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Intellectuals and the Establishment of Identities in the Thai Absolute Monarchy State

This article examines the ways through which intellectuals, who possessed authority in the Thai state under the absolute monarchy, established Thai identities. Economic and political contexts were important factors that influenced intellectuals to establish the identities in response to crucial problems, especially those tending to affect the power structure which intellectuals attempted to maintain.

The three intellectuals on whom the author focuses her study are King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn), King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh) and Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab (Prince Damrong Rajanubhab). The significance of this study lies in the fact that the three intellectuals' ways and systems of thinking, which were reflected through the identities which they established, had a number of effects on the political policies during the absolute monarchy period [1892-1932]. Meanwhile, their ways and systems of thinking also influenced the mainstream culture in Thai society.

It is hypothesized in this study that King Rama VI's ideas of creating identity were

different from those of his father owing to the differences in situation. Likewise, the differences in situation and experience caused Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab's ideas to differ from those of King Rama VI. Such differences caused the absolute monarchy system to have a great lack of the ideological unity needed to oppose the challenge from a new group of people who efficiently introduced a new ideology.

After the establishment of a true absolute monarchy in 1887, King Rama V attempted to extend his authority and claim his rights over natural resources throughout the kingdom in order to raise the national income through concessions, taxes and fees for forestry, the timber industry, mining, fishery, land, watercourses and so on. (14:378-379, 17:51, 55). According to the Mining Act,

'Land as well as all the minerals in the kingdom belong to the state through His Majesty's authority... authority to manage watercourses for boats and rafts, for agriculture, for mining and for other

useful activities belongs solely to the government to act as it deems appropriate and is not transferable to any person' (13:110-130).

The King possessed the authority to change the degree of the exploitation of natural resources in the provincial areas, such as changing an apiary forest into a firewood forest (14:442-443, 14:69-70), which became an important source of income due to the great increase in the use of firewood in various businesses. Another was a change from a field into pasture land (16:176) because of the slaughter license fees collected from domestic sellers and exporters. The king also promoted commerce by reclaiming land and converting it into roads, canals and railroads. Moreover, he regarded crime suppression and rapid criminal trials as a high priority so as to prevent commercial and occupational complications. At the same time, his attempt to create more efficiency in both local and regional governance gave rise to peace-keeping and resource-controlling mechanisms throughout the kingdom.

The aforementioned processes resulted in an increased importance for the government service. The majority of problems confronting King Rama V, therefore, were those concerning the relationship between government officials and the king. Such problems if left unsolved could eventually undermine the king's sovereignty.

King Rama V's Ways of Thinking

In order to comprehend fully the problems facing King Rama V and the solutions for which he opted, it is necessary first of all to understand his way of thinking. King Rama V realised the importance of commerce.

'...since in the present-day world commerce is considered most important, unlike in the past, when wars resulted from fights for women or desires to extend power. But nowadays things have changed; commercial competition has occurred instead.' (34:4)

King Rama V was satisfied to see that 'Siam will benefit from foreigners who settle and engage in trade and hence will continue to develop' (34:163).

King Rama V based his idea upon the belief that every person used his/her reasoning power in his/her own best interest. For this reason, he analysed the problems in the government service as resulting from government officials who sought personal satisfaction and consequently caused immense inequality amongst personnel with regard to benefits received in each office.

'An important issue has arisen because, through power abuse, ministers and personnel of the Interior, Defense, Port and Agriculture departments are currently seeking larger amounts of benefit than what they formerly received... the Department of Capital struggles to gain more benefits but is not able to do so openly, so it opts for dishonest means... the Department of Agriculture, on the other hand, manages all the purchase and distribution of rice, so it can easily misappropriate and gain more benefits than any other department can...' (36:132-136)

In short, King Rama V realized that government service problems were caused by the fact that 'the inconsistency of the government service process and of the personnel's legal benefits gives rise to multitudes of unfinished work, because there is a tremendous amount of work, and government officials do not have sufficient motivation' (36:134). 'Good government officials have no desire for positions in certain departments, for they expect more benefits and promotional convenience in some other departments. This is the way good people seek benefits' (36:148).

King Rama V's solution to the government service problems was structural reformation, as is evident in his statement, 'It is high time the ribs and boards were erected permanently. No longer should we only fill a hole to stop the leak' (36:148). The King also convinced the officers in government service who lost benefits

to accept change by explaining to them that despite the loss of short-term benefits, the long-term benefits would last much longer.

‘Although it seems that the loss of the present benefits is far greater than what you will gain after the change, you will be able to exploit those benefits for a great length of time...but if the country is not secure, all people will suffer equal pain.’ (38:185)

King Rama V’s option to solve government service problems on a structural basis and his explanation of the matter reflected his holistic way of thinking. In his opinion, it was not because of the bad nature of human beings that government officials sought personal benefits (and not because of craving according to Buddhist belief, either) but rather because of economic factors. People normally had reasons for seeking personal benefits to cope with the changing economic situation, as mentioned in the following statement-

‘...as the country is developing, government officials’ legal incomes become inadequate because things become more expensive than they used to be... but what is important is... that benefits are several times as numerous as they used to be... due to the country’s progress...’ (36:131-132)

Therefore, in addition to the reformation of the government service system and the advice concerning long-term advantages discussed previously, King Rama V also acted to solve problems in the government service system by giving salaries to government officials according to their rank, and later he also considered granting them pensions (13:187).

King Rama V was fully aware that in its early stage the newly established government service system was not able to operate well as a system and had to depend largely upon individuals, as he wrote, ‘In our country, good things and development are done by individuals, so, unlike some other countries, our country cannot operate as a machine’ (45:174). Understanding this fact, King Rama V also corrected people’s ‘disposition’. ‘Disposition’, in his belief, was

not something that could not be changed or corrected. He realised that it was the surrounding conditions that could determine and correct disposition, so that ‘bad characteristics will subside and lax behaviour will be improved’ (46:71). As King Rama V solved problems in the government service system, he also attempted to correct government officials’ ‘disposition’ or ‘temperament’ in addition to giving them professional knowledge, because to work efficiently would require not only knowledge but also good disposition or temperament. He believed that people were able to repent, as he stated, ‘Even if a man becomes evil like a thief, he still can become a good man if he really repents’ (21:291).²

King Rama V’s holistic thinking is also evident in his many other statements, which emphasize ‘thorough thinking and management ... so that the work will be carried out to completion’ (38:180), ‘wise and total management’ (38:180), ‘long-term planning’ (36:147), ‘complete thinking’ (38:185) and ‘thorough consideration of every advantage and disadvantage’ (38:183).

King Rama V’s holistic thinking also enabled him to see the connection between the past, the present and the future, as he pointed out that the problems in the government service system were a result of prolonged complex changes that had taken place earlier, and that his proposed amendments to the government would be to the country’s both present and future advantage. (See 38.)

Well aware of the differences between the present and the past, King Rama V suggested that in the present time ‘the country is prospering and the people are enjoying more freedom’ (11:15). The country’s prosperity not only caused consumer products to become so expensive that government officials began to work fraudulently and ‘seek benefits surreptitiously from their careers’ (11:235-236) or seek ‘dishonest benefits’ (11:236) but also gave rise to other problems, requiring government officials to work more efficiently. These major problems were higher taxes, a larger number

of criminals and an increase in civil cases involving large amounts of inheritance due to the growing amount of trade (7:141-144). As a result, King Rama V deemed it necessary to adjust the government service system to cope with such changes.

As King Rama V realized that the present differed considerably from the past and that whatever was done in the present would affect the future, much of what he did was based upon his careful thought about how validly the good things of the past contributed to the present and the potential advantages to the future; as he wrote, 'I must think about the future, when I will be no more' (45:69). Therefore, he focused his attention on doing things that were suitable for the time, despite his foresight that 'in the future, as the government officials' descendants attain more academic knowledge, the country will become like in the past, when the lords had very little to do' (45:66). However, then was not the time for a change because the country was not ready. 'Therefore, I think it is appropriate that the King's authority be maintained... which will be suitable for the country in the present time' (36:196). The only change he made was therefore 'to make the governance policy suitable for the period' through government officials' wisdom, honesty and loyalty' to perform duties in strict compliance with the King's orders (36:126). He did not agree to make so big a change that it would allow the nobility and government officials to have a decision-making role with the king or to establish a parliament.

However, King Rama V's historical reasons for government reformation were limited and he mainly explained that the differences between Siam and European countries stemmed from differences in their historical background.

'European countries... have parliaments and political parties mainly because it is common for their people to argue for better ideas. This practice is useful, but only in those European countries where such a practice is needed and has been exercised for hundreds of years, with a

firm foundation... Besides, those who developed the system were knowledgeable... To practice this system in Siam will not be suitable because of our different background and foundation. It will be like copying the European wheat-growing method and using it to grow rice and glutinous rice in Siam, which will certainly be fruitless... due to the lack of background knowledge. (38:175)

With this fact in mind, the King reasoned that whatever change was made 'has to suit the country's timing' (38:176) and 'has to be considered in accordance with the domestic factors... for to imitate other countries without considering our domestic factors will be to our disadvantage. This is because our background does not encourage such a change, after which divisions and confrontations will arise' (38:176).

'The people of Siam have always been united by the King and his words. This virtue lasts because it has been practised for generations. The present King's moral reign and unfailing mercy have won his countrymen's unquestioned trust and voluntary compliance. Nobody thinks about violating the King's words, unlike in Europe, where kings rule with violence... so people conspire against them... Such a cycle has continued for hundreds of years.' (38:176)

It may be concluded that King Rama V's historical way of thinking was employed for his political justification of government reformation, which developed a centralised system of government service and eventually gave rise to the absolute monarchy system.

Establishment of Identities of Government Officials

Bearing in mind the importance of the government service system and the fact that it was indispensable to the expansion of his authority and to natural resource management, King Rama V was then confronted with the problem of how to make the government

service system and government officials work efficiently. After the reformation, it was apparent to the king that the government service system was still not functioning automatically; the efficiency of the system still depended solely upon individuals, as previously discussed.

It was necessary for King Rama V, therefore, to find a way to make government officials loyal to the court and strongly united under his leadership. His chosen method was to grant honours and privileges to outstanding government officials, enabling them to attain a status higher than that of commoners. He graciously initiated and granted varying orders of decoration to government officials, for example. 'He opines that it is appropriate to have a special order of Royal Decoration called the First Order of King Mongkut Royal Decoration, which will be of higher honour and benefit to people in the government service' (12:470). If a highly decorated servant was indicted for a civil offense, he was allowed to plead directly to the king for mercy (13:421), and if he was adjudged not guilty of a state offense, the decoration that had been granted to him would be granted also to all of his direct blood line descendants.

The new system of government service was therefore full of privileges determined by a person's origin. For example, if a nobleman entered the government service, his position would be that of a commissioned officer or higher (17:310). The majority of high positions in the government service were occupied by elderly and qualified personnel with relevant experience. It was the king's belief that 'mere academic knowledge is not sufficient. Most people with academic knowledge are still new, young and inexperienced in government matters. It is extremely difficult for younger people to command older people' (46:173).

It is obvious that, despite its several minor differences, the new government service system maintained core characteristics of the old systems, especially differences in social status granted by the king. One clear example was the emphasis on 'feudalism', in which the King issued several Feudal Acts that determined government

officials' status (12:423,472; 16:178). This emphasis was applied not only to the stratification of government officials but also to stratification at the sub-district and village levels (12:423).

Moreover, King Rama V assigned a uniform to government officials, so that they would be dressed 'according to their designation' (12:482). This was done in order to emphasize the stratification of government officials' ranks and to indicate that the status of government officials was higher than that of commoners. For example, he issued a Royal Edict that divided the officers in the Ministry of Construction Works into ten levels, reasoning that 'It is proper for officers of both high and low ranks to be in a tidy uniform conforming to their duties' (17:459-460). He also issued an addendum to the Criteria for Criminal Offense Judgment Act of Bangkok Era Year 120 (1902), verse 2 of which stated, 'The court shall not accept a charge filed by a civilian against a government official concerning a government service matter, unless the plaintiff has sufficient witnesses to testify against the accused, in which case a summons shall be issued first, and if the accused ignores it, a warrant for his arrest shall be issued' (13:23). This was an act that limited the people's rights to inspect government officials.

Consequently, government officials in King Rama V's period possessed much higher status, privileges and honour than ordinary people did. However, government officials' occupational benefits and their potential to progress in their careers were up to the King's power and mercy. He stressed that the pension for a government official was 'the King's grant out of his mercy and hence nobody can claim that it rightfully and legally belongs to him' (13:187). In regard to the decoration to be granted to a servant's consanguine descendant, he emphasised:

'The authority to decide who is entitled to the decoration to be granted to his consanguine descendant rests only on the King or his designated successor.' (12:472)

This was done to remind government officials of the king's mercy, so that they would remain loyal to him.

Furthermore, King Rama V had a strong desire to know as many government officials as he could, in order that he would know to whom he could be merciful and in whom he could trust, believing that government officials would become more loyal to him if they got to know him better (5:122-123). Such a change in relationship became a public understanding that government officials were members of the noble circle.

In addition to having an image of higher honour and status, government officials were also given a new image for their duties. As the king's "slaves", government officials were expected honestly and loyally to perform their appointed duties. Such a performance was part of their honour. For instance, to make an army officer proud of his duty, the king said emphatically that the officer 'has done the most important duty, the duty of paying a debt of gratitude back to the land, the duty of defending our fatherland.' (See 31:37.)

Honour, loyalty to the king and honest performance of their duties constituted the much respected image of the government officials during the reign of King Rama V.

The Establishment of the King's Identity

In order to manifest his superiority to the government service system as well as government officials and advance his authority to employ them for administrative, benefit-maintenance and military purposes, King Rama V made every effort to make the monarch the most important figure in the realm. He initiated many activities to honour and glorify the monarch and to raise the monarch above the government officials and citizens. One obvious example was that he made the monarch the centre of all important activities each year. The Songkran [New Year] announcement, which was issued on the first day of the year, included the Royal Announcement of the important days to be observed in the year. King Rama V added many more royal occasions to the calendar, such as 'His Majesty the King's Birthday', which was

celebrated twice-according to both lunar and solar calendars, 'The Ceremony of the Oath of Allegiance to the King', 'The Ceremony of the Celebration of Coronation', 'The Royal Birthday Celebration', 'The Congregational Ceremony of Homage to the King' and 'Her Majesty the Queen's and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince's Birthdays' (15:1-5).

The Twelve Months Ceremonies were also given a new definition. Every other annual ceremony was redefined so as to emphasise the 'correct' relationship between people of different classes, with the king always at the apex and centre. There was a clearly defined classification of ceremony participants. The King took advantage of this opportunity to encourage people to abandon whatever belief they held that would cause trouble to the king and the country. (See 40:106 and 41:8-15.) Meanwhile, he explained the history and significance of Buddhism in Siam, the religion that kings so faithfully patronized. He said that Buddhism 'is complex and difficult to understand without proper learning... yields fruit to those who practise it... has been more deeply rooted in Siam than Brahmanism, because it is a teaching that yields fruit in the present time' (40:143).

The king's image as a patron of Buddhism and as a kind and just ruler with loyal and strongly united servants under him was extensively and earnestly recognised by the people. Such a relationship was at the core of absolute monarchy; that is to say, the king's kindness and justness were the reason for everything in the kingdom to progress in an orderly, peaceful and prosperous manner. His thoughts and orders would be effective only if his servants and citizens followed them. And what provoked their willingness to follow the king's orders was loyalty and unity. Without loyalty to the king, a person could not enter the government service, regardless of his intelligence and knowledge, because he would be likely to disobey the king's thoughts and orders.

Under the governance of a king with such an identity, a change towards a system with

a mechanism to control and inspect state authority would not materialise because it was by the king's virtue that such authority was established. This virtue, which was also referred to as 'The Royal Moral Conduct' and with which the king was brought up in accordance with his noble birth, was the ethic that determined the king's every thought and policy. Even in 'times of extreme sorrow' and 'deepest grief... over the sudden danger that befell his very dear son Crown Prince Maha Vajirunhis' (35:310), the king still stood fast in the Royal Moral Conduct so that he could give his best to the country without any sign of discouragement (35:309). The king stated emphatically, 'I shall instruct my son, who had recently been exalted Crown Prince, to behave according to the Royal Moral Conduct which I follow...' (35:311-312). He declared that although he as 'The Lord of Life' possessed the authority to kill anybody and was exempted from penalty, he never used such authority, but instead whatever he did was appropriate and just (36:168). Moreover, as the king was aware that he had to preserve his honour and glory, he was careful not to do anything that would shake his honour, so there was no need for control or inspection.

It was apparent that his Royal Moral Conduct was manifested in his kindness to all people regardless of their classes. Once, when he saw a police patrol 'beating a Chinese... and slapping a Thai, he was very displeased, thinking that that man should not have been a policeman because he was 'evil... and cruel' (35:91). On another occasion, a person suspected of being a bubonic plague victim came to see a doctor but then ran away with fear because of the rumour that whoever was touched by a doctor would die. So the king 'ordered Phraya Sukhum to ask the patient how he felt... and to put himself in the patient's shoes... (35:18). He thought that even prostitutes, of whom he suggested, 'People who are deceived easily are not good people' (35:314), should be protected. He reprimanded a government official in charge, 'He was not generous... and he was so ignorant that bad people could find a

way to persecute poorer people... and did not see the reason why poor people's difficulty was an important issue' (35:344). Or when a police constable chained the hands of an ex-monk forced to leave monkhood due to a grave sin and had him beaten thirty times, the king contemplated that 'if he took the penalty meant for his superior, he must be sympathised with... there should be a more thorough investigation so that an inferior does not have to be punished for the wrong his superior has done' (35:32,7-328).

As a matter of fact, King Rama V's kindness, which stemmed from his commitment to keep the Royal Moral Conduct, was undoubtedly recognised by members of the royal family, government officials and ordinary people alike. However, the king thought it important constantly to accentuate his image as a kind and merciful king, as is evident in government announcements. Even the economic administration, which was not a duty of the absolute monarchy government, would benefit the citizens if it was done with the emphasis of the king's kindness. When the Paper Money Act was passed, he announced, 'As commercial trade is getting more extensive in the Kingdom, it will be more difficult and time-consuming for people to carry a lot of cowries. So the king was kind enough to order the Minister of Treasury to print tickets to be used as a medium of exchange, which was called paper money...' (14:393-394).

The king's kindness was accentuated yet again when he ordered a decrease or exemption of annual tax for barren area inhabitants suffering from natural disasters or from insurrection, such as the Ngiaw of Phrae Revolt.

The annulment of gambling dens near the end of the reign was also announced as stemming from the king's mercy, from the fact that he did not want people to be impoverished. However, the real reason was an economic one; when the Chinese tax farmers could not take money out of the country, a large amount of money would circulate within the country, and the government would receive more income than from gambling dens (16:370-371).

Another image King Rama V emphasised was that of a just and righteous king. Not only was he committed to justice and righteousness but he also stressed that government officials had to be strictly committed to these two virtues. When a dispute arose concerning the inheritance of Chao Phraya Wichian Khiri, the king had a letter sent to Chao Phraya Surawong Waiwat, saying, 'This matter has to be decided fairly... so that no scandal will spoil state authority, on which people depend' (35:242) 'If governors and ministers behave unjustly, the countryside people will be in trouble' (37:427) 'He strongly desires to make it apparent to all the provinces that justice is firmly sustained' (35:251)

In regard to righteousness, the king revealed that he was embarrassed when a problem in railway construction occurred due to the government's fault. However, the government tried to use the contract to force the construction company to dismantle the railway and re-construct it in a nearby area as the government wanted. Concerning this problem, he had a letter written to the Minister of Urban Administration, saying, 'We have been foolish... we are embarrassed since our foolishness caused them to waste money, so I feel it is unrighteous' (34:36). In several other cases, the king used the word 'equal' instead of 'righteous'. For example, tax rates were readjusted so that there was only one 'equal' rate for all people. (12:292) However, the justness, righteousness and equality that the king emphasised were not applied to everybody but only to people of the same classes. (Noblemen such as) Princes would receive the best education, to which all princes were entitled, in addition to large palaces (19:27). The king's grandchildren would be educated as they deserved (46:84). This was the "justice" of that era. Moreover, that princes, noblemen and government officials received more privileges than commoners did was regarded as fair, too, because they belonged to higher families, possessed better qualifications and contributed more to the country than commoners did. As the king suggested, 'Those who contribute more to the country should receive more benefits' (13:230).

King Rama V's attempt to establish the monarch's identity as a merciful, generous and just ruler was so carefully made that ordinary people did not feel that they were being taken advantage of, even though the increase in tax rate and categories was not fair to them, as taxes — rice field tax, aquatic animal tax, government service tax and so forth — were to be collected from ordinary people rather than just from those who were financially better off, such as those possessing considerable wealth, making commercial profits or buying luxurious consumer products. Furthermore, the royal descendants and government officials were exempt from taxation (18:222). To convince people of the advantages of the policy, King Rama V explained that '...the nation's treasure consists of the taxpayers' money, so it should be spent wisely to ensure their common benefits...' (11:73) and that 'the government will collect taxes more easily and effectively, winning people's gladness and praise...' 34:199). The king declared that he 'desires to lighten the people's burdens and prevent their labour from being wasted' (44:253) so that 'the people will regard the King as incomparably fair and dedicated to his people's well-being' (38:169).

While emphasising justness and kindness as the principal virtues of the king's identity, King Rama V made every effort to create, preserve and elevate the majesty of the royal family, so that the status of noblemen would be distinguished from that of government officials (19:22-27). An example of this was the king's bestowal of land on a prince so that he could have his own palace built. A Chao Faa prince would receive a Prince's Royal Palace, which was enormous, while a Phra Ong Chao prince would be given a smaller one (19:27). Another example was his awareness of the importance of banners and salute-firing introduced by the West; he declared a finely detailed regulation of banners and salute-firing. Of the almost twenty kinds of banners, the king's, the queen's, the Royal Descendant's and the Royal Family's banners were ranked one to seven. The 'national flag' was ranked fourteen, for it represented

traders and commoners. (11:131-134) In addition, King Rama V was willing to spend his own money for his sons' education in Europe, as he thought it 'necessary for preventing embarrassment and strengthening his majesty...' (46:129).

The aforementioned establishment of the royal identity was to fulfill King Rama V's intended ideology for the absolute monarchy state, as written in the Royal Edict issued after the Front Palace Crisis:

'All the internal affairs—those ensuring peace and well-being—and all the external affairs—those concerning the defense of the kingdom—are under my absolute authority...[all] must swear an oath of permanent allegiance to me and my authority. (44:250-253)

The Thai Nation and the Thai Identity: King Rama VI's Establishment of Identity

In the reign of King Rama VI, although the government service system was beginning to operate automatically, the king nonetheless realised the insecurity of his authority and even his life. Not that he was afraid that a change in government would take place in his reign. In his letter to Chao Phraya Yomarat in 1912, after the Bangkok Era 130 (1911) Incident, he said, '...I am not afraid of crazy people who shout their political desire in the street; neither do I fear people who conspire in secret places. And I do not believe that these people will succeed unless the majority of the people agree to a change...' (See 27.)

He believed that, even if he passed away, a new king would succeed to his throne; the ruling system would not be changed (32:258). However, he was worried that 'If there is an impulsive act like the previous one, Thai government officials will become 'neutral' again and may cause some disaster. If they approach me by force, I may even lose my life' (see 27). He also said, 'Not only may I be killed by rebels but a crazy 'anarchist' may also take my life, and this is extremely difficult to prevent.' (See 27.)

King Rama VI was aware that his courtiers 'were rebuked and criticised day in, day out' (see 27). According to some official documents in King Rama VII's reign, King Rama VI's courtiers were subject to severe public hatred, derision and reproof, both overt and furtive (32:201-202).

Surrounded by groups of people whom outsiders of every class detested, King Rama VI was in conflict with many fellow aristocrats, such as Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab, Kromluang Rajburi Direkrit and Kromluang Phitsanulok Prachanat. Even Kromphra Nakhonsawan Woraphinit advised the king to reduce the court's expenses, and Krom Phra Chanthaburi Naruenat objected to the king's plan to visit Japan as the country was suffering from financial difficulty. (See 32:169-178.) The king might have seen Kromluang Phitsanulok Prachanat, his younger brother, as his political competitor when he and his brother were studying in England. Phraya Wisuthasuriyasak, his mentor, once told King Rama V, 'Seeing that the youngest son excelled in speech and exhibited marvelous wisdom... undoubtedly this son of Your Majesty will be wise and sharp in managing the country's affairs... I am wondering what should be done to make the Crown Prince as competent...' (46:41). When the Bangkok Era 130 (1911) Incident erupted, the army, who led the movement, wanted Kromluang Phitsanulok Prachanat to become king under a constitution. Later, when this younger brother of his asked him for royal permission to marry Momchao Ying Chawalit Opas, daughter of Kromluang Rajburi Direkrit, after he had divorced Mom Catherine, the king refused to grant his request, regardless of how much it saddened and infuriated his mother (8:638-639). It is possible that the king feared that the bond between his younger brother and his uncle would increase their power and majesty.

However, the main cause of political instability in King Rama VI's reign was the relationship between the king and government officials. In the previous reign, King Rama V

had created a government service system and established government officials' identity as highly honour-conscious people who, as government servants (but literally "royal attendants"), pledged lifelong allegiance to the king. He had stressed the importance of the innate qualifications of government officials, for these were associated not only with their noble origin but also with the fact that they had been born and raised in the families with a close relationship to the king. The environment in which these government officials had been raised had taught them to be conscious of the king's mercy and his superiority and to behave decorously. Thus, government officials, as descendants of noble families, had been granted more privileges and honour.

In King Rama VI's reign, on the other hand, although government officials were appointed to replace noblemen as ministers, a lot of conflicts arose between the king and most government officials. It transpired that almost all the government officials who had given themselves in allegiance to King Rama V did not expect their masters to leave the service or to be transferred to another ministry almost immediately after the enthronement of King Rama VI. As the 'head' of each ministry became a government official and not a nobleman, his subordinates found it difficult to adjust themselves immediately to support their new master. In the meantime, the king was surrounded by his courtiers, so it was immensely difficult for 'decent' people to approach him. Only some benefit-minded people gave themselves over to be groomed by Chao Phraya Ramrakhop and Phraya Aniruth Thewa, the King's closest court pages. (8:611)

Although King Rama VI had been back in the country for seven years when his father passed away, he did not care to develop a closer relationship with other princes and government officials. In fact, those lords and servants were already aware that they would have to 'submit' to him as he was then the Crown Prince, but it so happened that he spent most of his time with his close court pages. When he was crowned,

the situation worsened, as had been worrying his father since Bangkok Era 113 (1895); he had been worried that the Crown Prince 'will not be able to develop a good relationship with his relatives and with government officials in the capital and in other provinces before he becomes their commander, and he will be like a newcomer who knows nobody in the country' (see 25).

Because government officials, who were of noble descent, could not 'submit' to King Rama VI, they were worried not only about the future of their own careers but also about that of their children, some of whom could not occupy positions in the government service. It was obvious that some of the court pages close to the king 'were of Chinese descent or came from the South or were helped by some senior government officials.' (See 32:148.) Even Chao Phraya Ramrakhop and Phraya Aniruth Thewa had received their titles out of the king's favour. King Rama VI was aware of the feelings of these noblemen who were in the service, as he suggested in his letter to Nai Rong Sanit (Kulap), 'Some people feel that the positions that should belong only to noble descendants are being taken away, so they think they are going to lose a benefit.' (See 30.)

It was for this reason that government officials, who had been well tended during King Rama V's reign, found it difficult to express absolute fidelity to King Rama VI. They also began to doubt their future in the absolute monarchy system.

The conflicts and tension that the king had with government officials were clearly mentioned in his letter to Chao Phraya Yomarat:

'I have not a single ally; I stand alone. This is so obvious. When I first knew about some soldiers' subversion, nobody showed any sign of concern. Only when they were certain that I would not submit to a perilous fate did they begin to admire me... such an act was not different from a stage play... (See 27.)

One part of his letter to Phraya Thep Orachun, Phraya Uthai Montri and Phraya Tham Sukharat read:



‘... I feel as though I were all alone, without any allies. Or those who ally themselves with me are not in a position of authority. Those with great authority and responsibility in the service are showing less trust in me than they should...’ (See 29.)

Chao Phraya Yomarat, the most trusted minister to whom the King entrusted the most authority, was also subject to hatred and had to ‘cope with all kinds of ill-treatment. I said nothing when they rebuked me... people were angry with me only for government service reasons...’ Feeling that his life was in danger, Chao Phraya Yomarat had to put his family in King Rama VI’s custody. (See 27.)

It is evident that King Rama VI had to work with a political condition that failed to enable him to continue his father’s policy to strengthen honour and unity amongst government officials so that they would remain loyal to him. Consequently, King Rama VI had to find an alternative.

It should be noted, too, that in his attempt to find an alternative, he caused a feeling of lessened status and honour amongst government officials. He referred to both military and civil officials as ‘retainers’, ‘hirelings’ or ‘servants’, not as the traditional ‘Royal Attendants’. Furthermore, he regarded government officials as people who usually violated the law, so he often administered a reproof to them. (See 47:80, 146, 216, 229-267 for further examples.)

King Rama VI’s alternative was based upon a concept that was currently prevalent among some groups of people in Siam: the love of the Thai nation. However, he was the first person to try to define ‘Thai identity’ as ‘the heart or soul’ of the Thai nation (47:306). In the meantime, he made the Thai nation and identity a foundation upon which people were united under the king. The Thai nation and identity would be strong enough to create internal unity only if Thai people realised that they were part of the Thai nation, the Thai identity and Thai citizenry, and that ‘other people’ who were not ‘fellow Thais’ would not sincerely love them and

would abandon them in time of crisis or would even bring them disaster. This topic will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

In addition to the newly institutionalised ‘Thai nation’, King Rama VI’s other major institutions, called ‘congregations’, (Khana) included civil defence (*sua pa*) and boy-scouts. The use of a surname also started during his reign. The king explained, ‘the main cause or root of our country’s prosperity is patriotism... what creates patriotism is the love we have with one another in our congregation’ (47:305). ‘The love of our congregation is the love of our country, because — what is country? - the country is the largest Thai congregation, and all of us are members of that congregation.’ (47:307)

His plan to create a bond between the love of the congregation and the love of the country and the king was manifested in his book ‘Comparing Families with Clans’, in which he pointed out that the clan system tended to breed insubordination in a congregation.

‘... contrary to families, in which respect to older people is instilled. Young people keenly respect older people because they are in the same family, and because these older people are their fathers or senior relatives. This is natural love... and the root of loyalty to the family’s ruler and the nation’s ruler.’ (42:89-90)

The Identity of the Thai King

Many previous analyses have revealed that the concept of nationalism which King Rama VI emphasised was one in which the king, who was at the centre, had absolute authority. However, his emphasis on the monarch’s absolute authority differed in some ways from his father’s, as we shall analyse here.

King Rama V emphasised the monarch’s status as the chief of administration and government, so he usually attended ministerial meetings. He stated, ‘Would every person please convene in order to fulfill all the set objectives... and I shall attend the meetings to discuss

matters' (36:170). King Rama VI, on the contrary, seldom attended ministerial meetings. Rather, he ordered each minister to report the agenda to him in person. He also showed much interest in drama and wrote a large number of books. Moreover, he was so fond of spending long holidays in other provinces, especially at Sanamchan Palace, Bang Pa In Palace and in Phetchaburi province, that he frequently had to assign his elderly relatives administrative authority (32:162). It is understood that King Rama VI did not emphasise his role as the chief of government because the government service in his reign was beginning to operate automatically. What he emphasised, therefore, was the symbolic importance of the king and his 'sovereignty'. He occasionally stated, 'I am glad to be the sovereign amongst you' (47:312) and 'I am the sovereign of Siam' (47:147). His intention to emphasise the symbolic importance of the king was manifested in his letter:

'Besides, if we want to preserve the nation, we must preserve the pillar of the nation, the King, who guides the nation in all things... The reason we must be loyal to the King and protect him is because in the eyes of foreigners, he is the Head of State... and if a nation has a sovereign, it can be likened to a ship with a banner, as a Buddhist proverb says: "The king is the glory of the country..." (7:260-261)

Most importantly, King Rama VI terminated the government officials' role as the intermediary between the king and the people. His declaration in the Coronation Ceremony suggested that government officials 'interfered' between the king and the people.

'In Thailand, there are only two classes of people, not more. One is the King, the leader, who is given full authority... The other is commoners. Anybody who interferes between the King and the people is unlikely to be loved or admired by Thai people... We can see a piece of evidence for this in the chronicles. Lords or people of any class may seize power and interfere between the King and the people. If

the King is powerful, he can completely subjugate them. But if the King is weak, they will gain more authority and disasters will be inevitable...' (47:129-130)

He stressed that 'according to Thai tradition, the king and his people are acquainted with each other. The king does not isolate himself from his people, but always allows them to meet him' (47:131).

Thai History and the National Identity: the Thai Identity

Whereas King Rama V tried to search for the differences between the past, the present and the future and emphasised 'the Thai background' in order that the changes he introduced would suit the time and the Thai characteristics, King Rama VI focused his attention on 'the Thai identity', which had remained unchanged through history and would remain so now as well as in the future. King Rama VI used many words to refer to the permanent 'Thai identity', such as 'the traditions that have been observed since the old time' (6:206), 'the righteous traditions' (42:55), 'the Thai code of conduct' (42:55) or 'our ethical principles since the old time' (29:52). This concept of history was therefore like a still image in that the present could resemble the past and the past would recur in the present and the future; as he mentioned in his books, 'Let us unite and be like the Thais of King Naresuan's period' (29:66) or 'King Rama V abided by the ten virtues, observing the fine royal traditions just as his predecessors had been doing since the Ayutthaya period' (47:333)

It is apparent that King Rama VI used history as a tool to illustrate the 'heart and soul' or the 'moral standards' of the Thai nation, which had remained unchanged throughout its long history. This was the core of the Thai identity, which earned Siam eulogies from other civilised nations, for 'a nation without traditional and cultural traits is likely to be insulted and despised' (47:206)

King Rama VI believed that the Thai 'royal traditions,' 'ethical principles' or 'righteous

traditions', especially where the relationship between the king and the people was concerned, would never change, as 'the monarchic system has been the foundation of our ethical principles since former times' (47:52). Therefore, Siam should remain under this system. It can be summarised that the 'Thai identity' suggested by King Rama VI contained some unique characteristics that were permanent, unlikely to be affected by any context or situation.

As King Rama VI put great emphasis on the civilised 'Thai identity', he was cautious not to suggest that such civilisation was an imitation of the West. He said, 'What, then, is imitation? It is the confession of our inferiority' (47:391). He also insisted, 'Although the "Thai identity" contains unique characteristics, these characteristics reflect the universal "soul" or "moral standards", just like those of European countries, since righteousness is a truth that never dies regardless of how much the world and all things in it change' (2:59). He also added, 'Even though we abandon the Thai traditions and observe those of the West instead, the result is the same, because principles of righteousness are the same everywhere in the world' (42:56), and 'According to the principles, what is good or what is bad is the same all over the world' (43:107). He likened the belief in the coming saviour of mankind, which had been in existence since the Sukhothai period, to socialism, which originated in Europe (2:68). Even most of his ideas were a reflection of his universality, as he often claimed, 'My opinions can be supported by the most celebrated European experts in political science and law' (42:39). He usually stressed that his proposed principles were principles admired by learned men of all nations.

Therefore, the 'Thai identity' was what made Siam civilised. Not only did the Thai identity reflect universal moral standards, but it was also concerned with the mind and decorum. The king suggested that 'civilisation is in fact created by the mind and behaviour controlled by the mind' (42:213) and 'the more righteous people a nation has, the more truly "civilised" that nation is' (42:73). He specifically emphasised

the civilisation of 'behaviour and conduct that stem from patriotism' (47:173).

Despite the king's emphasis that the Thai 'path of righteousness' and 'righteous traditions', which dated back to the ancient time, were universal, Thai people of King Rama VI's period still thought highly of westerners and demanded that some occidental beliefs be introduced. The king thus had to explain that the Thai 'moral standards' were not only universal but also comprised aspects that were superior to those of other nations. He compared Buddhism, which 'belonged to the Thai people' (43:57), with other religions in order to 'explain clearly why Buddhism should be the religion of intelligent people' (43:24). In addition, he stated emphatically that 'the belief that occult powers have created all things on earth' (43:24-39) had no place in Buddhism, and that 'Lord Buddha... is in the truths... and shows us the truths that we can know and see, without the slightest deception' (43:41). More importantly, 'We see that our Buddha was of noble birth and hence deserves our respect' (43:40), while

'The founders of other religions were different. Jesus's birth was ignoble; he was born in a low family of traders. Mohammed was originally a low-class citizen who after founding a religion became a recognised figure in Arabia; this was to his advantage.' (43:22)

Having explained that some aspects of the Thai 'righteous traditions' were universal while some were superior to those of other nations, King Rama VI attempted to help Thai people clearly understand the Thai 'path of righteousness' or 'righteous traditions' by 'establishing the nation's moral standards—that is, the good principles...' (47:328). He kept emphasising that the 'good principles' or 'nation's moral standards' had existed in Siam since ancient times.

A large number of his books and speeches were inspired by his desire to illustrate the 'nation's moral standards' or the 'good principles', for example, 'Awake, Thailand', 'The Benefits of Righteousness', 'The Principles of

Government Service', 'The True National Identity', 'The Civil Defence Sermon' and so forth. In fact, the 'nation's moral standards', which King Rama VI emphasised as the 'heart or soul' of the Thai identity and nation, consisted of several aspects such as loyalty to the king, who was the sovereign; unity; bravery; perseverance in doing good things for the nation and the king; preservation of the nation's honour; honesty to one's duty and to other people and so forth. But the most important aspect was loyalty to the nation, the religion and the king. He stated that loyalty

'means that "a person sacrifices his own benefits to help others". That is, he is willing to be in any kind of trouble or even lose his own life because he is entirely devoted to the nation, the religion and the king. A person who can make such a sacrifice without remorse is a person of consummate mentality. He understands that he is just like a speck of dust, which is part of a mountain which we call "nation". If our nation collapsed, we tiny specks of dust would be blown by the wind... In fact, everybody has some value - no matter how small - because we belong to an independent nation, one that has never been colonised by any nation...' (42:122-123)

It can be observed that loyalty, which was characterised by the readiness to risk one's life or well-being, was a response to the economic and philosophical demands during King Rama VI's period. The country's biggest economic problems were the rice crisis in 1911, which caused a 2.53 million baht loss in the national budget, and the international financial crisis between 1920 and 1925, which caused heavy loss in the trade balance for six years running, resulting in a yearly decrease of treasury reserves (18:216-223).

Amidst the economic problems, many intellectuals who were 'commoners', such as Phraya Suriyanuwat, Chao Phraya Thammasak Montri and Mr Xiou Hud Seng, proposed ways to solve poor people's problems, particularly farmers'

problems. Amongst their proposals were the restructuring of taxation, development of infrastructure such as irrigation, promotion of co-operatives and expansion of income distribution (18:233-238). Even His Majesty's younger brother, Prince Kromluang Phitsanulok Prachanat, was aware of the diversity of people's ideas, as he informed his elder brother in a letter:

'...since the end of the late King's reign, people have lost their confidence in the King's policy. People have varied opinions; some say one thing is good and some say another thing is better. Some say one thing will put people in trouble while others say it will benefit them...' (See 26.)

King Rama VI responded to people's various ideas by establishing co-operatives, by allocating a fund of more than 3 million baht for the purchase of rice grain to be distributed to farmers when farming was difficult and by allowing farmers to have low-interest or interest-free loans (47:300). However, these attempts could solve very few problems and in some cases were fruitless, such as the co-operatives. In addition, as of 1906, the government increased the farming tax and cattle tax by 400 per cent and 800 per cent, respectively (10:79).

In spite of the intensity of their problems, the farmers still abided by the concept of patriotism, coping with all the difficulties without demanding any help from the country or the king and without showing interest in any ruling system detrimental to the country and the king, even though such a system might seem to provide solutions for their problems. Moreover, the idea of 'self-reliance', which the king had introduced as a foundation for the nation's economic stability (see 42), brought considerable relief and satisfaction to government officials who were worried about the future of the nation and convinced them that the king was not ignorant of the country's economic problems although many of the attempts to solve them were unsuccessful.



'Other People' : Why the Chinese?

In order to make 'our people' united under the king, a concept of 'other people' was to be created. And it was the Chinese that King Rama VI chose to be the 'other people'.

During King Rama V's reign, there was an attempt to unify all the dependencies to be under the Kingdom of Siam, so the people of the Lao Kao, Lao Chiang and Lao Phuan regions became both 'our people' and 'other people'. King Rama V advised the government officials stationed in the Lanna region (northern Thailand) not to 'show much discrimination' (37:126), even though he personally despised the Lao lords in Lanna (37:136). When the integration policy took effect, every region in Siam was renamed according to its location — that is, according to its direction from Bangkok. The Laos, the Ngiaw, the Khoen and the Cambodians were no longer 'other peoples'; they were all considered Thais (see 17). As for the Chinese, who also formed a large population, King Rama V was so well aware of their contribution to the country's economy that he did not regard them as other people. Among their immense contributions were gambling-house taxes, gambling taxes, opium taxes, liquor taxes, concession fees, mineral fees, forestry fees, check-point taxes and customs. On his visit to the South in 1891, he expressed great admiration for the Chinese and the Chinese chiefs in Ranong. His letter to the congregation of ministers in charge of the capital read:

'...When I was in Ranong, almost all the Chinese in town came to welcome me... Phraya Ranong held a very impressive reception. His brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren were warmly united... They maintained the city consistently, wisely and with incomparable determination...' (35:288-289)

Towards the end of King Rama V's reign, the Chinese began to form political organisations or associations, some in support of the Ching Dynasty and others in support of the Kuomintang. It was the opinion of the Chief of

the Patrolling Division that the founding of Chinese organisations in Bangkok could be used as a tool to increase the power of Chinese merchants. Chinese commercial clubs, he specified, would serve as a channel through which the Chinese government would extend its power to Chinese communities in Bangkok (9:160). However, King Rama V, who was still very sympathetic towards the Chinese merchants, thought that it was necessary for the Chinese merchants to found such clubs in order to handle commercial disputes. This was because the Chinese were so numerous and their investments were so large that commercial disputes and debt problems usually followed. Time-consuming court battles were inevitable and caused them grave difficulty (9:169).

The westerners, on the other hand, were a bigger problem than the Chinese during King Rama V's period. One area in which a problem arose was that of academic knowledge. He 'could not find Thais with sufficient knowledge, ideas, perseverance and courage' (34:286). Although he had to employ many westerners as government officials and counselors, he 'hated to appoint westerners heads of offices' (34:272), feeling that 'westerners were extremely contemptuous of Thais' (37:241). Then in 1903, he expressed his feeling, 'the English are becoming more and more dishonest. Perhaps they have almost succeeded in colonising us' (37:126). He contemplated, 'When, O Thais, will you stop thinking that England is a friend?' (37:249) Nevertheless, King Rama V realised that these westerners were too powerful for Siam to react with hostility.

King Rama V was very successful in his unification of dependencies as well as in dealing discreetly with the Western superpowers. One key mechanism was his success in keeping government officials loyal to the king. The concept of being 'our people', 'their people' or 'other people' as a thought-unification tool was not necessary. 'The Thai identity' had quite a weak connotation and was used to refer to 'Thai orderliness' (37:41) or 'Thai righteous behaviour and respect to parents, which were of utmost

importance' (45:124). A true definition of 'Thai identity' was not, however, created.

In King Rama VI's reign, the problem concerning Laos no longer existed, and Siam's relationship with the west showed a positive trend. Many treaties were amended which increased Thailand's tariff and court authority. The Chinese, however, became an important political problem as their economic contributions declined. It was for this reason that King Rama VI needed to create unity of 'the Thai nation' by treating the Chinese as 'other people' that Thais would have to segregate, be cautious of and avoid trusting and depending upon.

Political Problems Caused by the Chinese

Changes in the Thai political context in 1907 gave rise to the escalation of Chinese political movements in Siam. One such change was Siam's success in solving the extraterritorial rights problem, which terminated Western nations' rights over the expatriates of their protectorates. As a consequence, Chinese people of all dialect groups assembled in order to establish an organisation with a quasi-consular function. Obviously, the Chinese were seeking to strengthen their political power in addition to their economic power (9:136). Meanwhile, the political conflict in China caused both the Chinese government and the Kuomintang to try to seek political support from Chinese expatriates. On the 1st of December, 1908, Sun Yat Sen visited a Chinese club in Bangkok and delivered a speech that intensified their nationalism by accusing Thai people of taking advantage of the Chinese and treating them contemptuously (9:142). In addition, Xiao Hud Seng, president of an underground association called Tung Mei Huy Association, which had been supporting the Kuomintang, successfully persuaded the two formerly rival Hakka associations to unite and support the Kuomintang. In 1911, after the Kuomintang had gained victory in China, Chinese associations in Thailand—both legal and clandestine—had more active movements, which was why King Rama

VI found it necessary to alter his policy on the expatriate Chinese.

King Rama V during his reign had stated, 'I do not want the Chinese to assemble and approach me for an official discussion as if they possessed consular authority. If they are in trouble, they can plead for my help, like common citizens. This is my wish' (see 23). However, when the Chinese had a movement to 'unite', he did not obstruct them by force, as is evident in his letter to Phraya Rasadanupradit, one of the Chinese leaders.

'Between Thang Yu Vai's idea and Sun Yat Sen's idea, people normally see that Thang Yu Vai's idea is right. But neither person's idea is good to us. I do not want any political opinions amongst the Chinese in our country. Therefore, I ask that any group of people that would like me to encourage their effort to found a political party in my Kingdom be discreet. Since it is impossible to prohibit them completely, I shall be careful not to let these political societies obtain more privileges than necessary.' (see 24)

Understandably, the benefit of taxes, tariffs, concessions and other fees collected from the Chinese merchants were the main reason why King Rama V was willing to be accommodating towards the Chinese. But in King Rama VI's period, the government received less financial benefit and economic contribution from the Chinese. When their political movements became a problem, the king used them as a simple reason to treat the Chinese as 'other people'. As of 1907, there were abundant Western investments in mining businesses following a sharp rise in tin prices in the world market. By 1929, the number of Chinese timber concessionaires had been reduced from 58 percent in 1895 to 14 percent and timber export was in the hands of more and more British companies. Rice mills were in the same situation. In 1913, Siam Rice mill and its 34 Chinese-owned subsidiaries went out of business after Siam Chinese Bank's bankruptcy, which was caused by the bank's negligent

management, letting its administrators to misuse the capital. Most importantly, the government's former indirect income – such as opium tax and gambling-house taxes collected from the Chinese – gradually declined. In 1918 and 1919, income from opium and gambling-house taxes, which had constituted about 40 per cent of the government's total income, were completely ceased (18:202-221).

In addition, some intellectuals, such as Phraya Suriyanuwat and Chao Phraya Thammasak Montri, demanded that the government solve farmers' problems, and Chinese merchants in Bangkok agreed with the demand. In an issue of the newspaper called 'Sino-Siam Periodicals', which was owned by Xiao Hud Seng, an editor analysed the trade regression as occurring because 'farmers could sell their rice for less money, so the sales of other products were diminished' (see 20). During the 1907 rice crisis, each month many Chinese businesses suffered grave losses or even went bankrupt. (see 9:132) That explained why some Chinese might plan to establish a republic in Siam so that the farmers' problems would be solved and Chinese businesses would improve. It was suspected, therefore, that Xiao Hud Seng was behind the Bangkok Era 130 (1911) incident. (See 10:212-214.)

Amidst all these economic and political conditions, King Rama VI chose the Chinese to be 'other people'. He stressed that one had to be either Thai or Chinese, not both (42:16). He also expressed his intention, 'I shall erase the belief that the Chinese are part of Siam' (42:19) because 'the real Chinese are really foreign' (42:18) and 'there are Chinese descendants who will become Thai, but very few' (42:16). For those Chinese descendants to become fully Thai, or 'really belong amongst our people', they had to change their nationality and disengage themselves from all Chinese associations (42:41).

King Rama VI's criteria to distinguish Thais from Chinese were birth, behaviour, language and volition. Amongst these, language was regarded as most important because 'a language

unites people better than anything else does...' (42:225), 'makes people feel they are of the same race' (42:225) and shows that the speakers of a language are faithful to that nation (42:227). The most important virtue, however, was devotion, as he noted, 'If they are loyal to the King of Siam, they are real Thais'. (42:228) He said that the Thai people's patriotism, in particular, would make the Thai nation secure (42:6).

King Rama VI divided Chinese people into several categories according to how 'foreign' they were. Purely Chinese people were considered less 'foreign' than those who were 'half Chinese and half Thai'. For example, Chinese coolies were truly Chinese because they never tried to learn Thai and differed from Thais both in taste and ideas (42:227). But King Rama VI said, 'We can count these coolies as Thais, but in a very contemptuous way' (42:227). Chinese people in Bangkok were also regarded as real Chinese because they lived together in a large community and detached themselves from the Thais as they had no need to seek help from or be involved in any way with Thai people. But these Chinese were less 'foreign' because 'they were friendly and reasonable' unless 'the leader of their clandestine association incited them, making them unreasoning people' (42:15). Then they would become truly 'foreign'.

On the other hand, those who were 'half Chinese and half Thai' or 'Thai by birth, Chinese by occupation and English by document' were the most 'foreign' people of whom Thais had to be cautious. 'This sort of people is like a chameleon, which changes its colour according to the environment. When amongst Thais, they are Thai. When surrounded by Chinese people, they are Chinese. Many of them are also under the westerners' command. These people, who are usually political orators, are "half Chinese and half Thai". They consider themselves leaders of new ideas; they are mostly orators and journalists in Bangkok. These people can become anything in order to gain benefits' (42:16-18).

Another difference between Thais and 'foreigners' which King Rama VI emphasised

was the difference in civilisation and values. 'Although we became civilised after the Chinese, now we have overtaken them,' he noted (42:82). Then he added, 'We differ from the Chinese, who are fond of money and generally very stingy... We Thai people are poor in terms of money but rich in satisfaction and happiness' (42:51).

The aforementioned differences between 'our people' and 'other people' were the major reasons that King Rama VI did not allow 'other people' to become part of the Thai nation. He explained, 'They are totally foreign, by birth, by behaviour, by viewpoint, by language and finally by choice (42:18). If we were struck by destitution, they might just abandon us (42:41). We cannot hope that they will die with us (42:40). Therefore, we ought not to depend upon others; we must depend on ourselves. Let us all do our best for ourselves without asking for foreigners' help' (42:42-43).

Such an attitude towards 'foreigners' so deeply strengthened Thai people's consciousness of being 'our people' that they became patient and ready to sacrifice everything only to maintain 'our nation's' civilisation, security and independence for posterity.

Apart from the Chinese, there was another group of 'foreigners', but these 'foreigners' were of higher status than the Chinese. That was why King Rama VI strongly wished to make these 'foreigners' admit that Siam and the Thai king were as civilised and honourable as they were. These were the Europeans.

Since King Rama VI was educated in England for nine years and was personally interested in Western literature and philosophy, he had a special admiration for Western civilisation. It was because of the Western nations' power and development that their civilisation became predominant during that period. Knowing that literature and philosophy both emphasised the universality of human thoughts and emotions, he took the precaution of not regarding westerners as 'other people' who were superior to the Thais; neither did he wish to imitate Western civilisation, for that would mean that

the Thais admitted that they were inferior. However, while his appreciation of the West was obvious, he made every effort to make Thai people understand that the European nations' acknowledgement of Siam and her King as members of the world community reflected Siam's civilisation and independence.

Every year, during the king's birthday celebration, in his speech to his relatives and government officials, the king announced the government's annual achievements. On one such occasion, he congratulated Siam on her success in having been accepted as a member of the world community. On the 1st of January 1915, he declared

'In regard to the friendship between Siam and other nations, I am glad to show you evidence that such friendship is developing even faster than before. That is, the King of England has expressed extraordinary friendship to me by offering me the position of Special-General in the British Army and by accepting my offer of the position of Special-General in the Siamese Army.' (47:145-146)

The king stressed that both occasions had brought himself and the Siamese Army great honour, and were unprecedented events in the Eastern nations.

On the 1st of January 1919, he delivered a lengthy speech about Siam's participation in 'international affairs' (47:294-298). Then on the 1st of January 1920, he stated, 'International friendship increases throughout the world. As our country has declared to fight with the Allies, we have been acknowledged by all civilised people...' (47:355-356). Both statements reflected King Rama VI's satisfaction that 'our people' and 'other people' — evidently the westerners — were united and proved that he had accomplished his intention to establish the 'Thai identity' that was both universal and civilised.

It should be noted that the regarding of Siam's success in associating with 'other highly civilised people' as a matter of honour to the nation and the king and as evidence of the civilisation of the 'Thai identity' started officially

in the reign of King Rama VI and became a new trend that has continued until today. During his reign, particularly, such achievements enormously impressed most of the king's relatives and government officials, who had formerly regarded the Western nations as the most civilised nations, because it not only elevated Siam to be equal to other civilised nations and proved the universality of the 'Thai identity' but also marked the significance and success of the Thai monarchy.

Another significant difference between King Rama VI and his father, King Rama V, was their thinking about the future of Siam. King Rama V had been through a period during which the king had lost his authority and government officials had had very limited responsibility, so he had realised that sooner or later, when the descendants of government officials received higher education, a change in the government system would be inevitable. In contrast, King Rama VI never projected his thoughts into such a future possibility. He tried to emphasise that 'monarchy had been our ethical principle since the old time' (47:52), and this ethical principle, which was the core of the Thai identity, would never change. The Dusit Thani case, which many believe was the foundation of democracy, was undoubtedly monarchy - inspired. The 1918 City Administration Charter stated emphatically that the Dusit Thani inhabitants' authority to voice opinions concerning certain aspects of self-administration was 'granted' by the king (47:127). Moreover, 'Authority in any other area, which the King had not granted, remained with the central government, which was under the King's direct supervision' (47:127). Thus the City Administration, which was 'elected annually by the inhabitants of Dusit Thani', had to be approved by the king (47:130). Later, another Royal Edict was issued which contained addenda and amendments to the City Administration Charter. One addendum was the appointment — not election — of 'Honorary Statesmen', whose status and authority resembled those of senators, by the City Administration staff. The Honorary Statesman position was a lifelong position (47:50-51).

'Gratitude' was a virtue that King Rama VI emphasised more than his father had. In the Birthday Celebration speech he delivered to his relatives and government officials on the 1st of January, 1914, he said, 'Those to whom I have given support must always realise it and must pay me a debt of gratitude for what I have done' (47:348).

This concept was clearly seen in King Rama VI's use of new terms to refer to government officials and ordinary people. That he referred to government officials as 'servants' not 'Royal Attendants' and ordinary people as 'slaves of the land' not 'citizens' indicated that he emphasised the master-slave relationship in which the master possessed both power and mercy and the slave had to submit to such authority and do everything in return for the mercy.

The Thai nation in King Rama VI's imagination, which consisted of 'the sovereign', 'servants', 'slaves of the land' amongst others, was considerably different from the actual Kingdom of Siam, in which 'the King', 'royal attendants' — who assisted the king in national affairs—and 'citizens' — including Thais, Laos, Karens and so forth—received equal mercy from the king.

King Rama VI's imagination appeared to be in conflict with the principal concept of that period that held high regard for ordinary people. Since 'servants' and 'slaves of the land' did not have so strong faith in the king as he had wished, the concept that stressed the 'Thai identity' as the heart and soul of the nation failed to make these 'servants' and 'slaves of the land' love the nation that had the king at the centre.

The Creation of the 'Thai Identity' by Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab³

While King Rama VI adopted the concept of universality and the 'other people' idea to bind all Thais together in pride in their nation, Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab, uncle of King Rama VI, stressed the importance of Thai distinctive features or characteristics without trying to create 'other people.' Such distinctive

features, in his opinion, were qualifications that had permanently been in the Thai nation and Thai people throughout the nation's long history, still remained and would continue forever. It was because of these qualifications that the nation survived and prospered despite occasional crises. Most significant amongst these qualifications were 'the love of the nation's independence, the absence of persecution and the cleverness at integrating benefits'.

Unlike King Rama VI, Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab did not try to discover the true Thai identity. This was because he considered Thai culture as emanating from its cleverness at assimilating benefits. He explained the development of the Thai alphabet as follows.

'Siam ruled over people with predominantly Cambodian culture. Thais were usually good at determining which foreign tradition was good for them, and if it did not pose any threat to their benefits, they would accept or adapt it to their advantage, such as the adaptation of the Thai alphabet from the Cambodian alphabet.' (2:68)

Thai music, which was part of the 'Thai identity', was another result of cleverness at integrating benefits. He explained, 'The Indians brought this style into the country when the Cambodians were still dominating the land. When the Thais rose to power, they inherited it from the Cambodians and developed it for the stringed, percussion and wind instruments that we play today' (1:3-4).

The 'Thai identity' manifested in architecture also represented the cleverness at integrating benefits, as in the following observations.

'The construction of Buddhist pagodas in the Sukhothai period was inspired by the Lankan architecture. But it was typical of Thais not to ignore good and beautiful things. They even integrated strengths of different craftsmen into the Sukhothai style of the Buddhist pagoda.' (2:174)

And

'Thais of the Ayutthaya period were more familiar with the Cambodians than those

of the Sukhothai period were. They adopted the Cambodian traditions and language and even craftsmanship. Therefore, the pagodas built during the Ayutthaya period reflected a combination of Cambodian, Lankan and Thai architecture.' (2:186-187)

Thai architecture, therefore, reflects a combination of good aspects of other cultures, which were adapted to suit Thai culture and finally became established as a distinctive Thai feature.

It was through cleverness in integrating benefits that Siam could rise above Burma, a nation that had previously conquered Siam. Burma even adopted Thai art patterns. 'Burma imitated many Thai art patterns, such as the carving pattern called Yodia Pattern. Thai musical instruments and dance and singing patterns were also imitated by the Burmese during the Ayutthaya period' (22:95).

Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab emphasised that not only did the Thai nation belong to pure Thais, but 'people of all races and languages in Siam' (5:60, 171) were also called 'people with Thai nationality'. He stated, 'They are all Thais, whether they are Thai Yai (Shan) or Thai Noi (Siamese)' (5:77).

Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab was well aware of the importance of government officials and people under the king's 'leadership', as he remarked in his radio-broadcast speech on the 31st of March, 1931.

'The country's peacefulness depends upon several factors. For example, the countrymen—administrators and citizens alike—must be united to develop the country in peacetime and to solve problems when in crisis... so as to maintain independence... because for 150 years today the kings in the Chakri Dynasty have been leading the people of Siam to battle against the enemy and to maintain peacefulness.' (5:170-171)

He defined the statue of King Rama I as follows.

'The statue of King Rama I, it should be noted, represents not only the honour of

King Rama I but also that of our Siamese ancestors, who gave the King unconditional cooperation. (5:173)

Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab paid more attention to the importance of government officials in order to respond to their growing displeasure. Even though 1931 was the fifth year of King Rama VII's reign, the problem of the balance of authority remained widespread amongst government officials. To make the matter worse, King Rama VII's substitution of his relatives for government officials in ministerial positions caused immense difficulty in adjustment to those who had devoted themselves to serving ministers who were government officials, and King Rama VI's court pages. His increased attention to citizens was in response to their demand for a solution to their poverty and to their request to participate in the administration.

Like King Rama VI, Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab aimed at searching for and comprehending the unchanging theme of the 'Thai identity'. Thus his historical ideas were not based upon any change in the economic context; no matter how much the circumstantial situations were changing, the theme of the Thai identity would remain unaffected. His books about Thai history therefore contained historical accounts that reflected these three distinctive features.

Both King Rama VI and Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab utilised Thai history to demonstrate the theme of the Thai identity. They also emphasised the supremacy of the king's status and role. King Rama VI focused his demonstration only on successful predecessors such as Phra Ruang, King Naresuan the Great and King Rama I (47:53) in order to exemplify the importance of unity and loyalty to the king and to accentuate the king's vital role in national security and independence. He also referred to the king as an institution that was essential to the nation's independence and development. Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab, on the other hand, wrote books that emphasised the king as the leader of the maintenance of

independence, the leader of the termination of persecution and the leader of the integration of benefits. In the meantime, he also wrote about kings who had failed to be leaders in these three areas, probably because he wished to remind everybody that a king who tried to make the country warlike instead of putting an end to persecution, and who caused division instead of emphasising the importance of integrating benefits might lead the dynasty to a disastrous end, as in former times.

Since the majority of Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab's books were written during King Rama VI's reign and after the 1932 revolution, it is not surprising that he gave priority to the defence of the country, not of the dynasty. As he stressed, 'We must think about the country first, and the dynasty second' (3:23).

The differences between the three most important intellectuals' ways of establishing the 'Thai' identity in the absolute monarchy state explain why such a state did not have sufficient authority. The groups of government officials who enjoyed high status and honour in King Rama V's period became the enemy of the absolute monarchy system and in the succeeding reign played a great role in its abolition, not caring to sustain it exactly as the king who had started it wished. Moreover, the Thai identity established by King Rama VI did not correspond to that emphasised by Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab, resulting in people's indecision about the two 'alternatives'. Eventually, both identity alternatives had to give way to a new one introduced by another group of people in 1932.

After the June 24, 1932 revolution, the Thai nation and identity were given a new definition both by people in power and by those trying to challenge them. Some aspects of this new definition were similar to the definition established by the absolute monarchy intellectuals while others were different from it. The combination of these similarities and differences constitutes the mainstream image of 'Thai society and culture', which continues until today.⁴

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Note

¹ I am very thankful to the Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University, for providing me with the funds and resources for my research in Japan from 16 April to 19 July, 2000. My special thanks go to my very kind hosts, Associate Professor Takeshi Higashimura and Associate Professor Atsuko Ohashi Momoki. I also extend my gratitude to the Thailand Research Fund for granting me the fund for my research in Thailand from 1 December, 1999 to 30 November, 2002. I thank Professor Dr. Nidhi Eoseewong of Chiang Mai University and Professor Dr. Chatthip Nartsupha of Chulalongkorn University very much for giving me significant comments. My thanks go finally to Aajaan Chaiyathip Katsura and Aajaan Pete Hoepner of Payap University and also to Research Associate Susan Tennant of GSID, Nagoya University. Aajaan Chaiyathip translated this paper into English, Aajaan Pete and Research Associate Tennant proofread the translation.

² Somdet Kromphraya Damrong Rachanuphab had the same attitude towards 'disposition', as seen in his books: 'Usually a person's mind can be changed or trained to be good or bad' (5:221).

³ His book 'Siam's Wars with Burma' does not emphasise 'other people' but the Thais' love of freedom. The images of Burma and Cambodia presented in this book emphasise that such love of freedom inspires Thais to repel intruders and refuse to be under any nation.

⁴ This is my hypothesis, which I try to examine in my research project, "History of the Intellectuals' Thinking about Thai Society and Culture (1892-1992)".