EXPLORATIONS

A GRADUATE STUDENT JOURNAL OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

volume 3
Fall 1999

IN THIS ISSUE:

UH CSEAS

Explorations
in
Southeast Asian Studies

A Journal of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association

Vol 3 **Fall 1999**

Vol 1 Vol 2 Vol 4 Vol 5

Contents

Explorations is a student publication of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association (SEASSA) in association with the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), published twice a year and available both online and in print.

The principle mission of *Explorations* is to offer a forum for students to present disciplinary and interdisciplinary research on a broad range of issues relating principally to the region which today constitutes Southeast Asia. Embracing a diversity of academic interests and scholastic expertise it is hoped that this forum will introduce students to the work of their colleagues, encourage discussion both within and across disciplines, and foster a sense of community among those interested in Southeast Asia. Submissions for publication may come from students at any college or university, and are not limited to the University of Hawai'i.

Explorations
in
Southeast Asian Studies
A Journal of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association
Vol 3 **Fall 1999**

Contents Article 1 Article 2 Article 3 Article 4

The Origin and Significance of the Emerald Buddha

Eric Roeder

>Eric Roeder is an M.A. candidate in the department of Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. he is spending the 1999-2000 academic year examining the educational opportunities for the physical handicapped within Thailand

Notes

The Emerald Buddha is known as 'the palladium of Thai society'. Located on the grounds of the Grand Palace and situated within Wat Phra Keo, The Emerald Buddha watches over the Thai nation. Yet the image's history continues to reveal very little. Fable, myth, legend and fact intermingle, creating a morass for those who study the Emerald Buddha. While the Buddha is often mentioned in texts about Thailand, surprisingly little is written about it in great length. Beyond the image's origins in documented history, the Emerald Buddha has traveled widely.

This paper will look at the mythical origins of the Emerald Buddha as recorded in The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha and other sources, then trace its history in Thailand beginning from its first appearance in the town of Chieng Rai. Upon its discovery in Chieng Rai, the Emerald Buddha became much coveted. The image moved throughout the region, from Chieng Rai to Lampang, Chieng Mai, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Thonburi, and finally, to its present location in Bangkok. More than just a spoil of battle, the Emerald Buddha was believed to bring legitimacy and prosperity to all those who possess it. Thus kings throughout the region have desired to have the Emerald Buddha preside over and bring good favor to their capitals.

The arrival of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok marked the beginning and the rise of the Chakri dynasty. The first king of the Chakri dynasty Rama I validated his reign by moving the seat of his government to Bangkok and further strengthened his position through his possession of the

Emerald Buddha. Rama I constructed a magnificent temple to house the Buddha, and today the image serves as a potent religious symbol for the majority of the Thai Buddhists in the region.

A study of the iconography of this image may provide clues to its origins, and the stone used to create it--jasper, not emerald--may also suggest the original craftsmanship of the Emerald Buddha.

The older a Buddha image is, the more power it is believed to have. The Emerald Buddha has a long history, possibly reaching back to India. Early in the Bangkok period, the Emerald Buddha was taken out of its temple and paraded in the streets to relieve the city and countryside of various calamities. The image also marks the changing of the seasons in Thailand, with the king presiding over the seasonal ceremonies.

The power of the Emerald Buddha gives legitimacy to the king and protection to the nation. The image's significance is built upon its long history and symbolism as an object of power for those able to possess it. During the Bangkok period not all who desired the Emerald Buddha were of royal lineage. The political significance of the Buddha also marked Thailand's legitimacy during World War II. The image serve to mark political legitimacy outside the royal family.

Today, King Rama IX, still wields considerable power and influence in Thailand. Some believe he is the second to the last king of the Chakri dynasty, with his successor marking the Tenth and final rule of the Chakri. Of the King's children there are two candidates from whom he must choose, a prince and a princess. After Rama X who will be the caretaker of the Emerald Buddha? While the Emerald Buddha has had a murky past, its future is even less clear.

A Fable

Five centuries after the Buddha's passing into Nirvana, there lived in India an ascetic named Nagasena. Nagasena was deeply devoted to the teachings of Buddha. His dedication directed him toward becoming a monk at Wat Asokarem in the city of Padalibutra. In Padalibutra, Nagasena's devotion and love for the Buddha intensified. Confident in his abilities, Nagasena's unwavering devotion and words sparked renewed interest for the people of the city who had forgotten Buddha's teachings. Yet confidence and devotion aside, Nagasena's heart grew heavy due to his daily mental and physical exertion. His sharing the Buddha's teachings with the growing numbers of devotees in the city began to take its toll. Nagasena's sadness soon reached the slopes of Mt. Meru and the powerful god Indra. Alarmed and concerned, Indra and Visnu descended from the mountain to lift the heavy burden from Nagasena's heart.

Waiting in the lush garden of Wat Asokaren, Indra and Visnu, surrounded by peacocks and the scent of jasmine, approached Nagasena as he entered the garden. Upon seeing the two deities, Nagasena dropped to his knees with his hands and face close to the ground. Indra asked Nagasena to stand up and share his troubles. Nagasena explained to the gods that Buddha's teachings should be shared with all and that a image of the Buddha be created so that all could worship and pay reverence. The Buddha image had to be made to last forever, the likeness of the

Buddha chiseled from precious stone.

Compelled to help Nagasena, Indra instructed Visnu to go to the dreaded Mountain of Velu and seek out the most precious of all gem stones to be used for the image of Buddha. Staring at the ground, Visnu refused to budge, seeming to ignore Indra words. Indra's patience quickly waned and he demanded that Visnu obey his request. Visnu dropped to his knees and told Indra of his fears of the dark demons filling the slopes of Mt. Velu. Speaking in a voice choked with fear, Visnu told Indra that those who try to remove the precious gems from the mountain would be turned to vapor by the demons. Indra calmed Visnu's fears and offered to accompany him to Mt. Velu. In Marian Davies Toth's version of this tale, she notes that "the demons and giants of the mountain guard its treasures as carefully as the kings of Siam guard their white elephants."[1]

The great leap in time between the creation of the first Buddha image and the kings of Siam noted in Toth's version foreshadows the eventual resting place of the Emerald Buddha in Thailand. This time gap is not important, however; only the reference to Siam is relevant. In this case, the Hindu deities Indra and Visnu show their respect to the kings of Siam by acknowledging the difficult task of retrieving a stone great enough to produce the first image of Buddha.

As the story continues, both Indra and Visnu confront the demons of Mt. Velu. Recognizing Indra, the demons drop their aggressive posture and bow to him, asking how they can be of service. Indra explains that a most precious stone is needed to create an image of Buddha that will inspire all who gaze upon it. Displeased with Indra's request, the demons respond that they serve as guardians of the precious gems for King Isvara, a ruler living high up in the Himalaya Mountains. The demons note that the most precious of all these gems is a rare chunk of jade. Indra and Visnu are allowed to view the stone, and they marvel at the luminous green glow emanating from it. Convinced that this is the stone they must have, Indra asks if he might give the stone to Nagasena. In reverence of the Lord Buddha, the demons agree to Indra's request.

Indra and Visnu returned with the precious stone to the gardens of Wat Asokarem and presented it to Nagasena. At that point, Indra sensed that Nagasena heart was no longer burdened with grief. While Indra returned to Mt. Meru, Visnu stayed with Nagasena, taking on the form of a sculptor who created the likeness of the Buddha. Thus was the luminous chunk of jade transformed in the gleaming image of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha was placed in a beautiful new temple with a roof of gold and attracted thousands of people from every corner of the land.

This popular fable serves as the birth story of the Emerald Buddha. An image retrieved and sculpted by gods in honor of Buddha. An image well suited to serve as the palladium of Thai society.

The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha

The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha is a text tracing the mythical origins and travels of the Emerald Buddha. As yet there has been little attempt to determine what is factual and what is mythical in this account. The chronicle is generally considered to be a morass of information: it includes instances in which the Emerald Buddha is in two places at once, significant time discrepancies, and descriptions such as the king who could fly through the air to reach his desired destination in a short period of time. It would be easy to disregard the contents of this chronicle as mere fable, ignoring the possible merits hidden within it. At this time it is safe to say that there has been little academic research regarding The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha.

The Nagara Krtagama, the fourteenth-century Javanese poem by Mpu Prapanca, was once regarded by academics such as C.C. Berg as offering little more than an author's flight of fancy. While Berg's criticisms do have merit, since questioning historical authenticity is important, his dismissal of this text should serve as caution to not simply to discredit a traditional history out of hand. Today, the Negara Krtagama is considered an important source of information for scholars seeking to unravel the histories of the Singasari and Majapahit periods in eastern Java. Unraveling The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha may likely prove a much more difficult task due to its many ambiguities.

The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha was first translated into French, then into English, in 1932 by Camille Notton. Notton translated the Chieng Mai dialect (yuon) text, which was originally taken from a palm leaf manuscript found in Chieng Mai. This original manuscript is in the Pali language. According to Notton, there is no indication of the original author or a date of composition for The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha. There are also manuscripts about the Emerald Buddha found in neighboring countries. Laos, Cambodia, and the Shan States of Burma all acknowledge their own manuscripts of The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha.

The fact that there is more than one manuscript seems to imply that there had been an older text that existed at an earlier time. Notton notes that S.S. Reinach, a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres in Paris supports the idea that the later versions of the Emerald Buddha manuscript reflect some semblance of the original version of the chronicle. Notton further acknowledges Reinach's judgments that there is evidence that the original manuscript must have been an object of particular esteem.

The Chieng Mai manuscript came to the attention of a young Frenchman whose interest in Siam took him beyond his daily duties as a servant to the government of France. Camille Notton had a rather undistinguished career as a diplomat. Trained in Thai language at the Ecole des Langues Vivantes in Paris, Notton was appointed in August of 1906 as a student interpreter for the Bangkok legation.[2] He was transferred in 1916 to Chieng Mai and moved back and forth between Chieng Mai and Bangkok for several years. In 1930 he became a First-Class interpreter and was sent back to Chieng Mai from Bangkok in 1932. In 1935 Notton was promoted to Second-Class Consul and remained in Chieng Mai until 1938. According to Kennon Breazeale, there was no central-Thai version of the Chieng Mai annals in Camille Notton's time, Notton must have thus gained a reading knowledge of the northern-Thai script in order to translate the annals. Notton's translation of The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha marks the first translation

of the text by a Westerner.

The often reproduced fable noted earlier in this paper clearly received its inspiration from The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha. The chronicle's first Epoch relates how, from his home in India, Nagasena first conceived the idea of creating an image of the Buddha to encourage the flourishing of Buddhism. Nagasena was aided by both Indra and Visnu, and proclaimed that the newly-produced image would last five thousand years. Nagasena also predicted the Emerald Buddha's future importance in lands located beyond India.

Nagasena had through his supernatural knowledge a prescience of future events, and he made this prediction: 'The image of the Buddha is assuredly going to give to religion the most brilliant importance in five lands, that is in Lankadvipa (Sri Lanka), Ramalakka, Dvaravati, Chieng Mai and Lan Chang (Laos).' Moreover, the five images of the Buddha, namely Phra Ken Chan Deng (Buddha-heart-sandal-red), which was made by King Pasena, Phra Bang (Buddha-partly; so-called because as it is said in the chronicle of The Phra Bang, everybody among human beings and angels contributed a small quantity of gold, silver and copper for casting the statue), Phra Keo Amarakata (Buddha-crystal-smaragd), Phra Che Kham (Buddha-pure-gold) will ensure very great prosperity and give preeminence to the countries where they are established; and the kings of these places will excel all other kings. So shall it be.[3]

The section of Notton's translation in bold clearly notes the future significance that each image, including the Emerald Buddha, will have in the countries in which each image is established. Beyond being a self-fulfilling prophecy, the significance of the Emerald Buddha will be addressed further on.

Sri Lanka

The second epoch of the Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha notes a civil war in Pataliputra. Concerned about the safety of the Emerald Buddha, the ruler of Pataliputra sent the image to the King of Lankadvipa for safe keeping, intending to restore it to his kingdom once the fighting has ceased. The account continues by noting that the ruler of Pataliputra likely never journeyed to retrieve the image from Lankadvipa. Therefore, the image is said to have remained in Lankadvipa for two centuries.

With the Emerald Buddha in Lankadvipa, Buddhism flourished. Lanka emerged as a stronghold of Buddhism and upon his death the Buddha himself sought celestial protection for Sri Lanka and its faith. According to Karen Schur Narula, "the belief in the Buddha's statement upon his death would form the basis of Sri Lanka's concept of itself as a place of special sanctity for the Buddhist religion."[4]

The style of Buddha images appearing in Sri Lanka reflect a characteristically Sri Lankan

craftsmanship, according to Dorothy Fickle. The most common pose of Sri Lanka's seated images of the Buddha is that of virasana (yogic) position, the position that the Emerald Buddha of Wat Phra Keo shares. Yet based on these features alone, it is not possible to determine whether the Emerald Buddha originated in Sri Lanka.

Burma

The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha continues, noting that monks from Burma, dissatisfied with Buddhist scripture from India, ventured to Lanka to make transcriptions of texts there. The monks believed that the scriptures found at Lanka were the purest scriptures of the Buddha. Finishing their tasks in Lanka the monks made arrangements for their return to Pagan. Two boats set off for the return voyage, one carrying scriptures written by Sri Lankans, and the other carrying teachings for the people of Pagan as well as the image of the Emerald Buddha. As fate would have it, the boat carrying the Emerald Buddha never arrived in Pagan. Narula notes:

Recorded history pays homage to King Anawratha as the legendary and historical ruler who united peoples and places under the banner of a Theravada Buddhist Burma. The fact that this king ruled some six hundred years after the date attributed to him in The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha should be laid aside. The earliest recorded religious contacts between Burma and Sri Lanka date to the eleventh century. Indeed, the priest known in the chronicle as Silakhanda may well be the Mon monk Shin Arakan whom according to tradition, worked under King Anawratha to convert the Burmese to Theravada Buddhism.[5]

The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha records that Anuruddha flew back to Pagan, weary with the length of time it was taking for the boat carrying the scriptures (Tripitaka) and the Emerald Buddha to arrive in his kingdom. It is worth noting that the term 'flying' often symbolizes divinity, therefore its mention within the chronicle may be much more than literal. Upon his arrival, Anuruddha received word that the long missing boat had arrived in Indrapatha Nagara (Angkor).

Such a journey is possible but the likelihood of the boat being blown off course and arriving at Angkor would entail more skill than fate. If one did not want to travel over land and abandon his ocean-going vessel, one would have to navigate the Straits of Melaka and then head north to reach the coast of Cambodia avoiding possible mistaken landfalls all along the journey.

While not mentioned in The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha, the Emerald Buddha could have traveled over the Isthmus of Kra, close to the site of Ligor. In this case it would be a short journey to the Gulf of Thailand with a continuation on to Cambodia. The film Emerald Buddha, Seat of the Center of the Earth,[6] comments in passing about the myth of the Emerald Buddha being left at Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) for 1,700 years. The film suggests that the Emerald Buddha was brought to Ligor by a ship carrying a princess. The film does not mention where the ship came from or who the princess was; it also fails to offer a time frame for this tale.

Today, there is a wat located in Nakhon Si Thammarat that is said to contain a relic of the

Buddha. One of the most revered temples in southern Thailand, Wat Phra Mahathat is a prominent landmark, its original pagoda said to have been built some 1700 years ago to house the relic brought from Sri Lanka. Yet whether or not the Emerald Buddha followed the same path as the relic at Nakhon Si Thammarat is unknown and speculative.

Cambodia

The newly-arrived treasures came into the hands of Indrapatha, but this ruler of Angkor ignored Anuruddha's demand to return both the Tripitaka and the Emerald Buddha to Burma. Angered by the news that the king of Angkor refused to return the treasured items, Anuruddha flew through the air to Angkor to scare Indrapatha and his associates. Anuruddha flew around Indrapatha and his men, slashing their necks with his sword. While bleeding, the men were not seriously wounded and Indrapatha, fearing Anuruddha's powers, relinquished control of the Tripitaka. Yet the Pagan King Anuruddha, perhaps in his haste to leave Angkor, took only the boat containing the Tripitaka, leaving behind the statue of the Emerald Buddha.

According to The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha, some time after Anuruddha, during the reign of Senaraja, an incident of grave consequences took place at Angkor that would once again relocate the Emerald Buddha. This incident involved the young son of an officer and Senaraja's own son. The two boys commonly played together and each possessed a pet insect. The officer's son had a pet spider while the Senaraja's son kept a pet fly. The boys often let their insects play with each other until one day the spider killed and ate the fly belonging to Senaraja's son. The king exploded with anger upon receiving this news and immediately had the officer's son put to death by drowning. Upon the death of the officer's son, a great naga appeared, creating a tremendous storm and flood that killed the king and most of the inhabitants at Angkor. A monk concerned for the safety of the Emerald Buddha took the image and traveled north. Narula attempts to link the ruler who perished in the tempest created by the naga to the Khmer King Dharmasoka whose death during the siege of Angkor in 1431 was followed by the defection of two important monks to the Siamese. Narula notes that "the past and the Chronicle overlap here; Angkor was abandoned."[7]

The Luang Prabang Chronicle and The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha

Before continuing with the mythical history of the Emerald Buddha, it is important to consider the Luang Prabang chronicle. The Fine Arts Department in Bangkok argues that the 1967 publication of Tamnan Phra Keao Morakot (A Historical Account of the Emerald Buddha) contains the 1788 Thai translation of the Luang Prabang version of the history. Kennon Breazeale notes that since this version was rewritten in the Fifth Reign, it should be treated cautiously, since the author not only brought the history up to date but also may have 'corrected' some passages in the period prior to 1788.[8]

Breazeale also feels that the date of the composition can be determined tentatively from the terms Lao Phung Dam ("Black-belly Lao") and Lao Phung Khao ("White-belly Lao"). According to Breazeale, these were old terms known to the Thai, but they seem to be used here to indicate

the northern region (Lanna and Nan) and the upper-Mekong region (Luang Prabang), which, during 1890-1899 were officially designated as the Lao Phung Dam and Lao Phung Khao circles, respectively. Breazeale believes that these terms would not have been used in such a composition after 1899, because of Thai policy of suppressing ethnic identifications in official toponyms. Given the Thai government's efforts for the years prior to 1893 to find documents in provincial towns to support Thai territorial claims in the Mekong basin, Breazeale guesses that the anonymous document was written before 1893, hence his tentative dating of 1890-1892.

The Luang Prabang chronicle parallels The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha for the most part with only a few details distinguishing them apart. For example, in the Luang Prabang's version, Anuruddha sails on a Chinese junk rather than flying to Angkor. The Luang Prabang version also notes that Anuruddha tried to steal back the Emerald Buddha from Angkor disguised as a merchant but failed in his attempt. Both chronicles have the Emerald Buddha taken to the north after the devastating tempest at Angkor. Once it came in the north, the reigning king of Ayutthaya (Ayuddhya) Boran (King Atitaraj, according to the Luang Prabang text) took possession of the Emerald Buddha as well as its attendants. The image was kept at Ayutthaya Boran for many generations. The use of the term boran after the Ayutthaya period translates to 'ancient' in Thai, but the use of the term in the Luang Prabang chronicle is not clear.

A relation to the king of Ayutthaya Boran, The king of Kamphaeng Phet, asked for the image and carried it off to Kamphaeng Phet where it stayed for a time. This Kamphaeng Phet king then allowed one of his son's, who was governor of Lopburi, to keep the Emerald Buddha for one year and nine months, a time period agreed upon by both The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha and the Luang Prabang text. Both chronicles relate that a king of Chieng Rai (King Phromma That, according to the Luang Prabang text), friend of the king at Kamphaeng Phet, was allowed to take the image to Chieng Rai. The Chronicle of the Emerald Buddha notes that the image stayed in Chieng Rai until 1506. According to Narula, the Chieng Mai version of the chronicle explains that it was during the reign of Sen Muang Ma in the years 1388-1411 that the Emerald Buddha was hidden behind stucco in a Chieng Rai temple.

Chieng Rai, Lampang, Chieng Mai, Luang Prabang, and Vientiane

Perhaps the most reproduced aspect of the history of the Emerald Buddha is its remarkable discovery in 1434. The majority of books dealing with Thailand's history mention this discovery of the Emerald Buddha in Chieng Rai. Depending on which sources are used, the Emerald Buddha is said to appear in either 1434 or in 1436. Those who quote W.A.R. Wood's A History of Siam note the date 1436, while those who cite the chronicles use 1434. Yet what is important is not the slight discrepancy in the date of discovery, but the emergence of the Emerald Buddha from a mythical past to a historical reality.

According to the history found in the chronicles, in 1434 the Phra Keo Morakot was inside a large stupa at Chieng Rai. When the stupa tumbled down after being struck by lightning, a monk noticed a Buddha image covered in gold leaf beneath the crumbled stucco. Believing that the image was composed of ordinary stone, the monks of the temple placed it in the wihan (temple

sanctuary) along with the many other Buddhist statues. Chadin Flood writes:

Two or three months later, the plaster that covered the statue that was lacquered over and then covered with gold leaves, chipped off at the tip of the statue's nose. The head monk of the temple saw that indeed the statue inside was made of a beautiful green crystal. He therefore chipped out the rest of the plaster, and it was then seen by all that the statue was made of one solid piece of crystal without marks or imperfection.[9]

The population of Chieng Rai and the surrounding regions soon flocked to venerate the Emerald Buddha. News was also sent to the ruler of Chieng Mai who ordered an elephant procession to transport the image (called Phra Mahamaniattanapatimakon according to the chronicles) to Chieng Mai. As the procession approached the crossroads leading to Lampang, the elephant carrying the Emerald Buddha became agitated and ran off down the road toward Lampang. The elephant's mahout calmed his pachyderm then struggled to return it to the intersection, to continue the journey to Chieng Mai. Yet once again the elephant became excited and ran off toward Lampang.

At this point it was decided that a more docile elephant would be chosen to carry the image, yet the next elephant also reacted in the same way, charging down the road to Lampang. The news of the combative elephants soon reached the ruler of Chieng Mai. Being a strong believer in the supernatural, he feared the consequences of the incident and felt that the spirit guarding the Emerald Buddha did not want the image to come to Chieng Mai. The ruler of Chieng Mai thus allowed the image to go to Lampang and stay at a temple built from alms given by the people of Lampang. The image remained in Lampang for the next thirty-two years, residing within a temple that even today is referred to as the Phra Keo.[10]

According dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok Era (First Reign), in the year of the Chula Era, A. D. 1468, a new ruler of Chieng Mai came to power. He believed that the previous ruler should not have allowed the Emerald Buddha to stay in Lampang. Diskul Subhadradis confirms that "the Emerald Buddha was moved to Lampang from Chieng Mai in 1468."[11] The Buddha was brought in procession to Chieng Mai and set up in a wihan. The Chieng Mai ruler ordered a prasat (spiral roof) for the temple housing the Emerald Buddha, but after repeated lightning strikes destroyed the roof, the idea was abandoned. Within the wat, the Emerald Buddha was kept in a cabinet and was put on public display only occasionally. The Emerald Buddha stayed in Chieng Mai for eighty-four years. Flood writes:

In 1551 the ruler of Chieng Mai was Chao Chaiyasetthathirat, the son of the ruler (Phra Chao Phothisan) of Luang Prabang. The previous ruler of Chieng Mai gave his daughter, Nang Yotkham, in Marriage to Phra Chao Phothisan. She became his consort and bore him a son Chao Chaiyaset. When the latter was fifteen years of age, the ruler of Chieng Mai, his maternal grandfather, passed away. There was no other descendant to succeed him. High-ranking officials and Buddhist monks therefore agreed unanimously to offer the throne to Chao Chaiyaset, the eldest son of Phra Chao Phothisan and the grandson of the late ruler of Chieng Mai. His name was lengthened to Chao Chaiyasetthathirat.[12]

After Chaiyasetthathirat assumed rule of Chieng Mai, his father Phothisan passed away in Luang Prabang. Concerned that if he attended his father's funeral, he might be prevented from returning to Chieng Mai, Chaiyasetthathirat decided to take the Emerald Buddha with him to Luang Prabang. He also claimed that taking it to Luang would allow his relatives the opportunity to venerate the image and make merit.

The Chieng Mai chronicles record that Chaiyasetthathirat also decided to stay and rule Luang Prabang. The dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok era (First Reign) tell a slightly different story; while there is no mention of Chaiyasetthathirat's rule of Luang Prabang, it is written that he was on good terms with his half-brother and thus decided to stay in Luang Prabang for three years, discussing the division of their inheritance. It is also indicated that the officials of Chieng Mai felt that Chaiyasetthathirat had stayed away too long.

Breazeale writes that these officials of Lanna (Chieng Mai) were no longer willing to wait for Chaiyasetthathirat, and sought found another descendant of Mangrai dynasty to take the throne. This Shan prince, known as Mae ku, was a distant relative of Chaiyasetthathirat. The Chieng Mai chronicles again differ in their version of the story, recording that the officials chose a Buddhist monk called Mekuti, a relative of the late ruler of Chieng Mai. Yet neither text mentions any attempt by Chieng Mai to retrieve the Emerald Buddha from Luang Prabang.

In any case, Mekuti or Mae Ku may not have had an opportunity to do anything. Chaiyasetthathirat came under serious threat of attack after the Burmese took Chieng Saen, north-east of Chieng Mai, and Bayin-naung's forces gained the position to make an armed attack down the Mekong river. Thus, after twelve years in Luang Prabang, Chaiyasetthathirat decided to move his residence to Vientiane in the 1560's, taking the Emerald Buddha with him. The image stayed in Vientiane for two hundred and fifteen years until 1778.

Taksin and Chao Phya Chakri

Around the time the Burmese captured and pillaged Ayuddhya in 1767, a young Siamese general fled the capital with a few hundred followers. Scholars have speculated about the origins of this Ayuddhya citizen, Taksin, who seems to have been born with the Chinese family name Sin, which when was then extended to 'Taksin' when he served as governor of Tak.[13] As he traveled south of the sacked city of Ayuddhya, Taksin was able to increase his following and go on the offensive, routing the Burmese. Remarkably, within a short period of time Taksin had reconstituted the kingdom and was crowned king in 1768. Indeed, during his fifteen-year reign of Siam, Taksin was able to both unite the kingdom and expand its territorial claims.

With Ayuddhya so thoroughly destroyed, Taksin set up his new capital of Thonburi on the western side of the Menam Chao Phya, south of Ayuddhya. While Taksin set about the task of expanding his territory, one of his most accomplished generals also made a name for himself on the battlefield. A long-time associate of Taksin's, Chao Phya Chakri was victorious in the majority of his battle campaigns; one of his few defeats took place at Phitsanulok in 1776. Due to

famine and a lack of supplies, Chao Phya Chakri was forced to abandon Phitsanulok to the Burmese. According to W.A.R. Wood,

During this invasion Maha Sihasura expressed a desire to meet Chao Phya Chakri, whom he had found to be the toughest of his antagonists. A meeting was arranged, and the Burmese General, himself a very old man, was astonished to find that Chao Phya Chakri was only thirty-nine years of age. Maha Sihasura prophesied that Chao Phya Chakri was destined to wear the crown; a prophecy which came true approximately six years later.[14]

It should be noted that 'Chakri,' which designates the present dynasty, is a title rather than a family name. The title Chao Phya Chakri is found at various times in the history of Thailand. It is conferred upon a high-ranking military officer, who, upon accepting the title, will drop the name given to him at birth. The Chao Phya Chakri who served King Taksin was one of King Taksin's top military commanders. In 1778, he subdued Vientiane and removed the Emerald Buddha from Vientiane, taking it to Thonburi.

When Taksin acquired the Emerald Buddha, he placed it in a building near the site of Wat Arun, an action that has, curiously, been overlooked by many historians. The Emerald Buddha remained in Thonburi until Taksin's death. Alleged to have become insane, Taksin was removed as king and put to death by Chao Phra Chakri, who in turn ascended the throne. When Chao Phra Chakri assumed the title Rama I, he moved the site of the capital across the Menam Chao Phra to its present location in Bangkok. The Emerald Buddha also traveled across the river, very likely accompanied with pomp and circumstance. To house the image, Rama I constructed Wat Phra Keo.

After Rama I's ascent to the throne in 1782, he proclaimed a celebration to mark the site of the new capital. The dynastic chronicles note that the three-day celebration and festival also honored the Phra Sirattanasatsadaram Temple that housed the Emerald Buddha. Flood comments:

At the conclusion of the celebration, Rama I renamed the capital city to accommodate the name of the Buddhist statue of Phra Phuttharattanpatimakon; Krungthepmahanakhon Bawonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilokphop Noppharattanaratchathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amonphiman-awatansathit Sakkathattiyawisanukamprasit. This was to be the capital city that housed the Buddhist statue Phra Mahamanirattanapatimakon, made of the finest, most beautiful crystal. The statue indeed enhanced the honor of the king, who himself established this capital city of Krungthepmahanakhon.[15]

Wat Phra Keo (Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram)

The temple of the Emerald Buddha known in Thai as Wat Phra Keo is the most famous and perhaps the most beautiful wat in Thailand. The official name of Wat Phra Keo is Phra Sri Rattana Satsadaram, which translates into "the residence of the Holy Jewel Buddha." Wat Phra

Keo was built in 1784 by King Rama I and was constructed at the same time as the Grand Palace, which shares the grounds with Wat Phra Keo. Since its foundation in 1784, Wat Phra Keo has never been allowed to fall into decay.

The bot, or chapel, of the Emerald Buddha contains three small chambers on the west, twelve salas --four on the northern and southern sides and two on the eastern side and western sides. A tower, or belfry, is located on the south end of the structure, and there is also a small bot on the south-eastern corner next to the bot that houses the Emerald Buddha. The bot of the Emerald Buddha was constructed according to the standard plan of the majority of Thai temples but with the specific purpose of housing the Emerald Buddha.

The image of the Emerald Buddha sits upon an elaborate multi-terraced altar that is the focal point within the bot. The upper part of the altar, which was built during the original construction of the temple, rests upon a base added by King Rama III; on either side stand two images of the Buddha, said to personify the first two kings of the Chakri dynasty.[16]

The bot of the Emerald Buddha has not changed much since its construction, though its wood-work was replaced by King Rama III and King Chulalongkorn. The beautiful doors and windows of the bot, as well as the copper plates that cover the floor, were installed during the reign of King Mongkut. The wall paintings representing the universe according to Buddhist cosmology and the various reliefs depicting the various stages of the Buddha's life were partly restored under Rama III. The three chambers on the western side of the Bot were constructed by King Mongkut. The northern most chamber (Phra Kromanusorn) contains images of Buddha in remembrance of the kings of Ayuddhya, and the wall murals were painted by In Khong, a famous painter of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps due to their highly visible location at Wat Phra Keo, the best known Thai paintings are of the Ramakien, the Thai version of the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana. Originating in India well over 2,000 years ago, the Ramayana is a literary epic dealing with a reincarnation on earth of Visnu, destined in his rebirth to rid the world of demons. The Ramakien was written during the reign of Rama I (1782-1809). The 178 mural panels depicting the Ramakien at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha were also created during Rama I's reign and have received extensive restoration up to the present time.

While elaborate and colorful, the Ramakien murals also serve a didactic purpose, exemplifying virtues such as honesty, faith, and devotion. The story relates how the king of Ayuddhya, beset by the intrigues of one of his wives, banishes his son Rama to the forest. Rama is the reincarnation of Visnu on earth, and his beautiful wife Sita is the reincarnation of the goddess Lakshmi. The beauty of Sita comes to the attention of the ruler of Langka (Sri Lanka), the great demon Ravana or Tosakan. He kidnaps Sita and Rama, along with his brother Laksmana, must call upon Hanuman the White Monkey to help free Sita. In their devotion to Rama, Hanuman and his monkey army agree to attack Langka. It is also Hanuman who ultimately discovers and destroys Ravana's key to immortality by removing Ravana's heart from a box and allowing Rama to kill the demon.

Hanuman's loyalty is rewarded by Rama who builds a city in Hanuman's honor. According to the Ramakien, the site of Hanuman's new city was decided by the landing place of a magic arrow fired by Rama, and the boundaries of the town were determined by the circumference made by Hanuman's tail. According to Rita Ringus, Hanuman was reward with the city of Lopburi.[17] Today, Lopburi is the site of a festival honoring the monkeys residing at an old Khmer temple. Each year, these monkeys receive a bountiful buffet of fruits and vegetables.

After fourteen years of captivity in Langka, Sita was forced to prove her chastity through an ordeal by fire, in which she completed unharmed. Yet Rama remained unconvinced of his wife fidelity, and his suspicions were reinforced when he found a drawing of Ravana beneath Sita's bed. Rama's anger forced Sita to move to the forest where she gives birth to Rama's son. In succeeding years, Rama and his son, unaware of their relationship to each other, battled for control of the kingdom. In time, a recognition and understanding occurred, and father, mother, and son were finally united to live happily in Ayuddhya.

The story of the Ramakien is an elaborate and important part of the art-works displayed at Wat Phra Keo. While the origin of the Ramakien is Indian, the story has been assimilated by the Thai, and is known by the majority of the people of Thailand. Along with other works of art, the presence of the Ramakien murals reinforce the importance and meanings associated with the Emerald Buddha, which watches over all things associated with being Thai.

Continuing with the description of the bot of the Emerald Buddha, Rama I also placed twelve salas around the bot. Each contains fascinating remains brought from various regions, such as Cambodia and Java. Indeed, it was within one of these salas that the famous inscription of Ramkamhaeng resided, until it was moved to the National Library in 1924.[18]

A sala on the western side of the bot contains an important bronze image of a rusi, or hermit, said to have the power to healing the sick. The small chapel on the southwestern corner (Phra Gandhararaj) and the high belfry were both built during the reign of King Mongkut.[19] The buildings on the platform to the north of the Bot are occupied by a library and another small chapel in the northwest corner. The focus of this northern collection of structures is the Mahamandapa, a square pavilion erected by Rama I on the site of the ancient library, which was destroyed by fire upon its completion. This pavilion was built for the purpose of housing sacred scriptures and was restored by King Mongkut. The platform or terrace upon it which it stands was enlarged by King Mongkut.

At the same time, Mongkut also constructed the stupa Phra Sri Ratanachetiya, the building of which was completed by King Chulalongkorn, who adorned it with gold-colored tiles.[20] Also begun in 1855, the pantheon was originally planned as a special chapel for the Emerald Buddha but was later found to be too small for ceremonial purposes. Notton comments that the pantheon was renewed in 1903 after it had been partly destroyed by fire. During the reign of Rama VI, the king placed statues of his five ancestors in the pantheon to be worshipped at certain times of the year.

On the northern part of the terrace is a model of Angkor Wat that was begun by King Mongkut and completed by King Chulalongkorn. In the northeastern corner of the courtyard, the library, with its beautiful exterior and elaborate interior, was built by Rama I for storing sacred books. The magnificent bookcases of the library were made of lacquered wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, at the request of Rama I.

Besides all the structures that compliment Wat Phra Keo, there are also several guardian figures of more recent workmanship, bronze images of lions, elephants, oxen and monkeys. The nine towers standing in a row on the eastern side of the temple ground were erected by Rama I. The colors of the glazed tiles with which they are covered are different for each tower and correspond with the colors of the nine planets. Wat Phra Keo is clearly an appropriate showcase for the palladium of Thai society.

Description of the Emerald Buddha

The Emerald Buddha sits in the virasana position, a Yogic common meditation position for seated Buddha images in most of Thailand. Dorothy Fickle notes that "especially in southern India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, including Thailand, the right leg merely lies on top of the left leg in the 'hero pose' or virasana."[21] This contrasts with the 'adamantine' pose in which the legs are fully crossed, with each foot resting on the opposite thigh. The Emerald Buddha itself sits under a canopy on a high-tiered pedestal decorated with gold leaf.

The Emerald Buddha is 66 centimeters high, and its lap measures 48.3 centimeters.[22] The image has a round based, top-knot which is smooth, terminating in a dulled point marking the top of the image. The face of the Emerald Buddha has a gold third eye inset above its pronounced eyebrows. The eyes of the image are cast downward giving the image a placid appearance. The nose and mouth are small, and the mouth is closed. The ears are elongated, indicating the figure's divine status.

The torso of the image sits in an upright posture with smooth, rounded shoulders, an unpronounced chest, and a slightly protruding belly. The torso also appears to wear 'wet' drapery, with the robe clinging smoothly to it. The elbows of the statue almost rest on the thighs. The hands rest on the lap with the up-ward facing right palm resting in the palm of the left hand. This is the Dhyanamudra position indicating the 'Buddha of the West'. The Emerald Buddha was carved resting upon a platform, while this base itself rests on a gold lotus blossom.

Craftsmanship and Other Aspects

According to Hiram Woodward, the Emerald Buddha is an aerial image, associated with Indra's heaven.[23] The image has sometimes been linked to the Phra Sihing Buddha, which is a 'watery' image of Sri Lanka origin. It is possible that the Emerald Buddha was crafted in Sri Lanka, however, most art historians point to other locations of origin, with no general agreement.

Speculation on the craftsmanship has stirred controversy in the past. King Mongkut issued a declaration that the Emerald Buddha was made of jade and concluded from this that the stone used for the image had been brought from China. Challenging King Mongkut's interpretation has proved unpopular. For example, when one art historian contended that two famous Thai Buddha images, Phra Sihing Buddha and the Emerald Buddha, "were not as commonly thought, from India but were locally made," he was strongly criticized for causing confusion and undermining the fame and authenticity of the images.[24]

Surprisingly, Subhadradis does not provide an illustration of the Emerald Buddha and says nothing of its origins in his text on the subject. The renowned scholar of Thai art, Hiram Woodward, also makes no stylistic observations about the Emerald Buddha in his 1997 study. Lingat ascribes the image to the Chieng Saen School of the late fourteenth century and suggests that it may have been hewn out of a stone found in the Nan province, which has been analyzed as a variety of quartz.[25] Le May also feels that the Emerald Buddha is clearly of local manufacture and probably belongs, as Lingat suggests, to the Chieng Saen School.[26] Le May states that he is familiar with the greenish stone found in the Nan region, attributing his knowledge to the stone Buddha images available for purchase at local markets.

Basing his argument on stylistic grounds, Jean Boisselier contends that the image was probably not carved in Lanna. He notes that according to one tradition it arrived from Sri Lanka, while another says it came from South India. Yet, says Boisselier, art historians are not in the position to draw any definite conclusions about such an origin.[27] He believes that the Emerald Buddha is probably made of jasper, which is not a gem stone and which usually appears in the colors red, yellow or brown. It is worth noting, however, that the color green does not seem to be a feature of jasper.

Both Chieng Rai and Chieng Mai are along the trail that led from the Salween estuary into south-west Yunnan Province in China. Breazeale notes that the overland trade along this trail is very old and presumably pre-dates the founding of Chieng Rai. Despite some rapids, Chieng Mai was a relatively easy contact down-river with the gulf. Given these geographical links and the established fact that Chinese-style celadons were produced in the Sukhotai kingdom, Breazeale feels it is not inconceivable that the stone used to create the Emerald Buddha was brought to Lanna from a quarry in China or South Asia and that the sculptor likewise came from elsewhere.

The Significance of the Emerald Buddha

In Thailand, images of the Buddha, particularly stone or gem images, have long been associated with having special powers. Buddha images have also long served as objects of veneration and worship. They appear on small tables and altars in homes, schools, and temples; they are found in police courts where people are required to take oaths; various organizations make their pledges before them; and they appear in the committee rooms of provincial capitals where officials gather for services on national holidays. Kenneth Wells points out that "whenever a

chapter of monks performs a ceremony, as at a funeral of an important person or laying a cornerstone of a great building, an image of the Buddha is usually present and a sacred sincana cord is often attached and held by chanting monks."[28]

Images of the Buddha are brought out from their respective sites, to be carried in procession at times of drought. At Wat Si Ubon Rattanaram in Northern Thailand there is a priceless topaz Buddha image the size of a small table lamp which is used on occasion for a rain-making ceremony. Chieng Mai also houses two small images believed to possess rain-making powers. One of these Buddha images is made of quartz crystal and the other is made of grey stone said to be of Indian craftsmanship.

Buddha images were also brought out in procession during times of plague or epidemics. The Emerald Buddha itself has served to ward off the effects of epidemics. In the cholera epidemic of 1820, for example, the Emerald Buddha was taken from Wat Phra Keo and carried throughout Bangkok in both land and canal processions. Lingat notes that the 1820 epidemic was the worst in the history of Siam:

Corpses which there was no time to burn were heaped up in the monastery 'like stacks of timber' or else left to float about in the river and the canals. The people fled in a panic from the capital; the monks deserted the monasteries, and the whole machinery of government was at a standstill. The king even released the royal guard from their duties in the palace. There were great ceremonies of propitiation; the Emerald Buddha and the precious relics kept in the monasteries were taken out in procession through the streets, and on the canals of the city, attended by high dignitaries of the Church who scattered consecrated sand and water. The king and the members of the royal family maintained a rigorous fast. The slaughter of animals was completely forbidden, and the king caused all supplies of fish, bipeds, and quadrupeds, offered for sale, to be bought up in order that they might be liberated. All criminals, except the Burmese prisoners of war, were released from prison. The scourge abated at last after taking 30,000 victims within a few months.

Rama IV brought an end to the custom of removing the Emerald Buddha during times of epidemic for fear that it could suffer damage Also, Rama IV hoped that people would realize that diseases are caused by germs, not by evil spirits or the displeasure of the Buddha. After that point in history, a sacred cord was attached to the image so that ceremonies could take place outside of the temple on its behalf, without moving the image. By contrast, the Phra Sihing Buddha image, which is today located in the Buddhaisawan Chapel near the National Museum in Bangkok, is still removed from its site for short periods of time. During the Songkran festival in April, the Phra Sihing Buddha is taken out onto the Promenade Ground in front of the museum, where worshippers can sprinkle it with a few drops of water as a merit-making gesture.

Chao Phra Chakri is believed to have collected over twelve hundred Buddha images from around the country while serving under King Taksin. These images were brought to Bangkok and installed in temples that were built when Chao Phra Chakri ascended the throne. After being crowned Rama I, the new king installed a regnal image at the Royal Chapel, The Phra Chai

Buddha. Seated on an elaborate pedestal beneath a five-tiered umbrella, this 'Lord of Victory' image is depicted in 'the touching the earth' mudra and holds a fan before his face, which, as Dorothy Fickle points out, suggests the manner of a monk in Thai society.[29] The function of the Phra Chai image was to ensure victory in the field of battle for the ruler, thus it accompanied the king on all his military excursions.

It is believed that the older the image is, the more potent its power. In a temple containing several Buddha images, one or two in particular may be venerated for their unusual powers. Consecrated images are also believed to possess nana, or knowledge, which leads to release or transformation, and some images are even believed to have certain likes and dislikes. For example, the Phra Bang Buddha image was believed to have caused a series of disasters while it remained in the same city as the Emerald Buddha, and for this reason, Rama I finally returned it to Vientiane in 1782. In similar fashion, when the Phra Jinasi Buddha was removed from Pitsanulok and brought to Bangkok, the city suffered a three-year drought and the government official in charge of the image took ill and died.[30]

According to Sombot Phlainoi, the first six kings of the Chakri dynasty had their own regnal crystal Buddha images.[31] The practice of creating regnal images was discontinued when Rama VII died before his own consecration. It is still taboo to inquire after the king's health, and in the past, it was even forbidden to allude directly to the death of a king. Thus the term used to express this event is satec svargagata, 'to migrate to heaven.'[32]

Ritual Significance of the Emerald Buddha

While many ceremonies are performed throughout the year on the grounds of the Grand Palace, which encloses Wat Phra Keo, most of these only briefly acknowledge the presence of the Emerald Buddha. One such ceremony is Chakri Day, which allegedly began April 6, 1782. On this national holiday honoring the founding of the Chakri dynasty, the king takes a leading part in the ceremony. Rama IX, the present king of the Chakri dynasty is accompanied by the Queen, members of the royal family, the Premier, and officials in the Ministry of Defense and other government departments.

According to Kenneth Wells, the king and queen first pay homage to the Emerald Buddha, the palladium of the Chakri dynasty, in Wat Phra Keo. They then visit the pantheon, also on the grounds of the Grand Palace. It is at the pantheon where both the king and queen pay their respects to the images of previous Chakri rulers that have been enshrined there. Opened to the public only during the annual Chakri day commemoration, the small building is thronged by visitors throughout this day.[33]

Next, the Royal family stops at the statue of Rama I to pay their respects and lead a procession of dignitaries who leave wreaths at the site. The ceremony closes with the king lighting candles and paying homage to Buddha and his ancestors.

Quaritch Wales also notes a brief appearance by the Emerald Buddha in the coronation

ceremony. As part of his description of the coronation of Rama VI (King Prajadhipok), Wales records the Acceptance of the Headship of the Buddhist Religion:

During the coronation ceremony the king is carried in procession to the Chapel Royal (Wat Phra Keo). He wore a Great Crown while seated on the palanquin, but when on foot before mounting the palanquin, after leaving it, and while on his way to enter the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, he wore a Royal Hat. On entering the Chapel Royal the king made offerings of gold and silver flowers and lit candles before the Emerald Buddha and the images of Buddha representing the earlier kings of the dynasty. Then in full congregation of the higher clergy of the kingdom, he made a formal declaration of his religion and his willingness to become Defender of the Faith. [34]

The coronation ceremony was last performed by King Rama IX upon his assent to the throne. It is one of many ceremonies in which the king pays homage to the Emerald Buddha; however, today the number of times a king takes part in ceremonies that require homage to the Emerald Buddha has been reduced.

The Oath of Allegiance or the Drinking Water of Allegiance, in which the Emerald Buddha and other relics were honored, was once of great importance to the absolute monarchy.[35] But after the absolute monarchy was dissolved in 1932, this ceremony was no longer performed, having been replaced by Constitution Day. The Ceremony of the Expulsion of Disease was also ended by Rama IV after the cholera epidemic of 1820, thus eliminating its use in the future.

Today the most significant ceremony associated with the Emerald Buddha takes place three times a year. The king climbs up behind the grand pedestal that supports the Emerald Buddha and cleans the image by wiping away any dust that has collected and changing the headdress of the image. One of the king's royal attendants then ascends and changes the elaborate garments of the image while the king worships in silent prayer. As the designated Protector of the Faith, the king is the highest master of ceremonies for all Buddhist rites. Currently this distinction falls on Rama IX whose search for the meaning of life begins and ends within the power and influence of the charmed circle of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha goes through this ceremony in March, the hot season, July. the rainy season, and November, the cool season. Rama I introduced the ceremonies marking the change of seasons as well as providing the garments in which the Emerald Buddha is dressed. However, he only introduced the ceremony for the hot season and the rainy season. Rama III (King Chulalongkorn) introduced the ceremony for the cool season during his reign.

The hot season costume includes a pointed crown of gold and jewels, and a set of jeweled ornaments that are banded at various points on the body from the shoulders to the ankles. The rainy season costume is marked with a flaming top-knot headdress made of gold, enamel and sapphires. The gold robe is decorated with rubies and arranged with the robe draping over the left shoulder only, leaving the right shoulder bare. From the waist of the image down to the ankles, the image is covered with gold garments. The costume for the cool season introduced by Rama III is a mesh robe or covering made of gold beads. This elaborate garment covers the

entire body of the Emerald Buddha from the neck down and is draped like a poncho.

Political Significance

The Emerald Buddha's mystical origins, its desirability by past rulers seeking to legitimize power, and the powers attributed to older Buddha images, have all allowed the Emerald Buddha to become a potent religio-political symbol and the palladium of Thai society. The Emerald Buddha also serves to legitimize the power of the Chakri dynasty as well as its present king. The current king of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, has recently celebrated the fiftieth year of his reign. His legitimacy is reflected in his ability to defuse major crises in his country. In the recent past, the king has intervened to end crises between the military and students in October 1973, and most recently, in May 1992. Near the end of that May, the king ordered General Suchinda crawl on his knees in front of him, the media, and all the world, to shame Suchinda publicly. Broadcast over international television, this dramatic disgracing of an important military leader allowed the rest of the word to see the immense power the king of Thailand is still able to yield.

Although the king does not have any political or administrative power under the system of constitutional monarchy, his role in times of political crises has been crucial. The Thai people view him as a sacred and spiritual leader who serves as a symbol of unity. Because of this, the monarch remains above all conflicting political groups. Support from the monarchy remains an indispensable source of political legitimacy. A political leader or regime, even a popularly-elected government, cannot be truly legitimized without the king's blessing. The king is the caretaker of the Emerald Buddha, and the possession of the image itself symbolizes the legitimacy of the king. In turn, the Emerald Buddha brings prosperity to the land in which it is kept.

The legitimacy of power through the possession of the Emerald Buddha has not always been in the hands of the Chakri dynasty. When Prince Mahidol was out of the country there was no one to assume the role of King of Thailand, and in 1932, the monarchy lost its governing role in a coup d'état. A short time later, a youthful military leader gained the position as premier from Phraya Phahon. In 1938, Phibun Songkran was selected by the National Assembly to succeed Phahon. He held both the premiership and the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and in 1941 assumed the role of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. As a reward for winning the Indo-Chinese War against the French, Phibun was conferred the rank of field marshal in July 1941; he thus reached the summit of his military career at the relatively young age of forty-four.[36]

At the beginning of World War II, Phibun believed that Japan would emerge victorious at war's end. Thus, on December 14, 1942, he signed a secret agreement with the Japanese, committing Thai troops to Burma.[37] Judith Stowe writes that on December 21, matters were taken a step further by the conclusion of a formal treaty of alliance between the two Buddhist countries: "To emphasize its solemn and binding nature, the treaty was signed by Phibun and Tsubokami in front of the Emerald Buddha, considered the most sacred object in the whole of Thailand."[38]

By 1944, Phibun's campaign to urge people in Bangkok to leave the area drew suspicions that Phibun was deliberately abandoning the capital founded by the Chakri dynasty to promote his own royal ambitions. Indeed, Phibun drew up bills to have the capital moved to Petchaboon and construct a new Buddhist city at Saraburi, the place of his birth. Yet government officials were reluctant to move to Petchaboon because of its lack of infrastructure. Electricity, potable water supplies, stores, and telephones were non-existent, and the road to the site was still unfinished. According to Stowe, "The valley up which Petchaboon was situated was so insalubrious and inhospitable that thousands of conscript workers were dying of malaria, inadequate health care, and lack of food."[39] Yet Phibun remained undaunted by the mounting problems and loss of human life attributed to his project. He ordered the removal of all royal and national treasures to Petchaboon and the building of a grandiose new temple to house the Emerald Buddha. As Stowe notes,

To set the seal on these developments, Phibun intended to visit Petchaboon on April 23,1944, with the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhist Sangha for the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone of the new capital. But when the news of these plans was broadcast, it evoked comment from a Thai-language radio station based in India, which led Phibun to fear that the ceremony would be disrupted by an Allied bombing raid.[40]

In July of 1944, Phibun's bills for the construction of Saraburi were thrown out. Perhaps the Emerald Buddha had no plans of leaving Bangkok for the mosquito-infested land of Petchaboon. Yet Phibun managed to keep his colorful career going until 1957 with his once great ambitions kept to himself.

On February 23, 1991, the National Peace-Keeping Council announced the total seizure of power by the armed forces. Martial law was declared by Generals Sunthorn and Suchinda. The two generals flew to Chieng Mai to meet with the king and to gain his blessing for their new government. Rama IX granted the generals royal amnesty and endorsed their new government. The king's endorsement fended off any possible student protest and reassured foreign opinion. Elliott Kulick & Dick Wilson write that "over the next hours the final blessing came from the Supreme Patriarch of the Buddhist sangha, after which the two generals donned full dress uniform to go to the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha."[41] At Wat Phra Keo the two generals paid ceremonial respect to the Emerald Buddha, seeking final legitimacy for their fledgling government. In the presence of the Emerald Buddha each general swore to administer the Thai nation honestly and justly, for the well-being of the people of Thailand. The present government under Chuan Leekpai has also called upon the Emerald Buddha in the hope of raising the country out of its economic crisis and ensuring the stability of the new regime.

Conclusion

The palladium of Thai society continues to watch over the country. Perhaps in time the Emerald Buddha's mythical past will share more of its secrets. Interest amongst western scholars in the history of the Emerald Buddha seems to have peaked in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Much of

what we do know about the Emerald Buddha comes from Western government officials who took an interest in the history and culture of Thailand during their respective tours of duty.

The various annals or chronicles that speak of the creation and mystical travels of the Emerald Buddha have been found in the neighboring regions of present day Thailand. The presence of so many chronicles seems to indicate that there once was an original document from which the rest of the annals were created. It is possible that the Emerald Buddha, making its grand entrance in Chieng Rai, is a reproduction of a now lost version of the Emerald Buddha. For that matter, perhaps it is the great Buddha image that visited "five lands," as predicted by Nagasena.

The power of the Emerald Buddha seems to predate its discovery in Chieng Rai, making it a much coveted image among those who would count themselves as 'men of prowess' following its discovery. The Emerald Buddha was more than a mere spoil of battle. Along the its journey, the image gained fame for its power to bring prosperity to the kings and capitals in which it resided. Possession of the image gave and still gives legitimacy to those in power. The arrival of the Emerald Buddha to Bangkok marked the beginning of the rise of the Chakri dynasty. By taking the image across the Menam Chao Phra and building a temple to house it, Rama I validated himself as king and created the current capital of the country.

Speculation continues about the origin of the stone used and the craftsmanship of the Emerald Buddha, but the creation of images such as the Emerald Buddha do not reveal the artists behind the image. It seems common practice for the creators of Buddha images not to inscribe their identities, choosing instead to remain anonymous. The stone used could be traced to many regions, with some art historians believing that the stone and it manufacture were of local origin in northern Thailand. Some scholars have dated the iconography of the Emerald Buddha to the Chieng Saen period. Placing the stone in an earlier era and noting the less than gem-like qualities of the stone has created controversy in the past. Art historians studying the image have occasionally received a strong rebuke from those in high places in Thailand. It is important to note that none of these scholars has ever had a close look at the image, their ideas should therefore be received with reservation.

The magical powers linked with the Emerald Buddha have in the past been associated with the purging of evil spirits and disease. While no longer paraded in the streets, the image continues to be associated with the welfare of the country. Magical powers are also attributed to many Buddha images kept in Thailand. One of the more common powers associated with Buddha images is the ability to conjure up the rains in times of drought.

In recent times the Chakri dynasty has not been alone in seeking legitimacy through the Emerald Buddha. After 1932, when the monarchy was reduced to constitutional status, the many premiers who have sought political office have also gone to the Chapel Royal to gain symbolic legitimacy from the Emerald Buddha. During World War II, Phibun Songkram came very close to moving the Emerald Buddha away from the present capital to a new capital at Saraburi, his birthplace.

Last year Rama IX celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ascent to the throne. To mark the grand occasion, he was given a quartz crystal image of the Buddha. Rama IX's long career of meritorious works and defusing volatile situations in his country has strengthened his status as well as increased the potency and power of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha is the protector of the country, its significance resting upon its long history and Nagasena's prediction that it would bring prosperity and preeminence to each country in which it resides.

Notes

1 Marian Davies Toth, *Tales from Thailand* (Tokyo: Tuttle Company, 1982), 123.

2 Personal communication, Kennon Breazeale.

3 Camille Notton, *The Chronicle of The Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1933), 18.

4 Karen Schur Narula, *Voyage of the Emerald Buddha* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 26.

5 Narula 36-37.

6 *Emerald Buddha, Seat of the Center of Earth*, Directed by Timor Somogyi, Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1995.

7 Narula 55.

8 Personal communication with Dr. Breazeale.

9 Thadeus and Chadin Flood, *The Dynastic Chronicles Bangkok Era the First Reign* (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978), 66.

10 Flood 66.

11 Diskul Subhadradis, *The History of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha*, (Bangkok: Bureau of the Royal Household, 1982), 18.

12 Flood 67.

13 James Basche, *Thailand: Land of the Free*, (New York: Caplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), 23.

14 W. A. R. Wood, *A History of Siam*, (Bangkok: 1924), 266.

15 Flood 85.

16 Camille 3.

17 Rita Ringis, *Thai Temples and Temple Murals*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 151.

18 Camille 3.

19 Camille 3.

20 Camille 4.

21 Dorothy H. Fickle, *Images of the Buddha in Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8.

22 Abha Bhamorabutr, *The Grand Palace and The Temple of the Emerald Buddha* (Bangkok: Department of Corrections Press, 1984), 42.

23 Hiram W. Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand* (Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1997), 24.

24 Thongchai Winichakul, "New Histories in Thailand Since 1973," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Volume 26, Number 1. (March 1995): 113.

25 R. Lingat, "Le Culte du Bouddha d'Emerude," *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. XXVII (I). (1934): 37.

26 Reginald Le May, *A Concise History of Buddhist Art In Siam* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), 133.

27 Jean Boisselier, Jean-Michel Beurdeley & Hans Hinz, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 1987), 160.

28 Kenneth E. Wells, *Thai Buddhism Its Rites and Activities* (Bangkok: Suriyabun Publishers, 1975), 41.

29 Fickle 81.

30 Wells 40.

31 Sombot Phlainoi, *Tamnan Phra Chaiyawat Lae Phra Kaeo Pracham Ratchakan* (Bangkok: Chomrom Bamrung Bandit: Ruam San phuthaenchamnai, 1985), 91.

32 H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1992), 36.

33 Wells 243.

34 Wales 89-90.

35 Wales 193.

36 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier; Phibun through Three Decades 1932-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

37 Judith A. Stowe, *Siam becomes Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 228.

38 Stowe 228-229.

39 Stowe 283.

40 Stowe 228-229.

41 Elliott Kulick & Dick Wilson, *Thailand's Turn* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 8.

Explorations
in
Southeast Asian Studies
A Journal of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association
Vol 3 **Fall 1999**

Contents Article 1 Article 2 Article 3 Article 4

Vietnamese Claims to the Truong Sa Archipelago [Ed. Spratly Islands]

Todd C. Kelly

Todd C. Kelly graduated from the M.A. program in Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in August 1999.

Notes

There is a tide in the affairs of men[1]

On a string of mere flyspeck islands in the middle of the high seas, the military forces of five nations stand arrayed against one another, each prepared to do battle with the others. The land these potential belligerents seek to control is barely any land at all, but rather a group of tiny rocks, many of which are frequently under water. No humans have ever settled there, and for centuries the only nations that knew of their existence recognized them primarily as a hazard to maritime navigation. How then did this chain of islets, which the nations of Asia and the world considered insignificant for so long, suddenly become so important that battles have been fought over them and countries continue to risk war in order to control the chain? The answers are as difficult to see as are the Truong Sa Islands themselves at high tide.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is one of the six nations[2] that has laid claim to the Truong Sa archipelago. While all the claimant countries have publicly asserted that each should be the legitimate and sole sovereign of all or part of the archipelago, it is Vietnam that has been one of the most adamant in its claims and that has taken assertive steps in attempting to establish its control over the chain. Its willingness to go so far as to risk war with the mighty People's Republic of China (PRC) is evidence enough that the Truong Sa Islands are extremely important to Vietnam. But why? What are the historical, political, legal, economic, and strategic basis of Vietnam's sovereignty claims to the Truong Sa archipelago, and why is control of these islands so

important to Hanoi?

This paper presents the arguments Vietnam has put forth to substantiate its claims to the islands. It is not intended to validate those arguments but merely to examine the Vietnamese perspective on this issue. To that end, several primary sources--i.e., Vietnamese government documents--have been used for this study. Since these sources are official position papers or policy statements (White Papers) published by Hanoi, their objectivity may be questioned. Whenever possible, information drawn from these documents will be cross-referenced with non-Vietnamese academic works.

The majority of Vietnamese primary sources not only argue Hanoi's case for sovereignty over the Truong Sa but also attempt to refute the claims of other countries, particularly those of China. This repeated countering of Chinese arguments is clearly a result of Beijing's and Taiwan's actions regarding the archipelago, especially in the latter half of this century; but these rebuttals are also indicative of a larger adversarial issue: the historical relationship between Vietnam and China.

The Context of the Dispute

The pasts of the Vietnamese and Chinese peoples have been intertwined since their histories began. Indeed, the prevalent theory about Vietnamese origins is that the original inhabitants of northern Vietnam were descendants of the Yueh migration from southern China. Despite these common beginnings, independent civilizations developed during the Vietnamese pre-historical period, known as Dong-song.

That independent relationship would eventually change, however, at least for Vietnam (known as Van Lang until after 258 B.C.). Since the first Chinese conquest of the Vietnamese kingdom by Trieu Da in 208 B.C.E., there have been at least four periods when China occupied and ruled the 'land of the southern barbarians,'[3] as well as countless other minor invasions and incursions into Vietnam. This historical relationship produced a rather schizophrenic result: generations of Chinese rule introduced technologies, traditions, and advances--such as a written language--that had long-lasting effects on Vietnamese civilization and served to foster closer ties between the two peoples. Yet an independent and nationalistic spirit survived among the people of Vietnam.

This Vietnamese identity, cognizant of its distinctiveness from the Chinese identity, fueled resentment of outside rule and manifested itself through recurring struggles against the perceived occupation of Vietnam's territories by foreign powers--especially China. When viewed through the context of this historical dynamic, the dispute over the Truong Sa Islands appears as a microcosm of the age-old conflict between these two neighbors. To see how this is so, it is important to examine the islands themselves and their role throughout history.

The Truong Sa Islands

The countries disputing the Truong Sa archipelago can rarely find agreement on any issue relating to the island chain, and this includes what to call the disputed islets. Therefore, a brief discussion of the naming convention to be used in this analysis is in order. Throughout this study, the Vietnamese names for the archipelago and its features will be used except where quotation material preclude such reference. Since Vietnam has yet to publish a complete list of names for all the features of the Truong Sa archipelago,[4] the English names will be used whenever there is no known Vietnamese equivalent.

Located in the East Sea (called the South China Sea outside of Vietnam), the Truong Sa archipelago is best known in the West as the Spratly Islands. The area is also frequently referred to as the "Dangerous Ground" because of its hazards to maritime navigation. To both the PRC and the ROC (Republic of China, Taiwan), the islands are known as the Nansha archipelago.

The islands claimed by the Philippines, which do not include the entire Truong Sa archipelago, are called the Kalaya'an Island Group by Manila.[5] While Malaysia maintains Malay names for the islands and features it occupies, Kuala Lumpur's claims also do not include the entire chain, and thus no attempt has been made to rename the whole archipelago. Similarly, Brunei asserts that it is entitled to sovereignty over only two reefs, not the entire chain.[6]

The Truong Sa archipelago incorporates some five actual islands, three cays, 26 reefs, 21 shoals, and ten banks. Only 25 - 35 of these islets are known to be above water at low tide.[7] The largest island in the chain is Dao Thai Binh (also known as Dao Ba Binh), with a total area of .46 square kilometers and a maximum elevation of about 15 feet[8] Truong Sa Island itself is a mere 500 meters long by 300 meters wide with an above sea level elevation of less than eight feet.[9]

Given the minuteness of the Truong Sa Islands, it is not surprising that the archipelago has never supported any indigenous or permanent human settlements apart from the military occupations that began this century. However, the archipelago has been used as a temporary encampment, primarily by fishers, for centuries. In fact, when French naval forces took possession of the Truong Sa Islands in 1933, Chinese fishermen were found on several of the islets in the chain.[10] If no Vietnamese people are native to these islands, then why does Vietnam claim that the archipelago is as dear "to Vietnamese hearts . . . as could be any other part of the fatherland"?[11] The answer lies in the historical relationship between Vietnam and the Truong Sa chain.

"From Time Immemorial"[12]

While the Truong Sa Islands had been utilized for centuries by fishers from various countries, especially from Vietnam and China, the question remains as to which people first discovered the archipelago. Most agree that the Chinese were probably the first to find the islands,[13] although Vietnam contends that "not only the Chinese, but also the Vietnamese, the Malays, the Persians, the Arabs . . . made voyages to and from the waters of the . . . Truong Sa," and that any of these groups could have "discovered" the chain.[14] Vietnam has also declared that "even if it is true that the Chinese discovered these archipelagos," Hanoi will continue to refute China's claim

because discovery alone does "not constitute a legal basis for the Chinese claim that they have been under Chinese jurisdiction."[15]

Regardless of which nation actually discovered the islands, Vietnam maintains that it alone exercised the earliest authority and control over the Truong Sa archipelago. Until the 17th century, no written documents existed to prove this assertion. The first mention of Vietnamese exercise of sovereignty over the island chain appears in an annotated atlas written between 1630 and 1653. Although a 17th century document, textual analysis--including "historical references and linguistic style"--indicates that this early contact with the islands actually began some 200 years earlier, under the reign of King Le Thanh Tong [1460 - 1497].[16] It was during this period that the Vietnamese began to "organize the exploitation" of both the Truong Sa and the Hoang Sa Archipelago farther to the north.[17] This exploitation consisted of harvesting "valuable sea-products" and conducting salvaging operations to collect cargoes from vessels shipwrecked in the treacherous waters of the Truong Sa.[18] Because of these state-sponsored economic activities, the Le dynasty considered the archipelago to be part of Vietnamese territory.[19]

This de facto sovereignty over the Truong Sa chain is confirmed by European sources. Portuguese and Dutch maps drawn by navigators in the early 17th century identify the islands as Vietnamese.[20] It is important to note, however, that these early maps identify the islands as the Pracel or Parcel archipelago and locate them "in the middle of the East Sea, East [sic] of Vietnam, off the Vietnamese coastal islands."[21] According to Vietnam, the apparent error in positioning the islands was due to the relatively primitive scientific and navigational technology of the time. In addition, the Europeans grouped both the Truong Sa and Hoang Sa archipelagoes together into a single island chain called the Paracels.[22] This imprecision in differentiating the two archipelagoes is consistent with Vietnamese records from the period. Until the 19th century, both islands groups were known by the common name of Bai Cat Vong, also sometimes referred to simply as "Hoang Sa."[23] Regardless of the nomenclature differences, it was during the 17th century that the Truong Sa were placed under the administration of the Binh Son district within the Quang Nghia prefecture of Vietnam. Route Maps from the Capital to the Four Directions by Do Ba Cong Dao provides documentation of sovereignty over the Truong Sa archipelago, the first Vietnamese documentation of formal exercise of authority over the Truong Sa.[24]

Economic exploitation of Truong Sa resources continued through the reign of the Nguyen Lords and their successors, the Tay Son. Aside from harvesting the natural and man-made treasures from these islands, the Vietnamese state also conducted geographical and resource surveys in the archipelago. Descriptions of Bai Cat Vang islands, sea products such as turtles and conch shells, and references to foreign shipwrecks fare found in period documents and surveys, including Miscellaneous Records on the Pacification of the Frontiers written in 1776.[25]

State-sponsored occupation of the islands can also be traced to the reign of the Nguyen lords. Salvaging operations became formalized with the establishment of the Hoang Sa detachments or brigades, units comprised of 70 men from the village of An Vinh, the recruitment and organization of which were regulated by the Vietnamese government. These units sailed each March to the Bai Cat Vang island groups to retrieve shipwrecked goods and would normally

remain in the archipelago for up to six months each year. Descriptions of these teams and their activities are found in documents dating from the 1600s, which chronicle such operations into the Nguyen Dynasty in the 19th century.[26] This annual occupation of the archipelagoes is the first documented instance of state-organized physical sovereignty over the Truong Sa.

During the reign of the Nguyen emperors, beginning in 1802, documentation was produced that distinguished the Truong Sa archipelago from the Hoang Sa Islands and identified both as Vietnamese possessions. In 1836, emperor Minh Mang received a report from his Ministry of Public Works that recommended a comprehensive survey of all the East Sea islands because of their "great strategic importance to our maritime borders."[27] The emperor concurred. As a result of these exploration missions, Phan Huy Chu published the "Detailed Map of the Dai Nam," circa 1838. The map "expressly mentioned the Spratlys, under the name Van Ly Truong Sa, as part of Vietnamese territory, although the archipelago was not located at its proper place because of the use of ancient geographic techniques."[28] It was also during these years that European ships frequented the East Sea. With regard to the Truong Sa chain, some European vessels "even made surveys and designated names, as if discovering them for the first time."[29] Nevertheless, the Nguyen dynasty continued to exercise jurisdiction over the Truong Sa Islands without protest from any country until the French protectorate was established over Vietnam in 1884.[30]

The French Colonial Era

On 6 June 1884, France consolidated her occupation of Vietnam, which began in 1852, by forcing the Nguyen Dynasty to sign the Patenotre Treaty.[31] Under terms of that agreement, France was to represent Vietnam's interest in foreign affairs and was "bound to protect Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity."[32] The French began to conduct patrol trips of the East Sea, especially in the area of the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa islands in order "to ensure security and committed customs ships to combating smuggling."[33] French forces exercised further sovereignty over the Truong Sa archipelago on behalf of Vietnam through a 1927 scientific survey of the islands, which was conducted by the crew of the SS De Lanessan. A second expedition to the islands was launched in 1930. During this mission of the ship La Malicieuse , "the French flag was hoisted on the highest point of an island called ile de la Tempete."[34] The mission witnessed the first recorded instance of a sovereignty marker placed on any Truong Sa features. It is interesting to note, however, that the French found Chinese fishermen already present on the island when they arrived but did not attempt to evict them.

In 1933, possibly with an eye toward an increasingly militaristic Japan, the government of France decided to formalize its jurisdiction over the Truong Sa Islands by taking physical possession of the archipelago. Three ships, including the De Lanessan from the original 1927 expedition, sailed to Truong Sa Island to officially establish sovereignty. H. Cucherousset documented the act:

The three vessels first of all visited Spratly and confirmed French possession by means of a document drawn up by the Captains, and placed in a bottle which was subsequently embedded

in cement . . . . Then the Astrolabe sailed south west to a point 70 miles from Spratly and 200 miles from Borneo, and arrived at the caye (sandy island) of Amboine, at the northern extremity of the Bombay Castle Shallows. Possession was taken of the island in the manner related above . . . . The Alerte for its part visited the Thi-Thu reef, at about 20 miles north of the Loaita bank, and took possession of an island and of this atoll, still by means of the same ritual.[35]

In all, French forces took control of nine of the major islands in the archipelago--including Dao Ba Binh, the largest island in the group--during this expedition. On 26 July 1933 France published an official "Notice concerning the occupation of certain islands by French naval units." The notice listed the features possessed by France and stated that the islands would "henceforth come under French sovereignty."[36]

Today the Vietnamese government asserts that only Japan protested the 1933 French sovereignty claims, but evidence exists to support the Chinese position that their country had begun to contest France's jurisdiction a year before. In September 1932 China sent a memorandum to the French government contesting France's sovereignty over the Truong Sa. The argument was based on the Chinese interpretation of the 1887 Sino-French Convention, which delineated the boundary between Vietnam and China. According to the Convention, a straight red line was drawn along the 108 degrees 3 minutes 13 seconds East longitude line from the mainland coast and extending southward through the Bac Bo Gulf. "The Convention specifically states that islands located to the east of this line belong to China and islands lying west of it belong to Annam," but the terminus of the red line was left undefined.[37] In his book The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute, Pao-min Chang made this analysis of the red line ambiguity:

To terminate it at the Vietnamese coast would confine its applicability to the [Bac Bo] Gulf, or, in a more liberal sense, to the entire sea area off Vietnam . . . the second interpretation also allows one to apply the red line to all the islands in the seas off Vietnam.[38]

It was the more liberal interpretation of the accords that the Chinese adopted and which gave rise to their claim of sovereignty over the Truong Sa. Following China's protest, France briefly engaged in diplomacy over the issue with Peking, but the effort did not produce a solution. Seven months later, the 1933 French expedition to the Truong Sa Archipelago was launched amid continued Chinese protests.[39]

Japan also disputed the 1933 French announcement, citing historical evidence of phosphate mining in the Truong Sa by private Japanese citizens.[40] The French authorities not only rejected Tokyo's protest but went one step further by annexing the major islands in the archipelago to Ba Ria Province on 21 December 1933. Continued scientific surveys of the archipelago and the construction of a meteorological station on Dao Thai Binh Island furthered French colonial control of the Truong Sa Islands.[41] The Dao Thai Binh weather facility was listed by the World Meteorological Organization as located in "Cochinchina" (French Vietnam).[42]

World War II and the "Germs of Discord"

On 4 April 1939, the Japanese government issued a statement announcing its decision to "place the Spratly or Tempest islands off the coast of Indochina under Japanese jurisdiction."[43] The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs "protested energetically" in response to the Japanese decree, [44] and France's European ally, the United Kingdom, supported this protest. Three days after the Japanese announcement, the British Foreign Under-secretary Butter articulated his government's position that France exercised full sovereignty over the Spratly archipelago and that "all matters relevant to these islands were a French concern."[45] Tokyo did not immediately move to enforce its sovereignty claim, and France continued to exercise control over the islands through a resident administrative officer and a guard detachment stationed on Dao Thai Binh Island.[46] By 1941, however, Japan was in a position to forcibly occupy the Truong Sa archipelago--and France was in no position to stop it. Japanese troops landed on the islands that year and remained in control of the archipelago until the end of the war.[47]

Under Japan's occupation of the Truong Sa chain, the island of Dao Ba Binh became especially significant in Japanese military operations in the East Sea and Island Southeast Asia. A submarine base was established at the island, which became a staging area to intercept Allied shipping.[48] Its proximity to the Philippine Islands also made Dao Thai Binh an ideal "jumping-off point" for the Japanese invasion of the Philippines.[49] Japan did not restrict itself only to military control of the Truong Sa Archipelago, however. For political administration, the island chain was incorporated into the territory of Taiwan, which was then a Japanese possession.[50] Both the ROC and the PRC have since pointed to this formalization of Taiwanese (and thus Chinese) sovereignty over the Truong Sa group to strengthen their claim to the islands.

Japanese control of the archipelago ended with their defeat in 1945. Yet as the Empire of the Sun set, renewed controversies rose over the Truong Sa. Both France and China articulated their claims to the archipelago, and China sent troops to the Truong Sa Islands for the first time. In response to the Chinese landing forces and erecting sovereignty markers on Dao Ba Binh, France dispatched warships on several occasions to the archipelago, beginning in November 1946.[51] The following year France demanded the withdrawal of all Chinese troops from the East Sea islands but did not take any steps to forcibly evict them from the archipelago.[52] Other events were soon to preoccupy these two nations, as the Communists triumphed in the Chinese Civil War and France began to lose control of her colonies around the world. By 1948 France permanently ceased its maritime patrols of the Truong Sa and all but a small contingent of ROC troops departed the archipelago.[53]

The first post-war assertion of sovereignty by the Vietnamese themselves came at the 1951 San Francisco Conference on the Peace Treaty with Japan. On 7 July 1951 the head of the Vietnamese delegation, Tran Van Huu, addressed the conference on the issue of Truong Sa:

As we must frankly profit from all the opportunities offered to us to stifle the germs of discord, we affirm our rights to the Spratly and Paracel islands, which have always belonged to Vietnam. [54]

This statement "met with no challenge or reservation from any representative of the 51 nations at the conference."[55] However, while not specifically protesting against the Vietnamese declaration, the Soviet Union did introduce an amendment to the Peace Treaty stating in part that "Japan recognizes full sovereignty of the Chinese People's Republic over . . . the Spratly, and renounces all right, title, and claim to the territories named herein."[56] The amendment was defeated when it was ruled out of order, indicating to Vietnam that "Chinese claims to the Paracels and Spratlys were thus overwhelmingly disregarded."[57]

In the final peace treaty Japan renounced "all right, title, and claim to the Spratly Islands," but the signed document failed to specify to which country the islands were ceded.[58] Vietnam chose to sign the treaty as it was without attempting to clarify its sovereignty over the Truong Sa Islands; rather, Vietnam let Tran's statement to the Conference suffice.[59] No further attempts to exercise sovereignty over the islands were made by Vietnam until 1956, when a Filipino businessman made an announcement that surprised all parties concerned.

The Plot Thickens

Director of the Maritime Institute of the Philippines Tomas Cloma issued a "Proclamation to the Whole World" on 15 May 1956. In it he claimed "ownership, by discovery and occupation, of all the territory, 33 islands, sand cays, sand bars, coral reefs and fishing grounds of 64,976 square nautical miles" within the Truong Sa Archipelago.[60] Cloma called this portion of the chain Kalaya'an or 'Freedomland,' and appointed himself the Chair of the Supreme Council.[61]

This new claim spurred Vietnam and the Chinese to action. Saigon, Beijing, and Taipei all reiterated their respective sovereignty claims to the Truong Sa Islands and unanimously protested the Filipino's actions. Furthermore, naval units from Vietnam and the ROC were dispatched to the archipelago, precipitating mutual Vietnamese and Chinese protests. Yet, though Vietnamese forces made landings on Truong Sa Island, Vietnam established no permanent garrison in the island group.[62] However, the Republic of Vietnam officially annexed the entire Truong Sa Archipelago and placed it under the administration of Phuoc Tuy Province on 22 October 1956.[63]

During this period, Saigon no longer spoke for all of Vietnam. By late 1956, the country split into the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the north and the pro-Western Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in the south. As a fledgling communist state, the DRV found itself allied with the PRC as "comrades and brothers."[64] Therefore, in 1956, the DRV was placed in the uncomfortable position of either deferring to its newfound Chinese friends and their claims to the Truong Sa Islands or supporting the sovereignty claims of a hostile RVN over a distant part of Vietnam. Hanoi chose to abdicate its claim.

On 15 June 1956, two weeks after the RVN reiterated the Vietnamese claims to the Truong Sa Islands, the DRV Second Foreign Minister told the PRC Charge d'Affaires that "according to Vietnamese data, the Xisha and Nansha Islands are historically part of Chinese territory."[65]

Two years later, the PRC made a declaration defining its territorial waters. This declaration delineated the extent of Chinese territory and included the Truong Sa. In response, the DRV Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, sent a formal note to PRC Premier Zhou Enlai stating that "The Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam respects this decision."[66]

Despite the DRV's "abdication" of the islands, the RVN continued to assert Vietnamese sovereignty over the archipelago for the next two decades. Saigon's exercise of jurisdiction took various forms, including the placement of sovereignty markers on Truong Sa, An Bang, Song Tu Tay, and other major islands in the chain from 1961 - 1963. Additional scientific surveys were conducted on the islands in 1973.[67] Every time a country issued a claim against the Truong Sa Islands, including the claims that issued by Malaysia beginning in 1971), it was met with an official protest from the RVN. Furthermore, several statements about Vietnam's legitimacy of ownership of the archipelago were made to international organizations, and the first White Paper--an official government statement of position or policy--was issued after the PRC conquered the Hoang Sa Islands in 1974.[68]

In 1976, Vietnam reunified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Within a year the new government reaffirmed its claim: the Truong Sa archipelago belongs to Vietnam. But as the decade drew to a close, new challenges to Vietnam's claim were beginning: a 1978 Philippines Presidential Decree outlined Manila's claims to the islands, and Malaysia published a map of its continental shelf claim that encompasses 12 features of the Truong Sa chain in 1979.[69] With outside claims mounting, Hanoi published a new White Paper entitled Vietnam's Sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos, which again outlined the Vietnamese position and discounted the claims of disputing parties--in particular, those of the PRC. Hanoi's and Beijing's attention was soon focused on a different territorial dispute, however, as the two countries went to war over their mutual land border on 17 February 1979.

Buildup to the Current Situation

By the early 1980's, the claimant countries to the Truong Sa Islands began to feel that actions would speak louder than words. Even while publishing another White Paper in 1982 to further articulate its claims, Vietnam quietly began to occupy several islets in the archipelago and to construct military installations, including an airstrip upon Truong Sa Island.[70] Vietnam was not alone. The Philippines occupied a half dozen features and constructed a 5,500-foot landing strip on Dao Thi Tu. Malaysia also enforced its claim by landing troops on Da Hua Lau in 1983. [71] Yet, despite the military build-up in the islands, conflict did not appear imminent.

Then the PRC arrived. Beginning in 1985, Beijing assumed a renewed interest in the archipelago that coincided with its naval modernization program. By 1987, the PRC Navy began conducting patrols in the waters of the Truong Sa and had even gone so far as to stage a mock amphibious assault on one of the features. Alarmed at this militaristic approach, Vietnam became warned Beijing that such violations of Vietnamese sovereignty would carry "disastrous consequences."[72] For its part, the PRC occupied and began building its first permanent base on Da Chu Thap. Vietnam also continued to occupy features throughout the chain, and by March

1988 Hanoi had troops on 18 islets.[73]

Vietnam did not want to see a PRC base become operational in the Truong Sa archipelago. Given its relative strength in the islands, Hanoi decided that the time had come to stifle Beijing's expansion in the East Sea. On 14 March 1988, the first and only battle over Truong Sa sovereignty occurred. Disagreements exist over which side initiated hostilities, but a gun battle began between PRC and Vietnamese forces after the Chinese landed on Da Gac Ma.[74] When the smoke cleared, three Vietnamese ships were ablaze, 70 Vietnamese troops were dead, and the PRC emerged as victor.[75]

Vietnam did not back down, however. It deployed more than 30 vessels to the Truong Sa archipelago, increased reconnaissance flights over the islands, and occupied three more islets. Determined to hold its ground, Hanoi "warned Beijing that in spite of its massive economic woes, diplomatic isolation, and other internal problems, Vietnam was not going to let the disputed islands go without a fight."[76] This increased military assertiveness by the Vietnamese continued for the remainder of the 1980s, with the Chief of Vietnam's General Staff eventually visiting the archipelago to commemorate the Socialist Republic's liberation of the Truong Sa from the RVN in 1975. While on Dao Nam Yit, he pledged that his country would defend the chain "by all means."[77] Despite the increased tensions, no further fighting occurred.

Vietnam also continued to exercise sovereignty over the islands through more diplomatic methods. A population survey was conducted on the Vietnamese-controlled islets, presumably due to increased civilian settlement in the archipelago. The first organized fishing fleet was dispatched to the region to exploit the East Sea fisheries in the region. Several civilian installations were also constructed, including scientific stations and lighthouses.[78]

While the Vietnamese government continued to publicly reiterate its sovereignty claims and refute all others, it also entered into negotiations over the issue. Indonesia began sponsoring a series of dialogues in the early 1990's to bring together all claimants of the islands to discuss the issue for the first time.[79] In addition Vietnam and the PRC entered into bilateral talks on multiple occasions to discuss territorial disputes, including those concerning the Truong Sa.[80] Today Hanoi continues to repeat its call for "open talks for the settlement of differences concerning the Truong Sa archipelago"[81] and has even indicated that it would accept arbitration by the International Court of Justice on the matter.[82] Despite these efforts, the normalization of relations with the PRC in 1991, and Vietnam's admission to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1995, no agreement has been reached over the islands.

Basis for the Vietnamese Claims

Clearly, Vietnam has had a long historical relationship with the Truong Sa Islands. The Vietnamese history of occupation, exploitation of resources, and administrative control over the archipelago has its earliest recordings in the 1600's, but Vietnam's contact with the chain likely began well before this documentation. This centuries-old exercise of authority over the Truong Sa gives rise to one of Hanoi's legal claims to the features under the principle of terra nullius, or

"land belonging to no state."[83] According to international law, a state can occupy and therefore own such territory, which is exactly what Vietnam claims it did at least as far back as the 17th century: "The state of Vietnam took effective possession of the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagoes long ago when they were not under the sovereignty of any nation."[84]

Beyond simple occupation, Vietnam points to its historical exercise of control and authority over the island chain. The first recorded instance of this formal sovereignty was the placement of the island group under the administrative authority of the Binh Son district in the 1600's. The pre-colonial Vietnamese governments continued to exercise the state's official, unchallenged control of the archipelago for the next two hundred years. Even after France took control of Vietnam by virtue of the 1887 Treaty, authority over the Truong Sa was maintained and consolidated by the European power on behalf of the Vietnamese state. The French annexation of the islands to Vietnam provides a modern validation of Hanoi's administrative sovereignty claims.[85]

After Japan renounced her claims to the islands following World War II, the RVN further exercised sovereignty over the Truong Sa through its claims to international organizations, protests against assertions of foreign rights in the islands, occupation of the archipelago, and the re-annexation of the chain in 1956. Saigon's heir, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, has continued to maintain Vietnamese sovereignty to the point of military conflict to defend Hanoi's authority in the Truong Sa Islands. This history of asserting and reinforcing its claims lead the Vietnamese government to proclaim:

The state of Vietnam has always actively defended its rights and titles against all schemes and acts of encroachment upon the sovereignty, territorial integrity and interests of Vietnam in connection with the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagoes.[86]

While Vietnam's history forms the basis for its claims to the Truong Sa, it is the current situation in the archipelago that strengthens Hanoi's case. Vietnam now occupies as many as 24 features, more than twice as many as any other claimant to the islands.[87] At least five of these features have troops stationed on them, totaling approximately "1,000 soldiers or sailors and some construction workers," according to a 1992 Reuters report.[88] Such de facto control often outweighs even the most convincing historical arguments.

One other basis for Vietnam's claims to the Truong Sa derives from the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention. Article 76 of that agreement is the internationally-accepted definition of the continental shelf. Under terms of this Article, maritime nations may claim exclusive economic zones at sea of up to 200 nautical miles from their baseline shores. Further, such nations may "claim the resources of . . . naturally-extending [continental] shelves out to a maximum distance of 350 [nautical miles]."[89] Since Vietnam believes the Truong Sa Islands do not generate either exclusive economic zones nor continental shelves of their own, its position is that the claimant states "should be entitled to a full 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone generated from its main coastal or large-island land areas, and that the high seas area beyond 200 [nautical miles] should be governed by the International Sea-Bed Authority."[90] Although such a claim places only a few of the Truong Sa Islands within Vietnam's zone (and many of the

eastern features in the zones of other claimants, the Vietnamese still maintain their sovereignty claims to the entire archipelago. Therefore, each of the islands would still be Vietnamese--each with an accompanying 12 nautical mile territorial water zone--regardless of the economic zone into which they fell. Furthermore, Vietnam claims its 350 nautical mile continental shelf extending southeastward from its mainland shore toward the Truong Sa group. Vietnam is also not opposed to this provision for other claimants, since the East Palawan Trough and other sea floor geography do not justify the same continental shelf claim toward the Truong Sa by Malaysia, Brunei, or the Philippines.

Vietnam's Interests

The Vietnamese have made it very clear that their nation has a great deal of historical and legal justification for its claims to the Truong Sa Islands. However, the question remains: Is this group of tiny and apparently insignificant islets worth the political effort, expenditure of resources, and the risk of war with the PRC? What are Vietnam's interests in the archipelago? The answer is as tangible as a barrel of oil and as nebulous as a nation's psyche.

In the wake of the 1973 world oil crisis, the RVN issued oil exploration permits to foreign corporations to survey the East Sea, including the area near the Truong Sa Islands, for potential undersea reserves.[91] In 1975, the first oil strike off the Vietnamese coast was announced. For the next dozen years, speculation over the potential for oil in the Truong Sa archipelago was rampant. Yet it was not until November 1987 that any claim of oil discovery surfaced. It was then that the PRC revealed that a survey had uncovered rich oil and gas deposits in the Truong Sa area.[92]

The current view is that oil reserves in the Truong Sa group is likely modest, but the geologic information is still not sufficient for a comprehensive assessment. The PRC estimated reserves of 225 billion barrels of oil equivalent in 1994, but a Russian study the following year stated that the total was only six billion barrels equivalent (70% of which would be natural gas). Major oil companies are also pessimistic, though it is a common tactic for petroleum corporations to downplay the size of new discoveries in order to elicit more favorable exploitation contract terms. Regardless of the size of the reserves, Vietnam hired VietSovpetro in 1994 to begin drilling in a region of the Truong Sa that the PRC had conceded to the Crestone Corporation in 1992. Given the more recent conservative assessments of oil reserves in the archipelago, Vietnam may be less interested in black gold than in reasserting its authority, and therefore claim, in the area and thwarting another PRC attempt to exercise control.[93]

Oil is not the only resource the Truong Sa has to offer. Natural gas reserves in the area are estimated at 0.1 - 1.0 trillion cubic feet, with a 1990 U.S. dollar value of $0.25 - $2.5 billion. As is evidenced by the archipelago's history, fishing has traditionally been another area of economic potential for the Truong Sa. A 1993 estimate put the total marine catch for the disputed chain at 10.0 - 99.9 kilograms per kilometer.[94] Control of the continental shelf and the archipelago itself would place Vietnam in a prime position to exploit these resources.

Yet control of the resources beneath the East Sea may not be as important as controlling the resources that pass through it. Some of the world's most important commercial (as well as military) sea lanes, or maritime routes, pass through the East Sea; Mark Valencia has called the region "a nexus of maritime routes."[95] Not only a great deal of Asia's trade, but also much of the entire world's commerce travels along these sea lanes, including over 25% of the world's crude oil, and in particular, the flow between the Persian Gulf and Japan.[96] The ability to affect such vital economic flows as these maritime routes creates a strategic empowerment for any country that can disrupt or ensure this trade. Given Vietnam's desire to expand its economy, maintaining the free flow of commerce is within Hanoi's strategic interest. As one Vietnamese military officer put it, "Security insurance at sea in the sense of creating a stable environment for national . . . development [bears] a long-term and pressing significance, particularly in the context of countries [preparing] to step into the 21st century."[97] Control of the Truong Sa archipelago by Vietnam would create a type of "Strait of Vietnam" through which these sea lanes would then pass.[98]

Commerce is only one consideration of the East Sea maritime routes: the other is military significance. The world's great powers all have national interests in the region's sea-lanes. The United States Navy currently enjoys free and often discreet access through the East Sea, which it uses to maintain a strong military presence in this vital region. Until recently, Russia's only warm-water naval base was at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. Although Soviet forces withdrew from the facility in 1991, there is evidence that some military cooperation continues between the two, [99] possibly even an informal basing rights agreement. If the Russian Navy were to return to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnamese control of the nearby Truong Sa would allow Moscow to conduct military operations in the region relatively free from the prying eyes of the PRC.[100] By the same token, Beijing is extremely interested in disrupting the regional military hegemony of the Moscow and Hanoi, as well as in denying the Vietnamese any sphere of influence outside of its mainland territory.[101] Vietnam is well aware of the PRC's desire for an increased presence in (and therefore expanded influence over the affairs of) Southeast Asia. Hanoi is also not keen on having what it sees as an enemy establishing a military base on islands that have been used as a staging area for military conquest in the past.[102]

However, denial of military use for East Sea islands led Vietnam to the actions that most severely damaged its claims. The apparent 1956 abdication of the Truong Sa to the PRC, and the subsequent confirmation of this renunciation in 1958, seemed to cede the islands to the Chinese. In 1988, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam acknowledged that these statements had been made but was quick to point out that "it is necessary to replace [these statements] in their historical context."[103] In the document The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes and International Law, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that the nation was embroiled in a desperate war for survival when the statements were made; therefore, what appeared to be a concession of the Truong Sa to the PRC was actually just a strategic move to deny the United States use of the archipelago and the East Sea. Hanoi believed that any PRC sovereignty over the Truong Sa would be temporary: "Viet Nam trusted China in all sincerity and believed that after the war all territorial problems [between the two countries] would be suitably resolved."[104] However, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S. in 1972 "resulted in China

turning friend into foe and vice-versa and in China's collusion with the U.S. in its strategy against the Vietnamese people."[105] In short, Vietnam never intended to permanently cede the Truong Sa Islands to the PRC and since their alliance is over, Hanoi wants the archipelago back.

The view of China as an enemy is not a new one. Throughout Vietnamese history the two countries have gone to war on many occasions. In fact, the period of DRV and PRC alliance from 1950 - 1976 was more of an aberration than the norm. Despite the normalization of relations between the two nations in 1991, an air of mistrust seems to permeate Vietnam's interactions with the PRC--especially in the Truong Sa dispute. Insight into the Vietnamese view of PRC's claims to the Truong Sa Islands can be gained by examining the declarations made in each Vietnamese White Paper. For example, the 1982 White Paper states:

The ambition of the Peking authorities over the two Vietnamese archipelagoes of Hoang Sa and Truong Sa manifests all the more clearly their policy of big-nation expansionism and hegemony which is aimed at conquering Vietnam as well as Laos and Kampuchea gradually controlling and eventually turning the East Sea into a Chinese Lake and using the Indochinese peninsula as a springboard for their expansion into South East Asia.[106]

It is this age-old fear of Chinese conquest that seemed to be confirmed in Vietnamese minds when their ally-turned-enemy invaded Vietnam on 17 February 1979. The 1988 battle at Da Gac Ma provided further evidence of Chinese expansionism. If an entire people or a country as a whole can have a psyche or national mindset, then the Vietnamese must have one of resolved defiance when it comes to China. Especially in light of the loss of the Hoang Sa Islands to PRC forces in 1974, it appears that the root of Vietnam's interest in the Truong Sa is more than its historical ties, its legal rights, or its strategic aspirations: it is also the desire to hold the line against any more Chinese encroachment against Vietnam.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese have long been a sea-faring people; even their ancient creation myths indicate as much of a maritime orientation as a terrestrial one. Their sea voyages took them to many lands, and the Truong Sa archipelago was likely one of these. Whether the Vietnamese were the first to discover, administer, or exploit the islands is open to debate, but the long Vietnamese relationship with the Truong Sa chain is undeniable.

Vietnam has demonstrated that it does have historical claims based on first occupation and ancient sovereignty, dating back to the Hoang Sa brigades of the Nguyen Lords in the 17th century. Assertions of that sovereignty occurred over the subsequent 300 years. Hanoi's legal claims are based on this historic exercise of sovereignty and its current control of the majority of the archipelago. Vietnam has demonstrated the political will to retain authority over the islands through its diplomatic and physical defense of the Truong Sa.

Yet the basis for the Vietnamese claims appears to be a justification for a more practical, contemporary agenda of maintaining regional political power and influence in the East Sea as a

counter to perceived Chinese expansion into Southeast Asia. Given the long history of resistance to foreign occupation and the adversarial relationship of the two--not to mention the 1979 invasion, the proxy war in Cambodia, and the 1988 conflict in the Truong Sa themselves--Vietnam's resolved defiance against China is not surprising. Although Hanoi's claims also conflict with those of three fellow ASEAN countries, it is the dispute with the Chinese that dominates the Vietnamese government rhetoric. Despite Vietnam's offer to submit the matter to the International Court of Justice and for multilateral negotiations[107], the continued strength of the Vietnamese military presence in the Truong Sa is evidence that Hanoi is not willing to simply surrender what it considers to be historic territory. Vietnam is thus sure to maintain its claims to and influence over the islands--as sure as the tide washes over a string of sandy cays and reefs, somewhere in the East Sea.

Notes

1 William Shakespeare,*The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 128.

2 The other claimants are the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of China (ROC), the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, which is the only claimant state that does not have militarily occupied any of the islands or features.

3 The Chinese name for Vietnam, the characters for which continue to be used today. Steven J. Hood,*Dragons Entangled: Indo-China and the China-Vietnam War* (Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1992), 5; 161.

4 Pao-min Chang,*The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 111.

5 Mark J. Valencia et al.,*Sharing the Resources of the South China Sea* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1997), 33-34.

6 Valencia, 38.

7 Valencia, 5.

8 Valencia., 230.

9 Hungdah Chiu and Choon-ho Park, "Legal Status,"*Ocean Development and International Law*. 3. 1 (Spring 1975): 23 [note 16] and Valencia, 232.

10 Valencia, 67 [note 120] and Chiu and Park, 8.

11 Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,*White Paper on the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and*

Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands (Saigon: 1975). 7.

12*Vietnam's Sovereignty Over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos* (Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1979), 1. The full quotation from this White Book is: "Both Hoang Sa and Truong Sa have, from time immemorial, been part of Vietnam's territory."

13 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 16.

14*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos and International Law* (Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1988). Excerpts reprinted as "Vietnam Stands for a Peaceful Settlement of the Dispute with China Over the Truong Sa and Hoang Sa Archipelagos,"*Vietnam Courier* 1988, no. 7: 11. The point is a valid one; however, it is likely that the Chinese were the most frequent visitors to the islands in ancient times.

15*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories* (Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1982). Full text reprinted as "Vietnamese White Book: Claim to Paracel and Spratly Islands" in British Broadcasting Corporation, *Summary of World Broadcasts Part III Far East*, no. 6932: A3/10.

16 Republic of Vietnam, 16-8; Valencia, 30; Gerardo Martin C. Valero,*Spratly Archipelago: Is the Question of Sovereignty Still Relevant?* (Quezon City, Philippines: Institute of International Legal Studies, 1993), 18; and Marwyn S. Samuels,*Contest for the South China Sea* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 49 (note 32).

17 Republic of Vietnam, 4. The Hoang Sa islands were conquered militarily by the PRC in 1974.

18 Republic of Vietnam, 4.

19 Valencia, 30.

20*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*.

21*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 1 - 2.

22*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*.

23 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 10 and Republic of Vietnam, 31.

24 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 10 and Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 3.

25 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement" 10 and Socialist Republic of Vietnam,

The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories, 3.

26 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement" 10 and Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 3; 4 - 5.

27 Republic of Vietnam, 29, 31. The quotation is from the history annals*Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien*, vol. 165.

28 Republic of Vietnam, 31-33; 69.

29 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 16. In 1843, a British whaling ship, the Cyrus, "discovered" Truong Sa Island. The Admiralty in London named it "Spratly Island" after the captain of the Cyrus (see Hydrographic Office, The Admiralty,*The China Sea Directory*, Vol. ii, [London: J. D. Potter, 1889], 83).

30*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 6.

31 Republic of Vietnam, 70, Vietnam's Sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagos., 7, and Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Solution," 11.

32*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 6.

33 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Solution," 11.

34 Republic of Vietnam. Truong Sa Island was also known as "Tempest Island."

35 Republic of Vietnam, 70 - 71. The quotation is originally from*L'Eveil Economique de l'Indochine* no. 790 (28 May 1933).

36 Republic of Vietnam, 71 - 73; Valencia, 30; and French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Notices & Communications,"*Journal Officiel de la Republique Francaise* 26 (July 1933): 7837. The date listed in "Notices" for the occupation of Truong Sa Island itself is 13 April 1930, three years before the rest of the archipelago. It is likely that this is the date on which the crew of*La Malicieuse* planted the French flag on "Tempest Island."

37 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 13 - 14, 17 and Chiu and Park, "Legal Status" 24 (note 31).

38 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 14.

39 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 17.

40 Republic of Vietnam, 73.

41 Republic of Vietnam, 78 and*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 7.

42 Republic of Vietnam, 78, 80.

43 Republic of Vietnam,, 74 and*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 7.

44 Republic of Vietnam, 81.

45 Republic of Vietnam,73.

46 Republic of Vietnam, 76.

47 Chiu and Park, 8.

48 Valencia, 21.

49 Lim Teck Ghee and Mark J. Valencia [ed.],*Conflict over Natural Resources in South-East Asia and the Pacific* (Singapore: United Nations University Press, 1990), 105.

50 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 17.

51 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 17.

52 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 17 and Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 11.

53 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 17-18. The ROC garrison remained on Dao Thai Bin. There are discrepancies as to the amount of time the ROC has occupied this island, but it apparently withdrew forces sometime after 1950 and did not return until it established a permanent garrison in 1956. The ROC detachment is currently estimated at 600 troops, making it the largest concentrated permanent military force in the archipelago.

54*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 8.

55*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 8. It is important to note, however, that both the PRC and the ROC were excluded from this conference.

56 Republic of Vietnam, 87.

57 Republic of Vietnam, 88.

58 Republic of Vietnam, 87.

59 Chiu and Park, 28 (note 103).

60 Chiu and Park, 9.

61 Valencia, 34.

62 Chiu and Park, 9; 15. However, the ROC established a permanent presence (see note 54).

63*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 8.

64 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 12.

65 Valencia, 32 (note a). Xisha is the Chinese name for the Hoang Sa.

66 Valencia, 32 (note b) and Chang,*Territorial Disputes*, 21.

67*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 8.

68 Republic of Vietnam, 91, 96.

69 Valencia, 34; 36.

70 Chang Pao-min, "A New Scramble for the South China Sea Islands"*Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 12, no. 1 (June 1990): 23.

71 Valencia, 233.

72 Chang, "New Scramble," 24-5.

73 Chang, "New Scramble," 24-5.

74 Chang, "New Scramble," 26.

75 Chang, "New Scramble," 26 and Hood,*Dragons*, 130.

76 Chang "New Scramble," 27.

77 Chang "New Scramble," 35 - 36.

78 Chang "New Scramble," 35-36.

79 Daljit Singh, "A Political Overview of Southeast Asia"*Southeast Asian Affairs* 1992: 9.

80 See generally Ramses Amer, "The Territorial Disputes between China and Vietnam and Regional Stability"*Contemporary Southeast Asia* 19, no. 1 (June 1997).

81 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 13.

82 Valencia, 33.

83 Chiu and Park, 17.

84*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 9.

85 The legality of this annexation is questionable, however, since China also had claims to the Truong Sa by virtue of occupation by Chinese citizens. See Chiu and Park, 18.

86*The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 9.

87 Valencia, 8. The PRC occupies 8 - 9 features, the Philippines 8, Malaysia 3 - 6, and the ROC only 1. Brunei claims only 2 reefs, but has not occupied any feature in the archipelago.

88 Valencia, 31.

89 Valencia, 31 - 32, 48.

90 Valencia, 31.

91 Chang,*Territorial Dispute*, 22.

92 Hood,*Dragons*, 131 - 132.

93 Valencia, 9 - 11.

94 Ghee,*Natural Resources*, 101, 112.

95 Ghee, 116.

96 Hood,*Dragons*, 129; 175 (note 39) and Robert F. Ichord, Jr., "Southeast Asian Oil and United States Foreign Policy" (unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Hawai'i (1975), 173.

97 Senior-Colonel Dinh Nho Hong, "Vietnam Armed Forces and Asia-Pacific

Stability" (unpublished paper), Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (2 October 1997): 14.

98 Recently, others have also reached a similar conclusion. See Bob Catley and Makmur Keliat, *Spratly's: The Dispute in the South China Sea* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), 93.

99 Raymond L. Garthoff,*The Great Transition* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 536.

100 Ghee,*Natural Resources*, 105.

101 Ghee,*Natural Resources*, 105, and Chang, "New Scramble," 34.

102 The Japanese utilized the Truong Sa Islands as a base from which it launched its invasion of the Philippines.

103 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 12.

104 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 12.

105 Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Peaceful Settlement," 12.

106 *The Hoang Sa and Truong Sa Archipelagoes: Vietnamese Territories*, 14 - 15. Similar statements are found in the 1988 position paper and both the 1979 and 1975 White Papers.

107 Valencia, 91, 94.

Explorations
in
Southeast Asian Studies
A Journal of the Southeast Asian Studies Student Association
Vol 3 **Fall 1999**

Contents Article 1 Article 2 Article 3 Article 4

I Gusti Putu Jelantik's Babad Buleleng Placed within Historical Context

Robin Tatu

>Robin Tatu graduated from the M.A. program in Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in August 1999. She has newly joined the UH PhD program in History.

Notes

Often defined as 'historical chronicles' or 'dynastic genealogies,' the Balinese texts known as babad continue to challenge Western scholars seeking to define and understand them. The earliest Dutch scholars concentrated on debating the historical accuracy of the texts: H. J. de Graaf searched for 'reliable facts' while C. C. Berg claimed that they contained magic formulas and esoteric meaning.[1] More recently, Peter Worsley and M. C. Ricklefs have asserted that babad are literary creations generally lacking historical value,[2] while Henk Schulte Nordholt sees them as political documents crucial to group identity and position.[3] Raechelle Rubinstein has examined the religious prescriptions contained within the Babad Brahmana, and both Helen Creese and Heidi Hinzler suggest that today the main function of babad comes in the veneration of ancestors.[4]

From such differing interpretations, it should be clear that Balinese babad are complex and varied texts that elude easy definition and transcend distinct categories of history, literature, and religion. More recently, scholars have recognized that to understand babad, we need to investigate the 'local logic' behind them and the ways they are used by the Balinese. As Schulte Nordholt argues, "babad do nothing unless they are put into action" -- they gain their meaning not as written manuscripts but through their employment, whether chanted aloud at temple festivals, read and analyzed at family gatherings, or excerpted and dramatized in the theatre of Topeng dance-drama.[5] In this paper, I examine the political nature of babad and, in particular,

the circumstances that prompted the 1920 composition of Babad Buleleng. My study is prompted by Schulte Nordholt's work in situating this early-twentieth century babad within its specific historical and political context. Yet while Schulte Nordholt stresses that babad changed under Dutch colonial rule, I will argue that Babad Buleleng represents not a break from but a continuation of the babad tradition. While Babad Buleleng found new uses under the Dutch, it retained the basic idiom of babad and appears to have been employed along traditional lines, extending beyond politics to address Balinese religious and societal concerns, as well. As a continuation of the tradition, Babad Buleleng provides insight into earlier uses of babad and Balinese perceptions of the history. There are clearly dangers in extrapolating about the past based on more recent information, yet because so little evidence remains from Bali's earlier centuries, we need to be creative in reconstructing that past, and in this regard, Babad Buleleng can offer some clues.

Babad Buleleng as a Literary Work

When Peter Worsley conducted his 1972 translation of Babad Buleleng, he demonstrated that literary conventions had played a key role in shaping this babad. Rather than simply documenting historical events, for example, the author of Babad Buleleng took pains to portray the kings of Buleleng in the classical image of kingship found in the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. In addition, the babad was written in the exacting Javanese verse form of kakawin, which employs a mix of Old and Middle Javanese languages and follows a strict poetic meter. Worsley's analysis provided a new perspective on babad, revealing that literary conventions could be as important as the information contained within a babad text, and he was praised for considering Babad Buleleng in its entirety, rather than merely probing it for 'reliable facts.' A. Teeuw writes that Worsley demonstrated, wrote A. Teeuw how "[all] elements belong to the structure of a historical text, and that we will have to understand them in their proper function and . . . interdependence."[6] Yet if Worsley championed the literary unity of the babad, he downplayed its historical qualities, going so far as to claim that babad were written "within the context of a culture, the Weltanschauung of which is essentially ahistorical."[7] While such an assertion seems ill-informed, any number of scholars have espoused the belief that the Balinese are "without history," prompting a forceful rebuttal by Mark Hobart:

The denial of a sense of history to Balinese, the lack of inquiry into how the past is used. . . go hand-in-hand not with Balinese detemporalization of person, time and conduct, but with [the detemporalization] of Bali in a magnificent displacement worthy of the finest moments of Orientalism.[8]

In fact, the Balinese are as concerned with representations of their past as any people; they themselves characterize babad as records of the past. Though Worsley contributed to our understanding of the literary aspects of babad, he was still struggling to fit these texts into the narrow confines of Western categorization. Yet as Creese points out, in Balinese writing it is fruitless to seek to separate 'history' from 'literature' since no such genre distinctions are made.[9]

Babad Buleleng Placed within Context

Since the time of Worsley's translation, scholars have become increasingly aware that babad need to be understood within their societal context, particularly because these texts derive their meaning from their use--as vehicles for ancestral commemoration and group study or, as in the case of Babad Buleleng, as tools for political negotiation. In his study, Schulte Nordholt discovered that this particular text was written in 1920 to appeal for the appointment of I Gusti Putu Jelantik as ruler of Buleleng regency. This petition came at a time when Bali's Dutch colonial administration was moving to reinstate the island's traditional kingdoms and rulers, but Jelantik was only one of three candidates in Buleleng and he was not favored by the Balinese. Yet it was in part Jelantik's ability to create enough "traditional credibility" through his babad that won him the appointment. By disregarding the historical circumstances of Babad Buleleng in his 1972 translation, Worsley overlooked crucial aspects that influenced its form. "Babad were not written in order to be studied in Western libraries by literary experts," writes Schulte Nordholt. Rather, they are "embedded in a social and political world and should be read--as far as possible--within that context."[10] What Schulte Nordholt suggests about the political functions of Babad Buleleng should help inform our understanding of how the Balinese used these texts in the past and how they continue to employ them today.

Babad in Traditional Politics

In many ways, Jelantik's presentation of Babad Buleleng to the Dutch is consistent with traditional Balinese uses of babad to legitimize rule. The three earliest texts, Babad Dalem, Usana Bali, and Usana Jawi, all establish the lineage of particular Balinese royal families, tracing their origins to the warriors of Java's Majapahit dynasty who conquered Bali in the fourteenth century. The opening sections of these texts focus on the beginnings of civilization and religion on the island, while later sections are more heavily genealogical in nature. These earliest texts appear to have been produced at the beginning of the eighteenth century, following the shift in political power from the once dominant Gelgel dynasty to the newly-emerging Klungkung kingdom in approximately C.E. 1687.[11]

Because these texts all reflect back on the fourteenth century from a remove of some four hundred years, their historical reliability has been questioned; Creese suggests, for example, that the accounts reveal less about actual historical events and more about eighteenth-century Balinese historiographical concerns.[12] Indeed, the portrait of Gelgel's unassailed hegemony from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century as presented in Klungkung's official court document, Babad Dalem, most likely represents an imagined past glory rather than an approximation of reality. Yet if this glory was imagined, it was also projected and realized through Babad Dalem. The text helped establish Klungkung as the heir to both Gelgel and Majapahit and helped secure for Klungkung the position as the pre-eminent kingdom in Bali. Despite the emergence of competing court centers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Klungkung's small kingdom managed to dominate until its final conquest by the Dutch in 1908. This was due largely to the general acceptance of Babad Dalem's portrayal of Klungkung as a most direct descendant of the ancient sacred center of power, Majapahit.

As other courts struggled to legitimize their rule, they, too, sought origins in Majapahit, most often by claiming a hereditary connection through Klungkung and Gelgel and by composing babad that incorporated passages from Klungkung's Babad Dalem. Kingdoms like Badung and Tabanan that could not establish a link with Klungkung turned instead to the competing claims of Usana Bali and Usana Jawi. Yet into each new babad some portion of one of these three charter texts was integrated, the older texts serving to legitimate newer claims. Worsley notes, for example, that Babad Buleleng appears to pull passages from the older Babad Blahbatuh as well as the Kidung Pamancangah, a poetical version of the Babad Dalem.[13] Just as textual quotation was crucial, so did an idiom of style develop within the babad tradition, tied to Balinese religious and social traditions. Hinzler notes, for example, that the number seven is significant within the babad system, so that texts may list only this many generations, omitting any mention of less consequential ancestors, or condensing into one two generations or more.[14] Other requisite elements within babad, such as the descriptions of a kingdom's keris and priests, helped establish heritage and further legitimized a kingdom's rule. While the emergence of competing kingdoms in the mid-eighteenth century seems to have prompted the first composition of court babad, further shifts in political order at the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a new surge of babad writing. The increasing Dutch control of Bali introduced additional threats to the already warring kingdoms, many of which responded by asserting status through the writing of new babad and the re-composition of older ones.

During the pre-colonial period, babad played an important role in asserting the political claims of a kingdom. The possession of a royal collection of texts strengthened the status of a court, and during the eighteenth century, the Balinese kingdoms became centers of tremendous literary activity. But to interpret babad merely in terms of politics would be to assign too narrow a role for them. As heirlooms or pusaka, babad embodied the authority of a kingdom; as connections to the past, they were imbued with the spirit of the ancestors; and as written manuscripts, they contained the sacred power of Saraswati, goddess of arts and literature. As such, babad were and are revered, and along with other items of court regalia, they are housed within the ancestral shrines of temples. Just as no distinction is made between literature and history or fact and fiction, in Bali politics and religion are one; ancestral power enhances political position. Or as Schulte Nordholt comments, "temple and text belong to one another."[15]

It is out of this tradition that the Babad Buleleng emerges. Babad Buleleng ostensibly represents a shift in the babad tradition because it was employed for purposes outside the traditional Balinese kingship system and because it did not reaffirm position but rather petitioned for it. Yet as we will see, in Babad Buleleng the traditional and the new are not so easily separated.

The Reinstatement of Balinese Royal Courts[16]

Several circumstances led to the 1929 installment of Balinese royalty as volkshoofd, or 'native chiefs,' and the designation of the old kingdoms as 'negara.' Not the least of these was a devastating earthquake in 1917, an influenza that killed twenty-two thousand, and an atmosphere of unrest that necessitated more effective local administration of the island. Yet

according to Geoffrey Robinson, the move to elevate the status of royalty --which continued in 1930 with the reinstatement of royal titles and culminated in 1938 with the establishment of 'self rule'--was strongly motivated by the Dutch desire to protect Bali against the threats of modernization, Islam, and nationalism. It was felt that this policy of maintaining 'traditional Bali' could be aided by resurrecting the ancient symbols and structures of Bali's Hindu royal system. The Dutch government had long pursued an official policy of championing the 'native' Balinese villages over the perceived 'foreign' royal courts.[17] From the time of the first conquest of Buleleng in 1855 until the 1908 surrender of Klungkung, the kingdoms had been systematically dismantled and their power invalidated, with members of royalty sent into exile and their land and property confiscated. Yet the Dutch also demonstrated a preference for the high-born, and though stripped of their traditional roles, many royalty found employment as punggawa, from which position they were able to ingratiate and influence their colonial overlords. Nor were the punggawa unaware in their negotiations with the Dutch. In appealing for self-rule, for example, the Cokorda Gde Raka Sukawati skillfully mimicked both the language and the fears of the colonial authorities:

Luckily Bali has not yet been contaminated by the evil of provocation that results from the excessive influence and examples of other regions . . . . If the government introduced self-rule in each of the negara, then in our opinion, such evil influences will have more difficulty in reaching Bali.[18]

Colonial Negotiator: I Gusti Putu Jelantik

I Gusti Putu Jelantik appears to have been especially skillful with the Dutch, and according to Schulte Nordholt, he was mistrusted by other Balinese for his collaboration with the colonial government. In the capacity of translator, Jelantik accompanied the Dutch military campaigns against Badung, Tabanan, and Klungkung, helping to confiscate the holdings of the royal libraries.[19] Having gained access to the manuscripts from these royal courts as well as those of Mataram and Cakranagara on Lombok, Jelantik apparently accumulated for himself an enormous private collection of texts. Jelantik was a well-known connoisseur of literature, especially kakawin romances. During his life-time he composed texts and commissioned reproductions, notably on the adventures of Mahabharata's warrior-prince Arjuna.[20] He helped establish the Dutch manuscript library Kirtya Liefrinck-Van der Tuuk in Singaraja and served as its first curator. In addition, Jelantik was one of the first Balinese to offer manuscripts to be copied and catalogued for the Kirtya. Yet given Jelantik's political aspirations, his appropriation of other courts' texts could not have been an innocent gesture. Margaret Wiener writes that in Klungkung today, local rumor attributes Jelantik with the theft of the Klungkung royal babad since no copies have been found in the official Dutch collection, despite the presence of several babad from commoner groups.[21] If the possession a manuscript collection was integral to legitimizing a court's authority, then the absence of key texts would have had the opposite effect. Thus while Jelantik could not have gained any "real" power under the Dutch through his appropriation of other negara's texts, in traditional terms, his actions carried weigh -- and the babad of Bali's pre-eminent court would have been of particular interest to him. However, it is possible to read too much into Jelantik's calculation because he may have

considered it his right to take possession of the court babad, especially as the Dutch philologists showed little interest in them. R. H. Friederich typifies the Dutch attitude in dismissing the Babad Dalem as "sundry confused histories of priests and kings" and judging it to be a "far inferior" record of the past.[22] By contrast, Jelantik recognized the importance of Balinese texts and worked to preserve the island's literary heritage.

Babad Buleleng as a Political Tool

Jelantik's Babad Buleleng reveals its orientation toward the Dutch audience through a number of interesting elements. As might be expected, the babad carefully establishes direct lines of descent from Buleleng's original ancestor. According to Schulte Nordholt, most of these 'colonial babad' were written in this manner, articulating direct and unbroken lines of descent, whereas earlier babad are not as rigorous in this regard. Jelantik's babad also emphasizes the earlier glory of Buleleng. Several decades of direct rule by the Dutch and almost a century of political control had significantly weakened Buleleng's royal center through "deaths, exile, and the confiscation of property."[23] Yet rather than focus on the current diminished state of the kingdom, Babad Buleleng celebrates its past, primarily through its apical ancestor, Panji Sakti, whose story takes up more than half of the entire text. Not only does Panji Sakti descend from Java's Majapahit dynasty through two separate lines of descent, he is also favored by the gods, and his governance is peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous. Only when the Karangasem rulers seize power a few generations after Panji Sakti's death does the image change: the usurping kings are greedy, incestuous and brutal, forcing original family members into exile.

In composing this portrait of a 'glorious past,' Jelantik may well have been influenced by the Dutch discovery of the Nagarakrtagama and the ensuing excitement over this recovered ancient history of Java. As translator and curator of the Kirtya, he may even have aided J. L. Brandes's translation of the text in 1902. In any case, Jelantik would have witnessed the Dutch fascination with classical Javanese literature and the increasing support for 'traditional Bali' through the policies of 'Balinization.' He seems to have crafted his babad with these interests in mind, portraying Panji Sakti's Buleleng as a classical negara, one in which the king "dwelt contentedly in the palace . . . his descendants growing in number and his children multiplying.."[24] Much has also been made of Babad Buleleng's use of verse, which marks a departure from the babad tradition of prose composition. The exacting kakawin versification in Babad Buleleng and its eloquent use of Old and Middle Javanese recalls older traditions of Javanese literature. Babad Buleleng also employs self-conscious literary motifs from the Mahabharata and Ramayana and is characterized by the skillful interweaving of classical images. Surely such a text would not have failed to impress the colonial administration and convince them of Buleleng's--and Jelantik's--heritage.

Another notable aspect of Babad Buleleng is the flattering portrayal of the Dutch. None of their earlier hostilities against Buleleng is mentioned and unlike the graphic descriptions of battles with other kingdoms, the prolonged war against the Dutch is presented summarily: "a quarrel developed which led to war. A terrible and heated battle took place. . . . The war lasted three years."[25] Following this section, the babad praises the colonial government for "doing its best"

in 1849 to locate the descendants of Panji Sakti to replace the usurping Karangasem rulers. And instead of contending the royal appointment of 1849, which overlooked Jelantik's family line, the text cleverly acknowledges the Dutch for "doing what was right and proper." Yet it also reveals the failing of these rulers from Sukasada. One king is portrayed as a dissipate gambler who eventually abdicates, while another is "punished and exiled" by the Dutch who "desired to protect the world."[26] Such passages underscore the consequences of choosing the wrong descent line.

Any number of minor elements in Babad Buleleng also seem to have been crafted for the benefit of its colonial audience. In an early episode of Panji Sakti's life, the ancestor-hero saves a stranded ship of a merchant and wins from him the entire contents of the vessel. Worsley remarks that this episode serves a legitimizing function because the cargo contains materials "required to build and furnish a palace fit to be dwelt in by the ruler."[27] Yet given the tension that had developed between the Dutch and Balinese in the mid-nineteenth century over the plundering of stranded ships (tawang karang, a common Balinese practice[28]), Jelantik may have composed this scene with particular delicacy. As related in Babad Buleleng, Panji Sakti only intercedes after the merchant has beseeched him and twice promised the contents of his ship. Nor does Panji use everyday tools of "ropes, bamboo, and all the equipment necessary," as do the 'greedy' people who first attempt the salvage; instead, Panji points his magical keris at the ship and it does the work for him. If the Dutch believed that I Gusti Putu Jelantik was merely submitting a 'traditional text,' they underestimated his artful strategies in asserting his claim to the throne.

Deprived of their ability to wage war under the powerful rule of their Dutch overlords, the Balinese princes fought their battles by turning instead to the power of words.

While we do not know about the circumstances under which Babad Buleleng was presented to the Dutch, Schulte Nordholt has investigated a similar petition made by the ruler of Mengwi with the submission of Babad Mengwi. In arguing for Mengwi's reinstatement as a negara, this text was sent to local Dutch officials as well as to the Dutch parliament and Queen Wilhelmina in Holland. The manuscript was accompanied by a Malay translation, a separate genealogical summary, and a signed petition.[29] Babad Buleleng seems to have been submitted in similar fashion: one of the manuscripts consulted by Worsley, which is now housed in Leiden, also includes both a Malay translation and a genealogical chart, presenting the material in a manner that would be meaningful to the Dutch. This 'Manuscript D' also omits the final section of the babad that relates both the exile of the last king and the abandonment of Hinduism by some members of the extended descent group; through these omissions, a more positive portrait emerges of Buleleng.[30] We do not know how much weight Babad Buleleng carried in persuading the government in Jelantik's favor, whether his was a largely ceremonial gesture or whether it truly carried political clout. Further investigation into the historical circumstances would certainly enrich our understanding of the babad and its employment. Yet while the details are lacking, we do know that Jelantik's petition was persuasive enough to win his appointment as ruler of Buleleng.

Babad Buleleng as a Traditional Tool of Legitimacy

Although Jelantik's babad succeeded with the Dutch, his version of Buleleng's history is not uncontested. When Schulte Nordholt interviewed a competing branch of descendants in Sukasada village in the 1980s, the head of the clan dismissed Jelantik's babad with disdain. While he displayed Sukasada's babad, he refused to allow it to be copied.[31] This reaction gives some indication of the continuing importance of these texts and reveals as well that Jelantik would not have written his babad solely for a Dutch audience.

If Jelantik did in fact compose his text as early as 1920 and only submitted it to the authorities in 1928, then he may have first written it with the Balinese in mind. In fact, the babad was only part of Jelantik's traditional campaign for legitimacy. He also sought access at the main temple in the village of Panji and in 1920 built a new temple within his palace grounds.[32] In Mengwi, too, the 1928 composition of Babad Buleleng was accompanied by the resurrection of a new court temple and a story was circulated about the ancient origins of both the temple and babad.[33] Because the Dutch ignored religious activity, they overlooked the political intent behind such maneuvers, but for the Balinese, politics and religion are not separate. Temple and text are part of a single effort in establishing position.

Babad Buleleng has been viewed by scholars as an atypical babad, yet its variations do not depart radically from the babad tradition; instead they are within keeping of the changing nature of this genre. Not only Babad Buleleng but also Babad Buleleng and Babad Blahbatuh were written in verse. The poetry of Babad Buleleng may have impressed the colonial authorities, but it may also reflect the literary trends of the period. For example, different kind of versified history, the geguritan, had gained popularity in the late nineteenth century amongst non-royal groups, and, like other emerging forms, it may have set a literary challenge for the babad. The literary activity in the courts also would have raised the standards for composing babad, especially for a text scholar like Jelantik. When Schulte Nordholt showed a copy of Babad Buleleng Sedang to the competing branch line in Mengwi--possessors of the more literary Babad Buleleng--they dismissed it not only for its 'false version of history' but for its awkward presentation: "It is an ugly text; it is poorly composed. You can take it with you; no one will be interested."[34] In writing Babad Buleleng, Jelantik may have interwoven motifs from literary classics, but he also followed the tradition of quoting earlier babad, notably the Babad Blahbatuh, and Pamancangah or Babad Dalem. Rather than setting his text apart from earlier ones, Jelantik's innovations reflect the changing nature of the babad tradition.

Elements with Babad Buleleng would have clearly appealed to the Balinese. Not only is the ancestor-hero Panji Sakti endowed with divine power, first revealed through his flaming fontanel, but he is favored by the gods, who visit him directly and bestow upon him the powerful keris Ki Semang . Panji Sakti acquires all the accouterments required of the founder of a kingdom, as well, from a state gamelan to the ship's cargo, and, most significantly, a priest who descends from Majapahit. Worsley notes that the most extensive episodes in the babad concern Panji's priests, "not so much in their own right, but as attributes of Panji Sakti's kingship."[35] Dutch readers of the babad surely would not have not recognized the significance of such details,

but for a Balinese audience, these episodes would have contributed to the persuasive quality of the text.

Today Babad Buleleng is housed within an ancestral shrine and is consulted when issues of descent arise. As the charter text of the descent groups of Panji Sakti, and as an important link to the ancestors, the manuscript possesses significant spiritual power. Like other royal babad, its significance has extended beyond Buleleng's royal house to include commoners connected to the family line. When Babad Buleleng is read, both the manuscript and the readers must undergo ritual cleansing. And as is the case for all babad, readings of this text are not individual, silent acts but group presentations set within religious ceremonies and family gatherings.

Babad Buleleng may have been used to negotiate with the Dutch government, but this use did not effect a lasting change in the babad tradition; nor was that use the only one made of the text. Jelantik also employed Babad Buleleng along traditional lines, joining it to the ancestral temple and using it to articulate the legitimacy of his rule. Thus, the more important audience for this text may have been the Balinese one, and because Babad Buleleng continues to be employed and revered within the Balinese context, it would seem that Jelantik succeeded with his text. While the circumstances surrounding Babad Buleleng inform us specifically about this particular text, the example of Babad Buleleng should help us build upon our understanding of babad in general and the role they have played in past centuries. While the discussion in this paper has focused primarily upon the political role of Babad Buleleng, there is much more to be known about these texts, their presentation, and their reception by Balinese audiences. To continue developing our understanding, we need to study babad within the context of their social and historical situations.

Notes

1 See H. J. de Graaf, "Later Javanese Sources and Historiography" and C. C. Berg, "The Javanese Picture of the Past" in *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, Ed. Sudjatmoko, et. al. (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1965), 87-117; 119-36.

2 While Ricklefs did write that some babad "appear to be so mythological and devoid of chronological order that they are of little value as sources of political history, despite their literary interest," he adds that "others have proved to be valuable historical sources." The latter part of his statement is often neglected by those quoting it. M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since C. 1300*, 2nd Ed. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1981), 55.

3 H. Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction: Text and Context in Balinese Representations of the Past," *Indonesia* 54 (1991): 27-58.

4 Helen Creese, "Balinese Babad as Historical Sources: A Reinterpretation of the Fall of Gelgel,"

Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 147 Nos. 2-3 (1990): 243; Raechelle Rubinstein, "The Brahmana According to Their Babad," in *State and Society in Bali: Historical, Textual and Anthropological Approaches*, Ed. Hildred Geertz (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1991), 43-84; H.I.R. Hinzler, "The Balinese Babad," in *Profiles of Malay Culture; Historiography, Religion, and Politics*, Ed. Sartono Kartodirdjo (Yogyakarta: Ministry of Education and Culture, Directorate General of Culture, 1976), 47.

5 Schulte Nordholt 28.

6 A. Teeuw, "Some Remarks on the Study of So-Called Historical Texts in Indonesian Languages," in *Profiles of Malay Culture; Historiography, Religion, and Politics*, Ed. Sartono Kartodirdjo (Yogyakarta: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1976), 16.

7 P. J. Worsley, *Babad Buleleng; A Balinese Dynastic Genealogy* (The Hague: Nijhjoff. KITLV, Bibliotheca Indonesica 8, 1972), vi.

8 Mark Hobart, "The Missing Subject: Balinese Time and the Elimination of History," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, 31, No. 1 (June 1997): 153.

9 Creese, "Balinese Babad as Historical Sources," 239.

10 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 33, 57.

11 Helen Creese, "New Kingdoms, Old Concerns: Balinese Identities in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900*, Ed. Anthony Reid (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997), 353.

12 Helen Creese, *In Search of Majapahit: The Transformation of Balinese Identities*, (Clayton, Vic. Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1997), 9.

13 See Worsley's comments 15-20.

14 Hinzler, "The Balinese Babad," 49. By contrast, Babad Mengwi seems to have added a "first king," ascribing to him the deeds of his "son," the historical figure recognized by other sources. Schulte Nordholt speculates that the writer of the babad may have done this to create a heroic first ancestor to precede the "son." *The Spell of Power: A History of Balinese Politics, 1650-1940* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996), 27.

15 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 29.

16 Information from this section comes from Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 19-51 and H. Schulte

Nordholt, "Bali: Colonial Conceptions and Political Change, 1700-1940: from Shifting Hierarchies to 'Fixed Order,'" *Comparative Asian Studies Programme* 15 (Rotterdam, 1986) 34-49.

17 Such views were influenced by the writing of W. R. van Hoevell and R. H. Th. Friederich. See Schulte Nordholt, *The Spell of Power*, 231.

18 "Verzoekscrift" (n.d.), Mailrapport 655 geh/1935 (Verball 15 July 1938, no. 14), Box 3779, MvK, ARA quoted in Robinson 43. Nor did the Cokorda misread the Dutch concern: although only three of the volkshoofd signed this 1935 petition, the Dutch Resident added to it the names of all the other rulers. Schulte Nordholt 35.

19 H.I.R. Hinzler, "Balinese Palm-Leaf Manuscripts," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149 (1993): 433.

20 Jelantik's selection of literary texts is significant as the royalty used such works to create parallels between the legendary heroes and themselves. Creese, "The Dating of Several Kakawin from Bali and Lombok," *Archipel* 52 (1996): 169.

21 Margaret J. Wiener, *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 99.

22 Quoted in Creese, *In Search of Majapahit*, 7.

23 Robinson 45.

24 Worsley 173.

25 Worsley 199.

26 Worsley 205.

27 Worsley 25.

28 Schulte Nordholt, *The Spell of Power*, 160.

29 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 55.

30 Worsley 119-120; 107-108.

31 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 56.

32 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 56.

33 Schulte Nordholt comments that today this tale is accepted as a "true myth" and is repeated even by those who remember the construction of the temple in 1928. *Spell of Power*, 276.

34 Schulte Nordholt, "Origin, Descent, and Destruction," 54.

35 Worsley 32.