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## The Origin of Modern Official State Ideology in Thailand

EIJI MURASHIMA

### Introduction

Thailand is a non-Western country where a firm state ideology based on national political traditions has been developed to counter the influx of Western liberalism. The official state ideology is clearly set forth in Article 45 of the present constitution, which states that “No person shall exercise his constitutional rights and liberties in a manner adversely affecting the Nation, Religion, King and Constitution.” That is to say, every Thai must be loyal to these four institutions. Moreover, the government maintains a steady output of pamphlets and other publications to imbue this ideology into the minds of the Thai people.<sup>1</sup> “Nation” in this ideology is closely associated with “Religion” and “King”, both of which are fundamental elements in the traditional Thai Buddhist theory of kingship. According to this theory, the king, regarded as elected by a gathering of all the people, should reign justly as a protector on whom the people can rely, and should be guided by the restraints of the moral law of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the concept of “nation” in this ideology is different from that in Western liberal nationalism.

The idea of nationhood in modern Thai history is most often discussed in the context of King Vajiravudh and the politics of his reign (1910–25). For example, Walter F. Vella, who stated that he had studied Siamese nationalism during King Vajiravudh’s reign “as thoroughly and completely as [his] talents and the sources ... permit[ed]”,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the pivotal role which this triad of Nation, Religion and King plays in Thai politics, see Yoneo Ishii, *Jōzabubukkyo no seijishakaigaku* [Political Sociology in Theravada Buddhism] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1975); Charles F. Keyes, “Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand”, in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg PA: Anima Books, 1978), pp. 147–64; Frank E. Reynolds, “Legitimation and Rebellion: Thailand’s Civic Religion and the Student Uprising of October, 1973”, in *Religion and Legitimation*, ed. B.L. Smith, pp. 134–46; Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982) and Toru Yano, *Tai Biruma gendai seijishi kenkyū* [A Study of Modern Thai and Burmese Political History] (Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>On the traditional Thai Buddhist theory of kingship, Prince Dhani (1885–1974, who at the time of his death had been the President of the Privy Council for over 23 years) wrote, “A Siamese monarch succeeds to the Throne theoretically by election. The idea is of course recognizable as coming from the old Buddhist scriptures in the figure of King Mahasammata, the ‘Great Elect’”. See Prince Dhani Nivat, “The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 36, pt. 2 (1947):100. He also stated that “The *Thammasat* describes its ideal of a monarch as a King of Righteousness, elected by the people (the *Mahasammata*)”. See *ibid.*, 94. Dhani was a royal secretary during the reign of King Vajiravudh; his concept of Thai monarchy, which was thoroughly described in his article, seems to be essentially identical with that of King Vajiravudh. An older description of “the Great Elect” and “the king of Righteousness” is found in the *Traiphumilokawinitchayakatha* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1977) which was compiled by order of the king in 1802. Also see David K. Wyatt, “The ‘Subtle Revolution’ of King Rama I of Siam”, in *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southeast Asian Thought*, ed. D.K. Wyatt and A. Woodside (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1982), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>See Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo!: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978), p. ix.

made the following comment: “Vajiravudh’s nationalism and even many of its slogans (including the necessity for loyalty to nation, religion and king...) were Western imports”<sup>4</sup> brought in by King Vajiravudh. Also, in his recent history of Thailand, David K. Wyatt observed: “King Vajiravudh (r. 1910–25) had a great deal to do with breathing life into Chulalongkorn’s state and giving it a consciousness of itself as a nation, at least at an elite level.”<sup>5</sup> But in fact the introduction into Siam of the ideas of being a nation at an elite level had already begun in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910).<sup>6</sup> The idea of “Nation” (*Chat* or *Chat Banmuang* in Thai), in the sense of a national political community, came to be frequently used in the 1880s by Western-educated Thai intellectuals. It was during that period of the 1880s and 1890s that Siam experienced the greatest danger to its national independence, and the idea of the nation became a symbol that the Thai ruling elite could use and manipulate as a means of bringing about national integration under their leadership. However, the effect of this period of crisis on the origins of Thai nationalism has not received serious attention in studies on the subject.

Significantly, the adoption of *Chat* and its concept of the national political community in Thai politics did not bring about a fundamental change in traditional Thai political principles because *Chat* was explained in terms of the traditional Buddhist elective theory of kingship. Moreover, the ruling elite steadfastly upheld the significance of this particular political principle, maintaining that it was suitable to Thai conditions and an important part of the historical heritage and indigenous culture of the Thai nation (*chat Thai*). Thus, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, an incipient form of Thai official state ideology arose, based on the traditional idea of the Buddhist monarchy, on the concept of a national political community (*chat* or *chat banmuang*), and on a belief in the irreplaceable value of Thai national traditions. This sort of official state ideology, developed as an instrument to preserve the existing dynastic autocracy as it faced the danger of Western colonialism, was inherited by the following generation, especially by King Vajiravudh. Although this British-educated king attempted to westernize his country, he never went so far as to change fundamental Thai political principles. He inherited the substance of the state ideology from the previous generation, formalized it and consciously used it in an attempt to create a sense of nationhood among his subjects. Vajiravudh’s nationalism is a clear illustration of what Benedict Anderson has called “official nationalism” and what he defines as “an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups who are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>5</sup>See D.K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (London and Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich and Yale University Press, 1984), p. 224.

<sup>6</sup>Kullada also claimed that an “official nationalism” had already begun to emerge under King Chulalongkorn, basing her claim on the analysis of two school textbooks, *Thammachariya* and *Phonlamuang Di*. Kullada’s conclusions, however, would lead her to believe that this “official nationalism” did not begin to emerge until the beginning of the 1900s, during the last phase of Chulalongkorn’s reign, for the above two textbooks were not published until then. Moreover, she asserted that, “In 1893 when the officials and the people volunteered to fight against the French over the Paknam Incident they did it in the name of their gratitude to the king and the word nation was not mentioned at all.” See Kullada Kesboonchoo, “Official Nationalism under King Chulalongkorn” (Paper presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies, Bangkok, 22–24 Aug. 1984), p. 19. She fails to realize, however, that the incipient concept of the three-in-one loyalty to Nation, Religion and King can be traced back to the 1880s. Clearly this concept was used as a rallying point for the Thai people during the Paknam crisis in 1893 as we shall be discussing in this paper.

<sup>7</sup>See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), p. 95.

This paper takes a closer look at the origin and development of this state ideology in the reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh.

### *The National Political Community and Buddhist Monarchy*

*Chat*, a word of Pali and Sanskrit origin, has several meanings. Originally *chat* meant caste by birth. According to the theory of karma, all creatures are destined by birth to belong to some caste or be some kind of animal. Thus one generation of the circle of metamorphosis is also called *chat*. This original sense of *chat* as a group of people born into the same caste was extended to mean a group of people who by birth shared common language and cultural traits. In this second sense, *chat* is often used with *phasa* (meaning “language” in Thai). A third sense of *chat*, derived from the second sense, is that of a national political community. In this context, the concept is usually expressed in Thai with the compound *chat banmuang*. King Vajiravudh himself, in a royal speech of 27 June 1911 entitled “Instilling the Wild Tiger Spirit”, said the following about the sense of *chat* and its extension.

Originally *chat* meant lineage or caste in such examples as *chat Brahma*, which is a hereditary saintly caste, or *chat Kshatriya*, which is a hereditary warrior caste. *Chat* literally translated means “birth”, but later in history we Thais came to call a group of people who live together a *chat*. This new sense of *chat* is not wrong because he who is of the *chat Thai* is one who is born into the group which calls itself Thai.<sup>8</sup>

*Chat* in the second sense seems to have been used in the Thai vocabulary for some time. Based on the present writer’s own far-from-thorough investigation of Thai materials, the word was used in Thai documents even in the 1850s. There was for example “The Proclamation Regulating Behaviour toward the French, English and Americans in Siam in 1856” which was proclaimed to every *chat* and *phasa* in Siam which included Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mon, Laotians, Khmers, Burmese, Malays, descendants of the Portuguese, *Khaek* [Indians or Arabs] and Chams.<sup>9</sup> In *A Journal of the Tour of the Siamese Embassy to and from London in the Year of Our Lord 1857 and 1858* by Mom K. Rajoday R., published by the American Missionary Association Press in Bangkok in 1866 and one of the earliest books printed in Thai, *chat* is used six times in this sense. Also this same meaning of *chat* can be found in *Dictionarium Linguae Thai* by Pallegoix, published in 1854 in Paris.<sup>10</sup>

*Chat* in the third sense, however, came into frequent use only in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Western-educated Thai intellectuals began using the word as an equivalent for the English term “nation-state” and they often used it in discussions of the national independence issue.

There are today a number of words in the Thai language that connote the state, such as *banmuang*, *phaendin*, *prathet* and *rat*. The first two are native Thai words, *ban* meaning “house” or “village” and *muang* meaning “city”. Thus *banmuang* literally means “villages and cities”. *Phaen* has the connotation of “flat land”, while *din* means “soil” or “land”.

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<sup>8</sup>See King Vajiravudh, *Plukchai suapa* [Instilling the Wild Tiger Spirit] (Bangkok, 1914/15), pp. 56–57. Also see C.F. Keyes, “Towards a New Formulation of the Concept of Ethnic Group”, *Ethnicity* 3, no. 3 (1976): 204–205.

<sup>9</sup>See Fine Arts Dept. Thailand, comp., *Prachum prakat ratchakan thi 4 Pho. So. 2394–2404* [Collected Proclamations of the Fourth Reign, 2394 B.E.–2404 B.E.] (Bangkok, 1968), p. 145.

<sup>10</sup>See Jean Baptiste Pallegoix, *Dictionarium Linguae Thai sive Siamensis interpretatione latina, gallica et anglica illustratum* (Paris: Imperatoris impressum, 1854), p. 883.

The literal meaning of *phaendin* therefore is “flat land”.<sup>11</sup> *Prathet* and *rat*, on the other hand, are of Pali origin and their usage has become popular in the twentieth century. Regarding these terms for state, Pridi Banomyong, in his textbook on public law (the first Thai text on this subject), commented that there were no clear differences among the various words connoting the state.<sup>12</sup> Another point of interest regarding Thai words for “state” is that there were many oaths of loyalty that the king required of his servants, oaths both to himself and to *Banmuang* (or *Phaendin*).<sup>13</sup> These oaths show that the king’s subordinates had to be loyal to *Banmuang* (*Phaendin*) as well as to the king himself, suggesting that there already existed some notion of a polity other than the king. The existence of this other object of traditional loyalty may have helped the Thais accept the idea of a nation-state, just as *tenka* and *tianxia* had helped the Japanese and the Chinese to understand the meaning of the new national political community.<sup>14</sup> *Banmuang* and *phaendin* as designators of that other object of loyalty came into use before *chat* (or *chat banmuang*). But this latter designator was a more useful symbol for political integration because, it, in itself, means the national political group, the community as a whole.

It would seem that there were two main reasons why the use of *chat* in the sense of national political community came about during the 1880s. One was the critical international situation in which Siam found itself. By that time all of Southeast Asia had come under strong European pressure, and Siam’s neighbours, notably Burma and Indochina, lost their last vestiges of independence during that decade. This threatening environment forced the Siamese elite to realize the need for national integration. The other reason was the influence of Western political thought and its concept of the nation-state on the first generation of Western-educated Thai intellectuals. This first generation included King Chulalongkorn (1853–1910), Prince Prisdang (1852–1935), Chaophraya Phatsakorawong [Phon Bunnag] (1849–1920) and Khunluangphraya Kraisi [Luang Ratana Yati, Pleng Wepharaj] (1862–1901).<sup>15</sup> All took an active role in introducing the idea of a nation-state and contributed greatly to the formulation of the official state ideology.

Prince Prisdang, a grandson of King Rama III, studied in England from 1871 to 1876, graduating from King’s College. From 1877 to 1881 he returned to England to study civil engineering and also served as secretary for the Siamese delegation then in England for diplomatic negotiations. He was appointed Siam’s first minister of legation, initially to

<sup>11</sup>*Banmuang* and *phaendin* can be literally translated into Chinese as *guojia* and *tianxia*, respectively, because *guo* means city and *jia* means house or village, and *tianxia* indicates the flat land under the heaven. Both *guojia* (or *kokka* in Japanese) and *tianxia* (or *tenka* in Japanese) mean the state in Chinese (and Japanese). Moreover it is thought that *tianxia* should be the public body. This fact shows not only the close relationship between Thai and Chinese (or Japanese) language in this regard, but also the similarity of the traditional political thought.

<sup>12</sup>See Luang Praditmanutham [Pridi Banomyong] and Phra Sarasaspraphan, *Kotmai pokkhrong* [Public Law] (Bangkok, 1933), pp. 31–32.

<sup>13</sup>For instance, Section 2 in The Model of the Oath of Councillors of State in 1874, see Luang Ratana Yati, *Kotmai Thai ku phrarachabanyat lae pratat nai ratchakan thi 5* [Collected Thai Laws and Proclamations of the Fifth Reign] (Bangkok, 1893), pp. 165–68; and King Chulalongkorn’s speeches in 1877 and 1878, see King Chulalongkorn, *Phrarachadamrat nai phrabat somdet phrachulachom klaao chao yuhua* [Speeches of King Chulalongkorn] (Bangkok, 1915), pp. 13 and 23.

<sup>14</sup>See footnote 11 in this regard.

<sup>15</sup>Thianwan (1841–1915), a commoner, is another well-known nationalist. Although he is of the same generation as King Chulalongkorn and the above-mentioned aristocrats, his idea of nation was published a decade later than theirs. Thianwan’s idea of nation is found in his journal *Tulawiphakphochanakit*, which was published from 1900 to 1906. See Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Chiwit lae ngan khong Thianwan lae K.S.R. Kulap* [Lives and Works of Thianwan and K.S.R. Kulap] (Bangkok: Thiranan, 1979), pp. 138 and 141.



London in 1882 and then to Paris in 1883. In 1884, with reports coming in about fighting between the Burmese and the British and about the Franco-Burmese negotiations in Paris, King Chulalongkorn grew so anxious about the European threat to Siam that he questioned Prince Prisdang, then minister to Paris, about how the kingdom's independence could be preserved. The prince consulted with three of the king's younger half-brothers who were in London at the time. In January 1885 they submitted to Chulalongkorn a proposal known as "The Presentation of Opinions on Governmental Reform Submitted to King Chulalongkorn from the Royal Princes and the King's Servants", a document signed by eleven people.<sup>16</sup> This proposal appears to be the first petition to the king advocating the adoption of Western political principles. The proposal noted that these had become the standard for measuring civilized nations and needed to be adopted to preserve Siam's national independence and to make it into a modern nation-state. After opening with the following words: "Relying on both the power of our gratitude to the King and the power of loving our Nation (*Chat Banmuang*)", the proposal thereafter made frequent use of expressions of *Chat*. Below is a summation of this important document:<sup>17</sup>

The present problem facing Siam is to maintain national independence and a stable government. To resolve this problem, Siam must be accepted and respected by the Western powers as a civilized nation. Hence there is no choice but to bring about a new government modeled after the Western pattern, or at least after Japan, the only country in the East following the European way. According to European belief, in order for a government to maintain justice it must be based on popular consensus. Cabinet ministers must be selected from the elected representatives of the people and must be responsible to all the people. No nation (*chat*) in Europe can believe that Siam maintains justice since everything is decided by the king. It would also be dangerous for Siam if it should happen that the throne becomes vacant. Therefore the following reforms should be carried out:

1. change the absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy,
2. establish a cabinet system or ministerial government,
3. distribute power to the heads of departments,
4. promulgate a law of royal succession,
5. change the payment system for the bureaucracy from the commission system to a salary system,
6. promote equality under the law,
7. reform the legal system on the Western model,
8. promote freedom of speech, and
9. establish a merit system for the bureaucracy.

The proposal said that the above reforms would help to make the people feel there would no longer be any oppression or injustice. As a result they would feel a greater love for their country. They would regard Siam as a country of the people (*muang khong ratsadon*) needing their protection and maintenance in order that they might find permanent happiness, prosperity and justice.

<sup>16</sup>See Prince Prisdang, *Prawatyo nai phan-ek phiset phrawarawongtho praongchao Prisdang lem 1* [A Short Autobiography Vol. 1] (Bangkok, 1930), pp. 45–50.

<sup>17</sup>See Fine Arts Dept. Thailand, comp., *Chaonai lae kharachakan krapbangkhomithun khwamhen chat kanplianplaeng rachakanphaendin Ro. So. 103* [The Presentation of Opinions on Governmental Reform Submitted to King Chulalongkorn from the Royal Princes and the King's Servants in 1885] (Bangkok, 1967), pp. 21–25.

King Chulalongkorn replied to the proposal on 29 April 1885. In his reply he agreed with the views expressed regarding the international situation, but did not agree with a number of the main recommendations. His reply can be summarized as follows:<sup>18</sup>

He was not the same oppressive absolute monarch as those in European history and was not so short-sighted as a frog inside a coconut shell. Therefore, he was not an obstacle to the prosperity and security of the country. He himself had only just recently recovered executive power from his conservative ministers and only after a long struggle going back to 1868 when he had ascended the throne at the age of fifteen. Now he had finally gained the power to begin making governmental reforms. Any limitation or distribution of his power would not contribute to these reforms. On the contrary, there could only be a bad effect on them. Hence a parliament was no use in Siam because not only were there no suitable and able people to participate in it, but a parliament itself would hamper and corrupt the reforms.

The king gave a more detailed explanation of his thoughts about governmental reforms on 8 March 1888 in “King Chulalongkorn’s Speech Explaining Governmental Reform”,<sup>19</sup> which was delivered at the first meeting of his inner cabinet. This speech can be regarded as the starting point for the introduction of a modern bureaucracy in Siam, for it was following this speech that the centralization and functional differentiation of the administrative system gradually came into being and the so-called cabinet system (with the king as premier) began to function. It cannot be denied that these were fundamental reforms in Thai history and King Prajadhipok (reigned 1925–35) has likened them to the Meiji Restoration in Japan.<sup>20</sup> However, these reforms were limited to only the administrative structure and no fundamental change in political principles took place. In fact the king strongly objected to the introduction of Western political ideas which would limit his power. The king, who had a good command of English and wide knowledge of European history,<sup>21</sup> pointed out emphatically that the relationship between the king and people in Siam was very different from that which prevailed in Europe. In this regard he stated:

In Siam, there is no written law pertaining to the power of the king because it is understood that the king has absolute power. But in fact the king must always practise moderation and justice. I am not against having a written law on the powers of the king such as is found in other countries.... However its content is the problem. In Europe, where the power of the king is limited, political events caused by the dissatisfaction of the people brought about the limitation of the king’s powers. Even among European countries the degree of limitation is different because of differences in historical processes.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 53–60.

<sup>19</sup>This speech was first published by King Prajadhipok in 1927. D.K. Wyatt provides the date of this speech. See D.K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 91–92.

<sup>20</sup>King Prajadhipok said: “It was not an evolution but a revolution. Moreover, it was a very rare revolution in the world because it was bloodless. Even the Japanese revolution had its bloody Satsuma Rebellion.” See King Chulalongkorn, *Phrarachadamrat nai phrabat somdet phrachulachom klaow chao yuhua song thalaeng phraboroma rachathibai kaekhai kanpokkhong phaendin* [King Chulalongkorn’s Speech Explaining Governmental Reform] (Bangkok, 1927), introductory pages, pp. 2–3.

<sup>21</sup>His English ability was mentioned by a contemporary observer, Sir Henry Norman, who commented: “I had had the honour of being received by him [King Chulalongkorn].... the King is a student, not only of the affairs of his own country, but also of the politics and literature of Great Britain, and to a smaller extent, of Europe as well. He reads English with ease, and spoke it at least as well as the Tsarevich during all their conversations, which were carried on in that language.” See Sir Henry Norman, *The People and Politics of the Far East* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), p. 435.

In Siam there has never been such a political event where the people were against the king. Contrary to what happened in Europe, Siamese kings have led the people so that both they and the country might be prosperous and happy. Moreover, it is impossible for the king to govern the country following the European way because it is hard to find able persons to be members of parliament. Also, the people would never be pleased to have Western institutions. They have more faith in the king than in any members of parliament, because they believe that the king more than anybody else practises justice and loves the people. It is enough, therefore, just to write into a constitution what already has become accepted royal custom.<sup>22</sup>

From Chulalongkorn's speech one can see that the king did not consider the so-called absolute monarchy in Siam as being beyond the restraint of moral law. The monarch was entitled to people's obedience only to the extent that he practised justice and preserved the well-being of the people. But Chulalongkorn's concept of justice was far from that which was accepted in modern European political thought and which was proposed by Prince Prisdang and the king's half-brothers in 1885. Chulalongkorn legitimized his power on the basis of traditional Thai principles, most of which came from Thai Buddhism, and he totally rejected foreign political principles. He also emphasized the difference between Siamese and European history. The king's assertion of the importance of indigenous Thai political principles, coupled with what he regarded as the particular character of Thai history, can be regarded as the starting points of Thai nationalism, the basic element of the official state ideology.

In 1889, about the same time as the king's speech, one of Chulalongkorn's chief ministers, Phraya Phatsakorawong<sup>23</sup> (who became Chaophraya in 1892) wrote an article in the journal *Vajirayan Viset* (the Transactions of the Vajirayan Society, a group made up of princes and high officials). In this article he compared the Buddhist theory of kingship with modern Western political principles and brought in the newly developing symbol of *Chat* to explain the Thai monarchy. His argument can be summarized as follows:

It is understood that all the land of the kingdom belongs solely to the king. The king abides by the royal customs established by our ancestors who came together to form a *Chat*. This gathering of people chose from one family a capable man to be the leader of the *Chat*. This man was very able and intelligent and one the people could rely on to be their protector. This chosen leader guarded both internal and external security and brought happiness to the people. This had not been brought about by the opinion of the majority; rather it had been through the leader's own authority. The people who were organized into the *Chat* were loyal to him and followed his every advice. They renounced their natural rights, whether public or private. Therefore the leader (i.e., the king) received full freedom and power which was set forth in the royal customs that the people had enacted.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the Thai monarchy, which placed its legitimacy in Buddhism, was inextricably linked with *Chat*. But this "*Chat*" was not identical with the European concept of the "na-

<sup>22</sup>See King Chulalongkorn, *Phrarachadamrat nai phrabat somdet phrachulachom klao chao yuhua song thalaeng phraboroma rachathibai...*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>23</sup>He was born in 1849 and was a younger brother of the powerful Somdet Chaophraya Brom Maha Si Suriyawong. At age 15 he went to England to study and returned home at 19. He served as King Chulalongkorn's important private secretary during the early years of the reign because he was one of the few Thai officials at the time who could understand English and investigate foreign matters. He served as an acting minister of foreign affairs in 1888, Minister of Agriculture in 1890 and Minister of Public Instruction from 1892 to 1902. See Prince Damrong, *42 phraprawat bukkhon samkhan* [Biographies of Forty-Two Important Persons] (Bangkok: Bannakan, 1967), pp. 328–47.

<sup>24</sup>See Phraya Phatsakorawong, "Ruang Suan [On Farming]", *Vajirayan Viset* 4 (1889): 452–54.



tion". According to Phatsakorawong's argument, *Chat* was a gathering of the people that elected the king,<sup>25</sup> after which the king was given power over everything as the sustainer and protector of the people<sup>26</sup> under the moral law of Buddhism.

Phatsakorawong's argument was not much different from the speech by King Chulalongkorn, except for his use of *Chat*. He too upheld the traditional Buddhist theory of kingship, but what is important in his statement is his incorporation of the idea of *Chat* into indigenous political thought without fundamentally changing it. The Thai elite could now manipulate the *Chat* symbol in order to help bring about the political integration of the *Chat* under their leadership.

In 1893 another Western-educated Thai official, Luang Ratana Yati<sup>27</sup> (who became Khunluangphraya Kraisi in 1894), used the word "*Chat*" together with "King" and "Buddhism". This was in his weekly newspaper, *Thammasat-winitchai*, at the time of the 1893 French invasion. This newspaper, probably the only such Thai language source available to indicate the reaction of the Thai people to the invasion, carried an editorial in its 23 April 1893 issue entitled "France and the Thais". It condemned the French invasion, saying:

It is the duty of every Thai national (*khon Chat Thai*) who loves his *Chat* and *Banmuang* to make the utmost effort to the last in defence of the kingdom against the invading enemy.... I believe that those men who were born into *Chat Thai* would never surrender to become slaves of another *chat*.... We must be united to struggle

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<sup>25</sup>The Buddhist elective theory of kingship was not a mere theory in Siam. Until the succession to the throne of King Chulalongkorn, it had been the formal, though perfunctory, custom that candidates for the throne were approved by an assembly of royal princes, higher monks and high officials. Prince Wan said in a lecture at Chulalongkorn University on 15 July 1932 that until the reign of King Chulalongkorn, there had always been the phrase: *Anekajanani kara Samosara Sammata* (meaning: "be elected by the gathering of people") in the full name of the king. See Prince Wan Waithayakon, *Rathathananon* [Constitution] (Bangkok, 1932), pp. 8–11. Also King Prajadhipok made a mention of traditional Siamese elected kingship in his letter titled "Problems of Siam". See Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 285–87. This elective theory of kingship still has a great influence on the present monarch, King Bhumibol. He said: "As a matter of fact, His Majesty the King ascended to the throne through his election by the people. If the people should come not to want him, they themselves could decide to request His Majesty to abdicate the throne." See Tanin Kraivixien, *Phramahakasat Thai nai rabop prachathipatai* [Thai Monarchy within the Democratic System] (Bangkok: Ministry of Education, 1977), p. 39. It is also interesting to note that a chamberlain of the present king, M.R. Thongnoi Thongyai, has expressed his firm belief in the elective theory of kingship. See Supraphada Kasemsan, et al., *Chat Chitralada — su pracha Thai* [From Chitralada Palace to the Thai People] (Bangkok, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>The king as a sustainer and protector was also compared to a father. The king was regarded as the father of the family, i.e., *Chat Thai*. Even at present, the King and Queen are pleased to be called "Father" and "Mother" by their subjects. See Supraphada Kasemsan, et al., *Chak Chitralada*, pp. 6 and 8.

<sup>27</sup>Ratana Yati was born in 1862 and was the son of one of the king's royal pages. He studied English at the Phrarachawang Nantha-uthayan School which had been established by the king. For three years he was the best student at the school, which in 1882 earned him a King's scholarship to study law in England. He entered Middle Temple in London and in 1888 passed the qualifying examination for Barrister-at-Law. He was the first Thai student to do so. In 1893 he became the first director of the Public Procurator's Department; in 1897 he was appointed president of Criminal Court. He died in 1901. See *Anuson nai ngan phrarachathan pleng sop Khunluangphraya Kraisi* [To the Memory of Khunluangphraya Kraisi] (Bangkok, 1983). During his short life he published a large number of journals and books, such as the first book by a Thai on European history, *Phrarachaphongsawadan angkrit doi phisadan* [A Detailed History of England], published in 1893; a series, *Kotmai Thai ku phrarachabanyat lae pratat nai ratchakan thi 5* [Collected Thai Laws and Proclamations of the Fifth Reign], which also came out in 1893; and the first Thai journal of judicial precedents: *Thammasat-samai*, issued from 1897 to 1900.

against the royal foe in order to repay our gratitude to the king; we must defend Buddhism against being trampled down by the impious; we must defend our fatherland against the invasion of the enemy, and preserve the freedom and independence of the Thai Nation (*Chat Thai*).<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the editorialist used the *Chat* symbol with “King” and “Buddhism” in one of the earliest instances where these three symbols of the modern Thai state were used together.

King Chulalongkorn also began using the *Chat* symbol frequently after his first visit to Europe in 1897. For example, in a speech of 16 December 1897 he declared: “We must not be so blind as to imitate those things that are good for other *chat*, but which will have a bad effect on Siam or which are premature for Siam.”<sup>29</sup> In a speech to his military officers on 16 November 1903, the king said: “I am deeply impressed with your words of allegiance to me and by your oaths that you are determined to preserve Nation (*Chat*), Religion and Country (*Banmuang*).”<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, however, Chulalongkorn continued to adhere to his convictions of the irreplaceable value of Thai political traditions. It has been noted above that he warned against blindly imitating things from other countries. In another speech, given around 1903 to his officials, which has become well-known as “The Royal Discourse on Unity”,<sup>31</sup> the king reiterated his firm belief in Thai political principles:

Siam and Europe have taken different historical courses. Therefore, it is totally mistaken to try to introduce Western ideas as they are. We cannot cultivate rice in Siam using European agricultural textbooks about wheat. Western political institutions, such as parliaments or political parties, are not suitable for Siam where the king traditionally leads a backward population. Even if the radicals could introduce the European political institutions, they could not achieve their aims because their political party could not obtain a majority of support in the parliament since the majority of Thai people are conservative. Hence the unity of all Thai officials under the monarchical leadership is the best way for the prosperity of Siam.

The content of this discourse was almost the same as that of his 1888 royal speech on governmental reform. But by 1903 he had become more anxious about the loyalty of his officials, as an increasing number were becoming excited by Western liberal political ideas, concepts which were a major threat to Siam’s dynastic principles. Therefore Chulalongkorn warned them through this discourse and commanded that they unite with him under his royal leadership.

In sum it can be said that around the end of the nineteenth century, during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the formulation of the Thai official state ideology had begun. It was founded on the traditional Thai concept of Buddhist monarchy, on a conception of *Chat* as a national political community, and on the firm belief of the significance of the Thai national traditions. This incipient ideology was formulated during the 1880s and 1890s by the ruling elite as a device to integrate the Thai people in the name of Nation and national

<sup>28</sup>“Ruang frangses kap Thai [France and the Thais]”, *Thammasat-winitchai* 2 (1893): 30–34. For a detailed historical description on the Franco-Siamese crisis in 1893, see Noel A. Battye, “The Military, Government and Society in Siam, 1868–1910: Politics and Military Reform During the Reign of King Chulalongkorn” (Ph. D. diss., Cornell University, 1974), pp. 311–70.

<sup>29</sup>See King Chulalongkorn, *Phrarachadamrat nai phrabat somdet phrachulachom klao chao yuhua* [Speeches of King Chulalongkorn] (Bangkok, 1915), p. 113.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup>See King Chulalongkorn, *Phraboromarachawat lae phraboromarachathibai ruang samakkhi* [The Royal Discourse on Unity] (Bangkok, 1946), pp. 1–22.

traditions at a time when Siam faced a most dangerous threat from Western colonialism. This external threat to the Thai monarchy gradually subsided during the last years of King Chulalongkorn's reign, but was replaced by an internal threat arising from the rapidly growing number of urbanites who were becoming sensitive to Western political ideas. This situation forced the king to develop and make full use of this incipient state ideology for his conservative purposes. This ideology was handed down to his successor, King Vajiravudh, who formalized it and made vigorous efforts to instill it into his subjects' minds.

### *King Vajiravudh as a National Monarch*

King Vajiravudh was born on 1 January 1881 and became Crown Prince in 1895. Two years earlier, in August 1893, shortly after the French invasion, he had left Siam to study in England. He graduated from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1898 and then studied history and law at Christ Church College, Oxford. He left England in 1902 after a stay of nine full years and travelled throughout much of the world. However, despite this long period in the West and despite the fact that during his reign he would adopt a different policy toward the Chinese in Siam and make such new innovation as surnames, etc., his views on state ideology, expressed in a large number of addresses and articles after his return to Siam, show an unbroken continuity with those of his father's generation.<sup>32</sup> His arguments were much more refined because of his broader knowledge of the outside world,<sup>33</sup> but rather than borrowing his basic political ideas from European political thinkers, he inherited them from his father, King Chulalongkorn, and from his father's generation of Thai officials. Vajiravudh, like his father, stressed the significance of indigenous Thai political principles and the unique character of *Chat Thai* in Siam's history and culture. He frequently spoke to his subjects about the concept of nation and counted himself as one of the compatriots of the Thai nation (*Sahai Ruam Chat*).<sup>34</sup> However, he still called himself Lord of the Land (*Phrachao Phaendin*) and regarded his "compatriots" as servants at his feet (*Kha nai Prabat Somdet Phrachao Yuhua*).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, he wanted all his people to be united only under his leadership. Therefore, his concept of nation (*Chat*) was very similar to his father's and quite different from the Western liberal idea that the nation is established on the basis of human equality and freedom.

Like Chulalongkorn, Vajiravudh criticized the blind importation of such European political ideas and institutions as liberalism and constitutionalism, describing this as a cult of imitation. He chastised liberal reformers, saying that the idea of freedom brought about national disunity, and warned his compatriots against blindly following the propagators of liberal political views, accusing them of straying from the right path and

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<sup>32</sup>Walter F. Vella placed too much emphasis on the Westernized character of King Vajiravudh's ideas. He seems to have overlooked the king's continuity with his predecessors. See W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo!*, pp. xv-xvi and 33.

<sup>33</sup>A contemporary observer, Lord Northcliffe, wrote: "The King was brought up in England, speaks and writes French and English perfectly, and is a rather remarkable monarch." See Alfred Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World* (London: Jhon Lane The Bodley Head Ltd., 1924), p. 207.

<sup>34</sup>Prince Chakrabongse, the King's full younger brother, likewise said in 1913 that the king was equally a Thai citizen (*phonlamuang*). See "The Duties to Our Nation" in Prince Chakrabongse, *Krasae phradamrat lae khamchichaeng* [Speeches and Explanatory Remarks] (Bangkok, 1920), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>See King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], *Muang Thai chong tuen thet* [Wake up, Siam!] (Bangkok: Nangsuphim Thai, 1914), p. 72.

destroying the nation. He said that only those loyal to the king and who followed him were true members of the Thai Nation.<sup>36</sup>

However, King Vajiravudh did not face the same severe foreign threat as Siam had experienced during Chulalongkorn's reign. The king's unlimited powers began coming under increasing criticism in the local newspapers and even from his officials. On 1 March 1912, a number of military officers who had been planning a coup against the monarchy were arrested for treason, an event which came to be known as the Ro.So.130 treason plot. To some extent this increased internal criticism was a reflection of external circumstances. The absolute monarchy in Russia had begun to break down after 1905. The same happened in Turkey from 1908, while China's monarchy collapsed in 1912. Also, Mexico experienced a democratic revolution in 1910 and a nationalist movement was growing in India. Such political changes outside Siam were fully reported in Bangkok's Thai and English language newspapers. However, the Chinese Nationalist revolution, which became known in Siam as "*Kek Meng*" (meaning "Revolution" in Teochiu Chinese), had the greatest impact on the Siamese political scene. There were many ethnic Chinese in the country who had economic power and political enthusiasm and their loyalty to the Siamese monarchy was doubtful.<sup>37</sup>

Although King Vajiravudh took pride in teaching patriotism to his people,<sup>38</sup> he had no sympathy for nationalist movements in Asia. He condemned them, saying that those people who received European education and then joined such nationalist movements did so out of jealousy because they had failed to achieve their desired goal of becoming civil servants. He blamed these people for causing unrest<sup>39</sup> and equated them with utopian socialists, calling them "Uttarakuruans", the name given to inhabitants of a utopian world in an ancient, quasi-religious Siamese treatise, *Trai Bhumi Phra Ruang* (Treatise on the Three Regions).<sup>40</sup> To the king, they were followers of a sort of millenarianism which he called Matrayism (*Sasana Phrasriariya*).<sup>41</sup>

Vajiravudh's criticism of Asian nationalists was directed at the urban Thai population, particularly the government officials and ethnic Chinese who were easily influenced by new ideas from abroad. The growing dissatisfaction with the conservative Thai monarchy<sup>42</sup> among these urban groups made the king feel the need for national unity under his leadership all the more and consequently, he continually laid emphasis upon the official state ideology. In order to understand what this meant, it is necessary to examine Vajiravudh's conception of the Thai nation-state.

In March 1904, a little over a year after his return from Europe, Crown Prince Vajiravudh organized the Thawipanya (Enhancement of Knowledge) Club. He was both the

<sup>36</sup>See Vajiravudh's article entitled "The True Meaning of a Nation" in King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], *Khwamhen 10 ruang khong Asvabahu* [Ten Views of Asvabahu] (Bangkok, 1915/16), pp. 33–52.

<sup>37</sup>In order to discover the political ideas of the Chinese nationalists, some of whom were arrested during the strike in June 1910, the Siamese government had one of its officials, Tan Sutchai (who later acquired the title of Pra Chenchinakson) translate a very popular Chinese nationalist pamphlet, *Ge Ming Jun* (meaning "Revolutionary Army" in Chinese) by Zou Rong, into Thai. It had originally been published in Shanghai in 1903, and in its Thai version it was titled *Ruang Kek Meng* (Bangkok, 1910/11).

<sup>38</sup>See King Vajiravudh, *Chotmai het raiwan nai phrabat somdet phra mongkut klao chao yuhua* [The Royal Diary of King Vajiravudh] (Bangkok, 1974), p. 34.

<sup>39</sup>See King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], *A Siam Miscellany* (Bangkok: Siam Observer, n.d.), pp. 23–25.

<sup>40</sup>See King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], "Uttarakuru: An Asiatic Wonderland", *Siam Observer*, 12 Sept. 1913.

<sup>41</sup>See idem, *A Siam Miscellany*, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup>King Vajiravudh admitted he was an avowed conservative in "Uttarakuru: An Asiatic Wonderland".

chairman and the secretary-general. From April 1904 until July 1906 the club published a monthly journal entitled *Thawipanya*. The prince was the chief contributor to the journal which he used to give expression to his political thoughts. In an article entitled “The Records of the Siamese Parliament”, which appeared in the September 1905 issue, the prince, under the pseudonym “Noila”, sneeringly characterized an imaginary Siamese parliamentary system. This article was written in reply to a number of newspaper writers who were asking when the Siamese people would be able to have a parliament like other civilized countries. The Siamese parliament that the prince imagined in his article was an utterly useless body of absurdity and confusion. The members spent long hours in tedious debate and meaningless speech-making. The left and right wings were locked in continuous and ridiculous conflict, and many M.P.’s were Chinese who could not speak Thai correctly. This article was one of Vajiravudh’s earliest political essays, but it contained almost every element that he would stress later in his reign, such as his antipathy towards constitutionalism, his distrust of the political activities of the Chinese,<sup>43</sup> the need for patriotism, and the irreplaceable value of Thai history and culture. Except for the anti-Chinese element, what Vajiravudh expressed had already been set forth by his father in such works as “The Royal Discourse on Unity” and “King Chulalongkorn’s Speech Explaining Governmental Reform”.

Soon after Vajiravudh ascended the throne following his father’s death on 23 October 1910, he made a royal speech to his military officers in which he used words similar to those expressed by Chulalongkorn. He stated:

I am very pleased that the army has conferred upon me the title of field marshal, because it is evidence of your loyalty to myself and to the country (*Phaendin Siam*).... I intend to develop the army to keep pace with the times so that the independence of the Thai Nation (*Chat Thai*) can be entrusted to your keeping and can be done so in the full conviction that our military will be able to confront any enemy that might try to trample down the nation and religion.<sup>44</sup>

Along with echoing the words of his father, Vajiravudh, in May 1911, initiated his own patriotic movement, the Wild Tiger Corps (*Kong Sua Pa*), through which he intended to train civilians and form a home guard. The corps and its training were to spread the spirit of Wild Tigers amongst the king’s compatriots and to instill in them a spirit of sacrifice for the lives of their fellows and for King, Nation (*Chat, Banmuang*) and Religion (*Sasana*).<sup>45</sup> As part of his organizational efforts, Vajiravudh gave a series of six lectures between 26 May and 4 July 1911. These speeches came to be known as “Instilling the Wild Tiger Spirit”, and in them the king gave a detailed explanation of the three loyalties: “King”, “Nation” and “Religion”. These speeches later were compiled into one text and to date some one hundred thousand copies have been printed. Between 1942 and 1957 the Ministry of Education used the text in high school Thai language classes.<sup>46</sup> These speeches therefore have been an important vehicle for conveying the official state ideology to the Thai people.

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<sup>43</sup>King Vajiravudh’s criticism of the Chinese can be found as early as 1905 and did not begin with the Chinese strike in Bangkok in 1910 as is widely held.

<sup>44</sup>See King Vajiravudh, *Phrarachadamrat nai phrabat somdet phra mongkut kiao chao yuhua* [Speeches of King Vajiravudh] (Bangkok, 1929), pp. 4–5.

<sup>45</sup>See idem, *Plukchai suapa*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup>Interestingly, textbooks such as *Thammachariya*, which were used before the 1932 revolution to instill the state ideology, continued to be used after 1932.



Regarding the relationship between the king and the national community, the king stated in one of the speeches:

Human beings who were blood relatives usually came together and united into a community to maintain and protect themselves. But even if all members of the community were kin, they could not have resisted external threats if every member behaved as he pleased. To unify all members in times of emergency there was no other way than to entrust one member with a commanding role and for the others to follow him. It was also necessary to have a judge who could make resolute decisions for the maintenance of internal peace when members were divided in their opinions. The commander in times of external threats and the judge who kept internal peace was usually an older and experienced member of the community and to him was entrusted the sovereign power of all the members of the community.... Later in history, the custom of electing a community leader for life was instituted. This type of leader came to be called the king. He was entrusted with the sovereign power of the community, and exercised it in the interests and for the happiness of the whole community. Therefore, to respect the king is to respect the sovereign power of the community. Since community members own that power in common and have entrusted it to the king, to insult the king is to insult one's own power and ultimately to insult oneself. To be loyal to the king, on the other hand, means to love oneself because the king has been entrusted with the duty to protect and preserve the national community (*Chat Banmuang*) and to keep internal peace.

Here Vajiravudh reiterated the same elective theory of kingship that Phraya Phatsakorawong had described more than twenty years earlier. The king went on to say:

When there are members of the national community (*chat*) who remain distant from their own king and are not obedient to him, the king will not have enough power to perform his entrusted duties. On the other hand, when all members are loyal to him, anything can be accomplished. It is difficult to accomplish any work without a chief. When we sail the ocean, all of us must follow the captain. If we do not, there is a danger that the ship will sink and take the lives of its passengers.... When we know that something gives us dignity, we do our best to preserve and cherish it. Since the king gives dignity to the nation, he also gives dignity to every member of the nation. It is therefore the duty of all the members of the nation to do their best to preserve their king. Those who harm the king must be regarded as those who harm the nation (*chat*), who destroy the dignity of the country (*banmuang*), and who break the peace and happiness of the community. They must be regarded as the enemy of all the people.... Please do not think that I am not a human being. I am a human being as you are. I am one member of the Thai people to whom you entrusted the sovereign power of the Thai Nation. I never request anything of you that I am not willing to do myself. And when I am willing to sacrifice my private happiness, my body and even my life, and you also are willing to sacrifice yours, then I can be assured of the survival of the Thai Nation. Please think that you and I are in the same boat, that we all share a common fate.... Please remember that the day when you lose faith in me, the day when you think that I should no longer hold power, prestige and the role of maintaining the independence of the Thai Nation, that day will be the last day of my life.<sup>47</sup>

According to Vajiravudh, all members of the national community should be regarded as relatives and the king is the member who dignifies this national community. The king, who is regarded as elected, is entrusted by the people with the sovereign power of the national community. Thus his status as king is regarded as ultimately dependent on the

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<sup>47</sup>See *Plukchai suapa*, pp. 46–55.

will of the people.<sup>48</sup> But once the people have entrusted the commanding role to him, they must follow him absolutely. To be disloyal to the king is equivalent to being against one's own nation and even against oneself. The commanding king claims to rule on the grounds that he represents the real spirit of the Thai Nation as a whole. He therefore can justify the elimination of his opponents on the grounds that he is the personification of the common interest of the nation.

Concerning the relationship between Buddhism and Nation, the king said the following:

A nation filled with morality will prosper; on the other hand, a nation insufficient in morality will become badly disordered and divided.... When each member has no morality, does not care about justice and behaves without consideration for his neighbours, ...there must be conflicts and there can be no happiness among them. In such a situation, it becomes impossible to live together as a community which can only lead to the destruction of the national community.<sup>49</sup>

Further on he reemphasized the very close relationship between religion and nation:

Only by relying upon the stability of the country can Buddhism last permanently.... When a nation goes to ruin, religion cannot be preserved. Conversely, when religion vanishes from the nation, people will no longer have morality; and a nation insufficient in morality will go to ruin and destruction.<sup>50</sup>

Thus King Vajiravudh articulated the well-known triumvirate of "Nation", "Religion" and "King". It would be the ideological foundation of Thai government for many years to come.

King Vajiravudh applied his conception of the Thai nation-state to Siamese history in a drama that he wrote entitled *Programme of the Pageant of Wild Tiger Traditions*, which was produced at the Headquarters of the Honourable Corps of Wild Tigers on his birthday in January 1912.<sup>51</sup> It was in the middle of the same month that a group of young military officers began to hold meetings to plan a political revolution. They had been influenced by Western political thinking and constitutionalism. Many of them were said to have been descendants of Chinese and were influenced by the Chinese Revolution which became known as *Kek Meng*.<sup>52</sup> But the government got wind of the plot and on the first day of March 1912 began arresting suspects. Ultimately 106 people were taken into custody; ninety-two of them were found guilty.<sup>53</sup> This 1912 plot against the monarchy can be

<sup>48</sup>Although King Vajiravudh was a monarch who was not elected in any sense of the word, he stressed the elected nature of Thai kingship. This paradoxical fact can be explained by the historical circumstances of his reign. At that time the Thai monarchy was becoming more absolute and, consequently there was greater need to legitimize the king's power by referring to the tradition of elected kingship.

<sup>49</sup>See *Plukchai suapa*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup>See King Vajiravudh, *Kamnotkan sadaeng tamnan suapa* [Programme of the Pageant of Wild Tiger Traditions] (Bangkok, 1912).

<sup>52</sup>An article in the *Siam Observer* classified the military officers who planned the rebellion into three groups. The largest of these groups was composed of members who were largely of Chinese origin and whose level of education was higher than those in the other two groups. They planned to change Siam into a republic with Prince Ratchaburi as the first president. The other two groups upheld the idea of constitutional monarchy, one planning to install Prince Nakhonsawan as the new king, the other Prince Phitsanulok (Chakrabongse). See "Ruang nai thahan khit kankamreap [Military Officers Planned to Rise in Rebellion]", *Siam Observer* (Thai edition), 8 March 1912.

<sup>53</sup>See Thamsook Numnonda, *Yangterk runraek: kabot Ro. So. 130* [The First Young Turks: The 1912 Plot of Treason] (Bangkok: Ruangsang, 1979), pp. 17–34.

regarded as the first clear indication of dissatisfaction by the Western-oriented urban population, most of whom were ethnic Chinese or government officials.<sup>54</sup>

Following the discovery of the plot, King Vajiravudh, under the pseudonym “Asvabahu”, increased his output of political essays in both Thai and English. These appeared in the newspapers, *Nangsuphim Thai*, *Nangsuphim Siam*, and the *Siam Observer*. The first of these post-plot essays was *A Siam Miscellany*, which was originally published in the *Siam Observer* in 1912. In it the king treated affairs in China, India, Turkey and Japan. Except for the part on Japan, this essay was soon translated into Thai. At the same time Vajiravudh translated into Thai an English article, “The Dismemberment of China”, by E.J. Dillon (October 1912 in *The Nineteenth Century and After*). Under his pseudonym the king published in 2456 B.E. (1913/14) an article entitled “Uttarakuru” and a Thai book entitled *On China*. In the following year he produced “The Jews of the Orient” and “Wake up, Siam!” both of which were anti-Chinese. Along with these was another essay, *Affairs Related to the World War*. During 2458 B.E. (1915/16) he published “The Cult of Imitation”, “Clogs on Our Wheels”, *Ten Views of Asvabahu* and nine other short articles. Although King Vajiravudh was moved to write a large number of political essays,<sup>55</sup> the number of problems he dealt with was limited. Most were concerned with revolutionary political movements, the political and economic role of the Chinese in Siam, or the advancement of the Siamese nation-state. Through these essays the king expressed his deep conviction that each nation had its own wealth and peculiarities of history and culture. He was convinced that to become civilized, a nation had to be able to use its own potentialities and abilities to create a civilization appropriate to itself. To Vajiravudh, a nation did not deserve to be called a nation if it blindly took another nation as a model and did not seek its own way.

The king criticized both internal and external revolutionaries on the same grounds. He accused both of being influenced by Western ideas and of being motivated by private jealousies. He also criticized their ideologies for being too utopian. He repeatedly asserted that it was impossible for European institutions to be transplanted to the soil of the Orient. Revolutions would only bring the people misfortune. In this regard he wrote:

While constitutionalism may suit Western peoples, it certainly disagrees with Orientals as a whole.... The Turks being Orientals, constitutionalism with them was more of a poison than a medicine.... The Young Turks continued to talk political clap-trap about “Freedom”, “Constitution”, and “Reforms” when they did not really know how to set about their task. They amused themselves by throwing dust in the eyes of people, whose enthusiasm for “free institutions” made them easy and unsuspecting victims. Such people exist in large numbers in Europe and America; while there are people also in Siam (or should I say Bangkok?) who *affect* to be believers in “free institutions” because, I presume, they deem it a part of “civilization”. Such people fall easy victims on account of their predisposition to “enthuse” over anything in the nature of Constitutionalism.<sup>56</sup>

At another point he stated:

One of the truths is that what suits one country does not necessarily suit another country equally well. European institutions were created by Europeans to suit Euro-

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<sup>54</sup>King Vajiravudh showed his deep distrust of the Thai urban population. See King Vajiravudh, *Chot-maihet raiwan*, pp. 149 and 156.

<sup>55</sup>King Vajiravudh used the pseudonym of Asvabahu until around Nov. 1916 when he wrote political articles. See King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], “A Fine Idea, But”, *Siam Observer*, 25 Nov. 1916.

<sup>56</sup>See *A Siam Miscellany*, pp. 35–36.

peans, and it is manifestly absurd to adopt such institutions in our own country without first considering the suitability, or otherwise, of such institutions. For us to adopt European institutions without regard to suitability is to act like the Jambuans of my fable, who adopted the Uttarakuruan woollen cloaks without regard to the warm climate. Like the Jambuans in the fable, we shall not only look ridiculous in the eyes of Europeans, but we shall also have to suffer discomfort for no appreciable benefit at all.<sup>57</sup>

Vajiravudh equated nationalist revolutionaries with utopian messianic believers in Maitreya, the future Buddha. One month after the 1912 treason plot, he made a lengthy comparison in his diary between the ideas of utopian socialism — which he understood to be the basic ideology of both the revolutionary military officers in Siam and the Chinese nationalists — and the ideas of Matrayism.<sup>58</sup> He not only criticized the radical Siamese military officers for being utopian, but also accused them of believing in imitation. His argument, presented in an article entitled “The Cult of Imitation”, is summarized in the following:

There are many believers in the cult of imitation in Siam. But no matter how well they imitate Europeans, they cannot be respected by the Europeans. Imitating Europeans blindly means becoming slaves to them. It is the opposite of being a Thai. [It is a common belief in Thailand that the word “Thai” also means “free”.] Imitating Europeans in order to be civilized is definitely wrong, because civilization means having one’s own creativeness and independence of culture. If we still like to imitate others, we should imitate our glorious ancestors who were able to integrate and preserve our nation for the last two hundred years. Let’s please imitate our ancestors alone and sacrifice our private happiness, love, and even our lives for our King as evidence of our loyalty, as well as for Buddhism and Nation as our ancestors did.<sup>59</sup>

The king then declared that the thoughtless imitation of Europe was the worst mud obstructing the wheels of the nation’s advance.<sup>60</sup>

### Conclusion

The Thai official state ideology, centred on the triumvirate of Nation, Religion and King, has been associated by many scholars with the Western-educated King Vajiravudh. However, this study emphasizes the continuity of King Vajiravudh’s fundamental political ideas with those of the previous Thai generation. It shows that the concept of the three-in-one loyalty to Nation, Religion and King had its origin in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. *Chat* in the sense of a national political community became a popular word in the Thai vocabulary in the latter half of his reign when Siam faced a most critical threat to its national independence. At the same time, this sense of *chat* was incorporated

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 21–22.

<sup>58</sup>King Vajiravudh viewed all revolutionaries in terms of being believers in utopian Matrayism, regardless of whether they were Siamese, Chinese, Indians, Turks or Russians. See *Chotmaihet raiwan*, pp. 63–98. His views on Russian revolutionaries were expressed under the pseudonym Ramachiti in a work entitled *Kan chalachon nai Rassia* [The Russian Revolution] (Bangkok, n.d.). His fear of Matrayism was not groundless, for Buddhist millennialism developed in the Siam-Indochina border areas during the early 20th-century. See C. F. Keyes, “Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977): 291–302.

<sup>59</sup>See King Vajiravudh [Asvabahu], “Latthi au yang [The Cult of Imitation]”, *Nangsuphim Siam*, 9–10 April 1915.

<sup>60</sup>Idem, “Khlon tit lo [Clogs on Our Wheels]”, *Nangsuphim Siam*, 29 April–12 May 1915.

into the traditional Buddhist theory of kingship; thereby “Nation” (*Chat*) was linked with “King” and “Religion” (Buddhism). King Chulalongkorn denied Western liberal political principles on the grounds that the Thai people had their own peculiar political principles which were better suited to the Thai climate because they had been created through the process of Thai history. He stressed the significance and value of Thai national traditions. Thus the conceptual version of the Thai “nation-state” was originated by the ruling elite in order to unite their subjects in the name of nation (*chat*) and newly-defined “national” traditions.

King Vajiravudh basically inherited these political ideas from his father’s generation and formalized them into the official state ideology in an effort to shore up a shaky monarchy. Like his father, he was convinced of the irreplaceable value of Siamese national traditions and expressed his antipathy to liberal political ideas from the West. He accused advocates of liberalism of believing in a cult of imitation and insisted that the Thais had to strengthen their civilization using the foundations of Thai traditions. They had to build a modern nation that was distinctly Thai and not a corrupted imitation, fabricated from European political principles. These political ideas set down by King Vajiravudh retain traditional characteristics peculiar to Thai culture and have become the principles which underpin the modern Thai state. The fact that these traditional ideas persisted, even after the 1932 constitutional revolution, has made the concept of “democracy” in Thailand distinct from Western ideas of democracy.