

I N T R O D U C T I O N

This is a sociological study of religion as practised among the ethnic Thai people of present day Thailand. It is a study of the social role of religion in Thai Society, in an historical perspective. Thais were the original residents of Kwangsi/Szechwan/Yunnan areas in the present Southwest China. Around the 7th century onwards, they seem to have migrated southward under pressure of Han people and Tibetans to settle in their present day homeland. In this new land, Thais fought with the ethnic Mon-khmer, who had already established a prosperous kingdom at Angkor. Upon conquest of Angkor the Thai took over from Khmers the Buddhist religion, and the Brahmanical ritual and legal patterns. They assimilated these cultural borrowals and adapted them by compatibility to suit their ethnic and cultural characteristics. This whole saga of Thai people and the structural evolution of their state and culture has been brought out in Chapter I, "Thai Society in^a Historical Perspective".

This study is primarily concerned with social functions of religion whereas its origin, form and content are analytically subsidiary. The analysis centres around the role of Buddhist religious values that legitimize institutions and their interaction within the social order. Along with language,

religious values also provide the means for socialization within the primary institutions of family, kin and community. While the secondary institutions of economy, polity and education provide the conditioning environment for institutional living, their own pattern maintenance is buttressed by religious values. These and other considerations have been discussed in Chapter II, "Thai Social Structure : Institutions and Community".

The Thai religious system which is dominated by the Theravada form of Buddhism as practised by Thai Buddhists is analysed at two levels. Firstly it is at the level of theological postulates and ethical beliefs inclusive of folk magic and superstition. This ideological apparatus of Thai religiosity, both at the elite and the folk levels, has been brought out in Chapter III, "Thai Religious System : A General View". The second level of analysis is organizational which consists of formal hierarchical arrangements of statuses, roles, and associations like missions monasteries, and also to voluntary groupings like sects. It also refers to the action content of rites, rituals, ceremonies and periodic collective gatherings to promote the religious causes. These organisational aspects are discussed in Chapter IV, "Buddhasasana : The Religious System of Thai Buddhism". It may be mentioned, however, that Buddhism differentiates between

ascetic monks and the lay followers who are gainfully employed householders. The former are organized into the Buddhist Sangha or Ascetic Order. The latter are supposed to strive for worldly prosperity with a sense of public morality, and contribute a reasonable portion for religious causes and thereby earn religious merit. Thus for the householders Buddhism presents an active this-worldly ethic.

In Thailand and as elsewhere, religion and religious institutions consolidate and thrive within the conditioning context of societal survival, and sustenance. Buddhist Organization in Thailand is part of the normative and regulatory mechanism, along with the State and the Government, as in other countries following Theravada Buddhism. When Thais borrowed Buddhism from the Khmers of Angkor, they also borrowed the Brahmanical politico-legal system of state organization. Thus the political symbol of Devaraja or divine kingship accompanied the religious symbols of Buddha the enlightened, Dhamma or the normative autonomy, and Sangha or the Fellowship of ascetic monks led by the venerated elders. In Theravada Buddhism the secular authority and religious regulation go hand in hand for a normative ordering of societal living. Chapter V, "Religion and the Polity", discusses this unique interrelation of Church and State till it was finally disjuncted under the Western impact of science, technology and rationalism in the 19th century. The new political culture

brought in reforms that replaced slavery and feudal Sakdina system of land management based on serf labour. Finally in 1932 the traditional patriarchal monarchy was overthrown by an indigenous band of western educated bureaucrats - both civil and military. The country was transformed into a constitutional monarchy with all the elaborate formal apparatus of liberal parliamentary democracy. However, the entrenched economic and political upper strata allied in reducing it to a mere formality. The country since then has been under thinly veiled totalitarian rule.

The basic cause of this retarded revolution could be found in the underdeveloped primary economy of the ethnic Thai people in which the commercial, credit and industrial superstructure has all along been wholly managed, owned and controlled by the ethnic Chinese minority, in subsidiary partnership with other foreign minorities. The stranglehold of European commercial colonialism and exploitation could not be shaken till the mid-twenties of this century. Even thereafter the Thai as intellectual elites manning the country's civil and military bureaucracy, have simply joined hands with the non-Thai economic elites to take away a large share of income from the primary agricultural producer of rural Thailand. This economic stagnation and helplessness, unrelieved by Thai leadership - either religious or politico-

military, is discussed in Chapter VI, "Religion and the Economy".

While undergoing the crises of transition into development and modernity, the Thai nation did not have any help from its Religious Order. In fact since the time of King Chulalongkorn the polity has kept the religious elites away from the modern educational field. The consequence was detrimental to religious institutions since the monkhood remained unrelated to the impact of science and scientific spirit. A more harmful consequence was the blocking of the mobility, which the Wat organization provided all along, to the ablest from the peasant masses to gain entry into the urban world of civic authority. In recent time the state has become aware of this alienating gap and polarization between the elite classes and the peasant masses in the nation. In order to reverse this harmful trend the state is again trying to restore to the 'Religious Order' some kind of partnership in educational and welfare activities. The resultant trends are discussed in Chapter VII, "Religion and the Education".

Would the religious Order regain its intellectual lead and its former charisma, to bring the message of autonomous striving for this-worldly perfection and progress to its people? Will it bring to the elites an orientation of non-exploitation

and non-violence towards the public at large? Will they restore the faith in freedom and fearlessness, truthfulness and commitment to humanness as the Buddha had preached? In other words will the Sangha Order restore Dhamma i.e. normativeness to all, especially the elites? These are some of the questions posed in retrospect in the last Chapter VIII, "Religion and Modernization in Contemporary Thailand". The answer is a problematic and depends on manifold factors as discussed in the chapter. The Thais need the Charisma - both religious and secular - for their sustained march into modernity, with a balanced development, both material and spiritual.

During January-July 1975, I did some relevant field investigation in Thailand. I stayed in and observed Wats (monasteries), one each at Wangchai and Nampong villages, and one in Khonkaen municipal town. These three communities are in Khonkaen province of Thailand, 434 K.M. from Bangkok to the northeast. Similarly I stayed in Wat Sraket and Wat Mahadhatu in Bangkok-Dhonburi Metropolis. In all I talked to 229 monks and 419 laymen at these places. These data have been used both for comments and tabulation at different points in the writing.

Finally, I wish to express my sense of gratitude to Prof. K. C. Panchanadikar (Professor and Head, Department

of Sociology, M. S. Univ., Baroda) my supervisor, for his valuable guidance and comments. While he was away at El Colegio de México, in Mexico City, on a joint Mexican and India Govt. (I.C.C.R.) assignment; during Jan.'74-Aug.'76, I worked under guidance of Dr. (Mrs.) J. M. Panchanadikar, Senior Reader in Sociology at the Department of Sociology, to whom I am equally grateful. During my stay for study in Baroda (June, 1970 to 1979), a good number of times, both of them went out of their way, to help me out, from my academic and nonacademic problems and difficulties, which I shall always remember with pleasure. The staff members in the Department of Sociology, and at the Hansa Mehta Library, (Central Library, M.S.Univ.) were always helpful to me. So were other well-wishers of mine, both Indian and Thai. To them all, and my Alma Mater, I am both appreciative and grateful. I should also record my special obligation to Mahachula Buddhist University, Bangkok, Thailand, and its kind authorities, without whose basic assistance the present study would never have been possible.

Phramaha Prachitr Mahāhīng

Baroda-2

February, 1979.

CHAPTER I

THAI SOCIETY IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER I

Thai Society in a Historical Perspective

The Kingdom of Thailand called "Pradesh Thai" in the Thai language, was formerly known as Siam for centuries. It is a torrid and agreeable Southeast Asian kingdom about the size of France, lying in the heart of Indo-China. Its people racially belong to the Mongoloid Stock, ethnically to the Thai of Siam, and by religion are predominately Buddhists. Most, if not all, students of Thai history are agreed upon the northern origin of the Thais in the Yunnan region of the present-day South China. They have occupied the region of modern "Thailand" by migration and conquest, as discussed in detail hereafter.

The terms "Thailand and Thai" on the one hand and "Siam and Siamese" on the other, have been a source of some confusion. As a language and culture group, the Thai, T'ai or Tai live in Thailand, Laos, northern Vietnam, Southwest China and northern Burma. In various places, these people are known as Thai, Shan, Lao and in the case of those living in the Chao Phya Valley, Siamese. The present kingdom of Thailand was officially named "Siam" or "Pradesh Sayam" until 1939 and from 1946 to 1949. In 1939 and again in 1949 the name, "Thailand" or "Pradesh Thai" was adopted and thenceforth remains in use. In this work, the

terms are used interchangeably. However, "Siam" and "Siamese" will be used when the discussion preferably refers to a pre-1932 situation while "Thailand" and "Thai" will be used when referring to the later period.

Land and People :

Geographically, comprising a territory of about 514,000 square kilometres extending from 5° 40' to 20° North latitude and from 97° 30' to 105° 45' East longitude the kingdom is evidently bound, clockwise, on the east by Cambodia, on the south by Malaysia, on the west and north by Burma and on the northeast by Laos as shown in the Map I. The coastline extends roughly 1875 kilometres on the Gulf of Thailand and about 740 kilometres on the Indian Ocean. Bangkok is the capital and also the principal port of the country.¹ The country falling entirely within the tropical climatic region is made up of river basins with plains, forested mountains and plateaux. The Thai calendar is traditionally supposed to comprise three seasons : hot, from February through May; rainy, from June through October; and cool, from November through January.

On the basis of topography climate and ecology, the country may be divided into four regions : the northern, northeastern, central and southern or peninsula. Of these,

the northern region covers an area of about 65,639* square miles, lying between the Salween and the Mekhong rivers. The area is made up of alluvial soil favourable for rice cultivation and is interspersed by mountains. Its dominant inhabitants are Thai, usually called "Thai Nua" or "northern Thai". There are also several tribals such as the Karen, the Meo and the Yao. The central part of this area is drained by the tributaries of the four main rivers : the Wang, the Ping, the Yom and the Nam, all of which make their water courses southward and join together at the estuary of Paknam Pho in Nakonsawan province to form the Chao Phya river, watering in the Central Plain. The ridges in this area are thickly forested and yield any types of valuable woods. Chiangmai, Lampang and Tak are the main densely populated and urbanized centres.

The northeastern part holds a vast plateau including the Korat plateau sloping towards southeast and drained by the Mekhong river which ^{forms} the northeastern and eastern boundaries between Thailand on one hand and Laos and Cambodia on the other. The inland of the region is watered by the Nampong, the Chee and the Mun rivers. The area is considered as dry and poor. It is the biggest one in the country with an area of 65,724* square miles approximately. The region is dominantly

* The figure is adjusted from Thailand : Statistic Yearbook 1970-1971, No. 29, (Bangkok : National Statistical Office, 1972), pp. 3-4.

inhabited by the Thai, usually called Thai Isan or Thai-Lao because their life patterns are very much the same as those of the people of Modern Laos. Furthermore, living in isolated groups are the "Phu Thai" scattered in Karasin, Nakhon Panom and Sakonnakorn provinces whose former homeland was in Laos.² There are other minorities of the Khmer origins in Surin, Srisaket and Buriram provinces. The Vietnamese refugee emigrants are found concentrated in Nongkhai, Udondhani, Sakonnakorn and Nakhon Panom provinces. Korat, Ubol, Khonkaen and Udondhani are main urbanized centres in the northeastern area.

The central basin consists of lowland plains watered by the Chao Phya river and other river systems. The region covers an area of about 39,992* square miles and includes the southern portion of the Chao Phya valleys or the Chao Phya Delta. The central areas of the region are alluvial plains for rice cultivation, and are surrounded by hills. This is known as the Central Plain of Thailand, the largest and most fertile plain of the country. Here live the Thai or Siamese. There are in this area small communities of the Mons and Cambodians of the Mon-Khmer family, Annamites, Malays and Burmans mostly Tavoyans, a tribe akin to the Aracanese of Burma.³ The foreign minorities especially the Chinese and Indians are concentrated in the twin city of Bangkok-Dhomburi and other urbanized centres. (In fact, the two ethnic groups are concentrated in the urbanized centres

all over the kingdom). Bangkok, the present capital of the country, is the centre for political, economic and cultural activities of the nation. The main regional centres such as Ayudhya, the former capital of Siam, Lopburi and Supanburi are known to have played a significant role in the nation-building.

The last part is the southern or peninsula region made up of an area of about 27,100^{*} square miles, which is flanked on the west by a high mountain range, the Tenessarim, forming a part of the frontier between Thailand and Burma. To the south, this range of many names becomes the spine of the Malay Peninsula. There are many passes and gaps through the mountains but there has never been unlimited access, primarily because of military rivalry between Burma and Thailand. The eastside consists of a long gentle sloping coastline, mostly sandy, touching the Gulf of Thailand. In the southeast, in addition, are the Cardamon Hills which seal off the narrow strip of coast surrounding Chandaburi province. This region is sandy, mountainous and rich in tin and wolfram mines, rubber and fruit trees, but small quantity of rice. It is by and large peopled by the Thai, but in the southernmost part bordering on Malaysia, the inhabitants of the four bordering provinces and other adjacent provinces are predominantly of Malayan blood and Malay-speaking in rural areas.⁴ Nakorn Srithammarat is known as the cultural centre of the southern Thai. Table 1.1

indicates the major ethnic groups resident in Thailand as in 1960.

Table 1.1 : Thailand : Population by major ethnic groups, 1960.

Ethnic groups	Approximate population in thousands in 1960	Geographical location
Thai	21,050	
Major subgroups		
Thai or Siamese		Central region, Peninsula, Southeast Coast.
Northeastern Thai (Lao)		Northeast
Northern Thai (Lao)		North
Minor subgroups		
Phuthai		'Northeastern part of Northeast.
Shan		Near Burmese border
Lu		Near Laos in North.
Chinese	3,000	In urban and commercial operations throughout the country and in mining in South
Indians	10	Commercial operations throughout the country.
Malays	800	Near Malaysian border.
Cambodians	225	Near Cambodian border.
Kui	120	Northeast
Kaleung	30	Northeast
Vietnamese	75	Northeast
Karens	70	Near Burmese border.

Source : J. R. Behrman, Supply Response in Underdeveloped Agriculture: A Case of Four Major Annual Crops in Thailand, 1937-1963 (Amsterdam : North-Holland Publishing Company, 1968), p. 36.

Demographic Features :

Thailand is not overpopulated. It accomodates its population of about 42,550,000 out of whom about 21,440,000 are male and 21,110,000 are female.⁵ The illiteracy of the country's total population aged 15 and over is, according to the 1970 population census, as high as 11.73%,⁶ and the per capita income (GNP) is Baht 6,764 (20 Baht equals about US \$ 1).⁷

Furthermore, land is by and large individually owned throughout the country and though the size of the holdings varies from region to region,⁸ nowhere in the country as a whole is the pressure on land comparable with that experienced by some other Asian countries.⁹ Table 1.2 shows regional population density varying from over 260 persons per square mile of land in the central region to 114 in the northern. This is, of course, not the whole story.

Table 1.2 : Thailand : Population density by region, 1970.

Area	Popula- tion(in thousands)	% of total popula- tion	Area (square miles)	Area (% of total)	Population density per square mile
Central Region	10,392	30.43	39,992	20.15	260
Northeast Region	12,023	35.20	65,724	33.12	183
North Region	7,468	21.87	65,639	33.08	114
South Region	4,269	12.50	27,100	13.66	158
Thailand	34,152	100	198,455	100	172

Source : Adapted from Thailand : Statistic Yearbook 1970-1971 No. 29,
(Bangkok : National Statistical Office, 1972), Table 12, pp.37-39.

Furthermore, the population distribution pattern can be seen in terms of urbanization. In Thailand the urban centres may be equated with municipal areas. In comparison with the rest of the developing world, Thailand is not a very urbanized country. According to registry figures in 1970 only 14.6 per cent of the total population lived in municipal areas.¹⁰ The municipal areas throughout the kingdom given in Table 1.3 show a number of the urban centres in Thailand.

Table 1.3 : Distribution of Municipalities in Thailand by size and classification, December 31, 1971.

Population size	Nakorn (city)	Muang (Town)	Tambon (small town)	Total
100,000 +	1*	-	-	1
75,000 - 99,999	1	1	-	2
50,000 - 74,999	-	4	-	4
40,000 - 49,999	-	7	-	7
30,000 - 39,999	-	9	-	9
20,000 - 29,999	-	16	2	18
10,000 - 19,999	-	29	16	45
5,000 - 9,999	-	15	14	29
2,500 - 4,999	-	1	3	4
Total	2	82	35	119

Source : Visit Prachuabmoh, ~~and~~ et al., The Rural and Urban Population : Comparative Profiles (Bangkok : Chula Longkorn University, Institute of Population Studies, 1972), Table B 2, p. 88.

* Only Bangkok-Dhomburi Metropolis with a population of 3,022,244 is in this category.

Still further, on the basis of religion the population of Thailand can, according to the 1960 population census totaling 26,257,916 taken from the National Office, be distributed as shown in Table 1.4.

Origins and Early Migration of Thai People :

The origin of the Thai race is one of those moot points often debated by a number of scholars and their former homeland is very much in doubt. Almost all the students of Thai history, both Thai and foreign, hold that originally the Thais are an offshoot of the race whose homeland with its capital at Nanchao was in historical time in present day south China. The history of Thailand, as it were, began circa 650 A.D., not in Thailand of today, but elsewhere in Yunnan of south China (see Map II).¹¹ Before the kingdom of Nanchao, they, according to William Dodd, appear to have been inhabitants of Szechwan further north.¹² But Credner holds a different view that they came to Tali region of Yunnan from Kwangsi in the east.¹³ The present distribution of the Thai-speaking peoples in Szechwan, Yunnan and Kwangsi makes both theories plausible. Whichever may prove to be correct, the present Thai peoples of Southeast Asia appear to have come into the southern area from Yunnan, spreading out into Thailand, northern Burma (Shan) and the upper valleys of Tonkin (Lao, Thai and Tho).¹⁴

The people of modern Thailand are evidently said to have

Table 1.4 : Distribution of population by religion, 1960.

N = 26,257,916					
Adherents	Number	P e r c e n t a g e			
		Whole Kingdom	Central Region	Northern Region	Northeastern Region
Buddhists ⁺	25,024,840	95.3	38.1	15.0	37.0
Moslems	1,025,569	3.9	18.7	0.4	0.1
Christians	150,053	0.6	50.4	20.6	26.7
Hindus	3,483	*	80.6	3.9	6.7
Sikhs	9,712	*	72.6	10.5	8.3
Others	25,526	*	81.6	3.8	2.4
Unidentified	4,754	*	50.6	7.8	21.4
Agnostics	13,979	*	31.0	58.2	1.7
					9.1

Notes : + = The figure includes the Chinese who profess both Confucius and Mahayana Buddhism.

* indicates the percentage below 0.1%.

Source : Adapted from Thailand : Statistic Yearbook 1970-1971, op. cit., p. 60
and Thailand : Official Yearbook 1968 (Bangkok : Government Printing House), p. 529.

gradually migrated southward from Nanchao due to heavy pressure from Chinese or Hans in the North and Northeast and the Tibetans to the northwest.¹⁵ The land which is now called modern Thailand was dominantly inhabited by the earlier ethnic groups of the peoples e.g., the Semang of Nigrito origin and the Sakai of Indonesian origin to the south; the Mon-khmers in the Menam (Chao Phya) valley as far as Pegu; and the Lawa and the Tibeto-Burmans (who have survived in Thailand today as the Meo, the Karen, the Yao, the Lahu etc.) to the northwest.¹⁶ In this connection Phya Anuman Rajadhon is very suggestive :

A thousand or more years ago, most of Thailand apart from the southern area in the Malay Peninsula was under domination of the Hinduized Mon-speaking people of Dvaravadi (457-657 A.D.) and the Khmer or Cambodian or Kampuchean Empire (957-1257 A.D.) while the Malay Peninsula was under the suzerainty of Srivijaya, the Hinduized Sumatran Empire (657-1157 A.D.). During these times the Thais, as a race emigrated gradually from their homelands in Southern China into the Indo-Chinese Peninsula.¹⁷

Eventually after a long journey and many trials by 1238 A.D. the Thais, the ancestors of Siamese, successfully established their own independent state with the capital at Sukhodaya upon their victory over the indigenous inhabitants.¹⁸ Then onward they were on the whole known as "Siamese" and their land as "Siam".¹⁹ In due course of time the kingdom established its most celebrated capital at Ayudhaya (1350-1767) which in

sequence was replaced by the new capital at Dhonburi (1767-1782). The kingdom of Dhonburi was in turn substituted by the present capital at Bangkok (1782-). The current name of the country, "Thailand", or "Pradesh Thai" was officially adopted for the present kingdom, replacing the former name "Siam" since 1949.

The Rise and Growth of Thai Statehood :

The political history of the Thai state may be divided into six major periods. A brief sketch of important events in the six-fold Thai Chronology are indicated in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 : Summary of Thai Chronology

Date	Era or Dynasty: Important historical happenings	Noted rulers	Dates
I. C.650-C.1253 :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nanchao beginnings in the Ancient Homeland in the Regions of Kwangsi, Yunnan and Szechwan. Gradual decline of Nanchao and Thai migration southward under Chinese pressure 	King Sinulo King Pilaoko King Kolofeng	C.650- ? C.740-750 C.750-779 780-1253
II.C.1238-1350 :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sukhodaya Era Invention of Thai alphabet (1283) Fall of Sukhodaya 	King Sri Indradit King Ramkamhaeng King Lithai	1238-1270 1275-1317 1317-1347 1350
III. 1350-1767 :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ayudhya Era Capture of Ankor Tom (1393) 	King Ramadhibadi King Trailok	1350-1369 1448-1488

Table 1.5 Cont.

Date	Era or Dynasty: Important historical happenings	Noted rulers	Dates
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution of the India-Khmer mode of bureaucratic polity • First contact with Europeans (1511) • First capture of Ayudhaya by Burma (1569) • Retaking of Ayudhaya by Prince Naresuan (1584) 	King Maha-chakrapat King Naresuan King Narai	1549-1569 1590-1605 1657-1688
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French Christian Missionaries to Ayudhaya (1662) • Mohamedan Missionaries to Ayudhaya (1668) • Second capture of Ayudhaya by Burma (1767) 	King Ekatat	1758-1767
IV. 1767-1782 :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dhonburi Era • Retaking of Ayudhaya and establishment of new capital at Dhonburi (1767) 	King Taksin	1767-1782
V. 1832 - :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangkok Era • Establishment of Chakri Dynasty and of new capital at Bangkok (1782) • Thai sovereignty over Indo-Chinese states, War with Burma, American Missionaries (1800s) 	King Rama I King Rama II King Rama III	1782-1809 1809-1824 1824-1851

Table 1.5 Cont.

Date	Era or Dynasty: Important historical happenings	Noted rulers	Dates
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bowring Treaty (1855) followed by similar treaties with other western countries 	King Rama IV (Mongkut)	1851-1868
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inauguration of modernization under King Rama V; Loss to France : Laos, Mekhong Enclaves, Battambang and Siemreap (early 1900); Loss to Britain : Malay Peninsula, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu (early 1900). 	King Rama V	1868-1910
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolition of slavery (1905) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Side with allies in World War I (1917) 	King Rama VI	1910-1925
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sayre and recovery of Treaty Equality (1925) 	King Rama VII	1925-1935
VI. 1932 :	The June 1932 Coup and constitutional Monarch		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First National Permanent Constitution of December 1932 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joining World War II (1941) 	King Rama VIII	1935-1946
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> King Rama VIII's assassination 	King Rama IX	1946-
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetition of military coups after the 1932 coup. 		

Source : Constructed partially on the basis of works of W.A.R.Wood : A History of Siam (Bangkok : Chalermnit Bookshop, 1959); and H.G.Quaritch Wales : Ancient Siamese Government and Administration (New York : Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1965).

Early Beginnings in Nanchao :

As already noted, many of the Thai tribes, under varied circumstances, gradually migrated southward from their original homeland in the Yunnan and Kwangsi regions in the present-day South China. Many Thai tribes had made an effort to establish small independent principalities and were engaged in strifes and warfare between themselves as well as against neighbouring tribes. "One such principality rose as the "Kingdom of Nanchao" in Yunnan region of the present-day South China. Fighting many defensive wars against the Hans or the Chinese, Nanchao stabilized its independence from China by the middle of the 7th century A.D."²⁰ However, Nanchao had frequent contacts with China through diplomatic exchanges, trade and war. Its rulers sought marriage into Chinese aristocratic families and sent their sons and nobility to study in China.²¹ Thus the culture of this early Thai kingdom seems to have been influenced by the Chinese.

By the end of the 9th century Nanchao was forced to be a vassal kingdom under China and finally lost its independence in 1253 when conquered by Kublai Khan, the first Chinese Mongol emperor. Thus by force of circumstances the Thais of Nanchao had to migrate further south.²² Thai ethnic groups migrated further south. Some had done so earlier. One group settled in the fertile western region along the Salween and Irrawady rivers now known as the Shans of Burma. They include

some hilly tribes in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland of modern India. This group is called "Thai Yai" (Greater Thai). Another group including the Lao of modern Laos settled in Tonkin in the Mekhong basin. Other moved further south and settled in the regions of Chiangmai, Chiangrai and Payao in northern part of modern Thailand. Others moved further south and established in the lowland now called the Central Plain of modern Thailand. This group is known as "Thai Noi" (Lesser Thai) in contrast to Thai Yai of the Shan states of Burma.²³ By the early 13th century the Thais were well settled in the valleys of the principal river systems - the Irrawady, the Salween, the Chao Phya and the Mekhong rivers.

The Political and Religious Consolidation under Sukhodaya Monarchy :

By 1238 the Thais of the Thai Noi group defeated the Khmers at Sukhodaya and thereat established a Thai state under the first King Sri Indradit who extended his dominations at the expense of Cambodia and Burma.²⁴ His son came to be known "King Ramkamhaeng, the Great" in Thai history.

The establishment of the Sukhodaya kingdom gave Thais a distinct identity as a nation. It was thus a beginning of modern Thailand. It also marks a period of a great cultural development. During the Sukhodayan era the Thais absorbed

cultural elements from various civilizations with which they came in contact. Their composite culture was a mixture of Chinese, Indian and Khmer elements.

However, Thais seem to have carried with them their hydraulic cultural patterns of wet rice cultivation and despotic political system developed under Chinese contacts.

As far as the religious practice is concerned, it is not certain what the religion of the Thais was in their homeland before their exodus from their original home into modern Thailand and before they became the forerunners of the present-day Thais. It is, according to some scholars, almost certain that animism formed their belief and there may, perhaps, have been some traces of Buddhism through Tibet and China.²⁵ Once in the above mentioned valleys they came in contact with Hinduism and Buddhism of Theravada School through the Mons via the Burmese and the Khmers. And since the 13th century the religious form of Theravada Buddhism has been their faith and established into a state religion. It is here through Hinduism and Buddhism that the Thai culture has been expressed, especially the latter to which the arts, architecture and literature of the Thais owe a lot.

Very little is known about the Thai social structure below that of monarchy and feudal nobles. In the days of Sukhodaya the social structure was, according to Wales,

patriarchal in nature. It was organized on the basis of military requirements and kinship. Thanks to incessant wars the social organization consisted of military bands (Mu) based on a territory in terms of Muban (village), Muang (town) and Pradesh (country) under a chief. He was both a civilian headman and a military leader at the village level and owed feudal alliance to Chao Muang (Town Chief) up to the king. On the other hand, the family went in line with monogamy and a simple patriarchal pattern. A father had the upper-hand over the other members of the family. Respect for parents and the family bond were strongest factors. In the first free Siamese kingdom, society resembled a large family under the paternal rule of its king, who, as a father of his people, combined all the functions of government in his own person. After the nomadic stage the bond of kinship had come to be supplemented by the bond of territory or neighbourhood and this resulted in the growth of feudal organization. The administration of the kingdom was primarily carried out directly by the king and a number of feudal nobles. Slavery also existed in the Sukhodaya kingdom.²⁶

The Thai alphabet with all the essential features as of the present day was invented by King Ramkamhaeng of the Sukhodaya kingdom in 1283. This Sukhodayan alphabet was adopted throughout Siam. It had a strong influence also upon the development of writing in the Laos states.²⁷ For all these

achievements the Sukhodaya kingdom has been appropriately designated, "the cradle of Siamese civilization".

The Ayudhya Era :

Shortly after the death of King Ramkamhaeng the Sukhodaya kingdom began to disintegrate. In 1350 Sukhodaya was conquered by Ramadhibadi of Suvarnabhumi or the present Supanburi. He also subjugated the Khmer strongholds of Chandaburi and Lopburi and established his capital at Ayudhya on the strategically sited island in the midstream of the Chao Phya river, some forty miles up the river away from Bangkok.²⁸ In course of time Ayudhya conquered Lannathai (the present northern provinces) to the north, a part of Cambodia including Lopburi and its eastern adjacent Chandabon. To the south it gained control over the middle and lower Menam and much of the Malay peninsula, including Nakorn Srithammarat and Sigora, and extended its conquests as far as Malucca and on the west, Tenassarim and Tavoy in what is now Burma.²⁹

The Ayudhya kingdom was ruled by 33 kings during a long period of about 417 years (1350-1767). In addition to King Ramadhibadi were King Narai, the Great; King Naresuan, the military Hero; King Trailok, the distinguished administrator etc., who made a good deal of developmental contributions to Thai society. The Sukhodayan culture was absorbed by the Thais of Ayudhya. A good number of state laws such as the Palatine

Laws of A.D. 1458, the Laws of the Civil, Military and provincial Hierarchies of A.D. 1454, the Laws of Evidence A.D. 1350 etc. went into force.³⁰ A new system of the national administration was introduced in the reign of King Trailok (1448-1488) and went into operation with good success. The volumes of Thai literatures were brought into public notices. The Thais of Ayudhya had to fight several wars against the neighbouring states especially Burma and Cambodia; sometimes they won the war and were also defeated at times. As a result, there were cultural exchanges between Thailand and her neighbours, which enriched the culture of Ayudhya. During the reigns of King Ramadhibodi II and King Narai the kingdom had its first European contacts. Duarte Fernandez was sent as an emissary to Ayudhya court by Alphonso de Albuquerque, Viceroy of Portuguese India who had just added Malucca to the expanding Portuguese territories in the East. This was followed by the emissaries of Spain, the Netherlands, England and France.³¹

Notably in connection with political development King Trailok, after annexing the Khmer kingdom and the sacking of Ankor Thom in 1431, established a more centralized form of government in which functional specialization replaced, at least in part, the territorial basis of feudal rule, which was operative in the Sukhodaya kingdom and early period of Ayudhya.³² The reorganized structure had two essential parts - a headquarters and a set of provinces. The central (Wang

Rajadhani) headquarters organization of the kingdom included, in addition to king himself, two co-chief ministers known as Aggramahasenabodi, the heads of the civil and military divisions of populace, (Samuhanayok and Samuhaklahom). The military side of the headquarters included four major departments or Krom headed by ministers known as Senabodi, who were the king's councillors. A parallel structure presumably existed on the civil side. The four departments known as Chatustambha were Krom Wang (Palace Department), Krom Phra Klang (Treasury Department), Krom Nakorn Ban or Krom Muang (Department of the Capital) and Krom Na (Department of Lands). The chiefs of these departments known as Senabodi were under the jurisdiction of one or the other of the co-chief ministers and through these to the king. There was also a Department of Religious Administration known as Krom Dhammakarn. Through this the king appointed high church dignitaries and supervised the Buddhist Order to some degree. The central territory also included a relatively small part of the total domain of the king. At the outer or provincial level, it was arranged into provinces or districts and villages for the purpose of control and these were supervised by one or the other of the Senabodi. This administrative structure was associated with the Sakdina system, i.e., the hierarchical ranks with power and prestige based on land granted by a king or head of state (for example a senabodi, the rank of an important department, had a sakdina

over 10,000 rai* of land and the commoner, 25 rai); corvee service or free labour service by freeman for the noble patrons and the king and by slaves.³³ This reorganization resulted in the creation of more clearly defined social institutions based on the Sakdina system which was obviously the base for the formation of the hierarchical classes of the people, namely, the king, the royal family, the officials, the monks, the Brahmans, the freemen and slaves.³⁴ These patterns of the social practices were unmistakably followed till the early period of Bangkok.

The prosperous period of Ayudhaya kingdom came to an end when the ambitious Burmese resumed the interrupted war. Ayudhaya was besieged in 1760 and again in 1765. On April 7, 1767, the city of Ayudhaya, the centre of the then Thai society was captured by Burmese,³⁵ mainly through the inefficiency and corruption of those in power. Ayudhaya was destroyed. The city was burned down; its valuable records were completely destroyed and its works of arts spoiled or removed. Thousands were taken captive to Burma; the aristocracy was decimated. The present Ayudhaya is built at a different location. Where the old city once stood, there is only a tropical jungle pock-marked of archaeological excavations.

Dhonburi Period of Liberation :

This was the most difficult time for Thais as never

* 1 Rai = $\frac{2}{5}$ acre

experienced before. The country split into five separate independent principalities. The country found a strong leader in Phya Taksin who escaped before the collapse of the capital with the band of five-hundred brave men to eastern Thailand. With the help from other patriotic Thais such as Phramaha Montri (who was later made Phya Surasih) and Luang Yokkrabat (who was later on made Phya Chakkri and became a founder of Chakkri Dynasty, King Rama I). Taksin organized the inhabitants against the invaders and was able to liberate Siam from the Burmese within six months after the Burmese capture and destruction of the capital. He established a new capital at Dhonburi and was crowned as King Taksin (1767-1782).³⁶ Later he successfully consolidated his power at the expense of the other four independent major provincial principalities. Throughout his reign the main task was a reconstruction of the new Thai kingdom and the war against the neighbouring states especially Burma. At his death in 1782 his domains covered all of former Ayudhya, the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. His sway extended over most of the present day Laos, including Laung Prabang.³⁷ He was one of the historical heroes of Thailand.

King Taksin was succeeded to the throne by his honourable aide, General Chakkri, with the title of King Ramadhibodi or King Rama I, who became a founder of the present Chakkri Dynasty and whose successors have held the throne down to the present time.

King Rama I, for the purpose of the military strategy, gave up the capital at Dhonburi and moved it across the Chao Phya river to Bangkok just opposite Dhonburi. From then on nine kings have ruled the kingdom of Thailand. The two most celebrated kings were King Mongkut (Rama IV : 1851-1868) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V : 1868-1910) whose contribution to modernize Thai society will be soon discussed.

The Chakri Dynasty at Bangkok :

During the reign of Rama I (1782-1809) there was a constant trouble between Thailand and Burma. By and large he won the wars against the Burmese and regained control of the Malay states of Kedah, Pattani, Kelantan and Trengganu which had not been subjected to Siam earlier. He tried to restore the old Ayudhayan institutions, called back former officials and salvaged what remained of the few laws and records that had not been destroyed during the fall of Ayudhya.³⁸

The reign of Rama II (1809-1824) saw the renewal of contacts with European nations. Carlos Manual Silveira, a Portuguese commercial envoy and Dr. John Crawford of East India Company came to Bangkok in 1818 and 1822 respectively. The former subsequently concluded a Commercial Agreement with Siam while the latter failed to do so. Nevertheless from that time onwards British trade with Siam began to increase and the first English merchant James Hunter settled in Bangkok shortly after-

wards.³⁹ Meanwhile the war between Thailand and Burma had continued and finally ended after Anglo-Burmese war when Burma was annexed by the British in 1852.

During the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V the country saw a new development in its history. Thailand entered a new era of its relations with Western countries like Great Britain, France, Prussia, the U.S.A., etc. On the basis of mutual understanding the commercial and political treaties were concluded between Thailand and several Western countries. Many foreign scholars such as Robert Morant, James McCathy, Dr. George McFarland and Monsier Rolin-Jacquemins were invited into the country to advise the government and develop natural resources. At the same time several Thai students of royal blood and commonality were sent to European countries on King's scholarship to take training in the fields of arts, science and technology.

More significantly during the days of King Rama V slavery was quietly abolished. The traditional structure of the government based on King Trailok's model was radically reformed. Modern systems of education, justice, public health, post and telegraph, and railways were introduced. However, during his reign Thailand was compelled to cede some parts of the country to two colonial powers in order to preserve its independence. Cambodia including Battambang and Siem Reap and the present day

Laos were unwillingly ceded to France and so also were Penang, Kedah, Trengganu and some parts of present Burma to Great Britain.

After the reign of King Rama V the country had a spell of a frustrating period under King Rama VI (1910-1925) and King Rama VII (1925-1935). They were neither active in the national politics nor skilful in state administration nor in diplomacy while the whole world was engulfed in the first World War and an economic depression followed thereafter.

The long period of absolute monarchy came to an end during the reign of King Rama VII. A political system based on constitutional and parliamentary model was adopted in 1932. From that time onwards the country has been under constitutional monarchy.

The Constitutional Monarchy :

The events which took place in 1932 mark many aspects of social, economic and political changes in Thai social history. A successful coup d'état on June 24, 1932 was led by the European-trained Thai junior officials, both military and civilian, under leadership of Dr. Pridi Phanomyong on the civilian side and Phya Pahol and Colonel Luang Pibul on the military side. The coup resulted formally in the creation of constitutional monarchy more or less on the British parliamentary model. However, the real political power has continued to vest

with one or other faction from the ruling oligarchy, at the time - change over being effected through coups. Thus despotism has become the prevailing force in Thai society and constitutional democracy a mere formality.

Within a period of 45 years under the so-called constitutional regime, 37 national cabinets headed by 15 prime ministers have been installed in office. During this period the country has experienced seven military coups. The most recent ones were the sixth and seventh military coups of 1976 and 1977 respectively, resulting in the creation of National Administration Reform Council (NARC). The former suspended the National Constitution of October 1974 and put the country under the Interim Constitution of October 1976 under which the sixth coup installed the 37th national government whereas the seventh coup, upon bringing down the 37th government, has installed the 38th one in the power in 1977 to rule the country under guidance of the NARC (later on known as National Policy Council) and National Legislative Assembly respectively. The most recently revised permanent constitution was passed by the NLA and has become the country's effective law in December, 1978.

Ever since the coup of 1932 Thailand has been facing the problem of the nation-building in terms of national polity and economy and cultural and institutional adjustments under the

impact of modern science and technology imported from western industrialized societies.

The Thai culture is, according to M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, the former Thai Prime Minister, in a state of utter confusion, and probably has reached the highest degree of confusion ever known in Thai history.⁴⁰

Notes and References

1. National Statistical Office, Thailand : Statistic Yearbook 1970-71, No. 29, (Bangkok, 1972), p. 2; and Thailand : Official Yearbook (Bangkok : The Government Printing House, 1968), pp. 1-2.
2. A. Thomas Kirsch, "Development and Mobility Among the Phu Thai of Northeast," in Robert O. Tilman, ed., Man, State and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1969), p. 482.
3. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, The Culture of Thailand. (Bangkok : the National Culture Institute, 1956), p. 3.
4. Ibid. p. 30; and T.H.Silcock, "Outline of Economic Development 1945-65" in T.H.Silcock, ed., Thailand : Social and Economic Studies in Development. (Canberra : Australian National University Press, 1967), p. 2.
5. Ministry of Education of Thailand, Statistics Booklet on Private Education, prepared by the Office of Private Education (in Thai) B.E. 2518 (1975), p. 10.
6. The Bulletin of Education (in Thai) published by the National Education Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand, No. 5, (August 1977), p. 12.
7. The Office of the National Board on Economic and Social Development, re quoting Statistics Booklet on Private Education, op. cit., p. 10.
8. G. Wijeyewardene, "Some Aspects of Rural Life in Thailand" in T.H.Silcock, ed., op. cit. p. 76.
9. Jane Bunnag, Buddhist Monk, Buddhist layman : A Study of Urban Monastic Organization in Central Thailand (Cambridge : The Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 10.

10. Visit Prachuabmoh and others, The Rural and Urban Population in Thailand : Comparative Profiles, (Bangkok : Chulalongkorn University, Institute of Population Studies, 1972), p. 5.
11. W.A.R. Wood, A History of Siam (Bangkok : Chalermnit Bookshop, 1959), pp. 31-32; D.G.E. Hall, A History of Southeast Asia (London : Macmillan, 1960), p. 144; Phya Anuman Rajadhon, op. cit. p. 4; and Laung Vichitr Vadakarn, Siam and Suwannabhumi (Bangkok : Bangkok Printing 1933, in Thai), p. 39.
12. William C. Dodd, The Tai Race (Cedar, Rapids, Iowa, 1923).
13. W. Credner, "Cultural and Geographical Observations Made in the Tali (Yunnan) Region with Special Regard to the Nanchao Problem" in Journal of Siam Society, Vol. 27, Part II, 1935; pp. 135-152.
14. John F. Embree, "Thailand : A loosely Structured Social System", in Hans-Dieter Evers ed., A loosely Structured Social Systems : Thailand in Comparative Perspective, Cultural Report No. 17 (New Haven : Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), p. 3.
15. Wood, op. cit. pp. 40-42; H.G. Quaritch Wales, Siamese State Ceremonies (London : Bernard & Quaritch, 1931), p. 12; Hall op. cit., pp. 6-11; and Virginia Thomson, Thailand : The New Siam (New York : Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1967), pp. 7-14.
16. Wood, op. cit. p. 35; and Thomson, op. cit. p. 16.
17. Rajadhon, op. cit. p. 4.
18. Wood, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
19. Luang Vichitr Vadakarn, op. cit., p. 15; and Prince Chulachakrapongse, Lord of Lives (Bangkok : Klangvidya Publishers, 1974, in Thai), pp. 14-15.

20. Wood, op. cit., p. 32; Thomson, op. cit., p. 15; and Phra Sarasas, My Country Thailand (Bangkok : Golden Service Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 11.
21. Wood, op. cit., pp. 33-35; and Hall, op. cit., p. 144.
22. Wood, op. cit., p. 35; Thomson, op. cit., p. 16; Rajadhon, op. cit., p. 5; and Chulachakrapongse, op. cit., p. 5.
23. Rajadhon, op. cit., pp. 5-6; Hall, op. cit., p. 144; and Chulachakrapongse, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
24. Wood, op. cit., pp. 51-52; Hall, op. cit.,^{pp.} 11-12; and Thomson, op. cit., p. 19.
25. Wood, op. cit., pp. 38-39; and Phya Anuman Rajadhon, A Brief Survey of Cultural Thailand (Bangkok : The National Culture Institute 1956), Sr. No. 2, pp. 6-7.
26. H.G. Quaritch Wales, Ancient Siamese Government and Administration (New York : Paragon Books Reprint Corp., 1965), pp. 14-15, and 58.
27. Wood, op. cit., p. 57; and Chulachakrapongse, op. cit., p. 19.
28. Wood, op. cit., pp. 62-63; and Hall, op. cit., p. 151.
29. Wood, op. cit., p. 64; Hall, op. cit., p. 151; and Sarasas, op. cit., pp. 27-28.
30. All of these laws can be found in Corpus of Ancient Siamese Laws ed. by D.B. Bradly, 2 Vols. (in Thai, Bangkok, 1873).
31. Wales, Ancient Siamese Government, op. cit., pp. 65 and 90; and Wood, op. cit., pp. 97-98.
32. Walter F. Vella, The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand (Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1955), p. 322.

33. William J. Siffin, The Thai Bureaucracy : Institutional Change and Development (Honolulu : East-West Centre Press, 1966), pp. 19-23 and Wales, Ancient Siamese Government, op. cit., pp. 79-81.
34. Wales, op. cit., Ch. 3, pp. 21-68.
35. Wood, op. cit., p. 250; and Thomson, op. cit., p. 27.
36. Wood, op. cit., p. 252.
37. Ibid., p. 268; and Thomson, op. cit., p. 28.
38. Thomson, op. cit., pp. 28-29; and Wood, op. cit., p. 73.
39. Wood, op. cit., p. 276.
40. M.R.Kukrit Pramoj, "Education and Culture", in Education in Thailand : A Century of Experience. (Bangkok : The Ministry of Education of Thailand, 1970), p. 38.

A P P E N D I X I

(To Chapter I)

Chinese in Thailand

Relations between China and Thailand date back to the Sukhodaya period if not earlier. There were only about 3,000 Chinese in Ayudhaya at the close of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, the Chinese immigration into Thailand had been going on for centuries especially for trading purposes but its character was changed in favour of residential status in the second half of the 19th century onwards. By the middle of the nineteenth century Chinese immigration had reached the rate of 15,000 annually,¹ and at present the number is large enough as shown in Table 1.1.

At the earlier settlement some were workers, some farmers, some artisans, traders, fishermen and pedlars in Thailand. Later they took to commerce and then to industrial enterprise since the first quarter of the 20th century.

The point of an interest here is that the Chinese acted as the middlemen who performed the functions of money economy between the Thai farmers and the Western traders. Their functions were to get the Thai farmers' goods (agricultural products) transported to seaports, selling them to foreign buyers and buying manufactured goods from the former and selling them to

the farmers. In this regard they were replacing the prolonged state-monopoly of trade in the reign of King Rama III and since the Bowring Treaty down to this day. Interregional and intervillage trade was obviously carried on by the Chinese. The Thai left these entrepreneurial functions to foreigners especially the Chinese. As a result, in any new development which requires the appreciation of business methods and the use of individual initiative and entrepreneurship the Thais are rarely to be found.

The Chinese unlike other ethnic groups in Thailand tend to get assimilated and integrated into Thai society through intermarriage, adoption of language and religion, and education. They have been encouraged to do so since the reign of King Rama III onwards. According to Thomson Chinese have been to conform to the so-called "vile" habits of the Siamese. They enjoyed the titles bestowed by the Siamese king as compensation for payment of heavy taxes and other contributions to the state.² They were already well-settled before the 1963 coup and have since become more active in the economic activities of the country. They were at all times supposed to owe personal service to the government. However, in practice this was rarely enforced. Instead they were obliged to pay a special tax in lieu of it. The later developments in this regard have brought

the Chinese in a closer alliance with the Thai bureaucrats. The result is crystalization of a new economic elite or nouveaux riches from amongst the Thai bureaucracy on the one hand and the Chinese businessmen on the other.

-
1. H. G. Quaritch Wales, Ancient Siamese Government and Administration (New York : Paragon Books Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 68; and Virginia Thomson, Thailand : The New Siam (New York : Paragon Books Reprint Corp., 1967), p. 104.
 2. Thomson, op. cit., p. 105.