantry. In 1901 Bangkok began issuing land titles in .one inner circle 'in pursuit of a clear scheme of land ownership'.5 Damrong announced at the Thesaphiban conference on agriculture in 1910, the year after the Title Deeds Act appeared, that land would be ensured to all peasants, partly to restrict foreign landholdings, and partly to emphasise that most foreigners by treaty had no right to own land except by royal permission.6 The first attempts at land control in the north-east were made solely for these reasons. The Ubon commissioner in

1. TNA R6M3.4/l/l156: D to Sommot, 9 Oct. 19lO. M3.~/1/516: D to Prachin, 8 Aug. 1911. M3.4/4/532: D to Prachin, 19 Aug. 1911. M3.4/4/246: Maha Amat to Prachin, 13 July 1912.

2. *Thesaphiban* xvii/97 (Apr. 1914), 36-40.

3. TNA R6M3.4/4: Rice-inspection Committee to RVI, 27 July 1920.

4. TNA R6M18.1/3/223: D to RVI, 1 Feb. 1911. R7Kh12/1/324: Koman to RVII, 18 Dec. 1929.

5. Rama V, 'Speeches', p. 175: speech, 21 Sept. 1901.

6. *Thesaphiban* x/58 (Jan. 1911), 291-292.

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1887 forbade the sale of land without official papers, in a move obviously directed against the French. No attempt was made to issue deeds; and the decree became a dead letter for all except political purposes because no one had any proof of land ownership.1 The cadastral survey proceeded slowly in central Thailand, and had not reached the north-east at all by the end of the 1920s. The major reason offered was that the Lao continued to follow their old patterns of shifting agriculture, planting some land one year and then leaving it fallow for an indeterminate time while they shifted elsewhere. The resultant uncertainties over rights made the north-east unsuitable to the issuance of title deeds.2 (This obstruction provides yet another reason why the system of taxation was never developed beyond a simple capitation tax.)

In accord with Damrong's 19l0 policy statement, and the general eagerness to encourage production of an agricultural surplus for export, the governors in the north-east did try to make the Lao more industrious, as illustrated in a 1912 report by the Ubon governor.

> 'Whenever I arrived at any district office or village, I ordered the district officers and headmen everywhere to arrange for the people to engage in dry-season dry-field cultivation and absolutely not leave the land fallow. I ordered the district officers and headmen to supervise together the division of lands, giving a maximum of 1,600 square metres and a minimum of 800 square metres for each man to work. If I come on a later occasion and there is land still remaining with no one working it, the blame for not attending to this will be placed on the district officers and headmen. Once all the inundated padilands are being used for dry-season cultivation, they are to cultivate dry-field crops. If any villager is indolent and does nothing, he is to be sent to the circle offices to be used for various public works.'3

Nonetheless, only in the late 1920s with the extension of the railway and the construction of rice mills, was there any

1. TNA R5M2.12kaiUbon6/42: Phakdi to Chakkri, 24 Jan. 1891, annexed proclamation, 1 Jan. 1891.

2. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/11 (1931), 765.

3. *Thesaphiban* xiv/79 (Oct. 1912), 13: Phiromracha to Sithamma, 241 Jan. 1912.

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financial incentive to produce more than a subsistence level of rice or to diversify crops, as surpluses could not be marketed.

This type of coercion, tried out by Prachak in Udon also in the 1890s in an effort to stimulate agricultural production, could not produce significant results because of local resistance to change.1 The attitude of the Lao towards development in general was concisely stated in a survey of the economy of Roi Et and its potential.

> 'Official commercial affairs in this circle are still to be considered as undeveloped, because the people are altogether indolent. Once they have gained enough to live, they are satisfied. They do not give any thought to great undertakings to make themselves rich and well off, as do people in the inner circles.'2

A Japanese specialist engaged to study the question of introducing agricultural machinery to the north-east felt that

> 'at the present time the people are still indolent and very needy. One cannot make a big thing of arranging mechanical equipment for them to utilise.'3

He rightly supposed that peasants could not afford manufactured machines. Moreover, they tended to reject even the cheap, simple ones sponsored under government projects. One had to meet the peasant's abilities and his resistance to innovation on his own terms at first, merely by raising levels of production using the old technology. In these respects, public works providing the crudest agricultural assistance achieved a modest revolution•

Lack of water had always been the greatest concern of farmers, and placed many obstacles in the way of efficient administration. The first circle 'agricultural officer ' despatched to Ubon in 1908 began immediately to maintain records dealing with water resources.4 But an officially encouraged water conservation programme got under way only from 1910, when district officers were appointed as 'agricultural officers' ex officio for most districts (because

1. TNA R5Bl.lkai(misc)4.Prachak to. RV, 4 Apr. 1895.

2. TNA R6M20/4/60: Thamrongsiri to D, 25 Aug. 1912.

3. *Thesaphiban* ix/54 (Sept. 1910), 257: Yokota, 'Report on Supporting Cotton Production in Nakhon Ratchasima Circle'

4. TNA R6M3.4/15/169: Sithamma to Surasi, 26 Feb. 1918.

the government could not afford to pay numerous agricultural specialists).1 The new superintendent commissioner during his first tours of Isan in 1910 accordingly ordered local officials everywhere to plan water conservation projects in time for the next monsoons.2

In order to ensure better water supplies the north-east authorities embarked on a vast number of minor projects to improve water collection and distribution by constructing small reservoirs. Ordinarily some lowland site or marsh that was a natural catchment area was surrounded by a newly constructed dyke only a few metres in height, allowing greater retention during the annual monsoon. With such a store of water, a simple project required only a few irrigation channels for completion, opening up wide tracts of arable land to cultivation. Some rivers also were dyked to prevent annual flooding.3

The peasants did respond quickly to technological change which they could comprehend and which produced immediate, practical results. Within a half year after the Khonkaen commissioner constructed a dyke to conserve the 1908 monsoon rains, nearly a thousand villagers immigrated.4 Most of the work was done by local initiative under the leadership of the district officers. Corvee was used to its greatest advantage, as villagers could see and appreciate immediately the benefits of paying their obligations to the state. The improvement of water resources continued to hold the highest priority in public works into the 1920s.5 By the end of the decade rudimentary irrigation works had converted the upper Mun and Chi basins, and the marshes surrounding the Songkhram and Namkam rivers, into rich padilands.6

1. *Thesaphiban* x/58 (Jan. 1911), 263-265.

2. TNA R6M15.2/1362: Sisahathep to Sommot, 14 Jan. 1911.

3. See for examples TNA R6M15.2/3: file on Nakhon Ratchasima Circle dyke construction, 1911-1919; *Thesaphiban* xvii/102 (Sept. 1914), 327-464: 1ist of dykes constructed in Ubon Circle to 1914.

4. TNA RSM59/41457: D to Sommot, 8 June 1909.

5. Siphichai, 'Inspection Report', pp. 16-17-

6. SOM Agence 281/488: Rougni, memo., 31 Sept. 1929.

It is not perplexing that the peasants had never initiated such simple projects themselves. Land was always plentiful; and the Lao were accustomed to shifting cultivation. Even in the early twentieth century there was still no population pressure requiring improved agricultural efficiency. Irrigation works were undertaken officially not out of necessity, but with a view towards future economic development and the administrative efficiency to be gained from helping the populace settle down permanently.

The government failed to stimulate alternative production. Sericulture centres were established with Japanese assistance in various towns, but closed within a decade when the peasantry failed to buy government sponsored equipment or adopt modern techniques for silk spinning and weaving.1 Cattle breeding was probably the greatest economic potential of the region. Experimental breeding stations were created, but never got beyond the basic stages; and the agents never succeeded in attracting the interest of farmers.2 Also the government's co-operatives programme begun in the late 1920s, and perhaps eminently suited to social conditions and the pattern of concentrated settlement in the Lao circles, was never extended to the north-east, because it was felt that the floating population would render agricultural investment in co-operatives impractical.3 By the end of the 1920s the circle agricultural officer even in Nakhon Ratchasima still played a passive role: gathering statistics and providing some veterinary services.4

Among the numerous reasons for the slow development of north-east agriculture, one must bear in mind that the modern Agriculture ministry (re-established in 1899) was not especially service oriented, but tended to concentrate upon the cadastre and issuing title deeds in pursuit of higher land revenues in the rich inner provinces.5 Top

1. Siphichai, 'Inspection Tour', pp. 3-4.

2. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/11 (1931), 777.

3. Ibid., 765. TNA R7P9/1-4: file on co-operatives, 1927-1931.

4. *Thesaphiban* xxxi/1E (1931), 870.

5. Graham, *Siam: A Handbook*, pp. 287-288.

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officials continued for decades to speak only in vague terms about developing, the agricultural potential of the north-east, while government planning floundered about in the absence of any official statistics' on the state of commerce.1 The first serious endeavours to compile hard statistics, made only in the early 1930s, were hardly encouraging.

> 'I have ventured to present this Report, because I feel that very little is still generally known about the conditions in these two [north-east] circles, which I feel confident will one day play a large part in the development of (Thailand). No attempt has been made to offer suggestions for future development, but it is hoped that the present Report will form a sound basis of study....'2

The Lao aristocracy, the only indigenous group whose wealth and personal interests might have provided the potential and incentive for agricultural planning and investment, was deprived of its sources of income and peasant services, and was rendered too weak to provide leadership. The district bureaucrats were able to mobilise manpower only under certain conditions, and were often disinterested in rural development and rarely trained in agricultural sciences. Finally, French colonial agriculture accomplished little of note in Laos which might have prodded Bangkok to take a more active role in economic planning for the right bank.3 It is not entirely true, as often claimed, that Bangkok 'neglected' the north-east economically: sights and goals may have been set lower than in central Thailand, but nonetheless ahead of French Laos.

The reforms undertaken with a view towards modifying the political and ethnic ties from the viewpoint of the north-eastern people are still taking effect. Some idea of the general success of the process can be gained from recent

1. *Bulletin économique de l'Indochine,* NS 101 (Mar.-Apr. 1913), 230

2. Thai Ministry of Commerce, *The Economic Conditions of North-Eastern Siam*1, p. 1.

3. G. Maspero et alia, *Un Empire coloniale française: l'Indochine* (Paris, 1930) ii, 185.

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sociological research.1 Unfortunately, no impartial and comprehensive study of the changing loyalties of villagers has been possible because the frontier is still a politically sensitive area. In recent years dissidents and terrorists have been trying to revive ethnic tension through propaganda concerning the 'true' extent of the kingdom of Laos, which they claim should include most of the north-east.2 It is no less disturbing to learn that Thai authorities and school-teachers felt compelled to go in team to explain to villagers 'that they are Thai' and thus have no other loyalties.3

One is reminded of Rama VI's tour to various frontier provinces seventy years ago for the same purposes.

> Le prince héritier a parcouru ces cinque provinces, harangué les autorités locales, fait appel à leur patriotisme, insisté sur ce que laotiens et siamois sont des Thai et défendraient à l'occasion la même patrie.'4

Such efforts to train people in the concept of a singular national loyalty achieved their greatest successes through the village schools and the armed forces. As a major symbol of national unity, the presence of the army at royal ceremonies provided a means of popular representation, replacing that of the old ruling class alone who had previously attended. The first great occasion was the coronation of Rama VI, in which at least one company of soldiers from every circle was required to participate.5 But readily comprehensible manifestations of central authority were slow to arrive in the Lao districts themselves.

1. See for example, C. Keyes, 'Peasant and Nation: a Thai-Lao Village in a Thai State' (Cornell University Ph.D. thesis 1966); A. Kirsch, 'Phu Thai Religious Syncretism' (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis 1968); P. Kunstadter, ed. *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, 2 vols.' (Princeton, 1967), K. Janlekha, *Saraphi: A Survey of Socio-economic Conditions in a Rural community in North-east Thailand* (World Land Use Survey, Occasional Paper VIII, 1968; S. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (Cambridge, 1970).

2. *The Bangkok Post*, 30 Nov. 1972.

3. *The Bangkok Post*, 2 Apr. 1973.

4. SOM Siam 150: Bernard to GG, 13 Jan. 1906.

5. *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 8 Dec. 1911.

For decades the presence of the state in the view of the majority of the populace was limited to the district offices and small gendarmerie posts. Building up the bare framework of provincial administration was an especially slow process for the poor Lao districts, as the provinces had to pay their own way. Only when the full complement of basic offices had been created could the government expect to reach the take-off point beyond which excess revenues could be used for public services. To the peasants, meanwhile, government seemed to have an inexhaustible need for tax money but little capacity to provide anything in return. As the complexities of administration escaped the peasant's comprehension, especially in the north-east where the continually migrating populace never knew any loyalties to anyone above the aristocrats with whom they had personal contact, the peasants naturally turned to the traditional means of escaping the obligations pressed upon them from outside. The strongest theme throughout the Thai struggle to bring the Lao under firm central control is the desire of peasants everywhere to avoid contact with government authorities whenever possible, best documented in their tendency to take every opportunity to evade taxation and services.

The government was aware from the beginning that success would depend on convincing the people that changes were designed to help them. In 1892 Rama V insisted that the sovereign high commissioners must not only state the obvious reasons for their actions and new decrees, but also

point out the nice aspects and the implicit benefits in order to get the co-operation of the people.1 Legalistic achievements of the government were naturally the most successful ones. The individual's duties and obligations were strictly defined and easily transferred by decree. But the government failed initially to shift loyalties to the state. The modern bureaucracy did not manage to establish intimate links with the peasantry, and provided no alternative to the paternalistic Lao system, except in the case of the military. Well into the twentieth century the bureaucracy remained

1. TNA R5M62.1/34/S68: RV to D, 4 Oct. 1892.

alien to the Lao; and the government did not enjoy the support of the peasantry. In his final year as minister Damrong admitted that many laws and regulations which could easily be evaded could not yet be applied to the Lao circles, because the people still had no sense of responsibility to the government.1 Even at the end of the absolute monarchy, the basic inner province laws concerning taxation and services still could not be applied to the

The integration of the Lao provinces is characterised foremostly by discontinuity. Old institutions were ignored. The Thesaphiban system did not build upon the past, but furnished an entirely new political structure. Priority was given to general administration, courts, revenue collecting, and lawkeeping. The central government encouraged public works, education, agriculture, and commercial development; but these did not form an indispensable part of the Thesaphiban system. Bangkok's good intentions of replacing what it considered an ignorant and unreliable ruling class by a centralised bureaucracy did not materialise fully. Those men who had social and financial stakes in the towns, and personal interest in the administration to which they belonged and which literally belonged to them, tended to be replaced by indifferent and not entirely competent outsiders whose main interests and aspirations lay elsewhere. As the aristocracy declined, ultimate authority shifted to remote and obscure figures. But at least Bangkok had the good fortune to meet little serious resistance to its reforms. Had the 1902 uprising occurred a few years earlier when the army was not yet organised and diplomatic tension was at its height, France might have intervened with force and left Thailand with no territory at all in the Mekong basin.

1. TNA R6M16.1/8/109: D to RVI, 16 Feb. 1914.

FOR PAGES 290-310 (APPENDICES AND CHARTS) SEE SEPARATE FILES (SCANNED VERSIONS)

Notes on Bibliography and Footnoting

l) Proper names are transliterated according to the 'General System' of the Royal Institute of Thailand. No exceptions are made. The following substitutions are made for reasons of simplicity in typing.

ò for the vowel อ

ü for the vowels อึ or อื

č for the consonant จ

2) Entries for authors of Thai language works in the bibliography are alphabetised according to Thai custom by first name.

3) All titles of books in the Thai language are alphabetised according to my English translations. They are presented with inverted commas for identification as such.

4) Titles and names of authors are included in Thai script with each Thai language work. Original spellings are retained regardless of present-day usage.

5) Prior to 1941 the Thai new year began in April, meaning that the months of January, February, and March of any year were included under the date of the previous year in the western calendar. I have tried to give all dates according to the Gregorian calendar. But in cases where the month is not known, and wherever the whole Thai calendar year is involved, I have made double entries. '1901/2' means the Thai calendar year of April 1901 through March 1902.

6) There is no archive in any Lao state for the period covered in this thesis. There was little or no archival tradition in the individual towns. A few documents in the Lao language have been preserved in the archives of Bangkok. Very little has been published in Lao concerning Lao history or Lao annals. A list of Lao language works concerning Laos may be found in Pierre Bernard Lafont's *Bibliographie du Laos* (Paris, 1964), pp. 237-238. All archives for French Laos were in French, and are represented in the Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-mer, Paris.

7) Wherever letters of the Thai alphabet are required as page numbers of books in footnotes or as part of the series numbers of documents, Z have used transliterations of the universally known word-names for each letter: e.g.

kai for ก-ไก่ *khai* for ข-ไข่ *khwai* for ค-ควาย etc.

8) Abbreviations

D = Prince Damrong Rachanuphap

GG = Governor General of Indochina

MAE = Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, or the Ministre

RKB = *Rachakitčhanubeksa* (The Royal

RVII = King Rama VII

SOM = Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-mer

TNA = Thai National Archives

TNL = Thai National Library or its mss.

Thai Government Gazette) section

RB = King Rama VI WNL – Wachirayan National Library

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The material has been classified as follows:

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II. Official Thai Archives

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B. Thai National Archives

III. Private Collections of Manuscripts

IV. Unpublished Theses

Published sources

V. Annals

VI. Official or semi-official documentary sources

A. English and French languages

B. Thai language

VII. Newspapers and Other Serials

VIII. Modern Studies of Special Topics

A. Books

1. English and French languages
2. Thai language

B. Learned Articles

1. English and French languages
2. Thai language

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All official French documents cited in this thesis are taken from the following eleven series. Exact details on the contents of individual boxes, volumes, and dossiers involved may be found in my 'Inventaire des documents sur le Siam conservés aux archives de Paris', *Journal of the Siam Society*, lxii/2 (July 1974), 149-206.

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Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale: Bangkok

(cited as 'CC')

Volumes 1-9:1857-1901

Correspondance Politique des Consuls: Khorat, Nan

(cited as 'CPC')

Volume 1 (Khorat): 1895

Volume 2 (Nan): 1895

Correspondence Politique: Siam

(clted as 'CP')

Volumes 1-26:1855-1896

Memoires et Documents: Asie

(cited as 'Asie')

Volume 29-bis: Indochine (1867-1869)

Volume 81: Indochine (1843-1888)

Nouvelle Série: Siam

(cited as 'NS')

Volumes 1-54: 1896-1917

Papiers d'Agents: Mission Pavie

(cited as 'Pavie')

Volumes 1-57: 1887-1895

B. Archives Nationales, Section d'Outre-mer

(cited as 'SOM')

Agence des Colonies

(cited as ‘Agence’)

Cartons 281-282: 1918-1951

Asie 0rientale

Cartons 61-62: Mission Pavie (1888-1896)

Indochine

(cited as ‘Indochine’)

Nouveau Fonds Indochine

(clted’ as ‘NF’)

Siam

Dossiers 1-162: 1660-1690 and 1856-1920

II. Official Thai Archives

A. Thai National Library, Manuscripts Section

(cited as ‘TNL’)

Documents from the reign of Rama I

(cited as ‘Rl’)

Documents from the reign of Rama II

(cited as ‘R2’)

Documents from the reign of Rama III

(cited as ‘R3’)

Documents from the reign of Rama IV

(cited as ‘R4’)

Documents from the reign of Rama V

(cited as ‘R5’)

The documents from the first four reigns are arranged according to reign (A.D. 1782-1809, 1809-1824, 1824-1851, and 1851-1868), divided according to years in the Chulasakkarat calendar, and subdivided randomly within years into numbered manuscript items. A manuscript item may have more than one document copied in it; and not all the documents are necessarily from the same calendar year. For example, the notation ‘R3/1200/9’ denotes: the reign of Rama III. the Chulasakkarat year 1200 (26 Mar. 1838-15 Mar. 1839), item 9.

Documents from the reign of Rama V are divided into numbered bundles and subdivided into numbered manuscript items. For example, the notation ‘R5/2/17’ denotes: the reign of Rama V, bundle number 2, manuscript item number 17. The bundles were catalogued at two separate times; and two separate indexes with overlapping bundle numbers are still in use. All items taken from the *Old Index* are listed below; and the bundle number in each reference taken from these documents is followed by the notation ‘old’.

R5/248 (old)/…

R5/269 (old)/…

R5/270 (old)/…

R5/271 (old)/…

R5/272 (old)/…

All documents not containing this notation have been taken from the *New Index*.

Documents concerning the Lao states prior to 1782 (the year in which Bangkok was founded) are almost nonexistent. A dozen items concerning the Luang Phrabang and Wiangčhan kingdoms for the years 1770-1781 only have survived. The pre-Bangkok documents were otherwise all destroyed when the old capital of Ayutthaya was sacked by the Burmese in 1767.

B. Thai National Archives

Ministry of Commerce and Communications

(cited as ‘P’)

Rama VII

P5.2: Railway Department

P9: Co-operatives

Ministry of Defence

(cited as ‘K’)

Rama V

K9.0: Armaments

K13.2: Military organisation

K13.3: Conscription

Rama VI

K1.0: Miscellaneous

K2.0: Decrees and Royal Acts

K3.0: Government officials

K7.0: Conscription

Rama VII

K1.0: Miscellaneous

Ministry of Finance

(cited as ‘Kh’)

Rama V

Khl3.2: Levies in kind

Khl9: Pensions and gratuities

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

(cited as ‘T’)

Rama V

T2so: Lao emigration

T3France: Foreign Ministers, diplomats in Thailand

T5.1(Japan-France): Litigation of foreign subjects

T6: Foreign treaties relating to Thailand

T6ang: British treaties relating to Thailand

T12khwai: Thai princes and officials

Rama VI

T4: Foreign Ministers, diplomats in Thailand

Ministry of the Interior

(cited as ‘M’)

Rama V

M1.0: Miscellaneous

M1.1: Correspondence received

M1.3: Proclamations and Acts

M1.4: Peasantry and Royal Peasants

M2.1: Delineating provincial areas

M2.3: Appointments and transfers of officials

M2.5: District Officers

M2.6: Training of officials

M2.8: Headmen

M2.12kaiČh: despatches from Čhampasak

M2.12kaiLP: despatches from Luang Phrabang

M2.12kaiNR: despatches from Nakhòn Ratchasima

M2.12kaiSalawan: despatches from Salawan

M2.12kaiUbon: despatches from Ubon

M2.12kaiNK: despatches from Nòngkhai

M2’I2khai: Provincial edicts

M2.14: Inspections

M2.18: Holy Men’s rebellions

M2.19: Census

M2.21kai: French subjects and proteges

M2.25: Famines and migrations

M24.1: Construction of roads, bridges, waterways

M46: Nakhòn Ratchasima Circle

M52: Phetchabun Circle

M57: Isan Circle

M59: Udòn Circle

M62.1: Provincial towns prior to the Thesaphiban circles

M64: Hò invasions

Rama VI

M1: Miscellaneous

M2: Proclamations and Acts

M3.1: Officials

M3.2: Delineating provincial areas M 3.4: Famines and floods

M10: Gendarmerie

M15.1: Roads, bridges, waterways M15.2: Dykes

M16.1: Beasts of burden

M16.2: Elephants

M18.1: Levies in kind, commutations

M20: Various circles

M26: Isan Circle

M28: Udòn Circle

Rama VII

M2: Proclamations and Acts

M4.1: Provincial Administration inspections

M4.3: Delineating provincial areas

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Ministry of Public Instruction

(cited as ‘S’)

Rama V

S5kai-baimai: Provincial schools

S8.4: Provincial bhikkhus and ecclesiastical chiefs

S12: Centralisation of religion and education

S13: Buddha images and monuments

S16: Royal Acts concerning the Sangha

Rama VI

S2: Proclamations and royal Acts

S4: Schools

S9.1: Construction and renovation

S10: Centralisation of religion and education

S14.1: Circle, province, and district patriarchs

Rama VII

S4: Schools

Special Collections

Confidential Documents concerning France and Britain

(cited as ‘F’)

Rama V-VI

Fl7: Military conflict with France

Fl8.1: War on the right bank of the Mekong River

F20: Frenchmen in Udòn Circle

Special Volumes

(cited as ‘PS’)

Correspondence of the Royal Secretariate. Of importance to this thesis were volumes 6, 9, and 25 of general correspondence from the 1870s and 1880s.

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III. Private Collections of Manuscripts

France: Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris

Papiers d'Agents: Mission Pavie

(cited as 'Pavie')

Papers of Auguste Pavie, vice-consul (without exequatur) to Luang Phrabang 1887-1891, and consul general and minister resident to Siam 1892-1895. Papers of the numerous members of his mission. There are 57 numbered and bound volumes of documents, plus two boxes of unbound papers.

Thailand: Thai National Archives, Bangkok

Private Papers of King Rama V

(cited as 'B')

Of particular interest was the following series:

R5 Bl.lkai: Correspondence

Private Papers of Prince Damrong Rachanuphap

(cited as 'B')

Papers of Prince Damrong, Minister of Interior 1892-1915 and Director of the National Library 1915-1932.

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V. Annals

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