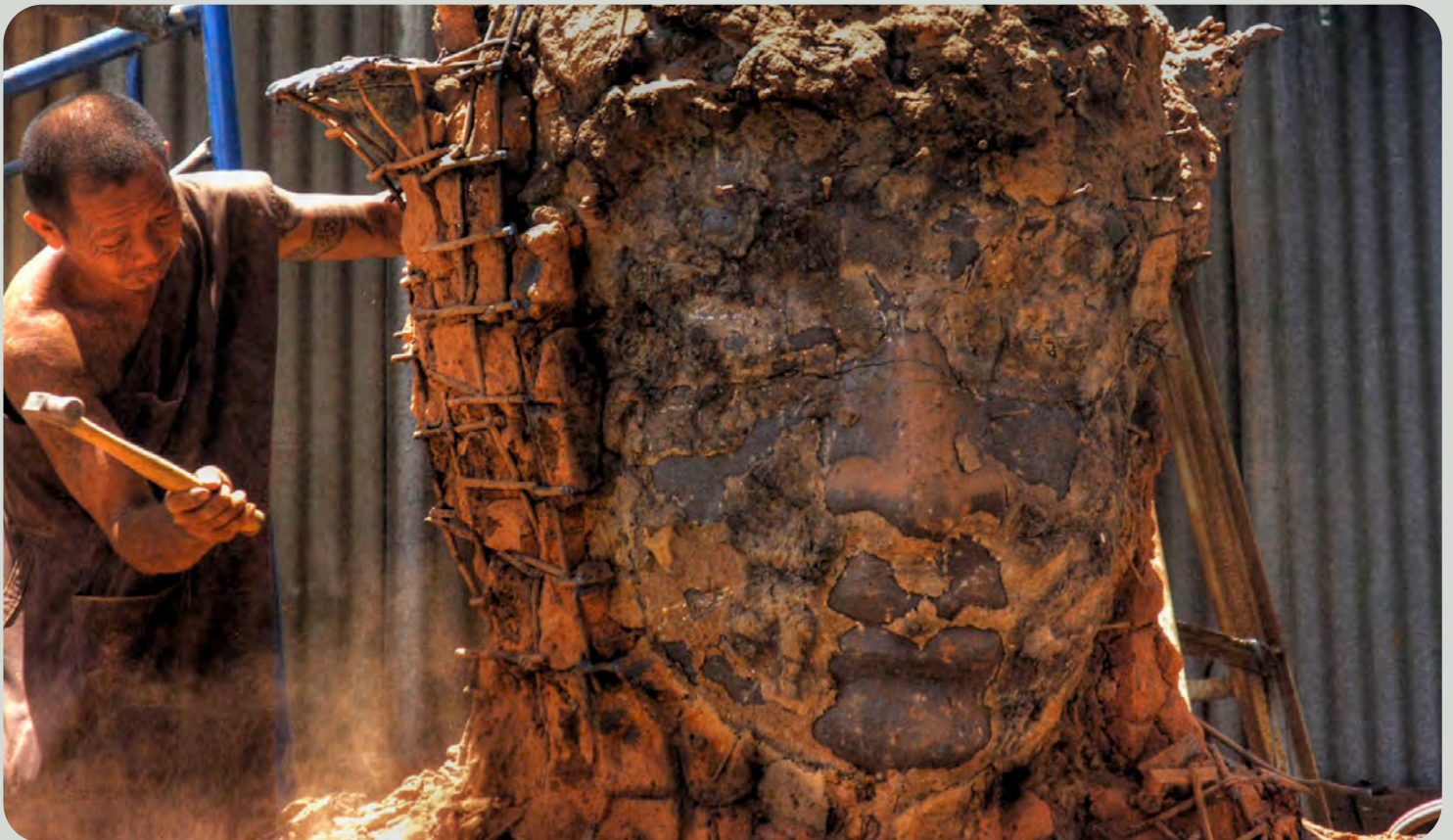


EXPLORATIONS

a graduate student journal of southeast asian studies

Volume 10 Spring 2010



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Dear Readers

We proudly welcome you to the tenth anniversary issue of **EXPLORATIONS** graduate student journal of Southeast Asian studies. The scholarship contained in these pages covers a variety of pertinent regional issues. Buddhism and war, buffalo theft, and seventeenth-century cross-cultural contact with Japan are all addressed. These pages also contain a newly translated Indonesian poem, as well as photo essays on modern lava casting sculptural techniques at a monastery/drug rehabilitation center in Thailand and the realities of archaeological work in Cambodia.

The publication of this journal was not a lone endeavor, and our list of individuals to thank is a long one. First and foremost, many thanks to our staff of dedicated volunteer editors and the countless hours they donated towards making this publication possible. We are grateful for the support of our faculty advisors Dr. Barbara Andaya and Dr. Liam Kelley, as well as the assistance of the very efficient, ever-cheerful Paul Rausch and the greater Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. We are also indebted to Dr. Leslie Sponsel for his generous and expert advice.

Editors,

Rachel Hoerman and Deanna Ramsay

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The principle mission of **EXPLORATIONS** is to offer a forum for graduate students to present research relating to Southeast Asia. This forum introduces the work of graduate students studying Southeast Asia to others in the field, encourages the publishing of scholarship by those from Southeast Asia about the region, and fosters a sense of community among those interested in Southeast Asia from around the globe. **EXPLORATIONS** embraces the diversity of academic interests and scholastic expertise of its authors, and hopes to encourage discussion both within and across disciplines in topics concerning Southeast Asia

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Seals of Red and Letters of Gold

Japanese Relations with Southeast Asia in the 17th Century

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Travis Seifman is a first-year M.A. student in Art History at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. His research interests center on early modern (17th-19th c.) Japan, with a particular interest in cultural history and Japan's relationships with the other cultures of Asia outside of the oft-discussed China and Korea. "Seals of Red and Letters of Gold," as published in this volume, is a version of a paper written as his M.A. dissertation in Japanese Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He continues to have a strong interest in the culture of the cities and ports of early modern Southeast Asia, but has recently turned his attention to studying the Ryūkyū Kingdom (Okinawa).

Portrayals of Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate are frequently characterized by descriptions of a country which, out of fear of Christian influence, closed its doors to the world (Toby 1977:323ff).¹ Indeed, for over two hundred years, from the 1630s until 1853, Japanese diplomatic and economic relations with the outside world were heavily regulated and restricted. Some scholars have described the shogunate's key goals in instituting these policies as the elimination of the subversive threat of Catholicism and the enforcement of a shogunal monopoly on foreign trade. The shogunate sought to achieve these goals through the complete cessation of Japanese overseas travel, outlawing of Christianity, and restriction of Europeans to a tiny man-made island in Nagasaki Harbor, along with other measures (Toby 1984:6). However, this explanation, like those which have come before it, fails to fully account for the cessation of direct trade with China and of all direct trade and formal relations with the various polities of Southeast Asia. Thus, one comes to wonder, how did fear of Western or Christian influence and a desire for greater shogunal wealth, translate into action

being taken against direct trade and friendly relations with the polities of Southeast Asia?

Trends in scholarship over the last several decades have turned away from the Eurocentric view of Japan's relations in this period, reviving an awareness of the importance of Asian contacts. It is now argued that the shogunate's policies of maritime restrictions derived from keen understandings and extensive information regarding the dispositions of its various potential trading partners, rather than purely from ignorance, fear, or isolationism (Walker 2002:44). Nevertheless, most scholarly treatments of Japanese trade during this period continue to focus on relations with China, Korea, and the Dutch East India Company, virtually omitting any reference to the polities of Southeast Asia. This poses a considerable obstacle to understanding the full picture of Japan's trade and diplomacy during this period. This work seeks to rectify this problem, through an exploration of the complex narrative of the golden age of Japanese commercial and diplomatic contact with Southeast Asia in the early 17th century, and its cessation, addressing as well as the impact of

domestic events in the region upon international relations and trade. This work focuses particularly upon Japanese trade and relations with the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya and Vietnamese polity of Quang Nam across the span of the 17th century.

Trade before Maritime Restrictions

In the decades before the imposition of maritime restrictions, from roughly 1590 to 1635, Japan's trade with Southeast Asian polities, independent Chinese traders, and agents of a number of Western powers flourished. Extensive trade was conducted at Japanese ports, as well as by Japanese traders and adventurers at ports in the independent Ryūkyū Kingdom and Southeast Asia. Not only did Japanese merchants trade with native Ryukyuan and Southeast Asian merchants, but with Chinese merchants as well who, in trading with Japanese in these locations, were not violating the Ming maritime restrictions (*haijin*²) forbidding travel to Japan. The Ming court had formally severed ties with Japan some decades earlier, and banned Chinese from travelling to Japan, though many defied this proclamation, and one Ming official wrote that "the ban of the Ming government is not sufficiently effective" (Iwao 1976:3).

Japanese maritime activity at this time was primarily the work of independent adventurers and pirates, not that of organized merchants associated with given businesses or guilds in Japan. These adventurers were quite numerous, and it has been said that, "unique among Asian nationals, they proved to be at least equal to the Westerners in trading and fighting skills throughout Far Eastern waters" (Theeravit 1988:18). Many of these Japanese adventurers who settled in Southeast Asia were Christians who faced persecution in Japan (Ribeiro 2001:55), and many were samurai who for any number of reasons sought adventure overseas and an escape from life and responsibilities at home in Japan. The majority of adventurers and others who traveled to Southeast Asia at this time were granted no special status, recognition, or protection outside Japan, by the shogunate or its predecessors, with the sole exception of those few traders who were formally licensed through the "red seals" system described below. Though many of these adventurers operated independently, on Japanese vessels, many others served on Chinese or Western ships, or earned

profit through military service to local Southeast Asian governments or other factions (Ibid.).

The Shuinsen System and the Politics of Trade

Japanese merchant shipping was controlled by Japanese authorities under Toyotomi Hideyoshi (r. 1582-1598), and later under the Tokugawa shogunate (est. 1603), both of which issued formal documents to officially designate authorized merchants in a system aimed at combating the piracy prevalent at the time. These ships were called *shuinsen*, or "red seal ships" after the vermilion seals on the formal documents (*shuinjō*) that they carried, and agreements were reached between the shogunate and the authorities in various Southeast Asian countries regarding the recognition and enforcement of the system. In this period of over 30 years, from the issuing of the first *shuinjō* by the shogunate in 1604, until the abolition of the system in 1635, more than 350 officially licensed Japanese ships traveled abroad, calling at 19 ports across the region (Iwao 1976:9-10). More than half of the *shuinjō* were issued for trade with ports in mainland Southeast Asia, with roughly half of those being issued for central Vietnam, also known as Quang Nam, Quinam or Cochinchina.

Extensive networks of transshipping were also established between Japan and parts of the Asian mainland during this period, in addition to the direct trade. Rather than being transported on a single vessel directly from their origin to their destination, many goods would pass through several ports and the hands of a number of merchants along their journey. There were a number of ports which operated primarily in this fashion, serving as intermediaries, and not as the origin or final destination for the bulk of their goods. This was effected largely through Western merchants who traded at Japanese ports, and through Ryūkyū, a nexus of trade in the region that provided a considerable proportion of the Southeast Asian goods exchanged within Japan and to Korea and elsewhere throughout the Edo period. The Dutch traded far more in Asian goods than in Dutch or other European ones, and the majority of items offered by Ryūkyū in tribute to Japan and China were Southeast Asian products rather than native Ryukyuan goods (Sakamaki 1964:385-386). Through these networks, Japan ex-

ported primarily precious metals and other mineral goods, along with ceramics and other craft goods, and imported silks, woods, lead, sugar, and a variety of animal materials such as skins and ivories, in exchange, from Southeast Asia (Iwao 1976:10).

Iwao Seiichi, who literally wrote the book on 16th-17th century Japanese settlements in Southeast Asia,³ identifies three factors as the primary causes for the expansion of trade in this period. Firstly, the lack of formal relations and trade with China encouraged traders to look elsewhere for their goods, and to initiate or expand activities in Southeast Asian ports. Secondly, the end of Japan's long Sengoku period (1467-1600), roughly 150 years of war within the archipelago, brought peace and stability. *Daimyō* (feudal lords) were now able to increasingly focus their attentions away from martial activities and towards economic goals, thus allowing for the expansion and development of domestic industry and trade. Finally, the period saw increased movements towards internationalization in general, largely spurred by attitudes and activities of the Western powers active in the region (Iwao 1976:1).

This period of prolific international trade also saw the consolidation of power, and the gradual imposition of controls upon trade and interaction with foreigners by both Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shogunate. It was of great importance for both of these authorities to take steps to ensure their legitimacy in the eyes of the *daimyō*, religious factions, and other regional powers, and their power and authority over the nation in general. Mary Elizabeth Berry, a historian of Tokugawa Japan, in her essay "Public Peace and Private Attachment," offers an excellent, succinct overview of the methods by which the Tokugawa shogunate consolidated and enforced its control. She suggests that the shogunate achieved these goals through a combination of compromises, personal relationships between lords and retainers, and laws and policies aimed at suppressing the ability of *daimyō* and other factions to gain too much power or wealth (Berry 1986).

This consolidation and centralization of power served not only domestic purposes, but was important in the international arena, as the shogunate sought to establish its legitimacy in the eyes of foreign governments, and to extricate Japan from the Sinocentric

regional order, establishing something of a Japanocentric regional order. International relations in East and Southeast Asia were for many centuries largely based on notions of Chinese cultural supremacy and a series of tributary relationships by which states would send gifts and formal missions to the Chinese imperial court in acknowledgement of the suzerainty of China, in exchange for formal recognition from China and various opportunities and freedoms in pursuing trade. The Ashikaga shoguns had entered into tributary relations with Ming China in 1405 (Sansom 1961:170), and though formal relations had been cut off since 1557 (Iwao 1976:1), Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shoguns who came after him felt the need to more explicitly end the pretense of Japanese subordination to China.

Efforts to achieve this took many forms, and included both ritual and practical diplomatic activities as well as military and cultural expansion. Hideyoshi sought to conquer Korea, Taiwan, the Ryūkyūs, and the Philippines in order to create a network of Japanese tributaries to rival China's. This would theoretically provide a basis for which relations could be forged on an even footing, allowing Japan to regain access to officially authorized trade with China (Arano 2005:206). In addition, Japan began to use its own imperial calendar, not China's, in official communications with Chinese tributaries such as Korea, and employed the title *Taikun* or "Great Prince" to refer to the shogun, intentionally avoiding any title such as "King" (王) that would imply a role within the Sinocentric order, subordinate to the Chinese emperor (Toby 1984:85-8).

Though these measures showed a distancing from China, and indeed did not initially go far to encourage friendly and open relations between the two countries, they were important elements in the consolidation of the shogunate's legitimacy and authority within Japan, and beyond its shores. In order to repair and resume formal relations with China, Japan had to show that it had a centralized authority with which the Chinese court could communicate and interact, and which could put an end to the problem of the *wakō*, pirates⁴, raiders, and traders whose depredations caused the rift in Sino-Japanese relations in the mid-16th century that led to the imposition by Ming China of *haijin* (maritime restrictions), mentioned earlier. The samurai lords of Japan were at war with one another from 1467

until about 1600, and lacked any single central authority powerful enough to take any action on this front; the problem was exacerbated by the Ming ban on trade with Japan, which caused countless otherwise law-abiding and peaceful traders to become labeled as *wakō*, i.e. as criminals, simply on account of their continued involvement in trade despite the ban (Arano 2005:186-7). Following the fall of China's Ming dynasty in 1644 to Manchu invasions, and the establishment of the Qing dynasty, many Ming loyalists fled to Taiwan and other parts of the region. Many became raiders and pirates, fighting for many decades under the likes of Zheng Chenggong (Coxinga), ostensibly seeking to restore the Ming to power. As a result, the ethnic composition of the *wakō* came to be primarily Chinese. Nevertheless, for centuries, though these traders and pirates derived from a wide variety of ethnicities and allegiances, the Chinese and Korean courts consistently insisted upon considering them *wakō*, or "Japanese pirates," and primarily, if not solely, Japan's responsibility to suppress. For this reason, many of the policies of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the early Tokugawa shogunate which related to foreign relations or trade were aimed at reducing illicit trade and other criminal activities, and at showing China that they could be trusted as responsible trading partners who looked after their own affairs (Arano 2005:190).

Certainly, many of these policies served to reinforce authority at home, and to prevent rebellions and other opposition to the central authority, but most can be seen as steps taken to control overseas travel and trade, and to prevent violence and criminal activities committed by Japanese abroad. Over the course of the 1580s-90s, Hideyoshi confiscated swords from commoners, removed *rōnin* (samurai with no lord) from towns and villages where they were not working as producers or in a military capacity, and enforced various other methods of strict control over the populace of Japan (Sansom 1961:331-333). He also banned Christianity and expelled missionaries from the country several times, and instituted the beginnings of the *shuin-sen* system, perhaps the most important step towards controlling the activities of Japanese overseas (Ibid. 347ff.). The system, in effect, established the conditions under which a Japanese merchant engaged in activities overseas could be considered to be doing so legally, thereby hypothetically putting an end to the

problem of legitimate merchants being taken to be criminals or pirates (Innes 1980:112).

Tokugawa Ieyasu, gaining control of the country in the years immediately following Hideyoshi's death, likewise made extensive efforts to repair relations with China and Korea, not only through direct diplomatic missions and the repatriation of Koreans taken captive during Hideyoshi's invasions of 1592-1598, but also through the display of tighter controls over trade and maritime activity associated with Japan. The shogunate claimed a monopoly on silk imports in 1604 (Ribeiro 2001:57), continuing a precedent set by Hideyoshi, and restricted all foreign trade, except for that of the Chinese, to only Hirado and Nagasaki as early as 1616. Numerous actions were taken against the spread of Christianity prior to the 1639 expulsion of the Portuguese, and formal proclamations against piracy were likewise issued repeatedly, beginning under Hideyoshi (Arano 2005:209). The involvement of Chinese, Europeans, and Southeast Asians, along with Japanese, in respecting the tribunals held at Nagasaki for individual cases involving trade disputes and the like, and making use of them, also represents the growth of the shogunate's authority and legitimacy in the eyes of foreign traders and others (Arano 2005:191). All of these steps, along with the continuation of the *shuin-sen* system, were aimed in significant part at persuading the Chinese authorities to recognize the shogunate's desires to suppress the unrestricted travel and trade which allowed for the preponderance of *wakō* and to address this and other related problems.

Japanese in Southeast Asia

One of the chief factors spurring extensive Chinese and Japanese trade in Southeast Asia was the revocation of a ban on trade in that region by the Ming court in 1567. Since the court still banned Japanese from entering Chinese ports, and Chinese from travelling to Japan, transactions came to be undertaken increasingly in neutral ports in Southeast Asia (Wray 2001:2). Many ports came to be host to bustling marketplaces, and to communities of Chinese and Japanese, along with Dutch and English East India Company outposts and to others involved in the region's lucrative trade (Reid 1993:90-93, 114-116 *passim*).

Japanese settled in a variety of cities across both maritime and mainland Southeast Asia during this pe-

riod, but the community in Ayutthaya, the Siamese capital, was perhaps the largest. One source estimates that 1500 Japanese lived in Ayutthaya during the community's peak in the 1620s (Ishii 1998:1). The kings of Ayutthaya were quite open to foreign trade and relations, engaged in relations with the shogunate⁵, and welcomed these Japanese adventurers (Polenghi 2009:29), making use of them from time to time in quelling rebellions and intimidating neighboring states. Some Japanese gained considerable influence in the royal court, and were bestowed titles or official positions. By the 1620s, Japan was Ayutthaya's most major trading partner, with the ships of over twenty Japanese trading houses, along with those of many maritime adventurers, making regular journeys between Nagasaki and Ayutthaya (Thecravit 1988: 22).

Ayutthaya was among the most distant of the ports and capitals with which Japan interacted in the early modern period, and relations between the two polities were established centuries later than the diplomatic contacts of each with other East Asian and Southeast Asian principalities. The beginnings of Japanese trade in Ayutthaya, and of the Japanese community there, are believed to have occurred around 1570, over a century after Ayutthaya entered into relations with the Kingdom of Ryūkyū, located a relatively short distance south of the Japanese island of Kyushu. Ayutthaya was invaded by Burma at this time and besieged; the city fell but was soon recovered (Coedes 1966:154). In the wake of this, relations between the kingdom and Japan, which could supply it with firearms and swords, became increasingly important. The Japanese role in supplying Ayutthaya's armies is evident from the cargo of a ship known to have been captured by the Spanish en route to Ayutthaya in 1589. Stopped at Manila, five hundred arquebuses (firearms) and five hundred swords and other blades destined for King Naresuan were confiscated by the Spanish (Breazeale 1999:28). Ayutthaya would suffer many further invasions from Burma over the course of its history, finally falling to one such invasion in 1767 (Coedes 1966:162-5).

The shogunate took the initiative in establishing formal relations with a missive sent in 1606. The two courts exchanged a series of letters, and six Siamese embassies visited Japan from 1616-1629 (Breazeale 1999:29), bringing a variety of goods both for trade and as gifts to the shogunate, along with formal letters from the royal court, inscribed on sheets of gold and pre-

sented in exquisite ceremonial containers. The Siamese royal court, or its diplomatic officials, was perhaps aware of the importance the shogunate placed on the proper dating of formal documents⁶, and of the diplomatic difficulties created by Korean missives to Japan dated with the Chinese imperial era name rather than the Japanese one. As a result, an invented era name, "Tenun" (Nagazumi 1999:91-92), was applied to some, if not all, of the Siamese court's communications with the shogunate over the course of many years, avoiding the potential difficulties that might have resulted from the use of the Sanskritic calendar.

Over the course of these few decades, the Japanese community in Ayutthaya grew quite large and influential. The royal court granted formal titles and official positions to a number of Japanese, the most notable of them likely being Yamada Nagamasa. Yamada, head of the Japanese community, represented both the royal court and the Japanese community of Ayutthaya in communications with the shogunate. Though shogunal officials generally only engaged in communications with their equivalent counterparts in foreign courts, Yamada was an exception, writing to the likes of Ieyasu's foreign affairs advisor Ishin Sūden, and *Rōjū* (Elders) Doi Toshikatsu and Honda Masazumi, and receiving formal responses (Nagazumi 1999:97). In addition to his political and diplomatic roles, he led a number of Japanese into battle against rebellions, uprisings, and Burmese invaders, and in domestic disputes over the royal succession. The shogunate's relations with the kingdom of Ayutthaya grew quite strong in these first decades of the 17th century, and trade prospered, for a time, between the two polities (Thecravit 1988:22).

The Vietnamese polity of Quang Nam or Cochinchina was another of Japan's chief trading partners in the *shuinzen* period, and the home of a small but influential Japanese population. Quang Nam was one of several polities at the time which controlled parts of what is today Vietnam. The Champa people and the lords of the Mac clan who controlled much of the south and the north respectively in the previous century were now restricted to small territories each equivalent in area to a single modern-day Vietnamese province. The lords⁷ of the Trinh and Nguyen clans, meanwhile, controlled the majority of the northern and central regions (Li 1998:11-17).

The Vietnamese polity of chief importance to the current study is Quang Nam, the central-southern area controlled by the Nguyen lords; the Dutch called it Quinam, while other Europeans at the time called it Cochinchina⁸, a term coined by the Portuguese, who derived “Cochin” from the Chinese name for Vietnam, *Giao Chi*, and added “-china” in order to distinguish it from the Cochin in India (Sud 2004:356). The polity’s primary port was Hoi An, known as Faifo to the Europeans, which has been described as the largest port in Cochinchina, and thus in all of Vietnam as well (Woodside 1995:162). Hoi An is located near the mouth of the Thu Bon River, a short distance south of Da Nang, where another small Japanese community was established in 1623 (Ribeiro 2001:71), and about three kilometers inland from the South China Sea (Wheeler 2003). The city bore a small but commercially active population of Japanese for much of the 17th century, from 1617-1696 (Ribeiro 2001:71), and even today the city is famous for its Japanese-style bridge, known as *Lai Vien Kieu*, or “Bridge of Friends from Afar,” built by that community. In the period of the *shuinsen*, that is, from 1604 to 1635, Hoi An saw ten Japanese ships per year on average (Li and Reid 1993:3), though it is likely that not all of these ships bore *shuinjō* (Reid 1993:19). This constituted roughly a quarter of all Japanese trade, more than that of any other individual destination (Chen 1974:13).

The attractiveness of the port of Hoi An for Japanese traders derived from a number of factors. As a neutral port outside Japan or China, it provided the ability to trade with Chinese merchants, and to acquire Chinese goods, despite the formal Ming ban on Chinese trade with Japan. The town’s identity as an active port began as the result of this trade, and as a result of the considerable Chinese and Japanese settlements which grew up there (Chen 1974:14). For several months each year, during the period when trade winds and weather permitted Chinese and Japanese merchant ships to come to the port, an annual market was held at which Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese exchanged goods (Ibid.). The Japanese residents of the city gathered goods from Chinese and Vietnamese traders in preparation for the arrival of each merchant ship (Li 1998:63), making the overall trade far easier and more efficient from the point of view of the Japanese merchants. This was, of course, not the only port where Japanese could trade with Chinese, but it was one of

the closest that was not controlled by Europeans, unlike Macao and Manila. Trade duties were lower in Hoi An, and the Japanese felt a closer cultural connection to the Vietnamese than to Europeans, Arabs or Indians (Li 1998:65). Japanese suspicion of the Westerners, likely alongside conditions deriving from Western attitudes towards the Japanese, also contributed to the popularity of Quang Nam over Macao or the Philippines as a major site of Japanese trade (Innes 1980:59-62).

The key factor that according to the historian Li Tana, “may have ultimately tipped the scale” (Li 1998:64) towards Hoi An was the active involvement of Nguyen Hoang (r. 1558-1613), and his successors as lord of Quang Nam, in encouraging foreign trade. Nguyen Hoang sent a number of missives to the court of Tokugawa Ieyasu regarding trade and individual traders, in an attempt to cultivate a friendly and close diplomatic relationship. A 1601 letter discussed the Japanese pirate Shirahama Kenki, who had terrorized the Vietnamese coast sixteen years earlier, and who was now in Vietnamese custody after a dispute over his legitimacy as a merchant; Nguyen used this issue as a pretext to make offerings of good will and requests for a continuation of good relations. Ieyasu’s response contained an explanation of the *shuinjō* system, and marked the beginnings of Tokugawa relations with the Nguyen polity (Li 1998:60-1). The Nguyen family gained closer ties to Japanese traders through adoptions and marriage, and many of the *shuinsen* to trade at Hoi An in this period were captained by Japanese relations of the Nguyen family. In addition, Nguyen Hoang and his successors frequently treated Japanese traders well when they were brought to Quang Nam by storms or other conditions while en route to a different destination (Li 1998:64). Finally, the Nguyen lords frequently engaged directly in commerce themselves, communicating with individual Japanese traders and asking that they carry certain goods abroad for sale, or that they buy and bring back certain goods, on behalf of the kingdom.

Good relations with the shogunate served political purposes as well for the Nguyen. Tensions between the Nguyen south (Quang Nam) and the Trinh north (Tonkin) developed into outright war in 1627, and petitions were sent both from Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, Hoang’s successor, and several Japanese merchants of Hoi An, asking the shogunate to sever trade with

Tonkin. The shogunate complied, and the efforts of the Nguyen and Hoi An merchants to maintain this situation persisted successfully until the *shuinsen* trade was ended entirely in 1635 (Li 1998:65). Later communications reaffirmed the Nguyen lords' delight in maintaining good relations, and their desire to continue to do so, though, of course, these may have been merely customary formalities and pleasantries. These letters also frequently discussed commercial matters, such as requests for goods or other materials, such as copper coins, which could not be obtained or produced domestically⁹.

Anecdotal evidence of Japanese merchant families who enjoyed close contact with Vietnamese people serves as further evidence for the friendly relations between Japanese and Vietnamese in this period. Grave markers in Vietnam and Japan illustrate the intermarriage and international travel of people of both nations in this period, as do Vietnamese gifts still held today by the Japanese descendants of merchant families of that period. A sheepskin sea map depicting the route from Nagasaki to Hoi An, owned by the Kodoya family, and a Vietnamese bodhisattva statue given by the Nguyen to the Nagoya family, along with a handscroll painting of a Japanese merchant ship traveling to Da Nang, are three prominent examples that survive today (Chuong 1991:209).

Though the Japanese population of Hoi An was small, numbering only in the tens of households and far outnumbered by the several thousand Chinese inhabitants of the city¹⁰, it played an important role in effecting both Japanese, and later Dutch, trade at the port. Japanese merchants came to Hoi An primarily for silks, the Japanese demand for which was so great that the comings and goings of the *shuinsen* had dramatic cyclical effects on market prices there (Li 1998:63). Goods were, in fact, divided into "new silk," which had been harvested and prepared in the spring, while the Japanese ships were in port, and "old silk," which was gathered in the winter. Though these two classes of silk were likely identical in terms of material quality, the "new silk" consistently brought higher prices at market (Ibid.). The first Dutch arrivals to the port in 1633 were greeted by the head of the Japanese quarter, or *Nihonmachi*¹¹, who reportedly served as a liaison between the Nguyen court and the foreign merchants of the port. According to historian of 17th century Japanese trade Robert Innes, "the Dutch soon realized that the resident Japanese dominated the local

economy" (Innes 1980:187-8). Though Japanese overseas activities would only continue for another two years, their dominance of this port was such that, for this brief period, the amount of goods the Dutch desired to purchase was rarely available to them. Even after 1635, the resident Japanese in Hoi An were initially hesitant to trade with or otherwise aid the Dutch, and shipped their goods on Chinese junks (Wray 2001:21).

The Imposition of Maritime Restrictions

Between 1635 and 1641, the Tokugawa shogunate put into place a number of policy changes and edicts that radically changed the patterns of Japanese trade and diplomacy. The shogunate abolished the *shuinsen* trade in 1635, and forbade all Japanese from leaving the country or returning to it. The construction of ocean-going vessels was banned, and Japanese living abroad, such as those in the various *Nihonmachi* across Southeast Asia, were essentially stranded, unable to return upon pain of death. The Portuguese were expelled from Japan in 1639, and all trade and relations with them suspended. The Dutch and Chinese were restricted to their respective settlements in Nagasaki beginning in 1641. Trade was only allowed at a handful of Japanese ports after this time, with merchants from only a very few nations, and formal relations were likewise maintained with only a few polities. Still, Japan remained quite open to cultural influences of the outside world and to knowledge of affairs in the region. Dutch and Chinese traders at Nagasaki served as significant sources of both goods from China, Southeast Asia, and around the world, and information about events and conditions, supplementing that obtained through contact with Korea, the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and the Ainu. Thus, Japan was far from completely sealed off from the world, and the shogunate's policies of maritime restrictions were in any case hardly unusual compared to those of other nations in the region, nor were its anxieties about the negative effects of Catholic influence.¹²

Domestic Politics

The general consensus in scholarship today is that Japanese policies in these matters were quite similar to foreign relations policies of other East Asian nations at the time, and were not excessive or unusual at all

(Wray 2001:2). The Siamese tended not to travel overseas in this period, trading instead via Chinese merchants. Korea, meanwhile, maintained an even tighter set of maritime restrictions than Japan, being completely closed to the West (Wray 2001:14-5), in contrast to Japan's policies towards the Dutch in Nagasaki. In addition, it has been argued that Japanese officials of the period did not see the maritime prohibitions (海禁, *kaikin*) as "closing" the country (Arano 1994:97), and viewed the measures as necessary for ensuring peace and order both domestically and abroad, along with the stability and perception of legitimacy of the shogunal government (Wray 2001:2).

The logic behind this series of decisions centered on desires for domestic order and stability, and for protection and enhancement of the legitimacy of the regime. The perceived threat of Christianity to the stability of the state was but one of a number of factors; the true cause was the more general desire of the shogunate to ensure national security, domestic order, and the perception of the shogunate's legitimacy through the centralization of controls over foreign trade and influences.

The Yanagawa affair of 1631 is frequently cited as an example of an incident in which a lack of centralized control over foreign relations brought difficulties, and which could have been a serious loss of face for the shogunate had it been unable to handle the situation satisfactorily (Toby 1984:76-80; Innes 1980:215). The affair concerned a series of letters to the Korean royal court, forged by the officials of the Tsushima domain to ostensibly represent official shogunate missives, and a conflict between the Tsushima lords and some of their retainers, which became serious enough to warrant shogunate attention. The forged letters, and their content, including the use of the previously rejected term "king" to refer to the shogun, represented a serious potential threat to perceptions of the shogunate's legitimacy and power in that they highlighted, and revealed to the Korean Court, the lack of centralized control the shogunate had over its foreign relations. In the end the shogunate did not rescind, or drastically alter, the special privileges granted to the lords of Tsushima and Satsuma to act largely independently in handling relations with Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom respectively. However, those involved were strongly chastised, in such a manner as to powerfully discourage further deviations from the shogunate's

attitudes and policies. In addition, stronger attention was paid in future years to the activities of these two domains. The shogunate ended all foreign trade except at the ports of Tsushima, Satsuma, Matsumae, and Nagasaki, where extensive restrictions and controls were put into place (Toby 1984:76-80).

The tightening of controls on shipping also served to cement Tokugawa authority by eliminating opportunities for individual *daimyō* to gain too much power, and to therefore threaten the shogunate's dominance. Tsushima and Satsuma were, of course, exceptions, for reasons too complex to delve into here in detail. The shogunate did, however, express its legitimacy and power in the affairs of these domains by repeatedly formally granting permissions and powers of trade and diplomacy to these domains over the course of the Edo period (Toby 1977:362n); the privileges of these domains were thus made to be not inherent, but rather derived from the shogunate and dependent upon the shogunate's favor. The shogunate, likewise, ended the *shuinsen* system in order to better centralize its control over trade. The shogunate never bore any overseas presence of the kind that could enforce its laws on the high seas or in the ports of Southeast Asia, China, and Korea had the system been continued (Toby 1984:96-97); the prevention of the acquisition of power or wealth by *daimyō* or merchants through overseas activities would likewise have been impossible to effect. In ending the *shuinsen* trade, the shogunate not only eliminated the potential for rival factions within Japan to gain wealth and power, but also the potential for undesirable foreign influences to be brought back into Japan by these traders (Innes 1980:210-212).

Thus, ending the *shuinsen* trade in order to effect greater centralization of power domestically is of obvious importance and impact. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to further explore other aspects of this process, and the ways in which the *shuinsen* system, as it existed, was particularly decentralized in its organization, thereby preventing sufficient shogunal control over the trade and the cultural exchanges that accompanied it, and requiring its dissolution.

The decentralized character of the *shuinsen* system was not restricted solely to its overseas nature. In fact, it was primarily merchants, rather than bureaucrats, many of whom were not of the samurai class, and were not directly tied to any particular *daimyō* or other indi-

vidual authority, who ran the system. The shogunate did not even truly have full control over the issuing of the licenses. Firstly, in this as in many other aspects of shogunal governance, Tokugawa Ieyasu retained significant influence even after retiring from being shogun; many of the chief officials in charge of trade and diplomacy, as well as in other fields, remained loyal to him over his successors, becoming fully responsible to Edo only after Ieyasu's death in 1616. The Nagasaki magistrate (*bugyō*) was among these, and was, until 1633, a *daimyō* of the same rank as the shogunal elders to whom he was meant to be a subordinate. In addition, the Zen sect of Buddhism originally held considerable authority in maintaining trade and diplomacy, and issued *shuinjō* independently of the Nagasaki *bugyō* until 1631. In that year, a formal letter from the *bugyō*, called a *hōsho*, became required in addition to the *shuinjō* license issued by the Zen priests in order to engage in legal overseas activities (Innes 1980:215-6). Even after 1635, Zen temples in Tsushima and the Ryūkyū Kingdom (from 1609 a vassal state to the Japanese domain of Satsuma) continued to have influence over matters of trade and foreign relations. Thus, this system was far from being under the direct centralized control of the shogunate, and had to be radically altered or abolished in order to effect the extension of shogunal power and legitimacy which began in 1635 to form the core of Tokugawa Iemitsu's agenda.

Foreign Factors and their Effects upon Trade and Diplomatic Relations

The imposition of maritime restrictions came largely as the result of conditions within Japan, and from factors relating to Japan's interactions with China and various Western powers. This had a profound effect upon Japanese living and trading in the ports of Southeast Asia, and upon Japan's diplomacy and trade in the region in a wider sense. However, it will be seen that events and conditions within Southeast Asia also influenced significantly the ways in which this dramatic diplomatic and commercial change came about.

Though the focus of this paper is on relations and trade with Southeast Asia, the role of Chinese and Dutch merchants in effecting this trade cannot be ignored. Following the imposition of maritime prohibitions, Southeast Asian trade with Japan was conducted almost exclusively through Chinese merchant ship-

ping. This was not officially licensed by the Ming government, and essentially constituted smuggling from Beijing's point of view; these merchants were operating in violation of the *hajjin* ban, though the Ming Court was fairly lax about enforcing it, and the Qing even more so (Tashiro and Videen 1982:288,304). Chinese merchant activity constituted two-thirds of the trade at Nagasaki while that of the Dutch East India Company constituted the remaining one-third (Hayashi, et al. 1912 v4:323-41). These proportions would later be solidified by limits imposed by the shogunate on the amounts imported (Innes 1980:190)¹³. The term *tōsen*, or "Chinese ships," was used to encapsulate the former group, though many of these vessels in fact derived from, or were built in, Southeast Asian ports. Some were even formally authorized and commissioned by the kings of Ayutthaya and Cambodia. However, it is estimated that upwards of 98% of the crews of these ships were Chinese (Ishii 1998:3; Nagazumi 1999:96).

The fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 to Manchu invaders saw armed struggles not only within China, but on the seas as well. The resistance against the new Qing dynasty lasted into the 1680s and involved extensive acts of piracy by Chinese sailors. From roughly 1674 to 1683, thirty to forty percent of the Chinese ships which traded at Nagasaki originated from Southeast Asia (Ishii 1998:10). Most of the Chinese merchants and sailors involved in trade with Japan and with Southeast Asia at this time were loyal to the rebels, and avoided, to some extent, dealing in ports controlled by the Qing. The rebellion came to an end in 1683, and the resulting peace brought greatly expanded trade, to which the shogunate responded by imposing stricter regulations in attempts to maintain control over the country's commercial affairs and balance of trade. Beginning around 1689, only 70 Chinese ships were allowed to trade at Nagasaki each year. Among them, only ten were allowed to be from Southeast Asia, with each ship limited to 20,000 *taels*¹⁴ worth of goods in cargo. The three ports of Pattani, Tonkin, and Cambodia were only allowed one ship each per year, along with two ships from Ayutthaya, two from Batavia, and three from Cochinchina (Ishii 1998:10-1).

Chinese accounts, called *tōsen-fūsetsu*, or "rumors of the Chinese ships," form a large portion of the Japanese records of this trade available today. These were assembled from interviews conducted by the officially

appointed Chinese translator of Nagasaki with representatives of each merchant vessel, and later (beginning in 1699) by an official appointed specifically for this task. Three sets of volumes of these records are known to scholars today (Ishii 1998:6).

Meanwhile, the Dutch East India Company acted throughout the region to fill the lacuna left by the disappearance of the Japanese from international trade, and served the economic needs of both Japan and the various Southeast Asian states by continuing trade between them following the 1635 imposition of maritime restrictions. The Company was, in fact, asked by agents of the shogunate to make efforts to ensure that the overall volume of trade at Nagasaki did not drop after the expulsion of the Portuguese and the abolition of the *shuinsen* trade (Tashiro and Videen 982:292).

Formal relations and direct trade between Ayutthaya and Japan became quite strong in the opening decades of the 17th century, but these were only to last for a short period. The shogunate severed relations in 1630, after Yamada Nagamasa was poisoned and killed (Iwao 1963:2). Yamada had led a number of samurai in battle during succession disputes following the death of the Thai King Song Tham in 1629, and certain elements at court saw him as a threat to the reign of the new king, Prasat Thong (Coedes 1966:157). The king feared retribution from the Japanese community (Theeravit 1988:33), and so their quarter in the city was burnt down. The Japanese who were not expelled or killed fled to Cambodia or elsewhere, though many returned a few years later upon offers of amnesty from the king (Iwao 1963:2-4).

Hearing of these events, and the succession dispute which preceded them, the shogunate decided to sever formal ties with the Siamese kingdom. Though this was the initial impetus for the breaking of diplomatic relations, these conditions persisted primarily because of other factors. The foul treatment of Japanese in Ayutthaya by the authorities there was not of primary concern; the shogunate, for the most part, saw Japanese communities in Ayutthaya, Vietnam, and elsewhere as undesirables, pirates and ruffians, and had little interest in protecting them. Rather, it was the way in which Prasat Thong violently gained power which irked the shogunate, a sentiment enhanced by extensive scheming on the part of agents of the Dutch East India Company to maintain the absence of competition in trade between Ayutthaya and Japan (Theeravit 1988:34). The

agents of the Company were among the chief sources of information on European affairs to the shogunate; it was not uncommon for Dutch reports on these matters to place extra emphasis on the associations of English, Chinese, or Siamese authorities with Catholic missionaries or governments in order to discourage shogunal involvement with the Company's competition.

Over the course of Prasat Thong's 26-year reign, Ayutthaya sent at least six envoys to Nagasaki to request the resumption of friendly relations and trade (Iwao 1963:18). Along with formal gilded letters from the king, they carried goods for trade and gifts to the shogunate, including aromatic woods, ivory, silk, tin, lead, and pepper (Iwao 1963:14). Those sent in 1640 and 1644 succumbed to typhoons and inclement weather that prevented them from reaching their destination. Four other missions, sent in 1634, 1635-36, 1653, and 1655-56, saw their proposals rejected on the basis of the shogunate's position that Prasat Thong was a usurper and that his rule was illegitimate.

Translation issues contributed as well, at times, to the inability of Ayutthaya's authorities to understand the shogunate's reasons for rejecting envoys and attempts to restore relations. At least once, in 1638 or 1639, Japanese translators in Ayutthaya intentionally mistranslated into Thai a shogunal missive to the royal court, originally written in Chinese, in order to hide the directness of its meaning, and protect the king from insult. The original message read, "As I [the Nagasaki magistrate] have written already, we were told that a subordinate killed the king to usurp the throne. Therefore, our authorities were ordered not to correspond with a king without legitimacy... Only after Japan lawfully recognizes the legitimacy of the king will the route to Japan be open.¹⁵" This came on the heels of another message from Japan several years earlier, which accused the Siamese envoy of being "worse than, and [knowing] less about the incident than, the previous ambassador," and explained that "therefore, he was not received and was likewise sent away" (Nagazumi 1999:94). The Japanese translators in service to King Prasat Thong, fearing the dishonor which would be brought to the Court by an accurate translation of such direct language, reported that "the shogun asked for an upright envoy to calm the unrest on both sides and for each side to placate the other" (Nagazumi 1999:95). Thus, in this instance at least, if not on other occasions, the true reasons behind the shogunate's

refusal to engage in relations with Prasat Thong's court were obscured, and possibilities for rapprochement diminished.

That issues of legitimacy were of great importance to the shogunate is made even clearer by this example. In rejecting relations with a ruler perceived to be illegitimate, the shogunate gained some degree of honor and legitimacy for itself. It may seem odd that the Tokugawa, who essentially gained power through military force in the wake of succession disputes, and who used similar methods of trickery to achieve its goals, should reject so strongly the idea that a king should gain his throne in such a manner. Tokugawa Ieyasu, after all, only became shogun after violating an oath sworn to Toyotomi Hideyoshi that he would protect Hideyoshi's heir, Toyotomi Hideyori, and ensure the latter's rise to power (Sansom 1961:386-7, 397-8 *passim*). But it must be remembered that there was in Japan a stark difference between the Imperial institution and the shogunate, and that no secular military leader had ever, or would ever, seek to overthrow the Imperial lineage and replace it with his own dynasty¹⁶. The notion that Prasat Thong should even think of violently overthrowing his king was, arguably, repugnant in the eyes of the shogunate (Theeravit 1988:35).

After the *shuinzen* system came to an end, trade continued between Japan and Ayutthaya, despite the absence of Japanese trading ships and of formal relations between the two governments, through Chinese and Dutch traders. In fact, the Dutch East India Company, which maintained outposts in Siam and Nagasaki, enjoyed great profits from the lack of competition in shipping goods between these countries. According to Iwao Seiichi, "they promptly launched a drive with all their facilities to alienate the two countries and to prevent reopening of commercial relations" (Iwao 1963:7; Theeravit 1988: 35-7).

An envoy mission of 1656 was the final attempt by Ayutthaya to seek rapprochement with the shogunate, and relations were never restored (Iwao 1963:17-19, 30). It is important to note that the difficulties experienced by the royal court in this matter stemmed from diplomatic and political problems relating to the legitimacy of Prasat Thong's rule, and not from practical concerns over trade or other matters. The shogunate was considerably more conservative in this period in its foreign relations, and remained so until the 1850s¹⁷, but it was not fundamentally opposed to trade with its

independent, non-Christian neighbors (Iwao 1963: 19). The shogunate took a hard stance against the rule of Prasat Thong, who it designated an illegitimate king, considering him a subordinate who usurped the throne (Nagazumi 1999:94-95). Missives to the Siamese court were quite open about the shogunate's position, however. One letter to the Siamese authorities, composed by officials under the Japanese governor of Nagasaki in 1636, relates the shogunate's views towards the Siamese king, and requests further explanation of the situation regarding the king's succession and his legitimacy from future envoys. The letter states that "if we [the Nagasaki officials and/or the central shogunal authorities] are convinced that we can settle the whole matter... we have no doubts that the doors of Japan will be open to your country in the future"¹⁸ (Iwao 1963:11).

This sentiment was borne out as royal vessels from Ayutthaya began in the 1660s-70s to be regularly received at Nagasaki and to be successful in doing trade. Some of these ships were junks, some sail-ships built in the Dutch style, and all bearing formal documents from the Dutch East India Company; Japanese authorities at Nagasaki considered these Siamese ships to be either *tōsen* (Chinese ships) or, on account of their Company documentation, Dutch, and therefore allowed them to make port and to trade without considering it a breach of the existing trade restrictions. As experienced and skilled Siamese navigators were rare, and Chinese were banned from working on Siamese ships in this capacity at this time, many of these ships likely had partial Dutch crews as well. No efforts were made to hide the origin or identity of these royal Siamese ships; on the contrary, these ships were far larger than any other junks calling at Nagasaki (Nagazumi 1999:99), openly identified themselves as royal junks from Ayutthaya, and each bore two or three Siamese representatives of the royal court (Breazeale 1999:29). Some of these were the king's own junks, while others were owned or commissioned by princes or other members of the royal family and the extended aristocracy. In total, these royal vessels constituted more than half of the ships traveling to Japan in this period from Ayutthaya, and a far greater proportion by volume of goods¹⁹. By this time, it is supposed, the threat from Spain and Portugal was perceived to have diminished significantly, and such a relaxation in the maritime restrictions was condoned (Nagazumi 1999:102). Japanese officials sometimes recorded the Siamese ships as such

in formal Nagasaki port records, but always considered them within the categories of Chinese or Dutch ships. Their reception and commercial activity was therefore not seen to be in violation of the restrictions.

These factors, combined with the end of Prasat Thong's reign and the policies and attitudes of his successor, King Narai²⁰, allowed formal royal trade to be resumed quite smoothly and quickly following Narai's accession to the throne. King Narai's succession in 1657 was backed by the Japanese community in Ayutthaya (Iwao 1963:20), and he sent missions to Japan soon afterwards, seeking to restore relations and trade to what they had been before the reign of his predecessor. Though formal relations were not resumed, trade with Japan prospered during Narai's reign, to such an extent that when there was an interruption, a letter to the British East India Company stated that "the want of shipping from Japan this year hath put a stop to all trade in this town [Ayutthaya]."²¹ A total of 43 ships are recorded as having journeyed from Ayutthaya to Japan during Narai's reign, thirty of which were successful in trading and returning home, bringing back copper, lacquerware, ceramics, fruits, silks (Iwao 1963:28-9), and other goods. Most of the remaining thirteen were blocked or destroyed by storms, or were refused trade at Nagasaki for one reason or another.

Under Prasat Thong, the Dutch East India Company enjoyed very little competition in its endeavors as middlemen trading between Ayutthaya and Japan. As mentioned above, Dutch agents actually took measures to ensure that relations between the two countries remained sour, thereby suppressing trade as well. These activities continued a generation later, under Narai, as the Dutch sought to regain the prominence and profits they lost to formal royal shipping. Dutch reports on foreign events to Nagasaki officials, called *fūsetsu-gaki* in Japanese, began to include references to Christian missionary activities in Ayutthaya and to embassies sent by King Narai to France, Britain, and Portugal (Iwao 1963:30). These intimations of Siamese association with the Catholic factions so distrusted and hated by the shogunate did damage to the royal trade, which was fully brought to a halt in 1688, following the death of Narai. Petracha became king after executing a successful coup against Narai's government, and reversed the foreign policies of his predecessor, severing relations with the West and putting an end to embassies to

distant lands. Japanese trade with Siam would be conducted solely through Dutch and Chinese merchants for the remainder of the Edo period, and no formal communications would be exchanged between the royal court and the shogunate.

Hoi An, meanwhile, saw extensive Chinese trade throughout the century, and the Japanese merchant ships which landed there in the early decades of the period were replaced by Dutch ones after the shogunal imposition of maritime restrictions in 1635. A Dutch factory operated in Hoi An from 1633-41 and 1651-54 (Reid 1993:305), bringing in Japanese silver and copper in exchange for Vietnamese silks which would then be sold at Nagasaki. Lacking new immigration to support it, the Japanese community in the port gradually shrank and all but disappeared by the end of the 17th century. However, communications between the Nguyen lords and the shogunate continued until as late as 1688 if not later (Vu 1991:136), relating primarily to commercial matters.

Only two examples of polities with which Japan enjoyed trade relations have been described in much detail here, but this should by no means be taken to mean that Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate did not trade or formally communicate with other nations in Southeast Asia. On the contrary, the Japanese *shuin-sen*, along with the Dutch and Chinese ships which replaced them, represented contacts with over twenty different ports across the region and effected not only commercial contacts but diplomatic and political communications as well, to varying degrees of formality. It was quite common for Japanese merchant captains, and later, Chinese and Dutch captains, to carry formal letters across the seas to be delivered to the appropriate authorities in each country. In addition, official reports made by "Chinese" merchant captains to the magistrates of Nagasaki represent, if not true communications between national governments, something vaguely approximating them, providing the Tokugawa authorities information on the events and prevailing conditions in a number of ports and polities across the region.²²

Those polities such as Tonkin in northern Vietnam, with which the Japanese had little formal contact and relatively little *shuin-sen* trade, are as crucial a part of the overall picture of Japan's relations in this period as those such as Ayutthaya and Quang Nam with which trade was prosperous. The request by the Nguyen lords

that the shogunate sever relations and trade with the Trinh lords of Tonkin was obviously the deciding factor in causing these actions to be taken, the request coming within the context of a friendly and close relationship between the Nguyen lords and both Japanese authorities and powerful Japanese merchant families. However, Trinh attitudes towards the Japanese, possibly shaped by their relationships with the Dutch and with the Nguyen, played an important role as well. Trade and settlement by foreigners in the ports of northern Vietnam were heavily restricted by the Trinh authorities in the final decades of the 16th century, and into the 17th. The Trinh authorities discouraged and restricted settlement due to fears on their part of the importation of weaponry by Japanese mercenaries (Wray 2001:9), but there nevertheless existed a small community of Japanese, mainly Christians, some of whom regularly sailed on trading ships to Japan, under Chinese captains. The community established a Japanese Christian mission in Tonkin in 1626, and remained in regular contact with the Japanese Christian communities in Macao and elsewhere for many decades (Ribeiro 2001:67-70).

Cambodian relations with Japan date at least as far back as 1566, when a Cambodian ship landed on Kyushu. Formal diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the Kyushu *daimyō* Ōtomo Yoshishige and Shimazu Yoshihisa began ten years later (Ribeiro 2001:73-4), and with the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 (Polenghi 2009:15). Japanese residents in Phnom Penh and Pinalu, in Nihonmachi established in the 1610s and lasting until the 1660s, are estimated to have numbered as many as 1500, a number of whom came to hold important positions in the Cambodian royal court, as occurred in many Southeast Asian polities at this time (Ribeiro 2001:73-4).

The Cambodian kingdom was wracked in the 17th century by conflicts between factions loyal to Ayutthaya and ones loyal to Quang Nam, each of which exaggerated the political turmoil by involving foreign powers such as the Dutch East India Company and Chinese Ming loyalists. Nevertheless, Cambodia surpassed even Ayutthaya at times in the number of junks it sent to Japan. Cambodian trade with Japan, through Chinese merchants and royal Cambodian vessels manned by Chinese sailors, peaked around 1641-1663, and again in the 1690s (Ishii 1998:153). Through the kingdom's considerable influences from both Ayut-

thaya and Quang Nam, its trading centers were able to offer a wide variety of both Siamese and Vietnamese goods and products, including sappanwood, deer hides, and Vietnamese silks (Ishii 1998:154-5).

Only towards the very end of the century did the overall volume of trade with Southeast Asia decline. Precious metals, particularly silver, had been Japan's primary exports in the 17th century, and by the end of that period, the country's mines were drying up. This combined with the inflation of the Genroku period (1688-1709), itself the result of a myriad of economic factors, to create a huge domestic demand for specie, particularly for the minting of new coins²³. This, in turn, led to the imposition of strict limits on the export of silver in 1685 and on copper in 1715 (Momoki 1994:45), and thus to the overall decline of trade.

The official Japanese records often obscure the origins of ships, counting nearly all Asian trade under the umbrella of the term *tōsen*, and in many cases Southeast Asian records are sparse or non-existent²⁴. I do not believe, however, that there is reason to think that formal communications or other forms of official relations between the shogunate and Southeast Asian polities were restricted to the examples given above. Further research, and closer examination of primary documents, could provide further accounts of interesting episodes along with further insights into the world of Japanese-Southeast Asian trade and diplomacy in this period.

Conclusion

To claim that the late 1630s represent a watershed in the history of Japanese foreign involvement is no exaggeration. Patterns of formal relations, trade, and overseas travel changed dramatically over a period of only a few years, setting in place conditions which would last for over two hundred years. However, it is important to realize that the policies instituted at this time did not result solely from shogunal politics, Chinese domestic affairs, and attitudes towards Western influence. It is clear from the evidence that these concerns were not the only causes of a blanket policy applied across Japan's relations with all of East and Southeast Asia. Rather, domestic events within the individual polities of Southeast Asia, and diplomatic incidents between these polities and Japan, had great impact as well, the

chief example being seen in the aftermath of the 1629-1630 succession disputes in Ayutthaya.

Japanese living and working in the *Nihonmachi* of Southeast Asia also played important roles in the diplomatic and economic relations of their host nations with Japan and other powers, and local politics likewise had incredible impacts upon these developments, completely divorced from wider concerns of a Sinocentric or Japanocentric East Asian regional order. Succession disputes in Ayutthaya, wars between the Nguyen and the Trinh, between the Nguyen and Cambodia, and between Ayutthaya and Burma, were complex events which all brought significant change to the region and, by extension, to relations and trade with Japan; in addition, in many cases, the Japanese role in such events is far from negligible.

Shogunal policymakers rarely, if ever, conflated the affairs and conditions of foreign politics into a single matter as many scholars of the East Asian regional order and maritime trade networks do today. Though the records at Nagasaki refer to all Southeast Asian vessels under the general category of *tōsen*, or “Chinese ships”, officials, bureaucrats, and merchants were not blind to the important differences between the politics and peoples with which they interacted. In order to gain a truer understanding of the complexity and extent of Japanese trade and foreign relations in this period, we too must consider all the actors involved: the Siamese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Ryukyuan, and others, not solely the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and Dutch.

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End Notes

- 1 An example of a treatment focusing almost exclusively on fear of Christianity as the underlying cause can be found in Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. pp17-19.
- 2 The Chinese term *haijin* (海禁), called *kaikin* in Japanese, is translated as "maritime restrictions."
- 3 Iwao, Seiichi. *Nan'yō Nihonmachi no kenkyū* ("The Study of the Japantowns of the Nanyang [i.e. Southeast Asia]"). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966..
- 4 Though the activities of the *wakō* incorporated aspects of raiding, privateering, adventuring and peaceful trade, and many were purely peaceful traders, the term "pirate" is quite frequently applied to them in scholarship. It shall therefore be used here as well for the sake of convenience and simplicity.
- 5 Details of pre-1630 missions to be found in Thecravit. pp26-27.
- 6 The issue of era names as it relates to issues of shogunal legitimacy and foreign relations is described in detail in Toby. *State and Diplomacy*. pp90-97.
- 7 Though frequently referred to as "kings" in both contemporary and modern Western sources, Nguyen Hoang and his successors are more properly called "Lords". Their Vietnamese title *chúa* more accurately translates to this, as they did not style themselves kings or emperors, accusing their rivals to the north, the Trinh, of usurping rule from the rightful royal lineage, the Lê dynasty. The term "kingdom" is thus likewise inaccurate, but used quite frequently as well. (Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce. Vol 2: Expansion and Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. p211.)
- 8 Note that the area further south, later commonly known as Cochinchina following the colonization of the area by France, was under the control of Cambodia at this time. Quang Nam was thus the southern portion of what was then Vietnam, and might be better described as the central area, not including the far south, of the territory covered today by Vietnam.
- 9 One such letter, from 1688, can be found in English translation in Kawamoto, Kuniye. "The International Outlook of the Quang Nam (Nguyen) Regime as Revealed in Gaiban Tsuusho." in *Ancient Town of Hoi An*. Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991. pp115-116.

10 A 1642 report to the Dutch East India Company by a Japanese inhabitant of the port describes a Chinese population of 4000-5000 and a Japanese population of 40-50. (Laarhoven, Ruurdje (trans.) "A Japanese Resident's Account: Declaration of the Situation of Quinam Kingdom by Francisco, 1642." in Li and Reid (eds.) *Southern Vietnam*. p31.)

11 日本街, literally "Japan town".

12 Chinese and Vietnamese fears, and the anti-Christian policies which developed as a result, are described briefly in Tarling, Nicholas (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*. vol 1, part 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp199-201.

13 The limits were set in 1685 at 6000 *kanme* worth of imports for the Chinese merchants, 3000 *kanme* worth for the Dutch East India Company, and 400 *kanme* worth of trade on the part of Company employees acting privately.

14 "A Chinese unit of weight that, when applied to silver, was long used as a unit of currency. Most taels were equivalent to 1.3 ounces of silver." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9070890/tael>> Accessed 11 July 2007.

15 *Dagregister van de factorij te Hirado*, 6-7 Nov. 1638. Quoted in Nagazumi. "Ayutthaya and Japan." in Breazeale (ed.). p95.

16 The conflicts between the Imperial Court and the Ashikaga clan in the 14th century may be something of an exception, though the Ashikaga did bear blood-ties to the Imperial line.

17 Though the maritime restrictions were relaxed in some small ways at various points during the Edo period, it was not until the 1850s that the restrictions were abolished entirely and relations resumed or begun with a number of nations both of the West and the Far East.

18 *Dagregister des Comptoir Firand*, 6 Nov. 1638. Quoted in Iwao. "Relations between Japan and Siam..." p11.

19 Breazeale quotes the statistic that "Thai crown cargoes [constituted] twenty-four of forty-two cargoes from Ayutthaya during the period 1687-1719, or 57 percent of the total." in Breazeale (ed.). p29.

20 Also known as Narayana (r. 1657-1688).

21 Constantine Phaulkon in a letter to Samuel Botts, British East India Company Factor, 21 May 1682. Quoted in Iwao. "Relations between Japan and Siam..." p26.

22 A great number of these reports can be found in English translation in Ishii, Yoneo. *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*.

23 The new coinage was itself one of the key causes of the inflation, as the shogunate, faced with a dwindling supply of precious metals, debased the currency. Genroku koban of 1695 were composed of 56.41% gold, as compared to 85.69% in 1601, and the silver coins of 1695 were only 64% silver, as compared to 80% in 1603. see Sakai, Robert. "The Satsuma-Ryūkyū Trade and the Tokugawa Seclusion Policy." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23:3 (May, 1964). p397.

24 The presumably great number and variety of official royal Siamese records lost in the extensive destruction wreaked upon Ayutthaya in repeated Burmese invasions and occupations serves as a solid example of the dearth of native Southeast Asian sources on the period.

Sovereign Yet Subordinate

The Use of Buddhist Discourse During the Reigns of King Rama IV, V, and VI in Siam (1851-1925)

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During the reigns of King Mongkut (Rama IV; 1851-1868), King Chulalongkorn (Rama V; 1868-1910) and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI; 1910-1925)¹, Siam (present-day Thailand), witnessed its Southeast Asian neighbors become colonized. Not wanting to lose sovereignty to Western imperial powers, the Siamese managed to navigate their own way through a modernization process, thereby avoiding complete subjugation. However, they were not fully sovereign as Western powers continually infringed on their territorial claims. These encounters with modernity have affected the nation-building process and the selective appropriation of aspects of Siamese culture to form a national integration.² One of the main elements used to create this national culture was Buddhism. Thus I will look at the time period during these three reigns to understand how Siamese Buddhism reflects this sovereign yet subordinate status.

Buddhism in Siam was both a space in which Siamese people were able to negotiate their identity in the face of Western hegemony through what scholars have labeled 'alternative modernity,' as well as a space that demonstrated its growing gravitation and accommoda-

tion toward Western ways of thinking. To show how the tradition was a resource for identity creation, I will discuss how Buddhism was a major part of Siam's alternative modernity by looking at the ways Buddhism was used as a unifying force in the outlying regions of the emerging nation. I will also use the issue of polygamy to illustrate how a Buddhist alternative modernity was exemplified. To demonstrate the changing perspectives on Buddhism during the colonial encounter, I investigate writings of early Siamese 'modern' Buddhists, such as King Rama VI (Vajiravudh) and the Minister of Foreign Treasury, Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong. Siamese Buddhists currently talk of their tradition as rational and scientific in accommodation to the Western worldview.

I am arguing that the Siamese Buddhist tradition mirrors the socio-political situation during this period. Politically, Siam was not fully submissive to an imperial authority, but she was also not fully in control of her own territory. Religiously, the country was not fully changed by Western moral standards, but was affected by Western ideas of logic and science. This paper shows how the category of religion was not only used to

enhance and create identity, but also to produce an affiliation with the other. It shows how religion can be redefined and repackaged in modernity.

Buddhist Alternative Modernity

During the period under study, Buddhism was a crucial resource for identity formation. Because of the intimate relationship between Buddhism and secular life in Siam, Buddhism has been the focus of attempts to create a distinctive Siamese identity.³ Non-Western modes of identity creation, such as those expressed by Siam, have been dubbed by scholars as ‘alternative modernities.’ The idea of alternative modernities emerged in the last decade, as scholars began to recognize that certain postcolonial practices took forms other than the modernity in the West. The literature largely revolves around the theme that modernity is not one process but many. Jonsson, however, reminds us that alternative modernities do not “deny commonalities, but highlight variation in relation to culture, region, and other contextual factors.”⁴

Instead of looking at modernity as a singular concept, scholars have investigated various avenues of space and identity. Alternative modernities look at models as unique— that represent neither Western modernity nor non-Western traditions. This new perspective brings awareness of how modernity operates and spreads in different contexts.⁵ Dilip Gaonkar asserts that Western forms of modernity cannot be fully avoided because modernity began in the West.⁶ Yet sites of alternative modernities show the differences in non-western countries’ self-understandings—each site exists within a unique context.⁷ Each site experiences a unique encounter and conflict of worldviews that produce alternative modernities,⁸ exhibiting varying combinations of convergence and divergence with Western modernity.⁹ But Gaonkar also argues that the West does not impose its modernity on these alternative sites, but rather people make themselves modern, give themselves identities, and appropriate modernity in their own fashion.¹⁰

Siam was such a site of alternative modernity and this theoretical work can be used to show how the Siamese experience of modernity was created by the Siamese themselves. Knauff writes that alternative modernities highlight how “actors negotiate their desire for economic success or development vis-à-vis their sense of

values and commitment to longer-standing beliefs and practices.”¹¹ In this way the Siamese used selected elements from both modernity and tradition to construct a new reality. Scholars such as Justin McDaniel have argued that Siamese Buddhists should not be seen as victims of modernity and globalization but rather as arbiters of innovation, as negotiators with modernity, who neither passively accept nor ignore it.¹² Tamara Loos has also located Siam as a site for alternative modernities in her book *Subject Siam*. Loos defines alternative modernity as a notion of power that is modeled on European thought but is also formulated against it.¹³ By locating the key aspects of local culture and power structures, the Siamese challenged the hegemony of European modernity. Buddhism was one of the key sources of discourse used to consolidate state power and national identity.

Unity through Buddhism

During the reigns of three successive Siamese kings of the Chakkri dynasty, Loos argues that Siamese elites began to realize that a centralized kingdom needed to be created if Siam was to stave off colonization. She writes of these three reigns, “King Mongkut created the Thammayut Buddhist sect of Theravada Buddhism; King Chulalongkorn rationalized and conflated it with the modernizing state; and King Vajiravudh fused it with nationalism.”¹⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Siam consisted of several small kingdoms with Bangkok at the center. After interactions with Western powers, the Bangkok kingdom sought to lessen the smaller kingdoms’ independence by pulling them further into the emerging geo-body.¹⁵ As will be seen, Buddhism was an integral part of the unification strategy.

The starting point for a national Buddhism began with the reformed Buddhist sect called Thammayut created by King Mongkut while he was a monk, prior to his ascension to the throne. This sect was wedded to Siamese modernity and state power, and it was eventually used to create a national identity. Mongkut found that the Buddhist tradition brought unity to Siam and because of this, protected the nation against threats of instability.¹⁶ This sect removed what Mongkut perceived as superstitious and magical elements of culture from Buddhism and emphasized a literal interpretation of the scriptures and a strict ascetic form of practice. While more of these characteristics will be discussed in

a later section, it should be clear that there were regional variations of Buddhism within the kingdom and the rationalized Thammayut sect was chosen as the one kind of Buddhism that could bring unity to the emerging nation.

After Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn continued to formalize and centralize the Buddhist sangha as part of a national integration through his father's Thammayut sect. King Mongkut established the principles for a national religion but King Chulalongkorn took this further to create a single national institution, concerning himself with deviant practices in the outlying regions. Chulalongkorn sought to negate difference by promoting social structures including Buddhism that were part of the main ideology of the nation.¹⁷ During his reign, no distinctive structures of Buddhism, especially in Northern Thailand, were permitted. Buddhism was unified as a sign of a modern nation—the sangha mirrored the government with a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure. The king enacted these sangha reforms in response to pressures from British and French colonialists.¹⁸ If Siam's government and social structures were not in order, these Western powers might have used this as an excuse to take power in Siam. These reforms thus aided the unifying process while forcing regional forms to disappear. The elimination of autonomous practices and beliefs, Keyes argues, helped to create a national Buddhist identity.¹⁹

The Sangha Act of 1902 was the main governmental action that brought all monks under a hierarchy that included a standardized set of texts and practices. Before this time there was no attempt to integrate the diverse traditions. One reason for this act was the “fear that regional Buddhisms were intimately linked with regional political autonomy.”²⁰ Because of this law, Reynolds writes “the center was in a position to ‘enforce’ a standard of Buddhist practice whenever diversified ethnic and regional traditions might differ from Bangkok Buddhist practice.”²¹ Prince Wachirayan, the supreme patriarch of Siamese Buddhism from 1910–1921, became the head of the sangha under King Chulalongkorn. He sent administrative monks from Bangkok to inspect monasteries in the outlying regions to report on their progress in complying with the unification procedures.²² These administrative monks sought to reform regional Buddhism and convert them to the more rational Thammayut Buddhism. Kamala Tiyanich writes that this control over regional practices

“illustrates just how much the Bangkok elite acted like a colonial power, imposing its own rules and language over local customs.”²³

That Siamese thought their country unique through its religious tradition is evidenced also by King Vajiravudh. With the work of Buddhist unification already in place, Vajiravudh focused on highlighting aspects of Buddhism that provided moral order and structure such as including time for Buddhist prayers in schools, police stations, and in army barracks.²⁴ Buddhist teachings provided a moral grounding in education as well as the national administration system. Vajiravudh disagreed with modernists who sought to abandon old rituals in favor of Western models. Instead, he argued that because Siam was not a Western country, modern Western notions should be adopted selectively and only when useful.²⁵ He therefore hoped to create a distinct modernity for Siam without copying Western forms. King Vajiravudh decided that Siam and Buddhism were inseparable and thus Buddhism must have a significant influence in helping to navigate Siam through modernity. Under Vajiravudh the Siamese did not link the idea of ‘civilization’ [*siwilai*] to Christianity but remained firm in their beliefs of Buddhism.²⁶ But at the same time, Siam needed confirmation from leading countries, which had already created and maintained this new ethos of civilization, Winichakul writes, to survive and maintain their dignity.²⁷ As I will show, Siamese leaders used Buddhism to attract Western countries’ sensibilities as well but first we will look at another issue, in which Siam used Buddhism to reject Western models.

Polygamy

Polygamy symbolized Siam's status as ambiguously modern. Western powers considered an emphasis on monogamous marriage to be an index of civilized cultures. However, Siam refused to rid itself of polygamy, not wanting to share in a similar course of modernity as the West. Even though Buddhist doctrine does not favor polygamy, it does not explicitly forbid it. Some Siamese promoted polygamy as part of Siam's “distinctive Buddhist heritage.”²⁸ Through this distinction from the West, Buddhism was again linked with Siam's alternative modernity. King Vajiravudh argued against following Western standards of modernity when he stated that monogamy in European family law is a result of Christian doctrine, while Siamese family law

should be based on Buddhism. He states simply that both Christianity and Buddhism are right in their marriage laws, but one works for Europe, and the other for Siam. Again, he does not write that polygamy is advocated within the Buddhist tradition but that it is not immoral. However, becoming involved in adulterous relationships, is immoral.²⁹ He argued that because polygamy was sanctioned by the Buddhist religion, the practice could not be abandoned without admitting that the tradition was lacking and Christianity superior.³⁰ Thus, because Buddhism was linked with polygamy, much was at stake for this issue in the modernization process.

A public defense of polygamy as a Buddhist practice was produced by the Minister of Foreign Treasury, Thipakorawong, in his book *Nangsui Sadaeng Kit-janukit* (Book Showing a Variety of Things) in 1867.³¹ In the passage concerning polygamy, Thipakorawong finds that the Buddha did not condemn nor support polygamy and that it is not forbidden in the precept concerning sexual misconduct.³² The Buddha said having many wives was a cause of greed and delusion but he didn't explicitly prohibit polygamy as one of his precepts: he offered criticism but no formal rule. Thus he asserts Siamese Buddhists are free to practice polygamy or monogamy as it is not an injunction of the religion as in Christianity.³³ Because the practice is not disallowed within Buddhist law, it also should not be disallowed under Siamese law. Thus, Thipakorawong defends polygamy using his knowledge of the Buddha's teachings and formulates this against Western practices of monogamy and Christianity similarly to Vajiravudh.

We have seen that the encounter with Western powers during the advent of modernity caused the Siamese to retain a unique, united national identity using Buddhism. But there were also ways in which Buddhism was used to attract and accommodate Western forms of modernity. Through the overall encounter with the West the Siamese were impressed by the technological and scientific findings introduced by missionaries and colonial officials. Because of this, they strove to place their alternative modernity alongside the Western model.

Accommodation to Western Modernity

While Siam proved its separation from the West through a standardized form of Buddhism and the sanction of polygamy, the leaders also emphasized certain aspects of Buddhism, showing its attraction to Western forms of modernity. In the mid-nineteenth century the intellectual atmosphere of the elite expressed more concern with modern sciences than traditional beliefs. They began to see superstitious practices as less civilized and educated whereas the elite strove to appear modern and civilized. Buddhism was a way to demonstrate this distinction.³⁴ One of the main characteristics of modern Buddhism for Siam was a return to an ideal past, before Buddhism had been corrupted by protective magical practices. This ideal past, thus for modern Buddhists, more fully coheres with Western modernity. During this period the Siamese argued that at its core, the essence of Buddhism is rational and dependent on empirical analysis.

Siamese Modern Buddhism

During the three reigns of Rama IV, V, and VI, prominent modern Siamese attempted to demonstrate that their tradition was compatible with Western ideas. Unlike Western modernity where Christianity was contrasted with secular rationality, in Siam, superstitious aspects of Buddhism were counterposed by rational forms of Buddhism. This rationalized Buddhism was separated from foreign religions but modern Buddhists were more interested in being separated from non-doctrinal and unorthodox forms of Buddhism. Reynolds concurs that "the modernizing tendencies that gained strength during the nineteenth century tended to undercut the traditional cosmological orientations within Buddhism, at least among certain segments of the elite."³⁵ The examples below show how Siamese Buddhists created this idea of a modern Buddhism in light of their interactions with Western ideas.

Mongkut's Thammayut sect exemplifies a modern form of Buddhism, which focused on rational doctrine and belief while disparaging folk practices. Mongkut sought to make monastic discipline stricter and more distinct from other sects.³⁶ Mongkut and the elites of his time accepted the Christian missionaries' critique that Buddhism was too superstitious and appropriated the rational aspects of the tradition to combat this.³⁷ King Mongkut and later King Chulalongkorn, as we

have learned, promoted a Buddhism that could stand up to the rationalism of Western and Christian missionaries' critique.³⁸ Also, Reynolds traces how, among the educated elite, nature and science became separated from religion and consequently some aspects of Buddhism emerged as myth. He cites the Thammayut sect as contributing to and representing a response to these changing qualities of mind with its emphasis on textual fundamentalism, rationalism, and the essentials of the Buddha's teachings.³⁹

An example of modern Buddhism at the state level can also be found in the writings of King Vajiravudh. He has argued that the country's primary religion, Theravada Buddhism, is superior, from an intellectual point of view, to religions practiced elsewhere. He compares Christianity unfavorably to Buddhism, saying that his tradition does not foster such incredible beliefs as virgin birth.⁴⁰ Thus, Buddhism is superior because of its rationality. Here Vajiravudh is using Western categories of science and rational argument to judge Buddhism above other religions. He therefore creates a Buddhist worldview that is appealing from a rational Western point of view.

Another modern Buddhist, Prince Wachirayan, inherited the rationalism with which Mongkut applied to the Buddha's teachings. He too sought to distinguish reality from myth and distrusted anything that did not stand up to rational explanation.⁴¹ Thus these new ideas about Buddhism became engrained in men of Wachirayan's generation after Mongkut set the stage with his new and radical ideas. Wachirayan believed Buddhism had an ideal past without magical practices, and sought to return to this. In his autobiography, Wachirayan describes the shift in thinking within himself and in Siamese Buddhist students toward a more rational understanding of the teachings. He writes:

One work which struck me was the Kalama-sutta which taught one not to believe blindly and to depend on one's own thinking. My knowledge and understanding at that time were typical of the modern Dhamma student who chooses to believe some things but not everything.⁴²

Thus some parts of the Buddhist tradition do not cohere with modern values and these were the passages that Wachirayan chose not to believe. Some passages he believed to have been inserted by later generations and other incredible passages he interpreted in rational

ways, such as the Buddha's victory over Mara, which he saw as an allegory.⁴³

He also questioned the value of the monastic institution. Wachirayan found his peers were critical of the institution, so he was reluctant to join the monkhood. But later in his life he took a more moderate view. He writes:

At the time young Siamese were inclined to say that to be ordained as a monk performed no useful service to the kingdom. Monks were lazy. They ate and went to sleep. It was a waste for the kingdom to support them. For my own part . . . I thought that monks set out to do good, but only individually.⁴⁴

Here he explains that just as one should think critically about Buddhist teachings, one also should not simply value any and every monk, but judge them individually based on each monk's societal contribution. He finds that some monks provide useful functions for society but concludes that "in former times monks provided more strength for the kingdom than nowadays."⁴⁵

Another example of modern Buddhist writing at this time is presented in *The Wheel of the Law* by Presbyterian missionary Henry Alabaster. This is a study of Siamese Buddhism published in London in 1871. Alabaster had many conversations with Minister of Foreign Treasury, Thipakorawong, about Western religions and Buddhism. Alabaster writes that in this work an attempt is made to "give a glimpse of the reasonable religious teaching and beautiful morality which lie buried among the superstitions of corrupted Buddhism."⁴⁶ Through this work it is clear that Thipakorawong was critical of Siamese Buddhist beliefs that contradicted empirical testing and did not have canonical justification. Instead he sought to strip away the superstitious elements and find the fundamentals.⁴⁷

These descriptions of early Siamese modern Buddhism show the impact of interactions with Western powers and the changed worldview of many elite Siamese. The elite found in Buddhism a way to engage Westerners and to show that Siamese modernity is compatible with Western forms. Another way Siamese Buddhism incorporated Western modernity was through science.

Buddhism and Science

During this period Siamese also reassessed their conception of Buddhist cosmography (how Siamese

understood the makeup of the universe). Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Buddhist cosmography had stood at the center of Siamese Buddhist belief as an all-encompassing statement of the world.⁴⁸ This traditional worldview is explained most fully in the document: *Traibhumi of Phra Ruang* (Three Worlds cosmography of *Phra Ruang*), which was reputedly first compiled in Siamese prose from the Pali canon and commentaries in 1345CE.⁴⁹ Composed by Phya Lithai, then heir-apparent to the throne of the central Kingdom of Sukothai. It is a royal text meant to be accessible to the laity and an expression of orthodox Theravada tradition.⁵⁰ Reynolds writes that this text has had an influence on religion, art, and ethical attitudes starting from its own time and continuing until the Bangkok period.⁵¹ It portrays the religious worldview in which Siamese Buddhists lived and represents the “first complete presentation of the Theravada cosmological perspective.”⁵²

The unquestioned use of the document ended when it had to compete with other systems of thought. By the end of Mongkut’s reign this cosmography was scrutinized as representing the Siamese modern belief system. The result was not a complete dismissal of Buddhist cosmography but rather a redefinition of the religious world in light of the explanatory power of Western science.⁵³ The encounter with the West, as in other Theravada Buddhist countries, created a challenge to traditional worldview. These traditional elements came to be seen as archaic and not a part of the true teachings of the Buddha.⁵⁴ Triggered by the Buddhist reforms of King Mongkut, Western rationalist concepts were introduced and created the possibility of a rational, secular worldview for elites. Elite Siamese denied the authority of the *Traibhumi*, which became labeled as useful for ethical reasons—indicating the consequences of immoral acts—but inadequate for describing the natural world.

The *Nangsuu Sadaeng Kijjanukit* (Book Showing a Variety of Things), by Thipakorawong can be seen as a successor or replacement of the *Traibhumi*. Frank Reynolds goes so far as to say that the publication of *Kijjanukit* represents the end of one world and the beginning of another.⁵⁵ Craig Reynolds sees this as a “portrayal of what concerned the Siamese elite in responding to Western religion and Western science.”⁵⁶ Thipakorawong favored scientific explanations of the world and denied the authority of the *Traibhumi*.⁵⁷ He

stated: “Had the Lord Buddha taught cosmography as it is in the ‘*Traibhumi*,’ he would not have been omniscient.”⁵⁸ Thus Thipakorawong believed the *Traibhumi* was created after the Buddha’s death and it is ignorant to believe this is the true cosmography of the world.⁵⁹ He states that the Buddha was omniscient but never spoke about his knowledge of science because he knew the people of his age would not have understood it. He asserted that whatever science would reveal in the future, it would not oppose the true and essential points of Buddhism.⁶⁰ To show this, *Kijjanukit* distinguishes between the cosmography present in the *Traibhumi* and the explanations of natural phenomena taken from sciences such as meteorology and astronomy.⁶¹ Thus modern Siamese Buddhist discourse emphasizes its compatibility with science and through this link Buddhism is perceived as equal to Western forms of modernity. It is rational and follows empirical analysis. The magical and superstitious elements have been rooted out, as has the nonscientific cosmography—and Siam is left with a truly modernized, rational tradition that can connect with Western ideas and people.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Buddhism was used by Siamese people as a resource useful in forming a distinct identity separate from the Western forms of modernity during the three modernizing reigns of King Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh. . Yet in other situations the Siamese have modified the Buddhist tradition to highlight to Westerners its modern elements. Thus Buddhism was used to help Siam remain sovereign and maintain its own modernity but at the same time to be compatible with the Western model. Buddhism is clearly a variable and complex tradition that can be molded to suit one’s interests for desired results. Currently, Thai Buddhists currently are innovative, reforming, and reviewing their religion—ideas are incorporated and negotiated. This innovative modernity has a history located in the colonial encounter and subsequent modernizing process in which it is clear that Siamese Buddhists balanced the two extremes of accommodating completely to Western modernity and ignoring it altogether.⁶²

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End Notes

¹1851 marks King Mongkut's ascension to the throne, and 1925 marks the end of King Vajiravudh's reign. During these three reigns Siam faced Western powers and ideas of modernization in a substantial way for the first time. The modernization process began in earnest with King Mongkut's reign and was carried through by his two successors. I am not arguing that the monarchy was solely responsible for modernizing Siam but that their collective reigns mark a time of challenge with modernity and when much negotiation with modernity occurred.

²Jonsson, Hjørleifur. "Mien Alter-Natives in Thai Modernity." p. 600.

³See Jackson, Peter A. "Thai-Buddhist Identity: Debates on the Traiphum Phra Ruang."

⁴Jonsson, Hjørleifur. "Mien Alter-Natives in Thai Modernity." p. 693.

⁵Knauff, Bruce, "Critically Modern: An Introduction." p. 17.

⁶Gaonkar, Dilip Prameshwar. *Alternative Modernities*. p. 14.

⁷Ibid. p. 15.

⁸Ibid. p. 17.

⁹Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 21.

¹¹Knauff, Bruce. "Critically Modern: An Introduction." p. 25.

¹²McDaniel Justin. "Buddhism in Thailand: Negotiating the Modern Age," p. 125.

¹³Loos, Tamara. *Subject Siam*. p. 20

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵See Winichakul, Thongchai. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*.

¹⁶Barme, Scot. *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity*. p. 30.

¹⁷Keyes, Charles. "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand." p. 551.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 554.

¹⁹Ibid. p. 555.

²⁰Tambiah, Stanley. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*. p. 239.

²¹Reynolds, Craig. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. p. 266.

²²Tiyavanich, Kamala. *Forest Recollections*. p. 19.

²³Ibid., p. 44.

²⁴Reynolds, Frank. "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand." p. 274.

²⁵Vella, Walter, F. *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*. p. 15.

²⁶Ibid., p. 530.

²⁷Winichakul, Thongchai. "The Quest for 'Siwilai': A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Siam." p. 534.

²⁸Loos, *Subject Siam*. p. 11.

²⁹Ibid., p. 122-3.

³⁰Ibid., p. 128.

³¹Reynolds, Craig. "A Thai-Buddhist Defense of Polygamy" p. 185.

³²Reynolds, "A Thai-Buddhist Defense of Polygamy." p. 205-6.

³³Ibid., p. 206.

³⁴See Winichakul, Thongchai. "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects 1885-1910."

³⁵Reynolds, Frank. "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand." p. 273.

³⁶Tiyavanich, Kamala. *Forest Recollections*. p. 6.

³⁷Ibid., p. 7.

³⁸Ibid., See page 213 and Chapter 11.

³⁹Reynolds, Craig. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. p. 125.

⁴⁰Greene, Stephen Lyon. *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama IV, 1910-1925*. p. 72.

⁴¹Reynolds, Craig. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. p. 144.

⁴²Reynolds, Craig, transl. *Autobiography: The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajiranana of Siam, 1860-1921*. p. 30.

⁴³Ibid. p. 30.

⁴⁴Ibid. p. 37.

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 37.

⁴⁶Alabaster, *The Wheel of the Law, Buddhism*. p. 247.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁸Reynolds, Craig. "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai Intellectual History." p. 161.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, Frank. *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*. p. 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵² Ibid., p. 18.

⁵³ Reynolds, Craig. "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai Intellectual History." p. 171.

⁵⁴ Barme, Scot, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* p. 23.

⁵⁵ Reynolds, Craig. "Buddhist Cosmography in Thai Intellectual History." p. 178.

⁵⁶ Reynolds, Craig. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. p. 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

⁵⁸ Alabaster, Henry. *The Wheel of the Law*. p. 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. xxi.

⁶¹ Reynolds, Craig. *The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand*. p. 130.

⁶² McDaniel, Justin. "Buddhism in Thailand: Negotiating the Modern Age." p. 127.

Buffalo Crimes and Modernization in King Chulalongkorn's Siam

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The family had been asleep for hours when they awoke to a racket outside their home. Nai Soot, Nai Kluen, and Amdaeng Ploi grabbed their weapons and rushed outside. Four robbers were after their water buffaloes, their most valuable possessions. They defended their animals in the darkness, but Nai Soot was stabbed and killed in the fighting, and Amdaeng Ploi was wounded twice on her arm. Nai Kluen, however, managed to recognize four local toughs among the robbers. Although he shot and wounded one of them, they managed to get away with the buffaloes.¹

This episode illustrates an experience that was not uncommon in turn-of-the-twentieth century Siam. Gang robberies, often violent, were an increasing phenomenon. Bandits liked to target water buffaloes, the most valuable possession of many rural families, so incidents like the one retold above could leave poor Siamese families desperate. Crimes involving buffaloes were of major consequence to rural Siamese, but rural society did not function in isolation. Rural Siam was affected by the major economic and political changes that the kingdom was experiencing at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This paper draws a connection between buffalo crimes—stealing buffaloes, robbing buffaloes, and buffalo-napping—and modernization.

Modernization is a theme that has occupied many historians that have studied Siam under King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910). Maurizio Peleggi argues that modernization in Siam during this period was a form of globalization; Siamese elites borrowed from ideas that had become popular among elites around the world. There was nothing new about Siamese elites adapting foreign models, practices, and material culture for their own benefit. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, Siamese ruling elites increasingly looked toward Europe and European colonies for models of modernity. Modern ideas, practices, and things were the marks of “civilization,” and legitimized their leadership of Siam as a nation. Peleggi argues that capitalism and colonialism were two of the most important global trends adapted during the

reign of King Chulalongkorn.² The Siamese king and his ministers adapted colonial forms of centralized administration, and economic elites (including Siamese, resident Chinese, and Westerners) imported new forms of Western capitalism.

The way I will use the term modernization, however, should not always imply planned or purposeful transformations. The political and economic changes discussed in this paper were all modern—they were all planted in Siam from Western seeds. But they were not all intentionally imposed on Siamese society by elites. Modernization also should not always imply progress. In fact, I will show how modernization in Siam towards the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign created problems as much as offered solutions.

I will be analyzing the characteristics of buffalo crimes in order to trace some of the lesser-known effects of modernization. There have been few studies on how modernization affected rural Siamese during this period. The research Tamara Loos has conducted on modernization, law, and gender in Siam is an important exception.³ Another resource that has been invaluable for this study is David Johnston's dissertation on the capitalization of the Siamese rice economy. Although he rarely uses the term modernization, Johnston meticulously documents the development of the rice industry during this period, and traces related changes in rural agriculture, society, and trade. In addition, an article derived from chapter four of his dissertation argues that a certain level of crime was accepted in the village context. Johnston's research emphasizes rice agriculture; he mentions modernization, buffaloes, and the expansion of police authority only tangentially. He does not draw any connection between modernization and buffalo crimes, but his observations on changes in the Siamese rural economy and society during King Chulalongkorn's reign provide crucial context for many of the observations I will make here.⁴ Although there are a few other studies on the rural economy during this period,⁵ most of the literature on modernization has not focused on rural Siamese, but on the monarchy: its methods, its motivations, and foreign influences on it.

This paper is a modest attempt to fill this gap by looking at buffalo crimes in turn of the twentieth century Siam. I argue that devastating increases in buffalo crimes can be strongly correlated to political and economic modernization in Siam, but that modern admin-

istrative methods were also used with varying success to address the crime problem. Modernization, therefore, was both a cause and a solution to buffalo crimes. I begin by emphasizing the importance of buffaloes in rural Siamese society by describing their uses and value. Because buffaloes were so valued in rural society, buffalo crime was a serious matter. I outline characteristics of various kinds of buffalo crime, from small-scale thefts to gang robberies, in order to contextualize my arguments concerning the changes triggered by modernization. After discussing the frequency and patterns of buffalo robberies, I pull economic data from newspaper accounts to show that high levels of buffalo crime followed intense economic modernization in rural tracts of new paddy land just north of Bangkok. Political modernization and centralization in Siam can also be linked to buffalo crimes. Such crimes tended to increase, at least temporarily, as Bangkok reduced the power of local authorities. Modern strategies implemented by the monarchy to combat buffalo crimes, such as expanding the duties and jurisdiction of the police, initially yielded mixed results.

I concentrate on the rural areas near Bangkok as a case study, although I occasionally mention places further afield. My concentration on rural areas around Bangkok is justifiable for three reasons: economic modernization was most rapid here, political centralization in this area can be most easily divorced from elite concern over European threats on peripheral territories, and sources such as the *Bangkok Times* cover the Bangkok area most comprehensively.

The Bangkok Times

Although I have drawn from a variety of sources, I have examined the *Bangkok Times* from January through December 1906 especially carefully.⁶ Discussions of long-term trends in this essay are sometimes illustrated with newspaper passages, but I have also attempted to find support for these trends from other sources that have taken the long view. The *Bangkok Times* has its weaknesses as a source. It was an English language publication intended for Westerners in Bangkok and abroad. Foreign news predominated and even the paper's domestic coverage was business and Bangkok-oriented. Although they rarely made the front page, short articles on buffalo crime, the rural economy, and provincial law enforcement nevertheless

appeared frequently. These stories provide a useful account of conditions in the countryside even though some of them seem to have been written with the entertainment of readers in mind.⁷ I have therefore not hesitated to quote the *Bangkok Times* frequently to convey the atmosphere of the times.

Details of buffalo crimes most often came to light through police reports or descriptions of court proceedings, especially in cases that made it to extraterritorial courts. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Western countries and Japan pressured the Siamese monarchy into signing extraterritorial agreements. These agreements specified that legal cases in Siam involving citizens or subjects of those foreign powers were to be heard and decided by judicial or consular officials appointed by those countries' governments.⁸ Extraterritorial rights became increasingly problematic as the number of individuals covered mushroomed.⁹ Asian immigrants to Siam were soon recognized as subjects of treaty powers, as were their children. Siamese with foreign employers or crimes that took place on foreign-owned property could also be heard at an extraterritorial court. The French court was reputed to be the most likely to rule against Siam's prosecutors (often Europeans themselves), leading to a high demand for forgeries of identification documents that indicated French protégé (subject) status.¹⁰ The result of these extraterritorial agreements was that many individuals in Siam could circumvent the law enforcement authority of the royal government. Prince Devawongse, voicing the frustrations of the monarchy, is said to have complained that defendants in Siam were "Siamese or foreign, just as best suits them at the moment."¹¹ But in regard to buffalo crimes, foreign courts in Bangkok seemed generally supportive of the Siamese government's prosecution efforts, despite insisting on Western police procedures.¹²

The terminology used by the *Bangkok Times* for work animals in Siam also deserves some comment so as not to lead to confusion. By "buffalo," the newspaper is referring to the water buffalo. "Bullocks" is used to denote both cows and bulls. "Cattle" is an umbrella term used to refer to both buffaloes and bullocks. In this essay, I have followed the terminology used in the *Bangkok Times* for consistency. Although "work animals" in Siam could also include elephants and horses as well as bullocks and buffaloes, I mostly limit myself to buffaloes here as they are by far the most frequently

mentioned work animal in the *Bangkok Times* and other sources.

The Value of Buffaloes

Buffaloes and bullocks were common in Siam at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most rural families had a buffalo, a cow, or a bull.¹³ If they did not, they could borrow one, rent one, or exchange their own labor to use one temporarily. Siamese families in the Chao Phraya River basin used water buffaloes for many purposes, but they were considered nearly essential for farming. Farmers occasionally used bulls instead, but buffaloes were preferred because they were stronger, more easily trained, and willing to work in waterlogged fields.¹⁴

In 1948, Thai scholar Phya Anuman Rajadhon published a small book on farmers in central Siam "as they were in the old times."¹⁵ He describes in detail how farmers in central Siam used buffaloes. The buffalo's most important duty was to provide the power to pull plows and harrows through the rice fields as the farmer guided the implements from behind. Farmers sometimes used buffaloes to thresh rice, as well. In the past, Phya Anuman explains, villagers created a common threshing ground and threshed each farmer's harvest collectively in turn. Rice sheaves were piled around a central pole, and villagers led the animals to trod on the sheaves in circles around the pole until the rice grains separated out and sifted to the floor. Villagers removed the empty sheaves as they rose to the top. Buffaloes were also used to pull bullock carts and their manure was used to fertilize the fields.¹⁶

Due to the important role they played in the rural rice farming cycle, buffaloes were one of the few rural possessions with much monetary value. Land was only beginning to acquire a market value in central Siam, and rural houses were small and impermanent. Although most families in central Siam had a small boat and some had an oxcart, they were generally not worth much.¹⁷ Aside from the yearly rice crop, a family's wealth consisted mostly of its work animals. A buffalo could be relied upon to fetch a high price in the event a family encountered hard times.¹⁸

Buffalo Theft and Nakleng

As the most common and conspicuous form of wealth in the Siamese countryside, cattle were also the most tempting target for thieves and bandits. Phya Anuman noted that it was “necessary to take great care with respect to oxen and buffaloes, because they are the important source of power in farming, and so there are always evildoers waiting to steal them.”¹⁹ After a morning’s work in the fields or threshing rice, villagers turned their buffaloes loose to rest and to forage for grass, but they were not left unguarded. Children, often in large groups, were responsible for tending the animals as they grazed each afternoon. Sometimes a small group of adults would join them to make sure they took their role seriously.²⁰

Small-time buffalo thieves, operating on their own, were usually inexperienced farmers who had fallen on hard times. In the following newspaper account, Nai Pee of Uthai Thani was accused of the theft of two buffaloes. The inexperienced defendant scrambled ineffectively to come up with a plausible excuse to avoid conviction:

When arrested the accused was in possession of the buffaloes, and at first he said they belonged to his brother Nai Suen Di. This the brother denied. Afterwards Nai Pee said he had hired them from Nai Mao. Nai Mao, however, denied having given them for hire; and the buffaloes were finally identified as belonging to Nai Pan. Accused was found guilty, and sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.²¹

Although the penalty sounds serious, one year in jail was much more lenient than punishments ordered for convicted gang robbers. Small-time theft was still considered a local matter because after the defendant’s release, both the plaintiff and the defendant were likely to remain in the same village.

In the following case of theft heard in the French extraterritorial court, the accused was charged with buffalo theft in Nakhon Nayok:

Nai Ta, the complainant, said he was roused about midnight by the noise of the buffaloes in the shed, and went out. He saw two robbers trying to open the shed. Taking his gun, he fired at them. Then he shut himself into the house as he was afraid to do anything more. It was a very lonely part of the country and he was alone in the house with an old man. [A district official] said that next morning he was informed by Nai Ta that he had shot a thief in the night. They went out together to see if any

trace could be found, and 20 sen [800 meters] from the place they came on the accused lying badly wounded. . . . Accused’s explanation was that he was on his way to see his mother and a sick friend. His torch went out, and as he passed Ta’s place he called for a light, when Ta shot him. Further examined he admitted he was not going the most direct way to his destination.

By press time, the judge had not yet ruled on the case. The *Bangkok Times* noted, however, that the accused was “still suffering very much from his wounds.”²² Cases of buffalo theft were not usually heard in extraterritorial courts. Either the plaintiff or the defendant (in this case, probably the plaintiff) must have claimed French protégé status and saw an advantage to bringing the case before the French court. Perhaps he could not expect fair or preferential treatment from local officials, or perhaps he hoped for a better judgment from the French court.

Some small-time thieves were farmers who resorted to theft only rarely, out of economic desperation. Others aspired to be *nakleng*, meaning “rogue,” “rascal,” “thug,” or “player.” *Nakleng* generally became members of a hierarchical network and engaged in more lucrative criminal activities, such as gang robbery. Aspiring *nakleng* stole cattle or committed other crimes to prove their mettle.²³ According to a columnist in the *Bangkok Times*, a *nakleng* was characterized by his “manly bearing and courage, readiness to fight in single combat or in a riot, fidelity to friends, deep loyalty and respect towards feudal lords and parents.” *Nakleng* flaunted their public image by “demonstrating” in the markets and in the gambling halls.²⁴ Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, Minister of the Interior and a celebrated historian, heard a captured bandit give testimony in 1903 and reported the details in the form of an interview. According to Prince Damrong, the robber explained how *nakleng* perceived themselves:

Criminals [*phurai*] don’t call each other criminals, they call each other *nakleng*. The people who call themselves this are known to be those who understand robbery, the people who steal cattle, or the people who collaborate with them such as those who buy stolen cattle. So, these people are called *nakleng*. It is understood that they are all these kinds of people.²⁵

Nakleng tended to look out for their own village’s interests while preying primarily on other villages. The line between criminal gangsters and upstanding citi-

zens in rural Siam was a fine one; *nakleng* or “retired” *nakleng* often served as local officials. Villages valued *nakleng* for their experience. One monk recalled, “In the old days parents would not allow their daughter to marry a man who did not know how to steal a buffalo. Local people believed that if you knew how to steal a buffalo, you would know how to keep your own buffaloes from being stolen.”²⁶

To dispose of a stolen animal, a small-time buffalo thief would make arrangements with a *nakleng* in another village to buy the stolen buffalo. The buyer, often a local official, frequently resold the buffalo back to the original owner if the owner agreed not to report the incident.²⁷ This practice, which historian David Johnston calls “buffalo-napping,” allowed thieves and local middleman to profit with a reduced risk of suffering violence or involving the state.²⁸ Prince Damrong’s *nakleng* explained that a farmer, on realizing that his buffalo had been stolen, would turn to a local *nakleng*. The *nakleng* then contacted *nakleng* in nearby villages, explaining that he was helping a farmer look for his buffalo, which must have innocently wandered off. The farmer, he would explain, was willing to pay a reward. The *nakleng* who had bought the stolen buffalo from the thief would then step forward, saying that he had heard the buffalo had come his way. They agree on an appropriate reward amount. Then the intermediary goes back to the farmer, collects the reward fee (with a commission), pays the buyer, and tells the farmer that the buffalo will be tied to a tree in a certain location.²⁹

Usually, no one publicly acknowledged that a crime had been committed. Johnston concludes that the “buffalo-napping” arrangement was mutually beneficial.³⁰ Villagers could get their stolen buffaloes back for less than their value if they did not press the matter with the authorities. The *nakleng* were assured a steady source of easy income with little fear of state intervention. Despite Johnston’s assertion, however, the practice benefited the thief and the middleman far more than the farmer; the prices they asked were not insignificant sums for a poor villager. A comparatively powerless farmer, however, often had little choice.

Sometimes *nakleng* buyers misjudged their victims, provoking them into filing complaints. For example, one man in Uthai Thani set out with some friends to look for his stolen buffaloes and came to the house of Nai Semma. Nai Semma told them that he knew where the buffaloes were, and could get them back for 200

Ticals [baht]. Although the *Bangkok Times* does not specify how many buffaloes were stolen in this instance or their market value, it can be assumed that this price represents a significant discount off the market price or else it would not be worthwhile to the farmer. Eventually, according to the *Bangkok Times*, the victim agreed to pay. “After getting the Tcs. 200, however, Nai Semma said he didn’t know where the buffaloes were.” The angry farmer turned to state officials, and Nai Semma was subsequently arrested.³¹

Likewise, in Minburi three men on three separate occasions found their buffaloes stolen in the night. In each case the owners could trace buffalo tracks leading to the home of a certain Hadji Hem. The case against him in the French extraterritorial court was summarized in the *Bangkok Times*. One of the plaintiffs, To Po, explained that he had approached Hadji Hem to ask where the buffaloes were located.

Accused told him to come back the next morning, adding that the people who had the buffaloes would sell them for 160 Tcs [baht]. Po said he had not that amount of money, but accused received in payment a gun he valued at 90 Tcs. and one of the stolen buffaloes worth 70 Tcs. The next day Po went to Hem and received seven of his buffaloes back.

The other two plaintiffs had similar stories. In his own defense, Hadji Hem tried to attract a better judgment by claiming that the plaintiffs were framing him because he was “a French protégé.” In the end, however, the French judge disagreed and sentenced him to a year in jail for receiving stolen property.³²

Bandit Gangs and Buffalo Robberies

Armed and organized gangs of *nakleng* bandits enjoyed success far more consistently than petty thieves. Prince Damrong’s bandit informant stated that robbers generally preferred to target buffaloes rather than household valuables. Although it was difficult to herd off and sell the animals without getting caught, they were usually worth more than what could be found in houses.³³

Bandit gangs usually struck late at night. Prince Damrong’s bandit explained that gangs observed certain rituals in the evening before committing home robberies. It is likely that they observed the same rituals before targeting buffaloes as well. The informant

described the rituals performed by a gang just before a raid:

When they gather together, they stack their weapons together in a cone shape. Then, they hang talismans on the cone of weapons, and sit around it in a circle. The robbers' spiritual leader [*ajan*] splashes liquor on the weapons, and they pray to the gods. They assure the land guardian spirits, the gods, and the king that their gathering doesn't aim to plot against the monarchy; they are doing this because they are extremely poor. They ask for the valuables of the house to maintain their lives, and that the robbery be as successful as they wish. This is the content of their prayers. But, if there is no experienced spiritual leader in the group, the praying ceremony is not done.³⁴

Villagers shared the robbers' deep respect for spirituality. The belief that the most daring and successful *nakleng* leaders had magical powers was widespread. For example, the *Bangkok Times* noted that villagers commonly believed that a notorious gang leader, Ai Suea Thuam, could neither be pierced by bullets nor cut by knives.³⁵

After the ceremony, the robbers set out towards the targeted village or homestead. Sometimes gangs attempted to get away with the buffaloes as quickly and quietly as possible; if no one discovered the missing buffaloes until morning, the gang would be more likely to evade pursuit. This was difficult, however, as barking dogs would frequently awaken a family.³⁶ In other cases, gang members fired their weapons as they approached to intimidate the villagers into avoiding confrontation. Buffaloes were most frequently surrendered to armed gangs without a fight, as exemplified by the following report of a robbery in Pathum Thani:

On the night of the 6th inst. some five or six persons attacked the house of Khun Prachaset at Sampok in that Muang [town]. They were well-armed, and began a fusillade, in which nobody was hurt, but by which the people of the house were quite scared.

Then the robbers were able to get quietly away with eight buffaloes, worth in all some Tcs. 760.³⁷

The gang fired their weapons to announce their presence, but did not meet much resistance. Even among the robberies that made the newspaper, nearly half of the incidents involved no fighting (see table). The bandits escaped with the cattle as quickly and quietly as possible, since the gang could not risk organ-

ized pursuers. In fact, gang robbers feared determined village headmen far more than provincial police because headman could raise a pursuit team and give chase immediately.³⁸

Because gunfights occurred in only about half of the newsworthy incidents of buffalo robbery, we can assume that they were even more uncommon in the incidents that went unreported. Farmers did defend their herds when they could, however. Wealthier families, groups of farmers, or villages hired workers or trusted *nakleng* to keep watch. These defenders were rarely successful against large, well-armed gangs, but this incident was an exception:

The other night some eight or nine robbers made an attack on a buffalo pen... They were armed and began shooting, but, notwithstanding that, the man in charge of the buffaloes made a plucky resistance and succeeded in driving off the robbers. This man Nai But got wounded in the affray, but not seriously. It is not known if any of the robbers were badly hurt.³⁹

A gunfight did not necessarily result in injury. Peter Thompson, a surveyor who recorded his travels in rural Siam around the turn of the twentieth century, explains, "They are armed only with rusty old muzzle-loaders, and often after an hour's firing no one on either side is hurt. This is not altogether to be attributed to the badness of their weapons or of their marksmanship, for the villagers are firing from behind their houses, and the dacoits are skillful at taking advantage of such cover as the ground offers."⁴⁰

Groups of farmers or entire villages sometimes pooled their herds to make cattle defense more practical, although larger herds provided more tempting targets for robbers. In the following incident, the defending farmer lost a large number of buffaloes, "having had the cattle of a number of people under his care":

On the night of the 16th inst. an armed gang of twelve or thirteen men attacked the house of a farmer named Nai Kan. There were four men on the place, and they made an effort to defend their cattle, but the robbers did not hesitate to shoot, and the defenders had to retire. The robbers got away with a drove of fifty buffaloes.⁴¹

This raid was unusual; a catch of fifty buffaloes was very large. It required a large number of bandits, and must have required extensive planning. Arranging a

Table: Gang Robberies of Buffaloes Reported in the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 1906⁽¹⁾

| Date ⁽²⁾ | Lo-cation on the map | Location of incident ⁽³⁾ (In 1906, the largest administrative divisions were <i>monthon</i> , followed by <i>mueang</i> and then <i>amphue</i> [district]). | No. in gang | No. cap-ture d ⁽⁴⁾ | Did the gang have guns? | Was there a fight? | No. wounded / killed: | | | No. buf-faloes stolen ⁽⁵⁾ | No. buffa-loes recov-ered ⁽⁶⁾ |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | | Defe-nd-ers | Gang mem-bers | Offi-cials ⁽⁷⁾ | | |
| 3/2 | 1 | [<i>Monthon</i> Prachinburi], <i>Muang</i> Petriew [Chachoengsao], <i>Klong</i> 6 | ? | 0 | Yes | Yes | 2 / 0 | ? / ? | x | 1 | 0 |
| 3/6 | 2 | [<i>Mueang</i> Bangkok], Bang Krapı district, <i>Klong</i> Samsen | 4 | 0 | ? | Yes | 1 / 1 | 1 / 0 | x | ? | 0 |
| 3/26 | 3 | <i>Muang</i> Paknam [Samut Prakan], <i>Klong</i> Mahawong | 8-9 | 0 | Yes | Yes | 1 / 0 | ? / ? | x | 0 | x |
| 5/15 | 4 | <i>Muang</i> Tanyaburi, <i>Amphur</i> Lam-luka | 7-8 | 0 | Yes | Yes | ? / 1 | ? / ? | x | 0 | x |
| 5/18 | 5 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, Sampok [probably Samkhok district] | 5-6 | 0 | Yes | No fighting | | | | 8 | 0 |
| 5/18 | 6 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, Bang Kuwat | ? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 1 | 0 |
| 5/21 | 7 | [<i>Monthon</i> Krung Kao], <i>Muang</i> Ayuthia, Chao Chet district, <i>Ban</i> Tao Lao village | ? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 7 | 7 |
| 5/24 | 8 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, <i>Klong</i> Bang Luang Chiengrak | 12-13 | 0 | Yes | Yes | ? / ? | ? / ? | x | 50 | 0 |
| 5/26 | 9 | [probably <i>Mueang</i> Bangkok], Rat-buri [prob. Ratburana] district | 3 | 3 | ? | Yes | 1 / 0 | 0 / 0 | x | 7 ⁽⁸⁾ | ? |
| 6/8 | 10 | <i>Muang</i> Minburi | ? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 11 | 0 |
| 6/8 | 11 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, <i>Wat</i> Talesap | ? | 0 | ? | ? | ? / ? | ? / ? | x | 4 | 0 |
| 6/8 | 12 | <i>Muang</i> Tanyaburi, <i>Klong</i> No. 14 | ? | 0 | ? | Yes | ? / ? | ? / ? | x | ? | 0 |
| 7/2 | 13 | [<i>Mueang</i> Bangkok], Bang Krapı [district] | 7 | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 6 | 0 |
| 7/7 | 14 | [<i>Mueang</i> Thanyaburi, Lam-lukka district], <i>Khlong</i> Soi, N. Suburbs | ? | 0 | Yes | No fighting | | | | 8 | 0 |
| 7/9 | 15 | [<i>Mueang</i>] Minburi, <i>Ban</i> Buabit | 5 | 1 | Yes | No fighting | | | | 3 | 0 |
| 7/10 | 16 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, <i>Klong</i> Chiengrak Yai | 5 | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 0 | x |
| 7/10 | 17 | <i>Muang</i> Tanyaburi | ? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 4-5 | 0 |
| 8/6 | 18 | <i>Muang</i> Pratoom-thani, Bang Nam Chon | ? | 0 | Yes | Yes | 1 / 0 | ? / ? | x | 4 | 0 |
| 8/7 | 19 | [<i>Monthon</i> Nakhon Chaisi], <i>Muang</i> Nakhon Chaisi, <i>Ban</i> Taptako | >10 | 4 | Yes | Yes | 0 / 0 | 2 / 0 | 1?/0 | 0 | x |
| 8/21 | 20 | Bang-kapı [district], N. of Samsen | ? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 6? | 0 |
| 8/27 | n/a | Supan district ⁽⁹⁾ | 8-9 | 1 | ? | ? | ? / ? | ? / ? | x | 'a number' | 0 |
| 8/31 | 22 | <i>Klong</i> Sansep ⁽¹⁰⁾ | 6? | 0 | ? | No fighting | | | | 3 | 0 |
| 11/26 | 23 | Bang Hua Pa, 20 <i>sen</i> north of <i>Klong</i> Rangsit ⁽¹¹⁾ | 20 | 2 | Yes | Yes | ? / ? | ? / ? | ? / ? | ? | 2 |

(1) Incidents described as “robberies” begun by “gangs” are included, even if the report does not specify that the criminals possessed weapons.
(2) Date of newspaper publication. Dates follow the “month/date” form.
(3) I have kept the spellings used in the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*. I have added locations in brackets to clarify the location. All of these locations are in *Monthon* Krung Thep unless otherwise indicated.
(4) Number captured by press time. If not mentioned, I have assumed none were captured.
(5) A question mark (?) indicates that an unspecified number of buffaloes were taken; a zero (0) indicates that the gang tried but did not succeed in stealing any buffaloes.
(6) Number of buffaloes recovered by press time.
(7) These figures record information reported. When an article does not mention casualties, I have used a question mark (?). When the article mentions that either defenders or robbers were wounded but does not mention any killed, I have inferred that there were none killed. I have assumed law enforcement officials were not present—indicated with an (x)—unless mentioned in the article.
(8) Bullocks, not buffaloes. The article does not specify whether seven bullocks were actually stolen, or merely targeted.
(9) Because no *Mueang* was specified, I would guess that this is a *Mueang* Bangkok district. Perhaps it is Srprathum district. The Rs are not pronounced and in the 1905 map I used, the district was spelled without the Thai letters for “thu.” I have not marked this spot on the map.
(10) Although *Khlong* Saen Saep extended all the way to Chachoengsao, this robbery probably took place in *Mueang* Bangkok or *Mueang* Minburi.
(11) Although *Khlong* Rangsit extended all the way to Nakhon Nayok, this robbery probably occurred in *Mueang* Thanyaburi.

quick and discrete getaway with fifty animals would have been difficult. This raid was most likely the work of a regional crime boss, rather than a local *nakleng*, who would have had the resources to be ambitious and who would have been willing to risk taking on a whole village.

The Frequency of Buffalo Robberies

In order to assess patterns and motivations of buffalo robbers, I examined the *Bangkok Times* for the year 1906 and compiled a table of each reported incident of robbery and its characteristics (see table). In total, the newspaper reported twenty-three incidents of gang buffalo robberies that year. All of the incidents occurred in the countryside near Bangkok, in the central region of Siam. The data on robberies in the table should be considered a sample of the most public and newsworthy incidents of buffalo robbery around the capital; it should certainly not be considered an exhaustive list.⁴²

For a better, but still incomplete, sense of the actual number of gang robberies around that time in Siam, we can look at the 1905/06 annual report of the Ministry of Justice. The ministry reported 30 convictions for dacoity (gang robbery) in metropolitan Bangkok, and 142 convictions in the provinces. These figures include robberies of household items, rice, and cash as well as robberies that targeted buffaloes. The figure in the report for convictions of robbers in Bangkok had fallen slightly from the 36 convictions the year before. The report did not compare the number of convictions in the provinces with the year before, and provided no data on arrests.⁴³ The *Bangkok Times* news reports of captured robbers represent just a small proportion of the number of people actually charged with gang robbery in the kingdom. Nevertheless, by comparing and analyzing the information reported about robberies in Siam in 1906, we can generalize certain gang robbery practices and test anecdotal observations about robbery patterns and motivations.

The string of buffalo robberies, for example, stretched significantly longer in 1906 than in previous years. The high season for stealing buffaloes commonly stretched from January through April, during the hot, dry season.⁴⁴ After the rice harvest (usually December through February), there was little for villagers to do in the fields. In addition, the hard, dry

earth made stolen buffaloes harder to track. In 1906, however, the length of the robbery season in the Bangkok area expanded considerably. In early June, the *Bangkok Times* stated that the “cattle lifting season” should have been nearly over, but in early August, the newspaper commented, “Cattle lifting seems to be a more prevalent crime than ever before in the suburbs. Formerly the game was given up with the coming of the rains [in June].” The number of robberies in 1906 finally abated by September, but in late November, a news report indicated that “the cattle lifting season in the suburbs has begun early.”⁴⁵

The data on 1906 robberies (see table) corroborates the newspaper reports of a lengthened season of cattle theft. There were no reported incidents of buffalo robbery in January and February 1906, perhaps due to the harvest of a boom crop, but a steady stream of robberies stretched from March through August. The November robbery seems to be an outlier; the newspaper’s prediction that the cattle lifting season had already begun was premature.

Economic Modernization as a Cause of Buffalo Crimes

The harvest in the early months of 1906 had been “a very good one,” yet Siam experienced a wave of robberies during the extended season of cattle robbery that year.⁴⁶ The crime spree reported by the *Bangkok Times* could not, therefore, be the result of a poor harvest generally. Prince Damrong’s bandit claimed that *nakleng* conducted robberies in order to fund eating, drinking, and gambling habits, or even to make legal business investments, but these motivations also do not explain the extended season of buffalo crime in 1906.⁴⁷

A more localized examination of economic and robbery reports, however, shows a strong correlation between the localities which most strongly felt negative effects of economic modernization and the areas frequently victimized by buffalo bandits. This area, called the “Northern Suburbs” by the *Bangkok Times*, includes the towns of Minburi, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, and Thanyaburi (which encompassed the newly created paddy fields off Rangsit Canal), as well as rural northern districts of the city of Bangkok such as Bang Krap (see map).⁴⁸ Of the twenty-three incidents of gang robbery reported in the *Bangkok Times* in 1906,



seventeen, or three-quarters, occurred in the Northern Suburbs (see table). Because many economic problems had been brewing in the Northern Suburbs for years, it is likely that poor economic conditions in the area motivated buffalo robberies and not the other way around.

The Northern Suburbs were hit hardest by economic problems because they were experiencing the most rapid transformation to a modern, capitalist economy. A rise in worldwide demand for rice coincided with unequal treaty provisions that removed barriers to foreign trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. Siamese commoners and elites hoped to capitalize on the new opportunities for profit by opening up rice paddy in the Bangkok area to feed the rice export trade. Wealthy government officials sponsored a boom in new canal construction in the 1870s and profited handsomely from their investments. In 1889, the royal government awarded a monopoly in canal development to a newly formed company made up of royal family and Western investors called the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company. The huge development project that consumed the company's efforts in the 1890s and 1900s was the creation of Rangsit Canal and a huge

network of interconnecting smaller canals northeast of Bangkok.⁴⁹

Although neither state-sponsored monopolies nor contracts for investment were new to Siam, the economic problems in the Northern Suburbs were the result of modern changes in several ways. First, the scale of the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company's Rangsit Canal project was unprecedented. As a result, problems with the development that came to light in 1906 (which I will describe below) had a magnified effect. Second, land speculation and absentee landlordism were made possible by the growing value of land. Higher land values and Western pressure led to shifting the tax burden from tax farms on luxuries to land taxes. Higher land values for paddy around Bangkok were caused by the growing international demand for Siamese rice exports. The boom in exports was made possible by low tariffs and the elimination of royal monopolies mandated by a series of treaties with Western powers. But when the value of the baht increased, international demand for rice declined and Bangkok-area farmers who were most connected to international markets suffered. Third, Siam had long been used to an abundance of land but a shortage of labor. By the beginning of the twentieth century, how-

ever, sudden increases in land prices, shortages of available paddy, and land speculation caused shortages of both labor and cheap, desirable land, prompting socio-economic problems which Siam was unprepared to face.⁵⁰

The Siamese government's attention was drawn to problems in the Rangsit Canal area after reports that 3000 families had simply abandoned their fields. On closer investigation, the number was more accurately thought to be about 2000, but the Siamese government viewed the situation with alarm.⁵¹ Prince Damrong sent several officials to investigate the matter. Their May 1906 report blamed land speculators and sympathized with farmers in the Rangsit area:

Most of the paddy land is rented from absentee landlords who live in Bangkok.As soon as [they] felt confident that the farmers wished to settle permanently they demanded major increases in rents. [Of course] by this stage any farmer would have found it very difficult to remove his buildings and belongings ... and consequently in certain areas extraordinarily high rents were enforced. [Moreover] once farmers have begun plowing and planting they are summoned to the landlord and forced to enter into contract with him. [In these circumstances] the farmers have no choice but to agree to the owners' demands.⁵²

A *Bangkok Times* exposé in July 1906 revealed the poor conditions in the fields off Rangsit Canal to the country's English readership. The paper noted that land speculation had been necessary to ensure the success of the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company's work to open up new fields, but that the canals had not been maintained and in many cases they could no longer be used for irrigation and transportation. "Inevitably," the paper concluded, "such landlords are chiefly concerned with the rents they can obtain.... With the silting up of the canals the land is not what it was, and the highly rented tenants found they could not meet all the claims upon them." Landlords were unsympathetic and farmers were forced to sell their property and abandon the land.⁵³ The government came up with a number of ambitious ideas to address the situation but, despite the admonition of the king, administrative disunity prevented significant government assistance. Severe economic problems persisted in the area for years.⁵⁴

Land speculation and devaluation also led to a return to shortages of labor (both human and buffalo), leaving

even more paddies vacant. The *Bangkok Times* noted that there was a lack of both labor and buffaloes to work the new lands opened up by the Siam Canals, Land, and Irrigation Company north of the city. A *Bangkok Times* correspondent reported that, after farmers had fled the area, "land was going cheap in the [Rangsit Canal] district, but there are hardly any buyers." The newspaper continued, "there is a great shortage of labor in that district this year. The Laos from Korat Monthon came down in large numbers, but got scared by some foolish report or other and promptly returned, losing Tcs. [baht] 12 in railway fares, to say nothing of time and in many cases a long journey on foot."⁵⁵ The demand for paddy lands alongside the new canals had been high in the 1890s and early 1900s, but demand dropped off around 1905.⁵⁶ Land investors and large farmers could not find enough labor to work their fields, and much of the paddy land in the Northern Suburbs was left fallow.

The spread of livestock diseases, such as rinderpest, can also be traced to the increasing commercialization of the Siamese economy, and also caused a shortage of buffalo labor in the Northern Suburbs in 1906.⁵⁷ Cattle trade routes, which previously linked delta towns with their upriver hinterlands, now expanded to include overseas destinations such as Singapore and Hong Kong.⁵⁸ Easily communicable diseases had periodically plagued Siamese herds in the past, but the expansion of the cattle trade, and trade routes, left Siamese herds increasingly susceptible.⁵⁹ The government responded to a serious rinderpest outbreak in 1898 by creating an abattoir to quarantine cattle for import or export, but the measure was not always effective.⁶⁰ A government report announced that in February 1906, for example, disease had felled 102 bullocks and 29 buffaloes in Songkhla, 136 bullocks and 104 buffaloes in Khorat, and 134 bullocks and 107 buffaloes in Chaiyaphum.⁶¹ But these statistics pale in comparison to the death rate in the Northern Suburbs. In May, the *Bangkok Times* reported that government veterinarians were investigating the deaths of about fifty percent of the buffaloes in the Rangsit Canal district.⁶² The officials concluded that a rinderpest epidemic was to blame. Disease, robbery, and the out-migration of small farmers had lately increased the cost of buffaloes approximately one hundred percent.⁶³ The newspaper noted that "a much larger area would be under cultivation but for a lack of buffalo."⁶⁴

In addition to problems caused by disease and the failure of the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company, farmers faced suddenly higher taxes in 1906. In a bid to reform Siamese legal codes and finances as a basis to renegotiate unequal treaties with Western powers and Japan, Siam began to phase out gambling, prostitution, and opium tax concessions, together representing a substantial portion of royal income. To offset decreased revenues caused by the abolition of gambling houses outside Bangkok, the government reformed the land tax system in 1905, increasing taxes on most categories of land and doubling the kingdom's land tax revenue.⁶⁵ According to the 1905/06 state budget report of the Ministry of Finance, paddy land was now taxed variously depending on output. Fallow land was also taxed, but at a lower rate. The report claimed that even the "highest rate levied is still considerably lower than the rate upon similar land in Burma," but the tax clearly had a strong effect on rice farmers and caused discontent.⁶⁶ A news item in early June noted that "taxes are being collected in the Northern Suburbs at present, and in many cases people have little enough money to meet these claims."⁶⁷ In the four weeks prior to the June 8 notice of tax collection in the Northern Suburbs, seven robberies were reported in Pathum Thani, Thanyaburi, and Minburi, all just north of the city near Rangsit Canal (see table and map). The *Bangkok Times* made the connection between economic problems and gang banditry in early August 1906: "[A] number of those who have abandoned their land seem to have taken to robbery."⁶⁸

The economic problems that hit the Northern Suburbs particularly hard did not abate quickly. An October notice in the *Bangkok Times* observes that the crop in Thanyaburi, which included most of the Rangsit Canal district, "will be very poor indeed," the result of a terrible year. The correspondent reports that "there is great difficulty in getting food for the buffaloes, and robberies are frequent."⁶⁹ The *Bangkok Times* estimated that, due to late rains, the next year's rice harvest in Siam would likely be less than seventy-five percent of average. But they optimistically noted that "the worst year in Siam can always be redeemed by a month's good rain and high water in the river." Many farmers, however, had already recast their seeds several times and were running out. An anonymous "gentleman who is in a position to form a pretty accurate opinion" estimated in October that rice yields would reach

only fifty to seventy-five percent of the previous year's crop.⁷⁰ And 1906 was only the beginning of the economic hardships in the Northern Suburbs. David Johnston notes that the economic depression that plagued Siam from 1905 to 1912 hit first and hardest in the Rangsit Canal district.⁷¹

The evidence concerning robberies in the Northern Suburbs of Bangkok indicates that robberies were motivated by rural economic challenges, not merely the need to fund *nakleng* gambling debts or business ventures. Although poor weather had always been a leading cause of crop failure for Siamese farmers, the increasing penetration of the capitalist economy into rural Siam caused a new set of problems, and clearly exacerbated buffalo crime. Higher risks assumed by farmers looking to profit from rice sales, rising land taxes, increased land speculation and leasing, and land devaluation caused by unmaintained canals were all unfortunate results of the modernization of the kingdom's economy. Even rinderpest, a naturally occurring disease, could now be more easily communicated over long distances as the international cattle trade linked Siam more closely to Singapore, Hong Kong, and beyond. All of these symptoms of economic modernization led to economic hardship in the countryside near Bangkok and caused a rise in buffalo robberies.

Political Modernization as a Cause of Buffalo Crimes

In addition to economic modernization, political modernization during King Chulalongkorn's reign also caused an increase in buffalo crimes. Although political modernization during this period is often characterized as administrative "reform," the major goal was centralization. It has been argued that political centralization in Siam during this period was not a modern development at all in that it promoted authoritarianism, but it is nevertheless useful to see the process as a kind of modernization.⁷² The monarchy was replacing an older political model of limited central suzerainty over relatively autonomous peripheries with a political model of central control over peripheries through bureaucratic appointments, derived from European colonial administrative models.⁷³

Centralization of law enforcement authority in central Siam, unlike in the borderlands, had little to do with foreign territorial threats, but it nevertheless

benefited the monarchy in several ways. First, a modern police force patrolling both Bangkok and the provinces would prove that Siam was capable of enforcing law and order in a Western fashion, undercutting the rationale commonly given by foreign powers for extra-territoriality agreements. Second, by protecting rural people from crime, the government assumed the role of protector from local authorities, binding the population closer to the monarchy. And third, reducing disorder in the countryside increased tax revenues, rice yields, and export tariffs. The transition, however, from local to central responsibility for the maintenance of order in the countryside was rough. The disorder caused by shifting authority towards Bangkok and its officers contributed to a rise in unrest and crime, including buffalo crimes, during the later part of King Chulalongkorn's reign.⁷⁴

Before the efforts of the king's administration to centralize provincial administration, local nobility and village leaders were responsible for law and order. The provincial nobility or other local authorities requested assistance from the capital only as a last resort, when the demands of gangs became too much. The king would often respond by appointing a special representative to the troubled region. The official, sometimes with military support, had the theoretical authority to demand cooperation from all local leaders until the problem could be brought under control.⁷⁵ Local leaders were reluctant to involve Bangkok, however, because even if a campaign against the bandits was unsuccessful, the interaction resulted in a transfer of resources and authority from these leaders to central officials.

In general, however, representatives of the central government had little authority in rural areas, particularly in comparison to the powers of strong local officials and *nakleng*. In 1902, a royal representative in Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat) concluded that the "increase in banditry was because the commune and village elders ... did not tell the officials about the bandits even if they knew who they were and what crimes they had committed for they feared the power of the bandits more than that of the government."⁷⁶

Without the local presence of a powerful police force, villages often relied on their own village's *nakleng* for their security. Bandit leaders and other *nakleng* were local powers in their own right and served as, cooperated with, and intimidated local officials. David

Johnston suggests that villagers saw cattle robbery as a tolerable agent of wealth redistribution. Therefore, he concludes, they avoided interfering with the operations of bandit gangs. He cited an article in the *Bangkok Times* that describes a powerful *nakleng* defended by thankful villagers: "the common people of the country... have been in no humor to assist the Police, for it is said that [*nakleng* leader] Ai Pia was a kind of Robin Hood, robbing only the rich and often helping the poor."⁷⁷

The Robin Hood characterization may fit some bandit leaders from the perspectives of their favored villages, but it cannot characterize buffalo banditry in general. Many of the targets of buffalo robbers were small, undefended farmhouses. In 1906, for instance, the *Bangkok Times* reports a number of cases in which farmers with very few large animals were nevertheless targeted (see table). Gangs seemed to have targeted cattle herds of any size. The following article demonstrates that no target was too small:

[A] gang of thieves... attacked a place where there was one poor solitary buffalo. The owner's family did their best to defend their property, and the robbers, who were armed as usual, opened fire. Both the wife and daughter of the owner were shot, the former being very seriously wounded. The robbers got the buffalo.⁷⁸

It appears that although larger herds may have been more tempting, buffalo robbers targeted small, perhaps weakly defended, animals as well. Although it may be applicable in some instances, the Robin Hood characterization of gang robbery cannot be generalized. Instead, villagers and local leaders collaborated or cooperated with bandits out of necessity in order to minimize losses.

The king was aware that without an effective rural police force, local leaders could not always confront bandits. The Ministry of the Interior gradually reduced the power of local leaders by reorganizing the provincial administrative structure and by transferring powers to royal appointees. Regional commissioners and their staffs gradually took over tax collection, natural resource management, and provincial law enforcement from the local nobility. Sometimes this could only be accomplished by appointing members of the rural aristocracy to high positions in the developing administrative system or by allowing provincial nobles to continue collecting certain taxes.⁷⁹

By weakening the authority of the established local nobility, the process of centralization of law enforcement responsibilities upset the balance between central and local powers in Siam. As the Ministry of the Interior grew less tolerant of collusion between local officials and bandits, violent incidents increased. *Nak-leng* could no longer rely on local officials to protect their activities, so they instead resorted to riskier and more violent raids. Local officials, facing sudden scrutiny of their relations with local outlaws, felt compelled to eliminate the evidence. Johnston notes a suspicious case where arrested bandits, held by Suphanburi officials in a local jail, were mysteriously poisoned before they could be questioned. Although it is unclear whether or not he had been involved, the provincial governor lost his job as a result. Historian Tej Bunnag argues that provincial nobility bitter about their loss of authority to Bangkok even encouraged gangs, hoping to convince the royal government that it could not administer the countryside without their assistance.⁸⁰

The modern system of law enforcement promoted by the monarchy had little patience for local officials who cooperated with robber gangs to strengthen local power at the expense of the state. The less-accommodating attitude of the Ministry of the Interior towards local arrangements that condoned crime upended rural systems of law and order, explaining anecdotal observations that robbery had become especially widespread in the last two decades of King Chulalongkorn's reign.⁸¹ Political modernization, then, also triggered a rise in buffalo crimes, at least in the short term.

Modern Solutions to Buffalo Crimes

The royal government, however, viewed the extension of royal authority into the countryside as a solution to, not a cause of, the crime problem. Unlike previous attempts to centralize power in Siam, King Chulalongkorn adopted Western colonial methods of internal control to monitor cattle in the provinces. I will briefly discuss two methods of intellectual control adopted by the Siamese government: counting buffaloes and other work animals in the first national census, and setting up an elaborate cattle registration system to monitor the cattle trade and, in theory, prevent buffalo crime. Then I will discuss the expansion of police authority as a solution to buffalo crimes.

After Prince Damrong's Ministry of the Interior became officially responsible for local administration throughout the kingdom, an effort was made to count the Siamese population. As historian Volker Grabowsky points out, the census count had political implications: unlike previous lists of male commoners, the Yuan (Northern Thai) and Lao were counted as Siamese in order to weaken European claims to these ethnic groups.⁸² The Siamese census of 1904 also counted buffaloes and bullocks (as well as horses and elephants). The census results revealed that ownership of large work animals was widespread. Although buffaloes seemed to be more common in some areas and bullocks in others, there seemed to be an average of one to two people per buffalo/bullock. The government's motivation for counting these animals is unclear; they were not directly taxed, but they were valuable rural resources. The animal counts were probably most influential in guiding new policies proposed by the expanding agriculture, public health, and perhaps even the policing bureaucracies.

Another method the royal government used to monitor cattle in Siam was an elaborate system of cattle registration that theoretically prevented stolen cattle from being bought and sold.⁸³ In 1900, the government announced new regulations that required official documentation of every buffalo or bullock transfer in the kingdom. Although details of the law changed several times in the subsequent years, by 1906 district chiefs were required to endorse new certificates for each purchase. Cattle dealers who intended to export cattle would have to present the papers for each of their animals to both the head veterinarian at an abattoir in Bangkok and then to customs officials. If the animals were intended for slaughter, the certificates were to be checked first by the Sanitary Department. All of these officials were to compare the physical characteristics of the animals with the descriptions of the animals on the certificates before making new ones or allowing the animals into their facilities. District chiefs had the authority to detain cattle suspected stolen for two months to locate the true owner.

This elaborate system for cattle registration remained largely ineffective. Although government officials at every level agreed that too many stolen cattle were passed through the system, none were particularly vigilant about comparing the animals to the descriptions on the registration. The government veteri-

narian, from England, insisted that it was not the duty of his staff to ensure that cattle were described properly on the certificates; in practice they checked perhaps one out of ten. The head customs agent, also English, argued that the “descriptions are after all matters of opinion,” before listing some examples of vague animal descriptions. Cattle traders and the government veterinarian argued that cattle appearances changed over time. According to the *Bangkok Times*, the veterinarian exclaimed that “no written certificate could be of any good for a bull five years old, which was issued when the animal was eighteen months old.”

The necessity of having endorsed certificates, regardless of the accuracy of the descriptions, nevertheless created a substantial market for forged papers. The *Bangkok Times* pointed out that it was commonly believed that anyone involved with the cattle trade could “produce hundreds of those papers.” Robbers reportedly even altered animals’ appearances by coloring the skin or bending the horns. Moreover, checking each animal carefully at every level would create unimaginable delays. The newspaper concluded, “if the system were taken seriously, it would make the trade impossible.” Although it did not achieve the goal of slowing the illegal cattle trade, the registration system did insert representatives of the royal government into a new arena, asserting that the proper transfer of cattle required the government’s seal of approval and claiming for the central government the responsibility for solving the cattle crime problem.

Most importantly, however, rural crime problems gave the Ministry of the Interior another justification to expand police presence throughout the country. The jurisdiction of the Bangkok police force was expanded to include the city’s closer rural suburbs, and the Ministry of the Interior formed the Provincial Gendarmerie Department in 1897 to take over provincial law enforcement from the army and the various modest security forces cobbled together by commissioners and local officials.⁸⁴ The transfer of authority outside Bangkok from local officials to representatives of the central government was gradual because many existing provincial leaders resisted. The transfer of law enforcement authority was well under way, however, by 1906.⁸⁵ By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, each of Siam’s seventeen new administrative regions (*monthon*) had a gendarmerie station, and 330 substations had been located at provincial and district

towns.⁸⁶ The provincial gendarmes were assigned a variety of duties, ranging from guarding the border and the new railways, checking travelers’ papers, detaining suspicious characters, arresting persons carrying firearms at night, as well as inspecting opium dens, gambling halls, and bars.⁸⁷ Aside from the overall goal of solidifying central Siamese political control, the priority for the provincial gendarmerie was to combat banditry.

Both the expanded Bangkok police force and the newly established Provincial Gendarmerie Department were created along European lines. In 1887, a prince who had spent considerable time in London was made Minister of Local Government. Impressed with what he saw in Britain, he recommended that the Bangkok police be modeled after the London police, including blue uniforms and helmets. Later, the force was reorganized on the colonial Indian model “in nearly every respect,” including another change in uniform design, and its commissioner and several officers were brought in from India.⁸⁸ During his stop at Pahang in British Malaya, King Chulalongkorn surveyed the colonial police system, and recommended further changes on his return home.⁸⁹

As part of its efforts to design modern law enforcement institutions, marginalize provincial powers, and work with European officials in Bangkok, the royal administration appointed a series of Europeans to lead the expanded Bangkok Police force and the Provincial Gendarmerie.⁹⁰ These Europeans, many of whom had previously worked for the Indian colonial police, were charged with the training, standardization, and recruitment of new law enforcement personnel.⁹¹ Sons of Bangkok elites were selected to be officers and a number of Afghanis and British Indians, especially Sikhs, were hired as Bangkok city police charged with dealing with Europeans and other foreigners especially.⁹² Former gendarmerie commander C.H. Forty points out that due to complex extraterritoriality procedures, “To be at all successful, a police officer had to make himself acquainted with the procedure and laws of the different courts and to have some knowledge of several languages. This state of affairs called for officers of considerable ability and education.”⁹³

The expanded Bangkok police force and the provincial gendarmerie faced a host of challenges. The European and elite Bangkok officers had little practical experience in the Siamese countryside, and were often

shown a cold shoulder by local leaders. Strategy, too, was a problem. An amusing news item illustrated the kind of challenges faced when gendarmes led and drilled by Europeans and Bangkok elites had little practical experience:

A body of police went forth to affect the arrest of the notorious dacoit chief Ai Pia, said to be in hiding somewhere on the southern outskirts of Bangkok. The police had been informed of the place where he was. Mr. Divisional Superintendent Follett, and Mr. Chief Inspector Day of the Special Branch, with a squad of men all in uniform therefore marched to the spot with some pomp and circumstance, causing some stir in the Paklat neighbourhood. They found where Ai Pia was, but Ai Pia himself was not. He had moved out for parts unknown, and so the Police marched back again.⁹⁴

Ai Pia was to remain a stubborn thorn in the side of law enforcement personnel until 1913. In addition, both the Bangkok police and the provincial gendarmerie had trouble recruiting new members. Even after absorbing existing security forces, the rapid expansion of gendarme activities in the provinces required a steady stream of new recruits, who were simply not signing up voluntarily. The conscription act issued in 1905 began to solve the problem by assigning some conscripts each year to the provincial gendarmes.⁹⁵ Lastly, corruption remained a problem. Intended to eliminate collusion between local officials and criminals, the Bangkok police and the provincial gendarmerie were by no means free of corruption. Some law enforcement officials were still found to be in league with gangs. Articles exposing this kind of corruption, even among the new police forces, periodically surfaced in the *Bangkok Times*.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the provincial law enforcement became more effective over time. In one instance in late November 1906, the *Bangkok Times* reported that the police responded quickly and bravely to the scene of a buffalo robbery, although they were outnumbered and ultimately not successful at protecting the buffaloes:

[T]wenty robbers all armed attacked a farmer's house. They must have known there was a police station near by, but apparently they are bold enough to defy the ordinary forces of law and order. Eight policemen promptly turned out and with the four or five men in the farmer's household attempted to prevent the robbery. But the thieves had evidently a big supply of ammunition, and by dint of steady firing part of them kept the police and the farmer's

people at a distance while the others rounded up and got away with the cattle.

A witness recalled that gunfire was exchanged for an hour or two, and the newspaper noted that two arrests had already been made.⁹⁷ In the following incident, however, the local gendarmes arrived on the scene of the robbery in time, defended the buffaloes, and wounded and captured some of the bandits:

There were over ten armed men in the gang, and they began operations with the usual fusillade. Fortunately, however, this was heard by a Gendarmerie patrol, who hurried to the rescue and came on the scene while the [robbery] was still going on. The robbers fired on the gendarmes, one of whom got a bullet through his helmet. The fire was then returned, and two of the gang fell wounded. The others fled at once, but in addition to the wounded men two others were captured.⁹⁸

As the provincial gendarmeries became more successful, the Ministry of the Interior added new units and local resistance waned.

Villagers and traders gradually became aware that the central government's law enforcement authorities were enjoying some success at reducing crime. Rural Siamese came to embrace the new rural authority as an additional tool in their efforts to protect their property. One locality without a police presence chipped in to fund a substation to entice the Ministry of the Interior to send gendarmes. At the time, the town of Chonnabot was located along the road from Nakhon Ratchasima to Udon Thani. "It is on this road that many traders pass," according to an October news article, "and robberies are frequent. The officials, traders, and people therefore combined and raised a sum of Tcs. [baht] 2,074 odd, with which they have now erected a very substantial and complete station, dug a well, etc." The Ministry of the Interior was delighted to accept the station and, according to the article, planned to send a squad of gendarmes to staff it.⁹⁹ Villagers voluntarily contributed to the monarchy's political centralization process when it proved capable of providing them some benefit.

Conclusion

Numerous studies have examined how King Chulalongkorn and his administration modernized Siam. This article does not deny the crucial role of the mon-

archy and the influence of the elite. However, economic and political modernization was not only an issue of elite concern; it also had a significant effect on everyday rural life.

The economic modernization of Siam, or the capitalization of the rice economy, was a major, though temporary, cause of the rise of buffalo robbery in the countryside. Exacerbating factors included higher land taxes to offset reduced revenues from tax farms, increased land speculation and land rents, unmaintained canals caused by absentee landlordism, and greater opportunities for the spread of cattle disease. By studying economic conditions in Bangkok's Northern Suburbs in 1906, a clear association can be drawn between negative effects of economic modernization in the countryside and conditions that encouraged buffalo theft and robbery.

Political modernization also affected rural life. By expanding centralized law enforcement to the countryside, the monarchy displaced local authorities, created bonds between the monarchy and local people, and attempted to undermine arguments made by representatives of Western governments that Siam did not have a modern legal system. New provincial administrators and law enforcement officials upset the existing balance between rural crime and local authority, also contributing to a temporary rise in buffalo crime.

The monarchy's attempts to strengthen its administration of the countryside led to a greater, modern, interest in the regulation of the buffalo, a major rural resource. The government eagerly counted work animals, registered cattle, and charged its expanding police force with stamping out the illegal buffalo trade. Rural Siamese continued, at first, to rely on local institutions of power for protection but gradually adopted the new law enforcement institutions as additional means to protect their buffaloes and other possessions. Through increasing rural acceptance of these new policies and institutions, the purview of the central government expanded to cover rural law enforcement and the intellectual control over cattle.

Historians tend to have a Bangkok-centric view of Siamese modernization under King Chulalongkorn. We tend to think of modernization during this period as a process of elite localization of European models, without considering its effects beyond the capital. But rural Siamese, particularly in the Bangkok suburbs,

also noticed changes during this period that affected their most valuable possessions, their water buffaloes. Villagers realized that bandit raids on their buffaloes were becoming more frequent. Crop failures and debts led their neighbors to resort to buffalo theft. Local officials no longer had the power to work out solutions between farmers and *nakleng*. But farmers increasingly chose to appeal to government bureaucrats to track down their registered animals, and village chiefs turned to the royal police force to combat banditry. When rural Siamese noticed changes affecting their buffaloes, they were thinking about modernization, too. Modernization in Siam during King Chulalongkorn's reign did not simply rearrange power among elites. It also caused rural Siamese to realize that new and closer connections—economic and political, troublesome and beneficial—linked them and their buffaloes to a modern Siamese society.

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End Notes

¹ I have retold the story reported in "The Buffalo Question," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 6 March 1906, 14. Nai and Amdaeng are forms of address for male and female commoners, respectively. Other forms of address that can be found in quotations in this essay are *Hadji*, for a Muslim who has completed the Hajj, and *Ai*, for a criminal or troublemaker.

² Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 3, 11-16. Instead of using the term "adapting," however, Peleggi and other Southeast Asianists have adopted O.W. Wolters' concept of "localizing," which credits indigenous actors with more agency. For Wolters' discussion of the term and how Southeast Asians have localized foreign elements, see O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999), 55-57.

³ Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴ David B. Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1975; and David B. Johnston, "Bandit, *Nakleng*, and Peasant in Rural Thai Society," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 15 (1980): 90-101.

⁵ For example, see Ian Brown, *The Elite and the Economy in Siam c. 1890-1920* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Chattip Nartsupha and Suthy Prasartset, eds., *The Political Economy of Siam, 1851-1910* (Bangkok: Sangroong Printing, 1981).

⁶ The *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* republished each week's seven daily Bangkok Times issues in one weekly installment to send overseas. 1906 is a particularly interesting year. In addition to ongoing efforts to modernize the government by expanding the responsibilities and authority of the bureaucracy, severe economic problems in the Bangkok area became apparent in this year. Efforts to modernize the kingdom's legal system were also well underway in 1906.

⁷ For the *Bangkok Times*' efforts to make light of crime stories, and especially for poking fun at the police, see Hong Lysa, "Indian Police Subalterns in King Chulalongkorn's Kingdom: Turn of the Twentieth Century Bangkok Pantomime" in Sirilak Sampatchalit and Siriporn Yodkamolsat, eds., *khue khwam phumjai* [It is Pride] (Bangkok: Sangsan, 2545 [2002]), especially 464.

⁸ Hong Lysa, "Extraterritoriality in Bangkok in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910: The Cacophonies of Semi-Colonial Cosmopolitanism," *Itinerario* 27, no. 2 (2003): 125-146.

⁹ Hong Lysa, "'Stranger within the Gates': Knowing Semi-Colonial Siam as Extraterritorials," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2004), 333-334.

¹⁰ Hong Lysa, "Extraterritoriality," 129 and 134.

¹¹ *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 4 June 1890. Cited in Hong Lysa, "Extraterritoriality," 134.

¹² For insisting on Western procedures, see Hong Lysa, "Extraterritoriality," 138-140.

¹³ Volker Grabowsky, "The Thai Census of 1904: Translation and Analysis" *Journal of The Siam Society* 84, part 1 (1996): 58-59, 68, and 76-78. According to the 1904 census, Siam's human population was 6,622,732. Omitting the portions ceded later in the decade to British Malaya and French Indochina, the population was 5,807,344. Grabowsky thinks these figures too low, and estimates that the population was actually about 7.44 million. The census also counted beasts of burden in central Siam (not including most of the North, most of the Northeast, and some of the most distant Malay states), showing buffalo to be the most plentiful at 1,144,478 and cows close behind at 1,104,751. According to census figures for this central region, there was an average of 2.9 persons in Siam for every domesticated buffalo (although this figure was as low as 1.3 in *monthon* Phuket and *monthon* Chumphon) and 3.0 persons for every cow. These figures should be considered the result of a rough count, at best.

¹⁴ Although these are the reasons frequently given, the preference must largely be cultural, as bulls tend to be favored in Cambodia.

¹⁵ Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Life and Ritual in Old Siam*, trans. William J. Gedney (New Haven: Hraf Press, 1961), 3. See also Kamala Tiyavanich, *The Buddha in the Jungle* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2003), 97-104.

¹⁶ Anuman, *Life and Ritual*, 10, 15-16, 21, 41-43.

¹⁷ The numbers of ox-carts (113,920) and boats (293,519) in central Siam were far lower than the numbers of work animals. These specific numbers represent a rough count at best. Grabowsky, "Thai Census," 68.

¹⁸ A buffalo's price depended on its age, size, gender, and health. "Tales of Crime," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 18 May 1906, 3, notes that eight stolen buffaloes were worth 760 baht. "The Cattle Case: Unbusinesslike Methods of Officials," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 12 September 1906, 18, states that a cattle dealer bought 105 bullocks for prices ranging from 50 to 120 baht each.

¹⁹ Anuman, *Life and Ritual*, 17-18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹ "Cattle Lifting," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 23 August 1906, 24.

²² "The Explanation of the Shooting," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 27 September 1906, 19. One sen is a distance of 40 meters.

²³ Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, *Rueang sonthana kap phuraipon* [A Conversation with a Robber] (Bangkok: Sophonphiphatthanakon, 1925), 36.

²⁴ Historicus, "The Nakleng," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 26 May 1898, 21-22, quoted by Johnston, "Bandit," 91.

²⁵ Damrong, "Conversation," 2.

²⁶ Kamala, *Buddha*, 126.

²⁷ Damrong, "Conversation," 38.

²⁸ Johnston, "Bandit," 92.

²⁹ Damrong, "Conversation," 38.

³⁰ Johnston, "Bandit," 92.

³¹ "A Little Trade in Buffaloes," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 25 October 1906, 7.

³² "The French Court," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 24 November 1906, 22.

³³ Damrong, "Conversation," 12-13 and 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21. I wonder if the statement that the robbers were in no way plotting against the monarchy was made for Prince Damrong's benefit?

³⁵ Johnston, "Bandit," 97, quoting Ayuthia, *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 1 June 1892.

³⁶ Kamala, *Buddha*, 115.

³⁷ "Tales of Crime," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 18 May 1906, 3.

³⁸ Damrong, "Conversation," 33-34.

³⁹ "In the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 26 March 1906, 8.

⁴⁰ Cited in Kamala, *Buddha*, 115.

⁴¹ "In the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 24 May 1906, 22.

⁴² A June newspaper article notes that unreported robberies were quite frequent: "A correspondent informs us that from Pakret downwards the river and the klongs [canals] are infested with these robbers, and hardly a night passes without some house, or boat, being attacked. The gangs are said to number from six to thirty men, generally well armed." "'Plon' in the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 6 June, 1906, 14. Plon means "robbery."

⁴³ "Ministry of Justice: The Annual Report," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 20 October 1906, 6-7. The Siamese year began April 1 and ended March 31 until 1941. I have not been able to determine if these figures include convictions in the extraterritoriality courts.

⁴⁴ Johnston, "Bandit," 90.

⁴⁵ "In the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 8 June 1906, 4; "Northern Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 6 August 1906, 10; "Cattle Lifting in the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 26 November 1906, 10.

⁴⁶ For the harvest being "very good," see "Rice Crop Prospects," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 29 October 1906, 11.

⁴⁷ Damrong, "Conversation," 42.

⁴⁸ For an explanation and a detailed map of the administrative divisions of the Bangkok region at the time, see the 1905 map and its explanation in Royal Thai Army. *Maps of Bangkok: A.D. 1888-1931* [phaenthi krungthep ph.s. 2531-2574]. (Bangkok: Royal Thai Army in cooperation with the Royal Thai Survey Department, 1987).

⁴⁹ For an extended discussion of economic changes in turn of the twentieth century Siam, see Johnston, "Rural Society," especially chapters II and VII. Also, see Ian Brown, *Elite*, especially 77-88, which concern the economic problems in the Rangsit area.

⁵⁰ For an overview of economic changes in the later nineteenth century, see Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81-104; and Johnston, "Rural Society," 44-47. For pressure to make legal reforms, see Loos, Subject Siam, 40-71.

⁵¹ Brown, *Elite*, 77-88.

⁵² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 77. A full translation of the report can be found in Chattip and Suthy, eds., *Political Economy*, 429-434.

⁵³ "Agriculture in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 18 July 1906, 15.

⁵⁴Brown, *Elite*, 78-79 and 88.

⁵⁵"A Late Year," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 23 July 1906, 11.

⁵⁶Johnston, "Rural Society," 59-60.

⁵⁷Rinderpest is a viral cattle disease that spreads quickly among populations that have not been inoculated; it is usually lethal. "Cattle in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 14 May 1906, 10.

⁵⁸For a brief discussion of the older buffalo trading routes, see Li Tana, "The Eighteenth-Century Mekong Delta and Its World of Water Frontier," in *Viet Nam: Borderless Histories*, ed. Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 152-153.

⁵⁹For more on the frequency of cattle plague outbreaks in locations worldwide and the connection between the cattle trade and outbreaks in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, see C. A. Spinage, *Cattle Plague: A History* (New York: Kluwer/Plenum, 2003), especially 486-487.

⁶⁰A. Cecil Carter, *The Kingdom of Siam* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 112-116.

⁶¹"Cattle in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 11 May 1906, 3. In addition to the cattle lost to disease, the report notes that wild animals also killed 23 bullocks and nine buffaloes in Songkhla ("Singora"), three buffaloes in Phuket, one bullock and 16 buffaloes in Trang, 12 buffaloes in Chaiya (in Surat Thani province), 17 buffaloes in Chumphon, and 3 bullocks and 3 buffaloes in Phatthalung. Two bullocks were destroyed by mad dogs in Buriram. The report also notes that 103 bullocks were slaughtered for food in Khorat during February.

⁶²"Cattle in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 14 May 1906, 10.

⁶³"Development of Agriculture in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 21 April 1906, 7.

⁶⁴"Cattle in Siam," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 14 May 1906, 10.

⁶⁵Brown, *Elite*, 38.

⁶⁶The Ministry of Finance Budget Report was published in "Finances of Siam: The Budget Report," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 2 August 1906, 22-24. After the land tax changes of 1905, land was taxed at rates varying from 24 att to one baht per rai, depending on estimated output. Sixty-four att equaled one Tical (baht). One rai is a measure of land area equal to a square forty meters per side. For the discontent caused by the tax increases, see Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam: 1892-1915* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 160.

⁶⁷"In the Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 8 June 1906, 4.

⁶⁸"Northern Suburbs," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 6 August 1906, 10.

⁶⁹"Crop Prospects," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 18 October 1906, 22.

⁷⁰"The Rice Crop," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 16 October 1906, 14; "Rice Crop Prospects," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 29 October 1906, 11.

⁷¹Johnston, "Rural Society," 280-285.

⁷²Benedict Anderson argues that Siamese "modernization" in this period on the contrary actually retarded the progress of modern nationhood. Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," in *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science*, ed. Eliezer B. Ayal (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1978), 193-247.

⁷³Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 81-84 and 101-107.

⁷⁴Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 160-161, 251.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 191.

⁷⁷Johnston, "Bandit," 93-94. He quotes from "Notorious Dacoit," *Bangkok Times*, 25 April 1913, 3.

⁷⁸"Gang Robberies," *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 2 March 1906, 2.

⁷⁹Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 65, 96-98 and 159-174.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 160-161 and 164.

⁸¹Johnston, "Bandit," 97-98.

⁸²Grabowsky, "Thai Census," 55-57.

⁸³Information on the cattle registration system comes from a series of Bangkok Times articles, mostly concerning a major legal case against a cattle dealer who was accused of trying to export stolen cattle on the basis of a number of certificates whose descriptions did not match the animals. In the course of testimony, a number of problems with the registration system were exposed, leading the judge to conclude that “the certificates cannot be relied upon to enable me to pronounce either party to be the true owner of the cattle...” See the following articles, all in the *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*: “A Cattle Case,” 11 September 1906, 15-16; [editorial] 12 September 1906, 17; “The Cattle Case: Unbusinesslike Methods of Officials,” 12 September 1906, 18-19; [editorial] 13 September 1906, 21; “The Cattle Case: Who is Responsible?” 13 September 1906, 22; “Correspondence: The Cattle Case,” 14 September 1906, 3; “Another Cattle Case,” 15 September 1906, 7; “End of the Cattle Case: Vytic Wins All Along the Line,” 19 September 1906, 19; and “The French Court: Another Cattle Case,” 10 November 1906, 3.

⁸⁴A gendarmerie is a police force with a military organization. Gendarmerie commissioners replaced army officers in Prachinburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chiang Mai, and took over from police commanders in Ayutthaya, Nakhon Chaisi, and Ratburi. Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 97-98 and 105.

⁸⁵Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 96-98.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 224. By administrative region, I am referring to monthon.

⁸⁷C.H. Forty, “A Sketch of Siam’s Gendarmerie,” *The Police Journal* 4 (July 1931), 429; and Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 105.

⁸⁸Forty, “Sketch,” 427.

⁸⁹Ratsukhon Jaratsi, “botbat khong kharatchakan chao tang prathet nai kromtamruat nai smai somburanayasithirat” [The Role of Foreign Civil Servants in the Police Division in the Era of Absolute Monarchy], Ph.D. diss. Chulalongkorn University, 1977, 36-39.

⁹⁰Forty, “Sketch,” 425-430.

⁹¹Ratsukhon, “botbat,” 168-173.

⁹²Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 175-176. Hong Lysa, “Indian Police,” 462-463.

⁹³Forty, “Sketch,” 427.

⁹⁴“An Elusive Dacoit,” *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 4 July 1906, 19.

⁹⁵Tej, *Provincial Administration*, 224. Recruiting was a problem for both the provincial gendarmerie and the Bangkok police, especially after the government stopped enlisting Indians. See “Dearth of Policemen,” *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 4 January 1906, 19.

⁹⁶See, for example, *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 9 February 1906, 2.

⁹⁷“Cattle Lifting in the Suburbs,” *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 26 November 1906, 10.

⁹⁸“Gang Robberies,” *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 7 August 1906, 15.

⁹⁹“The Gendarmerie,” *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail*, 19 October 1906, 2.

Socially Engaged Buddhism and the “Just War”

A Contradiction in Terms?

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In an article provocatively titled “Engaged Buddhism: A Skelton in the Closet?,” Brian Victoria presents a challenge to dominant notions that the movement known as “socially engaged Buddhism” is inherently a tradition of peace and nonviolence.¹ He contends that there is a sense in which the participation of the Japanese Buddhist establishment in promulgating the jingoistic rhetoric that was used to help justify Japan’s militant expansionism during the first half of the 20th century – rhetoric couched in the language of the need to defend Buddhism against its enemies and spread “true” Buddhism across Asia for the supposed benefit of all – might be viewed as a form of “engaged Buddhism.” He contends that although engaged Buddhism is usually portrayed as being a peaceful, gentle movement that seeks social uplift through nonviolent means, there is a compelling sense in which the active support of nationalistic militarism constitutes a variety of “engagement” with the socio-political sphere that might plausibly be characterized as what he refers to as “Engaged in Combat Buddhism.”² It is worth noting that although Victoria uses specific examples from Japan to make his case, he directs his critique at socially engaged Buddhism in general, and not just its Japanese instantiation.

He argues that engaged Buddhism’s “skeleton in the closet” is nationalism, a sentiment which cannot be neatly divided out from other, more quintessentially

“Buddhist” motivations for engagement with the socio-political world, and he asserts that “who but the most naive will believe that Engaged Buddhism is the sole exception to the ongoing reality that national self-interest readily turns religions, all religions, into its willing and obedient servants, ever ready to condone state-sanctioned killing when called upon to do so?”³

It is clear that in making this argument, Victoria is being deliberately provocative, using polemical language to challenge self-described “engaged Buddhists,” whom he sees as painting an overly rosy portrait of their own movement. But the question remains: does he have a point? Can there be such a thing as a variety of socially engaged Buddhism in which “social engagement” takes the form of rhetoric in support of violent action? More broadly, can the socially engaged Buddhist movement embrace the concept of necessary violence (or the “just war”) as a valid expression of the tradition, or is nonviolence a *sine qua non* without which no form of social activism can be viewed as “socially engaged Buddhism?” The answers to these questions have deep ramifications for what socially engaged Buddhism essentially is. Most definitions of “engaged Buddhism” seem to agree that the distinctive characteristic of the tradition is that it involves some form of “engagement” with the world of the here-and-now, but what does this “engagement” really mean? Is any sort of “engagement” with the socio-political sphere that is

expressed in the idiom of Buddhism – by definition – socially engaged Buddhism, or are there only certain types of engagement – and certain underlying motivational factors – that can be viewed as “valid?”

This essay will begin by examining cases in which the expedient use of violence has been endorsed by Theravada Buddhists (particularly Thai Theravada Buddhists) as a means of promoting a greater good using specifically Buddhist “just war” rhetoric. The discussion will then turn to the issue of looking at how we might go about determining just how authentically “Buddhist” this just war rhetoric is, and whether or not this is even a question that scholars who endeavor to offer objective analyses are in a position to address. Finally, this essay will take up the question of whether or not – as Victoria has argued – these “militant” expressions of the Buddhist tradition can (or should) be classified under the heading of “socially engaged Buddhism.” In the final analysis, due to the absence of a clear and widely agreed-upon definition of “engaged Buddhism,” the line separating “valid” from “invalid” forms of Buddhist “social engagement” would seem to reside in the eye of the beholder. It will be shown that the general issue of whether or not a Buddhist “just war” could be considered a “legitimate” variety of socially engaged Buddhism is not a question that objective scholarship (conducted by individuals external to the interpretive community of socially engaged Buddhists) is in a strong position to authoritatively answer, as it relates to privileged questions of the nature of religious authenticity. Furthermore, this essay will argue that although there are some exceptions, self-identified socially engaged Buddhists in Thailand have tended to define the parameters of their own tradition in such a way that the promulgation of a “just war” has been definitionally excluded from being a valid form of social “engagement.”

Buddhism as a “Tradition of Peace”

It is not uncommon to encounter some variation on the claim that “Buddhism is a religion of peace and nonviolence.” In and of itself, there is nothing terribly remarkable (or distinctly *Buddhist*) about this claim, as the sacred texts and charismatic leaders of numerous religious traditions often prominently employ the rhetoric of peace, and commit themselves to the ideal of nonviolence in some sense. However, as Christopher Queen has observed, the Buddhist tradition often

enjoys particularly widespread praise for “its peace teachings and the exceptional record of nonviolence in Buddhist societies over 2,500 years.”⁴ This purported record of nonviolence – along with the emphasis that the Buddhist *sīla* (moral code) places on not harming living beings – has led figures such as prominent Sri Lankan Buddhist intellectual K.N. Jayatilleke to argue that, “it is the proud boast of Buddhism that not a drop of blood has been shed in propagating its message and no wars have been fought for the cause of Buddhism or the Buddha.”⁵ Jayatilleke bases this assertion not only on his particular reading of the historical record, but also on an underlying claim that the ideals of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *metta* (compassionate loving-kindness) form the basis for the moral governance of human interaction among Buddhists, and thus comprise the building blocks around which Buddhist social ethics are built.⁶

Notwithstanding the assertions of Jayatilleke (and those who would make similar arguments), any claim that the Buddhist code of personal ethics has always prevented Buddhists from participating in violence and/or warfare is unsupportable by the facts. Moreover, the view that Buddhism holds a special claim to not just “talk the talk of peaceful engagement,” but also to “walk the walk of actualizing nonviolence” can be seen to entail an essentialist reading of what the Buddhist tradition actually *is*. Scholars have noted a tendency that exists in the Western world to contrast the ahistorical *ideals* of Buddhism (like compassion and nonviolence) with the historical *practices* of religions such as Christianity and Islam (such as crusades, holy wars, and inquisitions), which has led to the rather bizarre notion that an essentialized Buddhism comprised of texts and doctrines can be validly compared to historically embedded forms of other traditions.⁷ In many ways, this construction of a textually-based, “original” Buddhism that is a paragon of peace and nonviolent interpersonal interaction can be viewed as a legacy of the European colonialist project that created a normative picture of Buddhism which privileged text over practice.⁸ After recognizing this orientalist construction of the tradition to be the fantasy that it is, it becomes clear that the claim that the Buddhist world has somehow been exempt from historical acts of violent aggression cannot be supported. As Donald Swearer puts it, “while Buddhists may not have tarnished world history by launching armed crusades to convert ‘pagan

hordes,' the historical record certainly shows that Buddhists – monks and layman alike – have at times condoned, promoted, and participated in violence.⁹ Although the notion that Buddhist tradition has somehow been immune to violence is clearly a myth, the fact remains that there is a seeming discordance between the image that Buddhism projects as being a tradition of peace, and the reality of a historical record in which rhetoric cast in explicitly Buddhist terms has been mobilized in support of acts of violence and/or warfare.

A Buddhist "Just War"?

In June 1976, in the midst of a growing conflict in Thailand between right-wing government aligned forces and left-leaning student activists that would eventually lead to a notorious massacre of student protesters later that year, the prominent Thai Buddhist monk Kittivuddho Bhikkhu declared to a magazine interviewer that, "to kill a communist is not demeritorious." He went on to explain that "while any killing is demeritorious, the demerit is very little and the merit very great for such an act which serves to preserve the nation, the religion, and the monarchy. 'It is just like,' he said, 'when we kill a fish to make a stew to place in the alms bowl for a monk. There is certainly demerit in killing the fish, but we place it in the alms bowl of a monk and gain much greater merit.'"¹⁰ By using this kind of language, Kittivuddho implied that not only would the taking of human life be excusable under certain circumstances, but – in fact – there are some causes that are actually worth *killing* for.

Not surprisingly, Kittivuddho's remarks caused an uproar in Thailand, as numerous Thai Buddhists came forward to critique him for promulgating what they saw as an illegitimate distortion of the true Buddhist *dhamma* wherein killing could be seen as a religiously sanctioned activity.¹¹ It is worth noting that Kittivuddho later declared that his comments had been misinterpreted, and that he had meant that the "killing" of "communism," and not "communists" themselves, was what he was referring to as a meritorious activity. In this rhetorical move, Kittivuddho sought to extricate himself from the furor that his pronouncement caused by shifting the focus of his comments away from the destruction of what he saw as *harmful people* and toward the destruction of a *harmful ideology*. However, as Peter Harvey has noted, it is difficult to accept this revisionist interpretation of his remarks at face value

when they are placed alongside other – less publicized – speeches of Kittivuddho's wherein he makes remarks to the effect that killing 5,000 people [socialist sympathizers] to ensure the happiness of 42 million Thai people was a legitimate act that would not lead to negative karmic consequences, that Thais who kill communists would acquire great karmic merit, and that he, himself, would consider disrobing from the monkhood in order to kill the "enemies" of the nation, the monarchy, and the Buddhist religion.¹²

In the refracting light of the horrific acts of violence committed against Thai leftist-sympathizers in October of 1976 that Kittivuddho's comments eerily prefigured, it may be tempting to view his rhetoric as little more than unreasoned, cold-hearted violence-mongering. However, to do so would not be fair to the true motivations lying behind his comments, a sympathetic gloss of which might (arguably) be supposed to include a genuine desire to preserve the Thai nation and Thai Buddhism from harm. One potentially fruitful interpretive lens to be used in seeking to understand Kittivuddho's rhetoric involves viewing it in terms of constituting a variation on just war discourse. In its most basic form, just war theory represents a method of reconciling the ethical ideal not to cause harm through acts of violence (an ethical directive prominent in many religious traditions) with the competing ethical claim that sometimes an equal or greater amount of good can be attained through the expedient use of violence in order to achieve justice or avoid the suffering of the innocent.¹³ Just war discourse thus provides what ethicist Ralph Potter calls "a framework within which two polar claims may be acknowledged through compromise."¹⁴

There is a way in which the comments of a figure like Kittivuddho can be interpreted as an effort to articulate something like a just war doctrine, which would be something like this: although the personal code of ethics of the Theravada tradition explicitly forbids the willful killing of human beings, a "greater good" must sometimes be served which takes the form of preserving society in general, and the Buddhist religion in particular. According to Kittivuddho's line of thinking, in the 1970's communism represented an existential threat to the Buddhist tradition, which he held to be inherently worth defending (using violence, if necessary) because it forms the essential core of Thai national identity. The destruction of this identity would

in some sense signal the end of genuine Thai civilization. As Keyes puts it, "Kittivuddho calls people to fight for Buddhism because to be Thai is to be Buddhist. Threats to the nation and religion are perceived, thus, as threats to personal identity."¹⁵ Thus, although the validity of the type of "justice" that Kittivuddho seeks to actualize may be found to be suspect on moral grounds, his comments nonetheless represent a movement in the direction of just war-type thinking.

Although Kittivuddho is a particularly vivid example of the Buddhist deployment of just war discourse, he is hardly an isolated case within the Theravada tradition. Tessa Bartholomeusz has argued that the paradigm of the just war can be usefully employed with regard to the case of the contemporary conflict between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka. Although the causes for the civil war in Sri Lanka and the reasons given to justify violent action there are multifarious, and can hardly be reduced to any single cause or principle, at least one strand of Sinhalese chauvinistic nationalism in Sri Lanka has tended to paint the conflict there in religious terms, as a struggle between Buddhists and non-Buddhists for control of Sri Lanka.¹⁶ The textual source most often appealed to in this regard is the *Mahavamsa*, the post-canonical Pali Buddhist text that chronicles the coming of Buddhism to Sri Lanka and the establishment of what it characterizes as a righteous home for true Buddhism on the island.

In the *Mahavamsa*, King Dutugemunu is portrayed as playing the role of the traditional Buddhist monarch by striving to achieve peace and nonviolence in his land. However, in order to achieve this peace and allow the Buddhist religion to flourish, he first decides that he must eliminate the Tamils who share the island with his people and represent something of an existential threat to the establishment and success of his Buddhist kingdom. Thus, in his capacity as the defender of the dharma, Dutugemunu leads his forces into battle against his enemies and slays scores of Tamils, who are portrayed as sub-human creatures.¹⁷ In this particular instance, then, the end of establishing an idyllic environment wherein Sinhalese Buddhism could flourish is portrayed as justifying the *means* of setting aside the Buddhist prohibition not to kill so that Dutugemunu could ride to war and vanquish his enemies. Scholars have shown that the story of Dutugemunu has been appropriated by proponents of modern Sinhalese

chauvinistic nationalism and deployed as evidence of a Buddhist justification for the righteousness of using violence as an expedient method of defending the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka from perceived threats.¹⁸ In the words of Walpola Rahula, a mid-twentieth century Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, intellectual, and nationalist, from the time of Dutugemunu "the patriotism and the religion of the Sinhalese became inseparably linked. The religio-patriotism at that time assumed such overpowering proportions that both *bhikkhus* and laymen considered that even killing people in order to liberate the religion and the country was not a heinous crime."¹⁹

Returning to the case of Thailand, although the *Mahavamsa* (which is specifically relevant to Sri Lanka because much of its narrative takes place there) has not played a conspicuous role in Thai Buddhist justifications for violence, the general theme of the duty of the righteous Buddhist monarch to defend the Buddhist *dhamma* has been used in this way. Theravada Buddhist canonical and commentarial literature explicates the ideal of the *Dhammaraja* (the righteous king who rules in accordance with the Buddhist dhamma) who is typically characterized as having a *prima facie* duty to uphold the standard of peace and non-violence within his realm.²⁰ Alongside this commitment to peace, the Buddhist ruler is also charged with actually ruling the polity over which he presides, which – in practice – sometimes involves the use of violent force. Steven Collins notes that in the Pali Theravada textual tradition, "it is always assumed that a king will have enemies, inside and outside his kingdom, and knowing how to destroy them is a kingly virtue...[and] strength in arms is one of the five powers that a king needs..."²¹ Moreover, it is worth noting that even the Emperor Asoka, the paradigmatic example of the righteous Buddhist monarch who ruled over Northern India in the 3rd century B.C.E., only declared his intention to embrace nonviolence *after* he had vanquished his enemies through warfare, and even then, he reserved the right to punish and execute flagrant transgressors of his laws in order to maintain social harmony.²²

Max Weber has observed that part of what it means to be the ruler of state is to be one who "successfully upholds a claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order."²³ Thus, there is sense in which the Buddhist king's role – as head of a state – is to be the arbiter of the boundary that

exists between legitimate and illegitimate violence, and to deploy violent force as he deems necessary. As Sallie King has noted, it may be possible for individuals to live by an ethic of Buddhist nonviolence, but “the personal ethic of nonviolence does not translate neatly into a social ethic of nonviolence,” particularly when it comes to the ethics of states, which may occasionally need to defend their territories and citizens.²⁴

In the Thai case, the clearest example of a king attempting to use his authority as a Buddhist monarch to justify the legitimate use of violent force in the name of the greater good of preserving the Buddhist religion is probably King Vajiravudh (Rama VI), who ruled Siam from 1910 through 1925. Vajiravudh’s reign was marked by a rise in levels of Thai nationalism that he himself helped to engender through his linkage of the Thai nation, the Thai monarch, and the Buddhist religion together as triad which formed the heart of an essentialized notion of what it means to be “Thai” (or “Thai-ness”). In the name of preserving the nation and defending it against its foes both foreign and domestic, Vajiravudh advocated expanding the size of the Thai military and instilling what he called the “wild tiger spirit” in the Thai people so that they would be enthusiastically willing to defend the nation.²⁵

In and of itself, there is hardly anything remarkable – and certainly nothing specifically “Buddhist” – about this discursive construction of a distinctly Thai variety of nationalism. What is worth noting here, however, is the fact that King Vajiravudh explicitly made use of Buddhist rhetoric, ideas, and literature to advocate the necessity of warfare. In his capacity as a Buddhist monarch charged with protecting the *dhamma* and defending it against harm or annihilation, King Vajiravudh – through a series of speeches, pamphlets, and poetic literature – depicted Thailand as a kind of last, independent bastion of true Theravada Buddhism that must be preserved at all costs, and characterized Thai soldiers as righteous defenders of the Buddhist faith. Then, when Thailand sent forces to participate in the European theatre of warfare during World War I, Vajiravudh painted the necessity of Thai participation in the war as a matter of preserving the Buddhist dharma.²⁶ He even published his own version/translation of a classical *jataka* story (the Ekadasani-pata Jataka, which he subtitled “The War Between Might and Right”), that he claimed lent support to his notion that the Buddha not only did not forbid violence

in all contexts, but endorsed it when it was committed in the name of furthering a greater good such as moral righteousness or preservation of the *dhamma*.²⁷

To be sure, this was a controversial position to take. Some prominent members of the monastic *sangha* in Thailand explicitly rejected this connection between Buddhism and militarism as being illegitimate, claiming that the overriding Buddhist prohibition not to take human life was clear, and those associated with the kind of mechanized killing that warfare involves were therefore not acting in accordance with the principles of Buddhism.²⁸ Still others, however, including the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Buddhist *sangha*, Prince Vajiranavarorasa (who, significantly, was also King Vajiravudh’s uncle) spoke out in support of the King’s positions, and argued that the Buddha had never explicitly forbid violence in all circumstances.²⁹ In 1916, the Supreme Patriarch even went so far as to compose a document entitled “The Buddhist Attitude Towards National Defense and Administration” wherein he argued that the establishment of a just political realm is one of the duties of the king, and if participation in warfare to protect the nation against harm becomes necessary, the “Buddhist attitude” is that such a war would be legitimate.³⁰ Of course, it is not for the outside observer to judge who was “right” in this interchange about the true nature of the Buddha’s teachings, but the very fact that this conversation was even going on is indicative of the fact that something like a discussion of the merits of a “Buddhist just war” was taking place, wherein a compromise was being sought between the king’s duty to uphold peace and nonviolence while simultaneously fulfilling his traditional role of “protector of the *dhamma*” by sending troops to defend against what some portrayed as an existential threat to “true Buddhism” and Thai society in general.

The discursive construction of justifications for violence cast in Buddhist terms is hardly something that has been strictly confined to Thailand’s past. Michael Jerryson reports that during his recent fieldwork exploring the nature of the sometimes violent conflict between Muslim dissidents and agents of the Thai state in southern Thailand, he encountered a phenomenon that he identifies as the emergence of armed “military monks” who live as members of the monastic community in the Thailand/Malaysia border area, but who also take it upon themselves to defend their *wats* and fellow

monks against potential Muslim attackers.³¹ According to Jerryson’s account, these “military monks” understand themselves to simultaneously fulfill the role of a soldier *as well as* that of a monk, and view it as their duty to ensure – using defensive violence against attackers, if necessary – that the promulgation of the Buddhist religion continues unabated in Southern Thailand and is not extinguished by the threat of violence against monks who preach the *dhamma*.³² He describes a particular “military monk” informant portraying attacks on Buddhist monks as constituting attacks on the moral integrity of Thailand itself, and likens the moral reasoning of his informants – condoning the use of violence to repel a perceived threat to nation and Buddhist principles – to that which was employed thirty years earlier when Kittivuddho Bhikkhu excused the killing of communists in the name of a greater good. One key difference, however, is that while Kittivuddho merely rationalized “justified” violence enacted by others, these “military monks” are prepared to personally carry out acts of violence themselves.³³

Can we judge how “Buddhist” these calls to violent action are?

Before moving on to a consideration of whether or not these cases of actions and rhetoric in support of purportedly “justified violence” can be meaningfully characterized as instantiating a form of “socially engaged Buddhism,” it is first worth examining whether or not these examples of the promulgation of “Buddhist violence” can be portrayed as being authentically “Buddhist” at all. Returning to Brian Victoria’s aforementioned charge that *nationalism* is a “skeleton in the closet” of the engaged Buddhist movement that has been the underlying motivational factor responsible for acts of violence justified in Buddhist terms, it is clear that in each of the cases from Thailand cited above, nationalism undeniably played an important role in justifications for violence.³⁴ Could it be, then, that the justifications given for violence heretofore laid out are only “Buddhist” in some empty, nominal sense, and that – at heart – nationalism (albeit with a Buddhist component) forms the core of what was referred to above as the “Buddhist just war?” Ultimately, it will here be argued that although one may be able to locate some measure of support for this line of argumentation, formulating judgments concerning how “Buddhist” this rhetorical justification for violence actually

is does not fall within the domain of the proper role of the scholar.

Trevor Ling provides an important insight when he points out that although it is the case that the *reasons* given for wars and acts of violence are often “couched in ideological or, if you like, religious terms,” the actual *causes* for violent conflict are often “to be found mainly in the realm of material interest.”³⁵ Bearing this in mind, one must be cautious not to uncritically accept the *reasons given for conflict* as being identical to the *actual causes of conflict*. For instance, in a critical analysis of the underlying motivations for the intermittent violence between agents of the Thai state and disaffected elements of the Muslim populace of southern Thailand that has escalated since 2004, Duncan McCargo argues that although Islamic militants frequently employ rhetoric to justify violent action that makes reference to Islamic texts and ideas, it would be a mistake to read the conflict in southern Thailand using the simplistic (and over-utilized) interpretive trope of “Islamic violence.”³⁶ He notes that while the language of Islamic *jihad* has certainly found its way into public discourse, this does not make “the Patani conflict a religious conflict. The primary emphasis of the militants is on historical and political grievances, not religious ones. Islam has something to do with it, but the conflict is not about Islam.”³⁷ McCargo ultimately argues that the violent turbulence in southern Thailand is actually a conflict over political legitimacy which is “articulated in the idiom of Islam.”³⁸

So, could a similar claim be made about the Buddhist “just war” rhetoric laid out above, namely, that these are expressions motivated by a particular variety of Thai nationalism which are merely “articulated in the idiom of Buddhism”? To some extent, yes. Even in cases in which religion is not the underlying *cause* of violence, it does nonetheless provide a set of concepts and symbols that can be influential in determining the form that violence takes and the rhetoric put forth to support it. As Bruce Lincoln has argued, religious discourse can be deployed by members of religious communities in the service of recoding potentially problematic acts (such as violent action) as obligatory religious duties. In this way, action motivated by other, mundane factors can be legitimated by virtue of its linkage to the “transcendent discourse” of religion.³⁹ Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to imagine, for example, that when King Vajiravudh argued for the

necessity of preserving a nationalistic “Thai-ness” based on the monarchy/religion/nation triad and advocated defending the true Buddhist faith against its enemies, he was also deliberately engaged in the self-interested project of actively promoting a brand of nationalism that bound the institution of the monarchy (which is to say, himself) closer to the center of Thai national identity at a time in which notions of abolishing the absolute monarchy were beginning to circulate among Thai cultural elites.⁴⁰

However, while it is undeniably important to take note of the multiplicity of factors at play when justifications for violence are couched in religious terms, one must be cautious in making a subsequent move toward identifying these justifications as being not authentically religious. As Ian Reader notes in the context of his analysis of the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo religious movement that carried out a chemical weapons-based attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995, there is a tendency to treat violent actions by religious groups as somehow indicative of the fact that the group in question is not truly “religious,” or at least must not have been acting out of religiously-based motivations. He argues that:

Such attitudes, however, are based on a narrow and one-dimensional view of religion and on value judgments that are incapable of being academically or intellectually sustained. Religion, I would argue, is an inclusive, value-neutral category that is certainly capable of containing and expressing ‘good’ elements: it does not, however, necessarily have to contain them, and nor is it limited to them. There is nothing in this inclusive nature which prevents religion from having violent, bad or negative qualities and it is important, in my view, not merely to recognise this point but also to pay attention to the potentially ‘bad’ qualities of religion if any serious analysis that takes account of its multi-dimensional nature is to be undertaken.⁴¹

As Reader points out, danger arises when deciding whether or not an action, group, or individual is *genuinely* religious, as it necessarily involves a prior, value-laden construction of what it means to be “religious.” More specific to the Buddhist context, Ananda Abeysekara argues that the notion of an inherent contradiction between Buddhism and violence relies on a normative construction of a nonviolent, humanistic (and –

as was noted earlier – orientalist-influenced) concept of Buddhism.⁴² He continues by stating that those who argue that Buddhism and violence are mutually exclusive fail to take into account the fact that a plethora of diverse discursive conjunctures “render the terms and parameters of what persons, practices, knowledges, and so on can *count* as religion or violence *contingent*[.] and hence unavailable for disciplinary canonization as transparent objects of knowledge.”⁴³

Having recognized the fluid “contingency” of notions of both “religion” and “violence” that Abeysekara points to, it becomes clear that there is perhaps reason to be suspicious of some comments by prominent Thai studies scholars that imply that monks like Kittivuddho Bhikkhu – who use rhetoric grounded in Buddhist concepts and terminology to advocate the judicious use of violent force – are acting in a manner that is either “Buddhist” only in some qualified sense, or else outright not authentically Buddhist. Charles F. Keyes, for instance, designates Kittivuddho as an exemplar of what he calls “militant Buddhism,” which he describes as the “darker side” of Thai civic religion.⁴⁴ Peter A. Jackson identifies Kittivuddho’s rhetoric and actions as a variety of social activism that threatens what he sees as the proper role of the Buddhist *sangha* in contemporary Thailand, arguing that the involvement of monks in politics is ultimately unsustainable insofar as the ethical legitimacy of monks “is founded upon the notion of worldly renunciation and retreat from the spiritually polluting influence of involvement in lust-driven political conflicts.”⁴⁵ Thai scholar Somboon Suksamran identifies the actions that Kittivuddho was advocating as a variety of “Buddhist holy war,” and argues that the propagation of violence by “political monks” (his term) “runs counter to the Buddhist value [system] in which equanimity, peaceableness, and generosity are highly rated and anger, conflict, violence, and desire for material gain rated low.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, he continues that the methods advocated by monks like Kittivuddho “are by no means consistent with the teachings of the Buddha.”⁴⁷ To varying degrees (though particularly in the last case), these value-laden analyses fall victim to a reliance upon a particular hermeneutical interpretation of the “true” nature of the Buddha’s teachings that cannot be characterized as being constitutive of responsible, objective scholarship.⁴⁸

To conclude this section, it is important to be wary of claims that Buddhism (or any religion) is the actual, underlying *cause* of various manifestations of human conflict. However, it is equally important not to automatically dismiss rhetorical arguments for entering into situations of violent conflict as being somehow less than authentically Buddhist when these arguments are articulated in the "transcendent discourse" of Buddhism. The language of religious "legitimacy" or "authenticity" does not lie within the proper arena of scholarship, but rather is the domain of religious communities of interpretation.⁴⁹ Turning to the socially engaged Buddhist movement, we are now in a position to judge the extent to which this particular "community of Buddhist interpretation" is open to viewing the "just" use of violent force in seeking to resolve human conflict as an authentic expression of engaged Buddhism.

Socially Engaged Buddhism - What constitutes authentic "engagement"?

Among the primary obstacles that one faces when seeking to analyze the movement known as socially engaged Buddhism is the fact that there seems to be little agreement on how its parameters are defined.⁵⁰ Kenneth Kraft – among the pioneering scholars in the field of what is now sometimes referred to as "engaged Buddhist studies" – notes that "the subject matter of engaged Buddhist studies is engaged Buddhism, but the meaning of engaged Buddhism is far from settled."⁵¹ Moreover, James Dietrick points out that although there are some ways in which "engaged Buddhism" bears signs of being a cohesive, ecumenical social movement by virtue of the existence of organizations such as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, there is also a sense in which the term "socially engaged Buddhism" can be seen as "merely a convenient analytical construct that allows scholars to understand similar, though distinct socio-religious stirrings throughout Buddhist Asia and the West that share an interest in it relating Buddhism to contemporary social issues."⁵² Further muddying the definitional waters is the contention of Thich Nhat Hanh (who is credited with coining the term) that *all* Buddhism is engaged Buddhism, asserting that "Engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism. If you practice Buddhism in your family, in society, it is engaged Buddhism."⁵³ Moreover, because this nascent movement lacks a sin-

gle set of ideological and methodological principles upon which all members of the movement can agree, there is an important sense in which the term "engaged Buddhism" itself represents an unwieldy conceptual category, and it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of socially engaged Buddhists than it is to talk about socially engaged Buddhism.⁵⁴

On a practical level, however, most definitions of "socially engaged Buddhism" seem to agree that the distinctive characteristic of the tradition is that it involves some form of "engagement" with the social/political sphere, but what does this "engagement" really mean? Most often within scholarship on engaged Buddhism, the quintessential "engagement" that is discussed takes the form of efforts to promote phenomena like sustainable community development through education programs, various forms of environmental activism aimed at ecological preservation, and attempts to alleviate human suffering through temple or NGO-based programs of social uplift. A recurrent trope within these efforts is the promotion of the idea that peaceful, *nonviolent* solutions to persistent human problems are preferable. Indeed, active opposition to warfare has been one of the characteristic issues with which engaged Buddhists have involved themselves.

Perhaps as interesting as the controversy over what referent "socially engaged Buddhism" *does* signify is the ambiguity concerning what it *does not* signify. How far can the concept of Buddhist "engagement" with the socio-political sphere be stretched before it is no longer falls within the boundaries of "socially engaged Buddhism?" Might authentic "engagement" include promoting – or even participating in – wars being fought in the name of establishing justice or ensuring the safety of the Buddhist *dhamma*? Kraft poses the question this way: "Can it be that pacifism and just-war reasoning are *equally valid* options for present-day Buddhists? This question deserves more attention than it has yet received." Bearing this in mind, is Brian Victoria correct when he claims that Buddhist militaristic nationalism (that is, his aforementioned conception of "Engaged *In Combat* Buddhism") is a hidden side of socially engaged Buddhism? If so, might a figure like Kittivuddho, whom Keyes classifies as a "militant Buddhist," just as easily be described as a "socially engaged Buddhist?"

Despite the acknowledged multivocality of the engaged Buddhist tradition, the broad consensus answer to Victoria's challenge would appear to be a rejection of the notion that engaged Buddhism could encompass expedient violence (or a "just war") as a valid method of engagement.⁵⁵ For Sulak Sivaraksa, a prominent Thai social activist and self-described socially engaged Buddhist, the ideal of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) forms what he calls "the heart of the Buddha's teaching."⁵⁶ However, Sivaraksa is careful to point out that his focus on actualizing the ideal of nonviolence should not be confused with some sort of abject passivity. He argues that just as peace is not necessarily coeval with the absence of war, nonviolence is not simply an absence of violence.⁵⁷ Rather, for Sivaraksa, being an "engaged Buddhist" requires the individual to recognize that the root cause of all social ills (such as violent aggression) is ultimately to be found in the Buddhist "three poisons" of greed, anger, and ignorance. Having recognized this, the Buddhist must begin by transforming his/her own inner volitional state so as to minimize the influence of these "three poisons," which will then allow the individual to actively promote the creation of a culture of peace on the social level.⁵⁸ For instance, he notes that, "individually, we may not be ready to take on the National Rifle Association or the larger arms industry. However, we can all work on disarming the anger and violence in our own hearts and in our own families during our daily lives."⁵⁹ In this way, personal transformation can serve as a gateway into societal transformation.

Although Sivaraksa vigorously supports the active "engagement" of Buddhists in the socio-political sphere (as is evidenced by the enormous number of Buddhist NGOs that he has been personally involved in founding in Thailand), he is careful to delineate that there are certain varieties of "engagement" that he does not endorse. For instance, Sivaraksa argues that Kittivuddho's rhetoric in support of killing communists for the greater good of the Thai nation is unsupported by the Buddhist tradition. He goes on to state that although several efforts have been made by both Buddhist kings and Buddhist monks to articulate a notion of a Buddhist "holy war," these formulations of a "just war" doctrine are always marred by a lack of Buddhist textual and doctrinal support to back them up.⁶⁰ Moreover, aside from the issue of paltry textual support, Sivaraksa is suspicious of just war doctrines

on the grounds that they rarely deliver on their promise to maximize "justice" and minimize the suffering of the weak and innocent.

'Just war' theory is a slippery slope, and we cannot analyze it without considering social and power relations in any society. 'Just war' can always be used to legitimize the violence of the powerful against the weak...no matter how elegant a theory of 'just war' can be on paper, it is subject to the physical world of human interactions, and as such, it is subject to the influence of Three Poisons of hatred, greed and ignorance.⁶¹

Thus, although Sivaraksa is not blind to the fact that within the complex world of human relations obviating the need for the judicious use of violent action to achieve certain ends is easier said than done, it is clear that the "just war" is anathema to his formulation of the engaged Buddhist tradition.

From a certain perspective, Sivaraksa's rejection of the general notion of the Buddhist "just war" (and Kittivuddho's rhetoric in particular) as a legitimate expression of socially engaged Buddhism can be seen as roughly analogous to the comments by Thai studies scholars cited earlier that Kittivuddho's rhetoric is an expression of anything ranging from a "dark" form of Buddhism (Keyes), a significant and unsustainable break from the "proper" form of Thai Buddhism (Jackson), and an outright invalid perversion of the Buddha's teachings (Suksamran). However, a key difference resides in the fact that while Keyes, Jackson, and Suksamran are writing as academic scholars for whom normative judgments that presuppose an "authentic" formulation of the Buddhist tradition is inappropriate, Sivaraksa writes as an activist/scholar who is part of the interpretive community of engaged Buddhism.⁶² As such, he is justified in making certain kinds of normative judgments about which kinds of actions can or cannot be characterized as "authentically Buddhist" forms of engagement. Thus, when Sivaraksa argues that his formulation of engaged Buddhism simply cannot accommodate a just war theory, and anyone who seeks to articulate one cannot be judged to be a true engaged Buddhist, his opinion must be respected. As is true with any religious tradition, engaged Buddhism must be assessed on its own terms.

However, representatives of the Thai engaged Buddhist tradition do not speak with a single voice on the feasibility of a "just war." For instance, the late, emi-

nent monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu – a man whom Christopher Queen proposes “may be regarded as the senior philosopher of engaged Buddhism”⁶³ – articulates a somewhat more open view wherein engaged Buddhism might be seen to have conceptual space available for a “just war.”

No matter what kind of activity we carry out – be it politics, economics, or, indeed, even war – if done morally will maintain the natural, harmonious balance of all things, and will be consistent with the original plan of nature. It is absolutely correct to fight for the preservation of dhamma in the world, but it is wrong to fight for anything other than that. Indeed, we should be happy to sacrifice our lives in fighting to preserve dhamma for the Greater Self, that is, for all humanity.⁶⁴

Admittedly, Buddhadasa’s comments here are somewhat vague. He refers to “war” and “fighting,” but the passage retains a somewhat aphoristic quality that makes it somewhat unclear whether he is really advancing the possibility of an actual “just war” being fought in the name of preserving the *dhamma*, or merely employing the rhetoric of war as part of an effort to emphasize the importance that the preservation of the *dhamma* plays in his vision for a just society (what he calls, “dhammic socialism”). Nevertheless, as Sallie King notes, although the bulk of Buddhadasa’s writings strongly convey the message that nonviolence ought to constitute a basic, normative principle upon which all human interactions should be based, a literal reading of this passage demonstrates that Buddhadasa cannot be portrayed an absolutist when it comes to implementing the Buddhist ideal of *ahimsa*, and his position might best be thought of as advocating what King calls “partial nonviolence.”⁶⁵

In some ways, it is striking how closely Buddhadasa’s rhetoric here mirrors the Buddhist “just war” discourse described above. In the case of Kittivuddho Bhikkhu, King Vajiravudh (along with Supreme Patriarch Vajiranavarorasa), and the “military monks” in the south of Thailand, each of these figures articulated their reasons for advocating a form of “legitimate” violence in terms of engaging in what Buddhadasa here calls “a fight for the preservation of the *dhamma*.” However, it is arguably unlikely that these are the types of conflicts that Buddhadasa had in mind when he envisioned righteous individuals fighting “the good fight” and being willing to sacrifice their lives in the service of preserving the genuine *dhamma*. As Sivaraksa notes,

the notion of a just war is a “slippery slope,” as much depends on *who* is deciding what a “just” cause for engaging in violent conflict constitutes. Hence, justice becomes a question of interpretive hermeneutics.⁶⁶

Talal Asad has noted that “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the product of discursive processes.”⁶⁷ For precisely the reasons that Asad lays out, neither can there be a universal definition of “socially engaged Buddhism” – what one finds instead is a constellation of socially engaged *Buddhists* who employ their own particular understanding of their tradition and are motivated by a variety of discursive agendas in defining its parameters. Despite the impossibility of arriving at a universally agreed-upon definition of legitimate Buddhist “engagement,” however, it is important for socially engaged Buddhists to retain and exercise their right to define the membership of their own “in-group.” This is so that, for example, in the hypothetical scenario of a “militant” group of individuals emerging who advocate using the Thai military to aggressively conquer surrounding territories in order to usher in an era of genuine social justice in Southeast Asia and re-invigorate “true” Buddhism across the region, self-described engaged Buddhists would be in a position to claim that “this is *not* a valid expression of socially engaged Buddhism.”⁶⁸ The ability of religious practitioners to define the parameters of legitimacy vis-à-vis their own tradition is crucial for the survival of any religious tradition, for without it religious traditions can become passive slaves to whatever potentially nefarious agenda “outsiders” seek to foist onto the tradition.

Conclusion

It has here been argued that although Buddhism projects an outward image of being a tradition of peace and nonviolence, formulations of just war principles have been developed in Thailand which paint in specifically Buddhist terms the necessity of committing acts of violence in the service of furthering purportedly righteous causes. There is an important sense in which this rhetoric justifying the expedient use of violence represents a variety of militant nationalism that is merely “articulated in the idiom of Buddhism.” However, to the degree that proponents of “Buddhist violence” are expressing their own understanding of the

legitimate application of Buddhist principles to the real world of human relations, it is difficult for outside observers to meaningfully challenge the “legitimacy” of their claims. However, just as claims from scholars external to the Buddhist interpretive community that Buddhist militarism is *not* a legitimate expression of authentic, normative Buddhism must be viewed with extreme suspicion, one must also be wary of any claims by scholarly “outsiders” that the Buddhist “just war” *does* represent an authentic instantiation of socially engaged Buddhism. From the “insider perspective” of socially engaged Buddhists, although thinkers like Buddhadasa seem to leave some conceptual room open for the possibility of fighting for the just cause of preserving the *dhamma*, Thai engaged Buddhists (exemplified by Sivaraksa) tend to employ a stipulative definition of their own tradition that would seem to exclude the possibility of a “just war” constituting an authentic form of Buddhist “engagement.”

As a final note, it has here been argued that within scholarship, “socially engaged Buddhism” is perhaps too often portrayed as an analytical category with an expressly positive valuation. As a general principle, it is wise to be wary of the tendency to uncritically refer to Buddhist social movements that the scholarly community approves of – such as efforts to feed and clothe the poor and find peaceful solutions to human conflict – as “socially engaged Buddhism,” while varieties of Buddhist social action that scholars don’t approve of – such as jingoistic rhetoric in support of questionable wars – are designated as “corrupt” or “inauthentic” forms of Buddhism. In brief, “social engagement” – broadly construed – comes in many forms, and we should not be surprised to learn that when the pure world of texts, doctrines, and principles is translated into the real world of complex human relationships and conflicting agendas, things can get a lot “messier” than we might expect. When dealing with this “messiness,” the scholarly community needs to be vigilant in constantly questioning the validity and parameters of its own conceptual categories.

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End Notes

¹ Victoria: 2001.

² Ibid., pg. 86.

³ Ibid., pg. 89.

⁴ Queen: 1998, pg. 25.

⁵ Jayatilleke: 1983, pg. 4.

⁶ Ibid., pg. 1-10.

⁷ Chappell: 2006, pg. 63-65. Chappell continues, “Like all human movements, Buddhism also shows that sometimes there develops a discrepancy between self-image and reality.” Pg. 65.

⁸ See Lopez: 1995.

⁹ Swearer: 1992, pg. 63.

¹⁰ Keyes: 1978, pg. 153. Keyes is here quoting an interview with Kittivuddho published in a 1976 edition of *Caturat* magazine.

¹¹ See Keyes: 1978, pg. 158.

¹² See Harvey: 2000, pg. 261.

¹³ It should be noted that the “just war” tradition has its traditional roots in Christian moral discourse, and thus the term necessarily carries with it certain connotations that may or may not be apt in this case. Although Christianity – like Buddhism – contains within it a strong textual tradition that endorses foregoing violence in dealing with one’s opponents, the just war tradition arises out of the fact that when faced with the sometimes harsh realities of the complex world of human relations, holding strictly to this ideal may not always be possible. In the Christian case, for instance, the ideal to always “love one’s neighbor” would most obviously indicate that the individual ought to avoid bringing harm onto others, which would seem to preclude violence in any form. However, there is a second moral claim involved here, which is exemplified by the fact that a logical extension of the love of one’s neighbor might be the protection of the innocent from harm. Ethicist Paul Ramsay cogently illustrates how these two ideals might potentially come into conflict by slightly altering the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan. Instead of the canonical version, wherein a virtuous man stops along the road to Jericho to help out a stranger who has fallen victim to a band of outlaws and thereby demonstrates the ideal of Christian charitable love, Ramsay imagines how the story might have been different if the protagonist had not come along *after* the attack was over, but rather had interrupted the bandits as they were in the midst of assaulting the man. In this case, would the demands of Christian love and charity require the protagonist of the story to try to stop the assailants and help the innocent man, even if it meant committing an act of violence? Or, would the ideal of expressing Christian love by remaining nonviolent take precedence? The just war tradition attempts to provide a framework within which ethical dilemmas such as this can be worked out. See: Ramsay: 2002, pg. 142-143.

¹⁴ Potter, 1973, pg. 54. Also, it is important to note that for the purposes of the present discussion the term “just war” is being employed in a rather loose sense, and thus is not strictly referring to discourse related to the establishment of formal *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* criteria.

¹⁵ Keyes: 1978, pg. 161.

¹⁶ Bartholomeusz: 2002.

¹⁷ As Gottlieb and Jenkins note, the portrayal of the ethnic “other” as subhuman is a recurrent trope used in the justification of violence across time and space. See Gottlieb and Jenkins: 2007, esp. pg. 308.

¹⁸ Bartholomeusz: 2002, pg. 11-14. For further reflections on the feasibility of the application of just war theory to the Sri Lankan civil war, see: Harris: 2003.

¹⁹ Rahula: 1974, pg. 21.

²⁰ Thai Buddhist social activist Sulak Sivaraksa – who, as will be shown, has a particular construction of the proper Buddhist attitude vis-a-vis violence that he wishes to promote – puts it this way: “Early Buddhist political thought envisioned an ideal ruler, a world-conquering monarch who subdued the earth through righteousness rather than war... [and] a direct link was made between a ruler’s ethical standards and peace in the world. Not only did the ideal king prevent poverty and injustice domestically; his reign was also the model of a just and nonviolent transnational order.” Sivaraksa: 1992a, pg. 129.

²¹ Collins: 1998, pg. 454. Along similar lines, Ian Harris notes that one of the consequences of the “two wheels of *dhamma*” theory that separates the ideal of the world-conquering monarch from the world-renouncing ascetic is that “war is placed within the king’s own sphere of authority.” Harris: 1999, pg. 5. For further analysis of the Theravada Buddhist account of kingship and the influence of this formulation in Thailand, see: Tambiah: 1977.

²² See Nikam and McKeon: 1959, pg. 18-19, 28-29.

²³ Weber: 1947, pg. 154. Veena Das and Deborah Poole provide an insightful account of Weber’s notion of the state when they note that his conception is based, in part, on the notion that “the state is imagined as an always incomplete project that must constantly be spoken of – and imagined – through the invocation of the wildness, lawlessness, and savagery that only lies outside its jurisdiction but also threatens it from within.” Das and Poole: 2004, pg. 7.

²⁴ King: 2005, pg. 198-199. One is also reminded here of Reinhold Niebuhr’s argument that the difference between the “ethics” of human individuals and the “politics” of social groups is that while selflessness and principled nonviolence may be a feasible ethical ideal for individuals, the highest moral ideal for social groups (such as states) is “justice,” even if that means that societies may be “forced to use means, such as self-assertion, resistance, coercion and perhaps resentment, which cannot gain the sanction of the most sensitive moral spirit.” Niebuhr: 2001, pg. 257.

²⁵ See Vella: 1978, pg. 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 221-223.

²⁷ Vajiravudh: 1999.

²⁸ Vella: 1978, pg. 223-224.

²⁹ See Ling: 1979, pg. 136-137; Reynolds: 1979, pg. xlvi-xlix.

³⁰ Vajiravarorasa: 1916, esp. pg. 15-21. The Supreme Patriarch’s pragmatic acceptance of the necessity of maintaining a strong military is also hinted at in a text-book that he composed for the moral edification of Thai school children. In this text, he affirms the critical importance of individuals maintaining the Buddhist “first precept” (which forbids the taking of human life) as a necessary condition for promoting a righteous, harmonious society, but nonetheless notes that an armed police force and military (presumably authorized to use deadly force) are required to defend the country against internal and external threats, “thereby enabling people with other responsibilities to perform their work peacefully.” Vajiravarorasa: 1975, pg. 2, 37.

³¹ Jerryson: 2009.

³² The interesting issue of whether or not these “military monks” are – in the final analysis – *real* monks, or simply soldiers masquerading as monks, is not something that Jerryson takes a firm position on. However, he does report that although his “military monk” informants do sometimes employ the language of being “disguised” as monks to describe themselves, at other times they assert that they are not just acting, but rather are “real monks.” *Ibid.*, pg. 51.

³³ *Ibid.*, pg. 52.

³⁴ To review, these were: Kittivuddho’s portrayal of communism as a clear and present danger to the heart of the Thai Buddhist national identity, King Vajiravudh’s argument that Thailand was a bastion of “true Buddhism” that must be actively defended, and the self-image promoted by southern Thai “military monks” wherein they constitute a last line of defense against attacks on the Buddhist moral character of the Kingdom of Thailand.

³⁵ Ling: 1979, pg. 140.

³⁶ McCargo: 2008, pg. ix-x.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 188.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 12. McCargo is here quoting Sidel: 2006, pg. 217.

³⁹ Lincoln: 2006, pg. 5-6, 94.

⁴⁰ See Keyes: 1987, pg. 59-61.

⁴¹ Reader: 2000, pg. 29.

⁴² Abeysekara: 2001, pg. 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pg. 8. Italics added. Abeysekara makes an important point here when he notes that not only must one be careful not to employ an overly static, arbitrary definition of “religion,” but one must be cautious about taking the meaning of the term “violence” for granted as stable and self-evident as well.

⁴⁴ Keyes: 1978, 160. Keyes here makes use of Frank Reynolds' formulation of Thai "civic religion." See Reynolds: 1978, esp. pg. 135.

⁴⁵ Jackson: 1989, pg. 152.

⁴⁶ Suksamran: 1982, pg. 156, 164.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pg. 164.

⁴⁸ To be clear, this is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with formulating schematic categories such as "militant Buddhism" that may serve as heuristic devices to be used in the service of helping to understand Thai Buddhism as a social phenomenon. The problem only comes when this kind of conceptual category becomes hypostasized into a phenomenon that distinctly stands out over and against a normative construction of "authentic" Buddhism. One is reminded here of Stanley Tambiah's controversial comment – appearing in *Buddhism Betrayed*, his book concerning the intersection of religion, politics, and violence in the Sri Lankan civil war – that "the monk who has finally taken to the gun can no longer be considered a vehicle of the Buddha's religion." Tambiah: 1992, pg. 99. Juliane Schober notes that while Tambiah is able to supply sound textual support and compelling ethical arguments supporting this position, it is nonetheless ultimately an argument based on the construction of a particular notion of an "authentic" Buddhism. "Authenticity," she rightly notes, "is not defined by religious text and academic interpretation, but by the creed of communities that espouse such religious practice or belief." Schober: 2007, pg. 62-63.

⁴⁹ It must quickly be acknowledged here that the line between an "outside scholar" and a member of a "community of interpretation" is sometimes quite porous. In Somboon Suksamran's case, for example, because he is, himself, Thai (though his particular religious identity is not made explicit in the text), it might be feasible to posit that he may be seeking to engage in something akin to what H.L. Seneviratne calls "liberation anthropology," wherein the scholar does not shy away from making certain value-judgments about his/her own cultural context in the interest of furthering a greater good (see Seneviratne: 1999, pg. 6). If this is the case, it may render Suksamran's comments here somewhat more defensible. However, if this is what he is attempting to do, he does not make it clear in the text.

⁵⁰ To some extent, the hand-wringing over how to properly define the term "engaged Buddhism" can be attributed to a fashionably modern deconstructionist suspicion of establishing fixed, hypostasized definitions for abstract nouns.

⁵¹ Kraft: 2000, pg. 486.

⁵² Dietrick: 2003, pg. 252-253.

⁵³ Quoted in Kraft: 1992, 18. See also: Hunt-Perry and Fine: 2000, esp. pg. 36. It is important to note here that Thich Nhat Hanh's comments need not necessarily be interpreted as an explicit attempt to define the parameters of "engaged Buddhism" so much as they are part and parcel of an argument against conceptualizing a "non-engaged," *other* Buddhism against which a distinctly "engaged" variety of Buddhism is to be contrasted.

⁵⁴ Although the movement is here described as "nascent," the extent to which socially engaged Buddhism represents a "new" phenomenon is a highly controversial issue. For more on this, see Yarnall: 2005.

⁵⁵ It is worthy of note that some self-described socially engaged Buddhists even go so far as to offer definitions of their own tradition that specifically stipulate that engaged Buddhism is inherently nonviolent. For instance, Ken Jones states that "at its broadest definition socially engaged Buddhism extends across public engagement in caring and service, social and environmental protest and analysis, *nonviolence as a creative way of overcoming conflict*, and 'right livelihood' and similar initiatives toward a socially just and ecologically sustainable society" (italics added). Jones: 2003, pg. 173.

⁵⁶ Sivaraksa: 1988, pg. 197.

⁵⁷ Sivaraksa: 2004, pg. 55-56.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 56-57.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pg. 57.

⁶⁰ Sivaraksa: 1992b, pg. 80-81. Sivaraksa does not explicitly use Kittivuddho's name in this passage. However, his reference to "a notorious Thai Buddhist monk [who] told the Bangkok press that 'it is not sinful to kill a communist'" is clearly an allusion to Kittivuddho.

⁶¹ Sivaraksa: 2005, pg. 40.

⁶² To be clear, it is not here being argued that it is somehow inappropriate for scholars to critically assess religious phenomena with an eye toward checking for logical consistency and evaluating the extent to which discourses and practices are consistent with the rest of the tradition. What *is* being argued here, however, is that assessments couched in the language of "legitimacy" and "authenticity" lie beyond the purview of objective scholarship.

⁶³ Queen: 1996, pg. 3.

⁶⁴ Buddhadasa: 1986, pg. 119-120.

⁶⁵ King: 2005, pg. 185.

⁶⁶ Moreover, in accordance with the Trevor Ling's critical distinction between *causes* and *reasons* noted above, although the *reasons* deployed in arguments for the legitimate use of force may be cast in terms of the necessity of "preserving the *dhamma*," there is no guarantee that these reasons will reflect the true *causes* that motivate individuals to engage in violent conflict.

⁶⁷ Asad: 1993, pg. 29.

⁶⁸ Of course, this hypothetical situation would become a good deal more complicated if the aforementioned group of militant individuals understood *themselves* to belong to the tradition of socially engaged Buddhism.

Encek Peng Kun

A Poem by Remy Sylado

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Nurenzia was born in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. She earned her B.A. in English Literature from Brawijaya University Malang. In 2003 she was elected to join the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) ASEAN Student Fellowships and study for a non-degree program in the National University of Singapore. After graduation, Nurenzia worked as an English teacher in the Language Center of the University of Muhammadiyah Malang. In 2008 she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to continue her study in Ohio University's Linguistics Department. Nurenzia is currently finishing her Master's degree and writing a thesis on the potential of blogging and computer-mediated communication in promoting language learners' autonomy.

SYNOPSIS

This poem was written by Remy Sylado, a famous poet and writer from Indonesia. It was read for the first time at the Indonesian Language Congress in Jakarta, on October 16, 2003. It was also included in Remy Sylado's collection of poems, "Puisi Mbeling" (Naughty Poems), published by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia (KPG), Jakarta.

A Foreword to Remy Sylado's Mbeling Poem: Encek Peng Kun

"Encek Peng Kun" is a fragment from Remy Sylado's poetry compilation, *Puisi Mbeling*. *Puisi Mbeling* includes select Remy Sylado poems categorized into four periods: before 1972, during 1972, after 1972, and stories between 1970 and 2003. 1972 was an important year for the poet; in fact, it was the year when Sylado first introduced his invented term, "mbeling" or "defiant." In Javanese, *mbeling* is used to refer to someone who is extremely clever, and can get what he wants through extraordinary actions or tricks. Remy's choice of the Javanese word *mbeling* to characterize his poems reflects his closeness to Javanese culture, as he spent his childhood in Semarang and Solo, centers of Javanese culture in Indonesia. However, in contrast with the Javanese tradition of being passive as shown in the philosophies of "mikul dhuwur mendhem jero" and

"wani ngalah luhur pungkasane,"¹ the word *mbeling* is intended to include Sylado's criticism of the New Order regime and the *Horison*-centered world of Indonesian literature.² The *mbeling* movement conveys social criticism in a compelling and playful way, and it believes that words in poetry should not always be beautiful and sweet. *Mbeling* poetry allows writers to be extremely creative, to go beyond the ordinary, and to make use of daily expressions, playful words, and even profanity.³

Through the spirit of *mbeling*, Remy brings us into the realm of Encek Peng Kun. Encek, a man of Chinese descent, is depicted as a laidback but artful man seeking legal Indonesian citizenship. As the main theme revolves around how Encek faces a series of tests in front of an Indonesian judge, readers may laugh at Encek's amusing way of answering the judge's questions. But underneath it all, one can also sense the

inevitable pain upon rejection and the uncertain search for belongingness, as Encek Peng Kun is forced to stand in a courtroom only to answer trivial questions about a place he calls home. Readers are able to extract the message of how the Chinese are somehow forced to remain foreign despite their being Indonesian at heart.

Encek Peng Kun and his Chinese ancestors have endured many difficult times. In the second verse of Sylado's poem, he refers to the dark days of a mass execution in 1740 during the colonial period,⁴ and the absurd three and half decades of "colonialism" during the New Order, the three and half years of Japanese occupation, and the long and enduring three and half centuries of the Dutch East Indies era. The similarity in the numbers produces a dramatic effect, reminding us of how the Indonesian nation's dignity has been long raped by three different kinds of rulers – the Western "Other," the Asian, and even the Indonesian.

During the Old Order of Sukarno, the Chinese were forced to choose between dual citizenship or becoming Chinese citizens.⁵ At that time the Chinese were "others", the non-*pribumi* or the non-native Indonesian. Leo Suryadinata, a scholar of the Chinese in Indonesia, refers to this situation as the "distrust of a minority group which was not only strong economically but also 'unassimilable'." Time went on and the New Order of Suharto terminated the dual nationality policy. Prior to the new policy, a process of naturalization was required in order to receive the legal status of Indonesian citizenship.⁶

Yet, a concept of homogeneity under *Pancasila* – the five state Principles – was introduced by the New Order. *Pancasila* states that the nation should be united under the belief in one Supreme God, humanism, nationalism, popular sovereignty, and social justice. Based on those five principles, the *Program Pembangunan* (Assimilation Program) was introduced.⁷ And therefore, Encek has to go back and forth to the courtroom to obtain legal proof that he is worthy to be Indonesian, and is willing to receive a Javanese name to replace his Chinese name.

Although Kuntarto Winoto, Encek's new Javanese name, sounds local, it is a modification from his surname, Kun. The suffix "tarto" was added to his original surname to create a common Javanese name. Under the New Order, a law regarding Chinese Indonesian names was passed, and one of the most visible results of the

law was the transformation of most Indonesian Chinese surnames into Indonesian sounding names.⁸ In another example, the original Chinese name of Wang was changed to Wongsosaputro. The policy was intended to assimilate the Indonesians of Chinese descent, but it was also ironic as it betrayed the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) propagated by the Indonesian government.

Throughout the question and answer dialogue that serves as the main focus of the poem, Remy presents a clash of interests between Encek, a representative of someone of Chinese descent, and the judge, who symbolizes the New Order government. Encek Peng Kun also pronounces *r* as *l*, reflecting the fact that he speaks other Chinese dialects as his first language instead of Indonesian. Often Encek cannot appreciate the symbols of nationalism (the verses in *Pancasila*, the photographs of Suharto and Kartini, and the national anthem). Encek always gives nonsensical answers, and some of his witty answers are related to the fact that most people of Chinese descent in Indonesia work in the business and economic sector.⁹ When Encek was asked to recite the verses in *Pancasila*, he confused the third and fourth verses with popular Indonesian product brands. Instead of saying "two, humanism", he says, "two horns/*dua culas*". Some other product brands mentioned by Encek are three diamonds/*tiga belian* and *Nyonya Meneer*. This may be subtle, yet the stereotype of Chinese as economically oriented is vividly personified in Remy's character. Reading this poem, one cannot resist falling in love with Encek Peng Kun. He is honest, humorous, witty, and ingenious. Why can't such a man get a certificate of citizenship from the Indonesian government? When he cannot answer the nationalistic questions correctly, it is not because he is ignorant; rather, he seems only to be challenging those institutions as a sign of resentment. Perhaps it was also why Kuntarto Winoto (alias Encek Peng Kun) refuses to be involved in the country's General Election, opting not to vote at all. It is ironic that having a Javanese name and a legal certificate of citizenship is not enough to make him want to vote.

Encek Peng Kun

Encek Peng Kun¹⁰ was born in Jakarta
from a grandfather and grandmother who had resided
in Batavia
since Adriaen Velckenier's massacre of the Chinese

Though he was always an Indonesian at heart
Encek Peng Kun had never had a valid certificate of
citizenship
It had been difficult for him to get one during the New
Order Regime¹¹
which lasted for three and a half decades
which was different from the Japanese colonization
which lasted for three and a half years
which was different from the Dutch colonization
which lasted for three and a half centuries

In order to obtain a certificate of citizenship
and change his name into a Javanese name
Encek Peng Kun had to pass several tests
in front of a judge from the special court

The first test given by the judge was
an easy question normally recited by elementary school
students
The judge said, "Encek Peng Kun,
what are the verses in Pancasila?"¹²
Encek Peng Kun answered plainly,
"Hayya, evelybody knows lah, altogether thele ale five,
One, believe in the one and only God, Two holns,
Three Diamonds,
Foul, Health, and Five, Pelfection."¹³

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun
to come back the next morning

The next morning, slowly
Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be
tested.
The judge said, "Since you failed the test yesterday
today you must answer the question correctly
If not, I will never sign your letter of citizenship
So, who wrote Pancasila?"
Encek Peng Kun answered plainly,
"Hayya, evelybody knows lah, Kho Ping Ho fлом Solo
has wllitten numbels of 'pencak-silat'¹⁴ books"
The judge yelled, "Not pencak-silat, but Pancasila!"

As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied,
"Hayya, they'le all the same lah, both ale used for self-
defense"

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun
to come back the next morning

The next morning, slowly
Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be
tested
The judge said, "Since you failed the test yesterday
today you must answer the question correctly
If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship"
The judge then showed him a big photograph of Su-
harto
and asked, "Whose face is this?"
Encek Peng Kun answered plainly
"Hayya, evelybody knows lah, that's Sukalno".
The judge yelled, "No! This is Suharto"
As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied,
"Hayya, they'le all the same lah, both of them weal
kopiah"¹⁵

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun
To come back the next morning

The next morning, slowly
Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be
tested
the judge said, "Since you failed the test yesterday
today you must answer the question correctly
If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship"
The judge then showed him a big photograph of Kar-
tini
and asked, "Whose face is this?"
Encek Peng Kun answered plainly,
"Hayya, everybody knows lah, that's a bland of Jamu
Nyonya *Meneel*¹⁶ fлом Semarang".
The judge yelled, "No! This is Kartini".
As calm as he could, Encek Peng Kun replied,
"Hayya, they'le all the same lah, both of them weal hail
buns".

The judge was infuriated, and told Encek Peng Kun
to come back the next morning

The next morning, slowly
Encek Peng Kun entered the courtroom, ready to be
tested

The judge said, "Since you failed the test yesterday today you must answer the question correctly. If not, I will never sign your certificate of citizenship". Unlike the other day, Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "I am not going to fail again today". The judge said, "Today you only need to sing 'Indonesia Raya', the National Anthem". Unlike the other day, Encek Peng Kun was very sure of himself and said, "I am the number-one singer". As he stood up straight Encek Peng Kun began to sing, "Indonesia, 'your' native land The land where 'you' shed 'your' blood". The judge yelled, "Hey! It's not supposed to be 'your' but 'my'". Encek Peng Kun suddenly was not calm and plain anymore, "Hayya, then you first need to sign my certificate of citizenship. Once you sign it, I will sing 'my' Before you sign it, I will sing 'your'".

The judge was infuriated, but he decided to give in, "Okay, I will sign it now. From now on your name is: Kuntarto Winoto"¹⁷

Just outside the courtroom the judge said, "During the General Election you must vote for one of the three big parties: PPP, Golkar, PDI". Which one will you consider?" Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, I will vote for none of them". The judge said, "That's unacceptable! You must vote for Golkar". Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, I don't want to, my life will be difficult. If Golkar wins, there will be development everywhere. And I have to let go of part of my house for a public road". The judge said, "Then vote for PDI". Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, I don't want to, my life will be difficult. The 'Buffalo'¹⁹ party belongs to Sukarno. During Sukarno's era, my money was cut. So if PDI wins, my money will be cut again". The judge said, "Then just vote for PPP". Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, I don't want to, my life will be more difficult

If PPP wins, syariah Islam will be imposed. And my penis will be circumcised". The judge said, "So what will you vote for?" Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, I will vote for 'Golput'²⁰..". The judge said, "'Golput' is not allowed". Encek Peng Kun answered confidently, "Hayya, what do I care?"

The Original Text

Encek Peng Kun lahir di Jakarta dari kakek-nenek yang sudah membumi di Batavia sejak Adriaen Velckenier membantai orang Cina

Walau sudah mengindonesia sekian lama Encek Peng Kun belum punya surat warganegara sebab dipersulit selama penjajahan Orde Baru yang memakan waktu tiga setengah dasawarsa dan tak sama dengan penjajahan Jepang yang memakan waktu tiga setengah tahun dan tak sama dengan penjajahan Belanda yang memakan waktu tiga setengah abad

Untuk memperoleh surat warganegara dan mengganti namanya dengan nama Jawa Encek Peng Kun harus mengikuti ujian-ujian di hadapan hakim pengadilan khusus

Ujian pertama yang diajukan hakim adalah pertanyaan hafal-hafalan anak SD. Kata hakim, "Encek Peng Kun, coba sebut ayat-ayat Pancasila." Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya, "Hayya, semua orang tahu la, ada lima macam. Kesatu, kehutanan yang maha esa, dua cula, tiga belian, empat schat, lima sempulna." Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini

Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap uji. Kata hakim, "Karena anda gagal kemarin hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar. Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda tidak bakal saya tandatangani. Nah, siapa penggali Pancasila?" Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,

"Hayya, semua orang tahu, Kho Ping Ho dari Solo banyak kalang buku-buku celita 'pencak-silat'." Hakim membentak, "Bukan pencak-silat, tapi Panca-sila!"

Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua alat bela dili."

Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini

Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji
Kata hakim, "Karena Anda gagal kemarin hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda tidak bakalan saya tandatangani."

Hakim menunjukkan foto besar Suharto sambil bertanya, "Wajah siapa ini?"

Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, semua orang tahu la, itu Sukalno."

Hakim membentak, "Bukan! Ini Suharto."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua pakai kopiah."

Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini

Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji.
Kata hakim, "Karena anda gagal kemarin hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar
Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda tidak bakalan saya tandatangani

Hakim menunjukkan foto besar Ibu Kartini sambil bertanya, "Wajah siapa ini?"

Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya,
"Hayya, semua orang tahu la, itu melek jamu cap Nyonya-Mencil dari Semalang'."

Hakim membentak, "Bukan! Ini ibu Kartini."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun dengan lugunya
"Hayya, sama la, dua-dua pake konde."

Hakim geram, menyuruh Encek Peng Kun kembali besok pagi di sidang pengadilan ini

Besok pagi, keplek-keplek-keplek
Encek Peng Kun masuk ruang sidang siap diuji
Kata hakim, "Karena Anda gagal kemarin hari ini Anda harus jawab yang benar

Sebab, kalau salah, surat warganegara Anda tidak bakalan saya tandatangani."

Tumben Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu berkata yakin, "Sekalang owe tidak gagal lagi."

Kata hakim, "Hari ini Anda hanya cukup menyanyi lagu kebangsaan 'Indonesia Raya'."

Tumben Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu berkata yakin, "Soal nyanyi owe nomel satu."

dan sambil berdiri tegak Encek Peng Kun menyanyi, "Indonesia, tanah ail-'mu'

Tanah tumpah darah-'mu'."

Hakim membentak, "Hei! bukan 'mu' tapi 'ku'."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun tidak lugu lagi,

"Hayya, kalo begitu tandatangan dulu owe punya sulat walganegala.

Kalu sudah tandatangan, owe nyanyi 'ku'

Sebelum tandatangan, owe nyanyi 'mu'."

Hakim geram, tapi mengalah, katanya, "Ya, sudah Saya tandatangani sekarang juga

Mulai sekarang nama Anda: Kuntarto Winoto

Di luar sidang pengadilan hakim berkata,

"Nanti pemilu Anda harus pilih salah satu dari tiga partai besar: PPP, Golkar, PDI.

Kira-kira Anda pilih yang mana?"

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin

"Hayya, owe tidak pilih mana-mana."

Kata hakim, "Tidak boleh! Anda harus pilih Golkar."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin

"Hayya, tidak mau, owe bisa susah

Kalu Golkar menang, pembangunan di mana-mana lantas owe punya lumah kena potong dibikin jalan."

Kata hakim, "Kalau begitu pilih saja PDI."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin

"Hayya, tidak mau, owe bisa susah

Paltai banteng paltainya Sukalno

Dulu jaman Sukalno owe punya uang kena potong

Kalu PDI menang, owe punya uang kena potong lagi."

Kata hakim, "Kalau begitu pilih saja PPP."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin,

"Hayya, tidak mau, owe tambah susah

Kalau PPP menang, dibelakukan syariat Islam

lantas owe punya lancau kena potong disunat."

Kata hakim, "Kalau begitu Anda pilih partai apa?"

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin,

"Hayya, owe pilih Golput saja."

Kata hakim, "Golput tidak boleh."

Jawab Encek Peng Kun stel yakin,

"Hayya, emang gua pikilin?"

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End Notes

¹ The Javanese proverb "*mikul dhuwur mendhem jero*" was widely used during the New Order; it indicates that one has to uphold the leader's merits as well as to suppress his mistakes. The next proverb, "*wani ngalah luhur pungkasane*," suggests that winning is not true victory, that true victory is sacrifice.

² During the 1970s, a writer was considered to be a successful poet only when his/her writings were chosen to be published in *Horizon* magazine (Prologue to *Puisi Mbeling*, 2004).

³ From an interview with Remy Sylado (Prologue to *Puisi Mbeling* 2004).

⁴ See Hoon, 2008 and Hariyono, 2006. In 1740 approximately 10,000 people of Chinese descent are believed to have been killed upon the orders of Adrian Velckenier, the governor general of Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) from 1695 to 1751.

⁵ Based on the 1946 Citizenship Act and the 1949 Round Table Agreement. See Hoon, 2008 and Suryadinata, 1992. The act states that people of Chinese descent in Indonesia should: "produce evidence that their parents were born in the territory of Indonesia and had resided there for at least ten years; and make an official declaration rejecting Chinese citizenship" (Suryadinata, 1992, p.115).

⁶ Hoon and Suryadinata explain that the process was extremely complicated.

⁷ "This program prescribed the total dissolution of any markers and identifiers of Chineseness, and urged this problematic ethnic group (Chinese) to immerse itself in officially constructed local cultures." See Hoon, 2008.

⁸ See Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesiansounding_names_adapted_by_Chinese_Indonesians

⁹ See Hariyono, 2006.

¹⁰ Peng Kun is a Chinese name, and Encek refers to an adult man (similar to Uncle).

¹¹ "New Order Regime" refers to the time where Suharto ruled the country, from 1967 to 1998.

¹² Pancasila are the five state principles of Indonesia: belief in one Supreme God, humanism, nationalism, popular sovereignty, and social justice.

¹³ Encek Peng Kun misapprehended the second, third, fourth, and fifth of the Pancasila principles. Instead of reciting the correct ones, he mentioned several product brands.

¹⁴ Pencak Silat is a traditional martial art from Indonesia, its pronunciation is similar to Pancasila.

¹⁵ An Indonesian traditional cap. Each Indonesian male President wears kopiah in his formal photograph.

¹⁶ *Nyonya Meneer* is a famous brand of Indonesian traditional herbal medicine (*jamu*). A lady with hair buns appears in its well-known logo. Kartini, an Indonesian national heroine, is the writer of the book "Out of Darkness Comes Light." She wrote the book while secluded in her parent's house. Having to stay home all the time, Kartini wrote letters to a pen pal in Europe, sharing her passions to bring light to the life of Javanese women and empower them, against any discrimination within such a patriarchal society.

¹⁷ Kuntarto Winoto is a Javanese name, presumably derived from Encek Peng Kun's surname, Kun.

¹⁸ PPP, Golkar, and PDI were the three major political parties in Indonesia during the New Order Regime.

¹⁹ "The Buffalo" party is a slang for PDI, because the buffalo is the symbol of the party.

²⁰ Golput stands for Golongan Putih, a term used for those who choose not to vote.

Lava Casting for Sculptural Applications at Thamkrabok Monastery in Phra Puttabath, Thailand

Photo Essay

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John Daniel Walters is an interdisciplinary studio artist at the crossroads of the visual arts, vehicle restoration, cultural documentation and social mobility. His work encompasses aspects of architecture and landscape design, metal fabrication, figurative sculpture, mixed/digital media installations, and sustainable system and alternative fuel applications. He is currently a third year MFA Candidate at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He received his BFA from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in 2003 and has been active in the creative arts for over ten years.

The following photographic essay describes the lava casting process developed by the monks at Thamkrabok Monastery in Phra Puttabath, Thailand. I am a bronze sculptor in the MFA program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and spent one month in residence at Thamkrabok Monastery in 2008. During my residency at Thamkrabok I researched this unique fine art basalt casting process that was developed by the monks of Thamkrabok to construct very large ceremonial figures throughout the confines of the monastery. This rare casting technique is of interest to me as a new medium for my artistic practice, which is less resource intensive than bronze casting, but still archival in its quality.

In addition to my investigation into basalt casting, a more conceptual investigation took place concerning non-western perspectives on the issue of substance abuse management, a central theme in my past creative work. Thamkrabok Monastery is heralded as one of the most difficult drug rehabilitation programs in the world, combining various ceremonial practices, manual labor, and a personal commitment to sobriety as key aspects to recovery. Many of the monks who reside at Thamkrabok have been through the rehabilitation program and now choose to stay there.

During my residency, I was introduced to Phra Thong, one of the four adjunct monks at the monastery who was also formally trained in the arts. An adjunct monk is one who is both considered a teacher within the monastery and who is well on his way to enlightenment. As a resident at the monastery, I participated in a series of daily duties, one of which was sculpting for five hours every afternoon on a beeswax figurative form of the late Luoang Pau Charoon, one of the three founding monks of Thamkrabok. During this time, I would speak with Phra Thong about the methods used for casting large basalt objects, such as mold construction, material usage, fuel sources, basalt mixtures and finishing techniques.

Since it was the wet season in Thailand during July, I was unable to witness a basalt pour first hand, but I did study various sculptures, some that were fully completed and some that were in the process of construction. The processes

used to melt the basalt are not unlike the process used in the United States for contemporary fine art iron casting, but Thamkrabok's recipe for making basalt is unique. The materials for making basalt are of partially recycled origins, which makes it a welcome alternative to traditional bronze casting that is very energy intensive. The result is a sculpture of volcanic rock that is hollow and approximately one to two inches thick depending on the shape and quality of the mold.

The finished forms are ceremonial objects, most of which are in the form of Buddha in an enlightened state, designated by the flame atop Buddha's head while in seated position. There are a number of other forms including serpents, standing monks, monoliths, and commemorative statuary of past Abbots of Thamkrabok. This photo essay illustrates the lava casting process from photos given to me from the archives of Phra Thong and from photos I took personally. I have also digitally processed each photo to increase its clarity and for consistency in presentation.



Three Witnesses
Digital Print

Three Witnesses is the central ceremonial platform at Thamkrabok. The three central monolith forms symbolize the three founders: Luangpoh Yai, Luangpoh Chamroon Panchand, and Luangpoh Charoon, an aunt and her two nephews respectively.



Six of the Twenty-Four Witnesses
Digital Print

Surrounding the central monolith structures is a semi-circle of Buddha figures known as the Twenty Four Witnesses. During my time there, I observed one of the monks refurbishing these older statues using cement in a stucco application and black paint to achieve a consistent surface tonal quality.



Decay in Form
Digital Print

This photo shows evidence of the decay of these large forms. The inner steel architecture of these forms has begun to rust and break apart the lava shell that it supports. The moist climate and porous nature of basalt enabling this process further. Refurbishing is therefore often necessary for forms made in this manner.

Making Lava
Digital Print
Phra Thong Archive,
2000

The monks melt basalt ingredients in a large cupola fueled with cola and air. This huge furnace produces enough basalt to fill a ladle as shown, which is hoisted into a pour position using available machinery. Depending on the recipe, once cooled, the lava can take on hues of red and blue as seen by a collection of examples provided to me by Phra Thong.





The First Level
Digital Print
Phra Thong
Archive,
2000

Here a pour team works to fill the lower portion of the mold. They maneuver the large ladle with utmost precision and teamwork. Many men are needed to help plug holes and keep the mold intact.



Pouring the Figure
Digital Print
Phra Thong Archive, 2000

This process begins with the construction of a large mold made of earth and wire. When pouring the lava, the monks must start from the bottom and move upward at a steady pace. The large earthen molds contain a number of entry spouts that allow the crew to reposition the pour vertically as the mold fills.



Breaking the mold
Digital Print
Phra Thong Archive, 2000

After the lava has cooled, the earthen mold and supporting cage are removed to reveal the figure within. A similar wire structure within the thin lava shell cannot be removed and is left permanently left inside. This inner cage contributes to the previously described decay of these large sculptures.

Luangpoh Yai
Digital Print

There continues to be projects of vast magnitude performed at Thamkrabok. Recently a monolith structure with a commemorative figure of Luangpoh Yai was constructed to the north of the Twenty-Four Witnesses. These structures are truly awe-inspiring due to the original nature of the materials used for their construction and the colossal height at which they stand.



Cambodia Down South:

Images of an Archaeological Field Season in the Delta

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Archaeology in Cambodia explores landscapes that have shaped and have been shaped by their human inhabitants for thousands of years. Since 1996, the Lower Mekong Archaeological Project (LOMAP) has focused its efforts on understanding the development of complex societies that emerged in southern Cambodia's Mekong Delta during the first half of the first millennium CE. One focus of the project is to survey the distribution of archaeological sites and features on this landscape and understand how their relationships change through time as the nascent polities, later referred to as Funan by Chinese visitors, were forming in the region.

Most of the archaeological sites or features in this part of the country fall into three categories: mounds, ponds, and moat mounds. Identification of these features is facilitated by the uniform flatness and persistent grid of rice paddies that dominate the landscape. Even slight changes in elevation or vegetation can intercept your gaze from kilometers away. Though line of sight is rarely obstructed, the infrastructure of access generally provides a different story all together. The following collection of images offers a glimpse into the trekking, trudging, riding, roving, winding, wandering field season of the 2009 LOMAP crew's explorations of southern Cambodia's Mekong Delta.



With two or three archaeologists to a moto, the LOMAP crew prepares for another day in the field.



All too often, as you get closer and closer to where you need to be, the roads give way to paths, which turn into bunds. Eventually, on foot is the only way to reach most sites.



Though mechanized agriculture is ubiquitous and on the rise in some areas, it is not uncommon to see the hard work of plowing done with more traditional tools of the trade.

Mounds are often marked by a conspicuous change in vegetation, with more trees around their periphery and sometimes trees and shrubs across their surface, if they are not cultivated.



The vegetation on a mound provides welcome cover for an afternoon deluge during the rainy season. In this sort of rain, staying dry can be a lost cause.

Burning the leftover plant material after rice harvest sends plumes of smoke into the mid-afternoon air during harvest season.





Larger roads are often associated with canals. Crossings can be widely spaced.

The afternoon rush hour clogs the infrastructure of even the more remote regions of Cambodia at times, though with a decidedly different character than in the city.



Motos generally provide the most convenient form of transportation in the field. They are small and light, can go almost anywhere, and on dry days make good time on the main arteries.

Interacting with Archaeological Landscapes in Cambodia

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Alison Carter is a Ph.D. candidate in the Anthropology department at UW-Madison, where she lives with her husband and dog. She has been working in Cambodia since 2005 and her dissertation research explores Iron Age trade networks in mainland Southeast Asia through examination and compositional analysis of stone and glass beads.

In the United States, most people experience archaeology through glass museum cases or documentaries on TV. However in Cambodia, a country roughly the size of Oklahoma, there are over 4000 documented archaeological sites that people live on top of, next to, are surrounded by, or stumble upon while working in their fields. People interact with archaeological sites everyday and these interactions cover a broad spectrum from sacred places of worship, spaces that provide economic opportunities, objects of curiosity, and places of national importance. The following is a small collection of images that show some of the ways that people interact with archaeology. They were taken while on LOMAP projects in 2005 and 2009, as well as in my own travels throughout the country.



2005: Looting at Phnom Toich in Angkor Borei, Takeo Province

Looting archaeological sites is often an easy way for people in Cambodia to make a few extra dollars. Usually people look for easily saleable items like gold, silver, and bronze objects, or beads, but that is not always the case. This photo was taken at a small rock-filled mound in the town of Angkor Borei, which may have been part of an ancient wall or foundation for a building. The stones were removed and then pounded into gravel to be used in house construction. This family had sold their farmland due to an illness and this was their last chance for an income.



July 2008: Phnom Chisor, Takeo Province

*Phnom Chisor is a beautiful 11th century Angkorian temple on a small hill in Takeo Province. It is also one of the few Angkorian temples that is actively being used as a place of worship. Locals have gone to great lengths to repair these temples (even adding a metal roof on the main sanctuary) and to decorate the interior. The first image shows the interior of the main sanctuary of the temple, which has been nicely decorated and is being looked after by the *acha* (វិញ្ញាណបុត្រ), or Buddhist laymen, who watch over this site. The second photo shows part of the courtyard of the temple, including some small spirit houses.*



August 2009, LOMAP Field Survey in Takeo Province

Ceramics and pot sherds are common archaeological artifacts that people often find in their fields and on their land, but they do not always know what to make of these objects. After finding out that we were interested in ancient ceramics, the children in this village went "fishing" in an ancient pond to pull out Iron Age ceramics sitting at the bottom so we could look at them. After telling the people in the village about these ceramics, they were surprised to find out how old they were.



Feb 2007, Preah Vihear Temple, Banteay Meanchey Province

I first visited Preah Vihear in 2007, before the border between Cambodia and Thailand was closed. There was a small village at the foot of the temple and many people set-up stalls at various locations around the temple to sell food and trinkets to the tourists. Tourism is an important and vital source of income for many people who live on or near archaeological sites.

September 2008, Preah Vihear Temple, Banteay Meanchey Province

About 1 ½ years later I returned to Preah Vihear temple, although this time the border between Cambodia and Thailand was closed and there was considerable tension. Preah Vihear has become a nationalist symbol of Khmer pride. Tourists had been replaced by Khmer soldiers defending the border and posted at strategic locations around the temple. These two soldiers were happy to pose with a non-functional Khmer Rouge period gun that is located next to one of the temple buildings.



June 2008,
Kampot Province

At many archaeological sites children are the unofficial tour guides. They speak surprisingly clear English and are often quite knowledgeable about the history and significance of the site they live near. In Kampot province this group of energetic kids walked us through rice fields and took us on a tour of a small brick temple inside a nearby limestone cave.



March 2008, Chapel of the Sisters of Providence Hospice
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

This church was built in the 1880s and belonged to the Sisters of Providence. After the Khmer Rouge period when people began to move back into Phnom Penh, families converted the interior of the church into a dwelling space. Now, several families live inside this historic church constructing multistory homes and completely transforming the interior.



August 2009, LOMAP Field Survey in Takeo Province

This dramatic mound did not have many artifacts on the surface, but did have a long oral history. A local farmer told us that during the rainy season there would be boat races around the mound and that it was still an important location for village ceremonies.

Justin Thomas McDaniel's *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand*

Book Review

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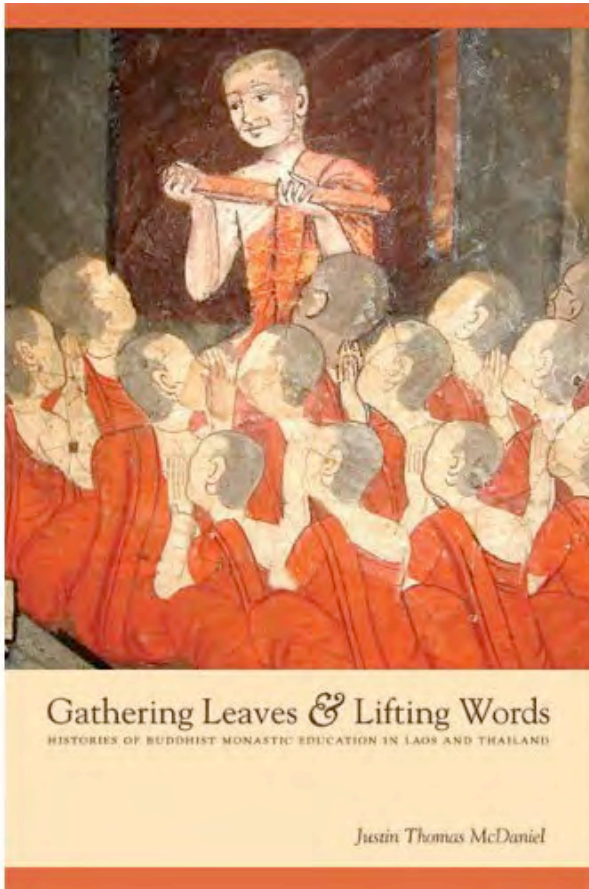
Quentin Pearson is a third year Ph.D. student in the Department of History at Cornell University. He is currently in the early stages of research for a dissertation focused on changing conceptions of religious and medical knowledge in nineteenth century Siam (Thailand).

Justin Thomas McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

Justin McDaniel has recalibrated the scale of writing Theravada Buddhist history in this impressive study. Challenging assumptions about the centrality of classical forms of the religious tradition, McDaniel focuses on three genres of pedagogical manuscripts, which together embody a particular mode of religious instruction known as “lifting words.” Operative both in the contexts of monastic education and lay instruction, lifting words is the pedagogical technique whereby “Pali [Buddhist scriptural language] words are lifted from texts, both canonical and noncanonical, and then creatively engaged with and explained by teachers based on their own experiences” (7). For McDaniel, these texts constitute “particular moments in a history of articulations of Buddhism... [which] evince the ways local agents were reaching back and reaching toward Buddhism” (120). *Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words* is concerned with discrete historical articulations of Buddhist understanding, which are “reflective of a

pervasive episteme and intellectual and aesthetic attitude toward the translocal, externally validated sources of knowledge” (165).

The three manuscript genres that McDaniel interprets—namely *nissaya*, *vohaara*, and *naamasadda*—are best understood as local instantiations of Theravada Buddhism, which might be seen as a translocal database of ethical and soteriological forms of knowledge. If Theravada Buddhism, with its cosmopolitan language (Pali) and well-defined canon, is a bridge connecting parts of the religious worlds of South and Southeast Asia, then these three kinds of pedagogical texts are its supports, the discrete spaces where it touches solid ground amidst the changing tides of social life. And while the bridge itself hovers above the waters of historical change—at least in standard academic treatments of Theravada Buddhism—its supports stand firm as anchors testifying to continuity and change in local epistemic and social contexts. Along with McDaniel’s emphasis on the local articulations of Theravada Buddhism, comes a new lexicon for thinking about the supports rather than the bridge itself. Instead of the standard litany of analytic tools for studying religion, McDaniel offers new sites of interpretation: curricula in place of canon, interpretive



communities instead of institutions, and the local episteme rather than classical texts or doctrine.

Part I (Chapters 1-3) of McDaniel's study offers a conventional history of monastic education in the region, including the institutional changes and reforms that punctuate the religious history of Thailand and Laos. What is novel however, is McDaniel's insistence on the continuities linking modern and premodern monastic education and his contention that the most highly acclaimed moments of reform—especially the 1902 Thai *Sangha* Act—were largely ideological and ineffectual in practice (108). In Part II (Chapters 4-6), McDaniel reveals his methodological groundwork: an examination of the curricula of monastic education as it was practiced on the ground and articulated through the air of temple pavilions by individual monks. It is here that McDaniel hits his stride, approaching each manuscript as an epistemological puzzle and recreating individual religious subjectivities by identifying the disparate textual threads running through the manuscript. In a display of his incredible command of the textual repertoire of the Northern Thai or Lao Buddhist monk, McDaniel catalogues the individual texts—

both canonical and not—that helped constitute the nissaya composer's religious understanding. What emerges is strong evidence for continuity between 'premodern' and 'modern' monastic education through the deep grammar of pedagogical modes of thought and practice. In Part III (Chapters 7-8), McDaniel presents case studies in the application of his methodology, as well as evidence that aspects of the 'premodern' modes of pedagogical thought and interaction with authoritative Pali texts persist to this day under the guise of modern pedagogical technologies and media.

Gathering Leaves & Lifting Words is constructed as a challenge to historians—unnamed by McDaniel—who postulate a radical breach between the social and intellectual worlds of the premodern and modern eras. This explains McDaniel's willful denial of the efficacy and import of state-initiated religious reforms as the defining markers of modernity. Yet the very force of McDaniel's

argument against the significance of the 'ideological' reforms initiated by the political elite could obscure productive avenues of inquiry into the workings of state power during the colonial era. Even if state-sponsored reforms had little discernable impact on social life beyond the capital (Bangkok) as McDaniel contends, they might still retain analytic value for the historian. Not all instances of intellectual change need be mapped at the micro-scale of the individual. Even when it remains sequestered in elite social climes, intellectual history can still provide insight into the engagements of knowledge and power, both in terms of how an indigenous elite sought to effect cultural homogeneity at home, and how such projects were informed by the logic of colonial rule. In short, demographics should not be the only determining factor in assessing intellectual change; even the most demographically-shallow instances of intellectual change might still be relevant sources for charting the cultural and epistemological landmarks at the confluence of colonial forms of knowledge and power.

McDaniel's study has much to offer those in the field of Buddhist studies, both in terms of primary source analysis and methodological apparatus. Philologists and historians of ideas in other fields will likewise benefit from his careful attention to the context of the propagation of tradition, as well as the processes of reception and localization of classical forms of knowledge.



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