

THE INFLUENCES OF THE LIFE AND EDUCATION OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE CHAKRABONGSE BHUVANATH IN RUSSIA ON SIAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates King Rama V's strategy to modernize the Siamese Army by sending his son, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath, to study in England and Russia. The aim was for the prince to be educated according to Western standards, acquiring proficiency in foreign languages, culture, and military affairs. This initiative was part of a broader plan to professionalize the Siamese Army and safeguard Siam against European imperialism. The research utilizes the British Library Oriental Manuscript 15749: Chakrabongse Letters as a primary source, focusing on the correspondence between King Rama V and Prince Chakrabongse. It examines the prince's life and education abroad to uncover the King's intentions, the prince's experiences, and his contributions to the Siamese military upon his return. The findings reveal that King Rama V intended for Prince Chakrabongse to not only gain advanced military knowledge but also to serve as an informal ambassador for Siam. The prince embraced his educational responsibilities with dedication, gradually becoming a representative of the King and building strong relationships with various royal families, notably the Romanovs. After graduating with a military education and being promoted to senior colonel in the Russian Army, Prince Chakrabongse returned to Siam to serve as Chief of Staff. His knowledge and experience were crucial in integrating modern practices into Siamese military education, laying the groundwork for a more professional Thai army.

Keywords: Military academy; modernization; Siamese army; Siam; western education

1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate King's Rama V's arrangement to send one of his sons, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath, to study in England and Russia to learn English and other necessary foreign languages, Western culture and manners, and most importantly to be educated in military affairs to create a professional army in Siam (later Thailand). The study examines the purpose of King Rama V, how he managed to have his young child live and study abroad, what the prince did and learnt, and the consequence of this arrangement, by examining the private correspondence between the King and Prince Chakrabongse.

The practice of sending members of the Thai royal family to study in Europe became prevalent during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910). According to Amarinrat (1979), the policy of sending students abroad was a calculated strategy to introduce Western knowledge and practices into Siamese governance and society. This aligns with King Chulalongkorn's overarching vision to modernize Siam through a well-educated bureaucracy capable of implementing reforms. This trend was subsequently adopted by the king's successors, as well as by noble and affluent families. The practice of sending Thai students abroad began during the reign of King Rama III and became more common during the reign of King Rama IV. King Rama IV recognized the importance of understanding Western culture to counteract Western colonialism and to maintain Siam's sovereignty. The kings were notably supportive of Western languages and academic disciplines (Mulsin, 2004, p. 39). The initiative to educate Thai individuals in Western languages began with English language classes held at the royal palace. King Rama IV established a school and appointed Anna Leonowens as the English teacher for his children and wives (Mulsin, 2004, p. 6). By the late reign of King Rama IV, the first group of three Thai students was sent to Europe—two to England and one to France. In Siam, six students were taught English by missionaries; some of these students subsequently worked as government officers, while others continued their studies abroad (Mulsin, 2004, p. 46).

Education in Western countries during the reigns of King Rama VI and King Rama VII promoted the concept of national democratic governance, similar to the systems observed by Thai students in various European nations. This period also encouraged the idea of freedom of publication and emphasized the involvement of the populace in governance. Thailand began to align itself with European styles following the signing of the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855 during the reign of King Rama IV, and subsequent treaties with other European nations (Bunnag, 1973, p. 102). Under King Rama V, a significant transformation occurred in the educational system, characterized by emancipation and a revolution in education that extended to all social classes, not just the elite. More capable students were afforded opportunities to study further in the West, where they were exposed to modern political ideas and constitutionalism. These students returned with a strong desire to implement changes in Thai society (Amarinrat, 1979).

During the reign of King Rama V, European colonialism intensified as Western powers vied for dominance. Recognizing the imperative to modernize Siam in response to this expansion, King Rama V initiated comprehensive reforms in governance, abolition of slavery, education, technology, and the establishment of a modern army. The army was to be reformed along European lines. Initially, the King employed foreign officers, including Gerolamo Emilio Gerini, a military graduate who joined the Siamese Army as a lieutenant in 1881, as well as other Western officers to instruct at the Royal Thai Military Academy in order to enhance the army's capabilities (Prakongsin, 2008, p. 1). Additionally, some Thai scholarship students, including the King's sons, were sent abroad primarily for military training with the expectation that they would return and contribute to the development of Siam (Wyatt, 2003, pp. 247–249).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical records concerning either the life of Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath or the Siamese/Royal Thai army reformation are challenging to locate and often consist of older sources. Nonetheless, some significant sources provide collective insights into Prince Chakrabongse's personal and professional life. *Born in Parutsakawan Palace* by Prince Chula Chakrabongse (2009) covers historical anecdotes from the late reign of King Rama V to the early reign of King Rama IX, as well as customs and traditions in the Thai royal court. *To my son Lek* edited by Mom Rajawongse Narisa Chakrabongse (2018) first published in 2017, compiles over 300 letters between King Rama V and Prince Chakrabongse from 1896 to 1910. The collection reveals insights into Prince Chakrabongse's military education in Russia, the strategic Siam-Russia relationship, and key events such as the 1905 revolution. It also highlights the close bond between King Rama V and his son and includes Prince Chakrabongse's romantic letters to Ekaterina Desnitskaya. Previously accessible only through the British Library, these letters provide valuable perspectives on Siamese royal affairs and court life during this era.

Recent historiography has increasingly questioned the long-established explanations that credit Siam's modernization primarily to the vision and leadership of a small group of royal and elite actors. While earlier works, such as those by Bunnag (1969) and Soontravanich (1973), laid important foundations for understanding the role of the monarchy in shaping reforms, later studies have highlighted the complexities, tensions, and unequal dimensions of these processes. Scholars including Mead (2009), Teeraeak (2014), and Aphornsuvan (2017) have shown that the reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were far from uniform, often reflecting internal tensions within the absolute monarchy and producing uneven forms of modernity across different social groups.

Some important works describe the prince's roles in the Siamese Army after his return from Russia. Bunsiri's *The Military and Political Role of His Royal Highness Prince Chakrabongse* (1980) described the

Prince's personal and educational life at a young age, his military role after graduation from Russia, marriage, temporary heir apparent, and political views. Bunnag's *The Intention of Prince Chakrabongse to Manage Military Education* (2006) explains how the Prince significantly advanced Thai military education by organizing the Royal Military Academy with systematic procedures and promoting a professional military spirit based on scientific principles. He emphasized reasoning, language skills, practical training, and cadet health, while establishing new institutions modeled after Western systems, like the Command and General Staff College and aviation education. His modern approach laid a strong foundation for the current Thai military education system.

Battye (1974) and Raymond (2018) provide critical analysis of Siam's modernization, particularly focusing on education and military reform under King Chulalongkorn. These studies emphasize the strategic efforts to modernize Siamese governance by sending key individuals, including Prince Chakrabongse, abroad for education. Their examinations of foreign influences on military modernization offer new dimensions to the understanding of Siam's response to colonial threats and its alignment with Western standards. These works provide an essential foundation for exploring the broader political and military strategies of the era. Boontanondha (2013) specifically delves into Prince Chakrabongse's contributions to military education, highlighting his efforts to institutionalize systematic training and align Thai military practices with European models. His analysis reveals how these efforts not only enhanced military efficiency but also reinforced Siam's sovereignty against external pressures.

Other studies give a broader scope on the military reformation during the Rattanakosin era. *The Modernization of the Royal Thai Army Along the Western Lines from 1851–1932*, examines the extensive reforms undertaken to modernize the Royal Thai Army in response to threats from colonial powers like France and England (Wongwises, 1976). Spanning from King Mongkut's reign to the early democratic period, the study highlights the necessity of adopting Western military practices to maintain Thailand's independence. The thesis provides a chronological account of the army's evolution, detailing the significant reforms under Kings Chulalongkorn and Rama VI, culminating in Thailand's participation in World War I and subsequent developments under King Rama VII. This work underscores the complex interplay between domestic reforms and external influences in shaping the modern Thai military. Moreover, *History of the Thai Royal Army, 200th Anniversary, 1782–1982* (Research Department, Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, 1982) discusses the organization of the army during King Rama V's reign, and *The Military textbook* produced by the Directorate of Operations in 2011 (Directorate of Operations, 2011) outline military reforms and the impact of European influence on standardizing the Siamese Army.

There are some useful works which contribute to the study. *The Art of War* (Chakrabongse, 1916), compiled by Prince Chakrabongse, served as a military textbook of the time, covering military history from antiquity to the Napoleonic era. The History of the Thai Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School is detailed in *Before Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School* (Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School, 2018), which provides comprehensive information about the school's development. Mulsin's *King Chulalongkorn and Educational Reformation* (2011, pp. 152–160) explores the influence of European educational models beginning with the King's Guard Regiment in 1868. Boontanondha's *Politics in the Thai Military in the Reign of King Rama VI* (2016, pp. 192–193) examines efforts to maintain military power and prestige under King Rama VI following his succession in 1910. This period also marked Siam's participation in World War I, where 1,200 Thai troops joined France, demonstrating the readiness of Thai soldiers and highlighting the outcomes of King Rama V's military reforms.

All of these informative sources provide a comprehensive understanding of Prince Chakrabongse's personal, educational, and career life with extensive historical materials. This study aims to contribute to this subject by examining new evidence previously accessible only at the British Library: The Oriental Manuscript 15749, also known as *the Chakrabongse Letters Manuscript*, which was published in *To my son Lek* in 2017. The version used in this research is directly sourced from the British Library, providing a unique perspective not widely incorporated in existing studies.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses historical research methods: source collection, verification, interpretation, and writing. The research data was collected from the analysis of Siamese army literary works. It employs a unique primary source: the correspondence between King Rama V and Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath. This approach provides a distinctive perspective that is not commonly found in existing literature on the Siamese Army. By integrating these letters, the paper aims to offer new insights into Thai military history, royal life, and education, as well as the impact of these factors on Siamese military development. The data for this study were collected from the *British Library Oriental Manuscript 15749: Chakrabongse Letters Manuscript*. This

manuscript comprises 16 sets of letters, written mainly by Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath (Prince of Phitsanulok) to his father. Spanning from 1896 to 1915, these letters cover a range of topics including Prince Chakrabongse's experiences studying in England, his life at a military school in Russia, his European travels, personal relationships, the connections between Siamese and European royal families, as well as his education, military experiences, and political events in both Siam and Europe.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's military education in England and Russia represents a pivotal period in his life, shaping his contributions to Siam's military modernization. Drawing on primary sources from the British Library, particularly the Oriental Manuscript 15749, this study examines key aspects of his training and its long-term implications for Siam. In England, Prince Chakrabongse initially received foundational training in military science and Western administrative principles. His exposure to British military discipline and organizational frameworks provided him with a broad understanding of modern military operations. These early experiences laid the groundwork for his later studies in Russia, where he joined the prestigious Corps of Pages in Saint Petersburg, an elite military academy reserved for aristocrats and the imperial family. During his time at the Corps of Pages, Prince Chakrabongse underwent rigorous training that combined theoretical studies with practical military exercises. His curriculum included advanced subjects such as strategy, artillery, and engineering, emphasizing precision and efficiency. The Russian military's emphasis on hierarchy and discipline profoundly influenced the young prince, providing a model for military reform in Siam.

The Oriental Manuscript 15749 reveals rich details about the Prince's correspondence with King Rama V during this period. These letters illustrate his challenges and accomplishments, reflecting his determination to excel in a foreign environment and adapt European military practices to Siamese contexts. For example, his descriptions of the 1905 Russian Revolution and its impact on military morale underscore his keen observational skills and strategic thinking. While his journey from Siam to Britain offers an engaging narrative, this study focuses on his military education and the knowledge he acquired. His training experiences in England and Russia were instrumental in his later efforts to professionalize the Siamese army. Upon his return, he applied European methodologies to establish institutions such as the Command and General Staff College and to standardize military education, fostering a professional military ethos in Siam. By limiting the scope to his education and its direct impact on military reforms, this study maintains its focus on Prince Chakrabongse's significant role in shaping the modernization of Siam's armed forces.

4.1 The two trips of King Rama V to Europe

King Rama V of Siam was the first monarch of the Chakri Dynasty to undertake two significant trips to Europe, occurring in 1897 and 1907. The first trip extended from April to December 1897 (Wattananggun, 2003, p. 4). These trips occurred during a critical period of Western imperialism when Siam faced intense pressure from European powers, particularly Britain and France, which sought to dominate Southeast Asia. Historians have offered several interpretations regarding the motives behind King Rama V's European journeys. One perspective suggests that the king aimed to observe and understand the advancements and activities of foreign nations. Another viewpoint posits that the king sought to establish Siamese representation and cultivate diplomatic relationships with Western countries. Both trips were intricately linked to the broader context of Western imperialism (Wattananggun, 2003, p. 12). Prior to these European excursions, the king had visited Java in 1870 and India in 1872 to gain insights into colonial administration and Western treatment of these territories.

King Chulalongkorn's European travels, including his first trip in 1897, occurred after some of his sons, such as Prince Chakrabongse, had already been sent to study abroad. However, the trip was instrumental in reinforcing the King's modernization agenda, which had long prioritized education as a key driver of national progress. Observing the advancements in European governance, military systems, and educational institutions firsthand validated his earlier decisions and inspired further efforts to align Siam with Western models. Rather than preparing Siam's future leaders directly, the trip symbolized the King's commitment to showcasing Siam's sovereignty on the international stage and strengthening ties with European powers. These diplomatic efforts were part of a broader strategy to secure Siam's independence amid colonial pressures, a vision that required educated elites capable of implementing modern policies. King Chulalongkorn's educational reforms predated his European travels, as seen in his abolition of slavery and the establishment of formal education for common people. His decision to send his sons and other elites to Europe for advanced education reflected his belief that exposure to Western knowledge would prepare them to lead Siam's modernization. The King's travels, therefore, can be seen as a complementary effort to his ongoing reform initiatives, emphasizing the importance of education in strengthening Siam's institutions and independence.

During his first European trip, King Rama V visited Emperor Nicholas II of Russia, who had previously been hosted by the Siamese royal court in March 1891 (Wattananggun, 2003, p. 58). The Grand Duke Nicholas, impressed by the hospitality extended to him, requested that the king send his sons to study in Russia, assuring that they would receive the same care as the Russian royal family (Weerasilpchai, 2023, p. 192). Consequently, King Rama V instructed Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath, who was then studying in England, to further his education in Russia as a cadet at the Russian imperial Corps de Pages.

4.2 1897: Study life in Elsenwood Camberley

Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's education in England began at Elsenwood School in Camberley, where he studied from a young age. The institution provided him with a strong foundation in Western-style education, emphasizing discipline, language skills, and cultural adaptability. His time in England not only honed his academic abilities but also exposed him to Western customs and values, preparing him for his future roles in Siam's modernization efforts.

In 1897, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh resided and studied at Elsenwood Camberley in England. During his time there, he was among several royal family members from Siam who were also studying in England. These students often gathered in Camberley for special occasions such as New Year's celebrations. The prince focused primarily on studying English and Russian, as his father, King Rama V, intended for him to further his education at a military school in Russia (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, January 13, 1897). The prince developed a keen interest in Russian and inserted into one of his letters four Russian translations: "Siam," "King of Siam," "Chulalongkorn," and "Chakrabongse."

Beyond his language studies, the prince attended lectures on British military history and observed military exercises at the cadet school. He stayed informed about current events by reading newspapers regularly. On one occasion, he encountered an article that suggested his father had initially intended for him to study in Russia but had decided instead to continue his education in England. The article speculated that sending the prince to Russia might lead to conflicts with Britain and potentially result in anti-British sentiments. The editor commented, "Great idea! Sending the prince to Russia might cause conflicts with Britain. A Russian education would brainwash the prince into a British hater" (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, March 24, 1897). The prince dismissed this as mere gossip, considering it to be insignificant.

Prince Chakrabongse enjoyed his Russian classes immensely and aspired to speak fluently, stating, "I wanted to surprise the emperor" (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, December 2, 1897). He also attended English plays and began learning to ride at the cadet school. During the Christmas holiday, he participated in a charity play with other members of the Thai royal family in London. The performances included two plays—*Freeing a Mother-in-Law* and *Who is Who*—with the prince acting in the latter. Each play was performed twice: the first for general audiences and the second for wealthier patrons. Both performances were well-attended and sold out. "We gained tens of pounds," the prince remarked (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, December 31, 1897).

4.3 1898: Trip to Moscow

Following the Christmas holidays, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, and arrived in Moscow in January 1898. The prince later moved to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, where he continued his studies and participated in military activities. He joined other cadets in a military maneuver, marching with a gun past *The Arc de Triomphe I*, a memorial to the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. During this event, the soldiers presented "Arms" to honor those who had sacrificed their lives for this victory (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, February 14, 1898). On another occasion, the emperor visited the cadet school, prompting all students to shout "Ura!" to show their respect and loyalty. Following such visits, it was customary for the emperor to grant a holiday to the students (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, February 26, 1898). However, the prince did not have an opportunity to converse with the emperor, and the usual Sunday feast was canceled due to the empress's illness and mourning for the Queen of Denmark.

The prince enjoyed his time in Russia. On March 3, his birthday, he was treated to comedic performances, and the cadets presented him with a Russian-style box of assorted sweets, which he appreciated (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, March 7, 1898). In April, he finally had a meeting with the emperor and two grand dukes, along with Field Marshal Prince Bhanurangsi Savangwongse, his uncle. Their conversation, which focused mainly on England and Transvaal, was friendly and engaging. When asked which side he supported, the prince responded, "Transvaal," to the emperor's pleasure. "They blamed England. So did the Russians," noted the prince (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, April 3, 1898). At the time, Russia sympathized with the Boer republics and criticized Britain's imperial expansion in southern Africa.

Before returning to London, the prince visited Grand Duke Constantine, head of the military educational department, and attended the annual musical performance of the Russian Military Academy Cadets. The performance, which included the royal anthem, was held in honor of the emperor and empress, and the proceeds were donated to the poor. As a gesture of gratitude, the prince presented a holy relic of Lord Buddha, received from the king to the Russian representative as a tribute to “His Majesty the King’s honor” (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, April 3, 1898).

The prince’s studies in England were designed to ensure proficiency in both English and Russian. This preparation was essential for his anticipated studies in Russia and for acquiring a comprehensive understanding of European manners and culture. His visit to Russia was initially intended to provide him with a preliminary impression, and he was evidently impressed by the warm reception he received, expressing a willingness to relocate and continue his studies there.

4.4 1898–1905: Life in Russia

The prince and his entourage arrived at Palais d’Hiver in St. Petersburg on June 13, 1898, where they were warmly welcomed by the general. On June 17, the prince and his followers were invited to lunch with the emperor and empress. Subsequently, the prince visited the emperor’s mother, accompanied by Phum. During their conversation, the emperor’s mother expressed her pleasure at seeing the prince with company. The following day, the prince and Phum packed and left for Peterhof to begin their studies at Corps de Pages (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, June 21, 1898).

The prince did not write to the king for three weeks due to an accident where he fell off his horse, an event reported widely in Russian newspapers. The prince felt overwhelmed by the attention, noting, “Even in England they knew what happened with me,” and commented on the competitive nature among cadets, “They both keep watching each other and see who is gaining or losing marks.” Despite the concern, he assured the King that there was no cause for worry, humorously adding, “When people asked too much, I said ‘I am writing and not dead yet’” (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, July 6, 1898).

On June 15, the prince resumed his activities and participated in cadet maneuvers dressed in a Russian uniform. He was impressed by the cadets, remarking, “Those cadets are good. They are from good families and behave well. They did not bring about any nonsense matters.” He also expressed gratitude to the two doctors who had treated him, inviting them to dinner and presenting them with golden and silver Thai-style trays as tokens of appreciation (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, July 12, 1898). After his full recovery, the prince received a royal commission from the emperor and empress to attend various important ceremonies and activities. These included the princess’s name day celebration, the annual military inspection, a meeting with the queen of Greece during her visit to Russia, a welcome dinner for the king of Romania with the emperor and empress, as well as plays and races (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, July 26, 1898). During a storm that struck the city, the prince joined other soldiers in assisting the victims (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, August 8, 1898).

The prince began his studies at Peterhof, focusing on subjects such as mathematics, the Russian language, shooting, drawing, and playing the harmonica (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, August 19, 1898). He continued to follow the emperor and empress, often accompanying them to the train station when they traveled to Moscow, even during late hours. On August 20, 1898, the prince received a letter from King Rama V expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of detailed updates about his feelings regarding life in Russia, his progress in Russian studies, and his interactions with those around him. In response, on September 7, 1898, the prince wrote:

Dear Father, I did not provide details earlier as it seemed too soon to make judgments. However, I am now ready to share the following: First, I am well here, though I cannot say it is as comfortable as my time in England. In England, I focused solely on my studies, but here there are numerous concerns. I must be cautious about my words and actions, but I will always uphold your honor. Second, the people around me are kind. The Thai followers are particularly pleasant, and I am grateful we chose the right persons. As for the Russians, they are all well-meaning towards me. Third, I can communicate in Russian. However, since many people here speak English, we often use it for convenience and accuracy. (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, September 7, 1898)

Prince Chakrabongse shared with the King that he greatly enjoyed his schooling in Russia. He found the curriculum engaging and appreciated the opportunity to interact with many good friends. He noted, “I pay so much attention in class because the teacher will ask us about what we have learned. I want to be able to answer those questions.” In addition to the general subjects, his studies included physics, Russian history, European history, natural history, writing, swordsmanship, and equitation. He joined a hunting club, which he found entertaining, and took field trips to observe porcelain, glass, and bullet production. He was particularly

fascinated by bank note production and detailed this process in a letter to his father (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, September 20, 1898).

During conversations with the general director of the school, Prince Chakrabongse was given the choice between the cavalry corps and other corps. He chose the cavalry corps, distinguishing himself as the only royal family member in this role. The general director informed him that the King and Queen of Spain had spoken highly of him, and that the emperor had a favorable opinion of him. “I have heard so many compliments about you,” the general said. “I heard that the emperor has a fancy for you” (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, September 27, 1898).

Prince Chakrabongse attended the Corps des Pages under the guidance of the emperor and school director Count Keller. Both he and Phum were appointed as cavalry officers in the Royal Guard Hussars. The Corps des Pages program comprised nine levels of study. To complete his education and graduate within the four-year timeframe, the prince undertook home-schooling for some subjects beyond level 6. Despite this, he participated in all the field exercises like other students. Upon reaching level 8, the prince had to study additional subjects: law and political history, in addition to the existing curriculum which included history, military regulation, geography, tactics, Russian, mechanics, artillery, fortification, chemistry, German, natural history, French, topography, and jurisprudence (National Archives of Thailand, King Chulalongkorn, T.49/29, 1901). He earned second place for the academic year with a score of 163/168 (Chakrabongse, 2012, pp. 258–259). In accordance with the tradition for students who achieved one of the top three places in level 8, he was promoted to royal cadet and sergeant.

The Corps des Pages established in 1759 under Empress Elizabeth of Russia, was one of the most prestigious military academies in Europe, reserved exclusively for the sons of nobility and royal families. By the late 19th century, it had become synonymous with excellence in military education, offering a rigorous curriculum that combined academic, military, and social training. Cadets at the Corps des Pages studied military strategy, artillery, and engineering, alongside broader academic subjects such as history, geography, and foreign languages like French and German, which were essential for diplomacy and military communication. Practical training included horsemanship, drills, and live maneuvers to instill discipline, physical endurance, and tactical decision-making skills. Furthermore, the institution emphasized etiquette and moral education, ensuring cadets were well-prepared for roles in both the military and the court (Rambaud, 1904; Menning, 1992). Graduates often entered elite units such as the Imperial Guard, reinforcing the academy’s reputation as a symbol of privilege and leadership within Russian society (Duffy, 2000). During Prince Chakrabongse’s time at the Corps des Pages (1898–1905), the academy was at its peak but faced challenges stemming from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and the 1905 Russian Revolution. These events exposed vulnerabilities in the Russian military system, shaping Prince Chakrabongse’s understanding of the importance of adaptability and reform in military institutions (Fuller, 1992). His experiences at the Corps des Pages provided him with the skills and vision to implement European-style reforms in Siam’s military, laying the foundation for a professional and modernized armed forces upon his return.

Tsar Nicholas of Russia warmly welcomed the Prince of Siam and Phum, providing them with accommodations at the Winter Palace, complete with attendants and royal staff to serve their needs. Captain Krulof of the Imperial Horse Guards was assigned to oversee their care and facilitate their activities. Both were enrolled at the Corps des Pages, an elite military academy, where their education was tailored to their unique status as foreign nationals, members of royalty, and under the emperor’s patronage. To ensure they could keep pace with their Russian peers, specialized instructors were assigned to them, particularly for language studies.

Their daily schedule was rigorous, beginning at 7:00 AM and including mathematics lessons at 8:00 AM, followed by lunch at 11:00 AM with Captain Krulof and their Russian language instructor to further practice the language. From noon to 2:00 PM, they attended classroom lessons, and from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM, they engaged in field training and gymnastics at the academy. Afterward, they returned to the Winter Palace for further studies at 4:00 PM, followed by dinner at 5:00 PM, during which they continued practicing Russian. Their evenings, from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM, were devoted to special activities organized by Captain Krulof, often focusing on social and cultural refinement. These included music lessons featuring the piano, violin, and the balalaika, the latter being a particular favorite of the Prince of Siam. On other occasions, they received formal dance lessons or attended theatrical performances or operas. This comprehensive schedule emphasized both intellectual and cultural development, preparing them for military and social responsibilities. (Weerasilpchai, 2023, pp. 193–194)

In his final year at the Corps des Pages in 1902, the curriculum expanded to include English, history of wars, physical exercise, hippology, military law, military administration, and international law, as well as extracurricular activities like dancing, music, and drawing. The prince excelled, scoring the highest marks of 11.75/12 on his final exam, with Phum achieving second place with 11.50/12 (Chakrabongse, 2012, pp. 258–

259). His outstanding performance set a new school record, and his name was inscribed on the school's marble. He was promoted to second lieutenant of the Royal Guard Hussars in August 1902.

Despite his academic achievements, the prince was required to fulfill his duties as an officer, which included military practice, guarding, and preparing for further studies. In the same year, he and Phum began a two-year program at the Command and General Staff College. To meet the king's desire for him to graduate and return to Siam as soon as possible, the prince worked with the Royal Guard Hussars on Tuesdays and Fridays while attending classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. His coursework encompassed topics such as war chronicles, war strategy, Russian, French, military formation, fortification, and ordnance (National Archives of Thailand, 1901). He studied rigorously and graduated with first place, achieving a perfect score of 96/96. Phum earned second place with a score of 89/96 (National Archives of Thailand, 1901). Tsar Nicholas II promoted him to the rank of senior colonel in the Russian Army. Prince Chakrabongse and Phum returned to Siam in February 1905.

4.5 Working for Siamese Military Academy

Before Prince Chakrabongse returned to Siam, King Rama V had implemented significant reforms within the Siamese military. These changes affected various branches, including the Royal Pages Corps, cavalry, and the war department, and included the establishment of military academy education, the Ministry of Defence, conscription, and a new organizational structure for the army, which included companies, battalions, regiments, and armies. Standardized military training was introduced for field exercises and maneuvers. Upon his return to Siam, Prince Chakrabongse was promptly appointed as deputy to the chief of the army department, who was responsible for overall army command. His primary role was to oversee the training of officers and soldiers to maximize their effectiveness. In 1906, he was reassigned to the position of director of the Royal Military School and chief of military education (Ratchakitcha, 1906). When the Department of Military School Command was dissolved and replaced by the Department of Military Education in 1910, Prince Chakrabongse was appointed as both the chief of staff and chief of military education.

4.6 School management

Prince Chakrabongse's commitment to education, shaped by his own experiences as a student, led to significant advancements in Siamese military education. His first major reform was the separation of the general education program from the military curriculum. In this new structure, primary school students completed a common program covering general subjects, such as conversational Thai, mathematics, sciences, and English. Upon graduation, they would then proceed to the secondary school to undertake military-specific training. The military curriculum included subjects like military mapping and equestrian skills. Among the various disciplines, science was particularly emphasized by the prince. He promoted an educational approach that encouraged students to ask questions and seek answers through experimentation. This led to the publication of *the Book of Science*, aimed at disseminating scientific knowledge (Bunnag, 2006, p. 98). Under his leadership, the School of Science and the Science Council were established within the military school, equipped with a laboratory to enhance practical learning. In addition, the educational facilities and class arrangements were upgraded to better serve the students. The courses within the military academy were aligned with those of the Ministry of Education, covering subjects such as mathematics, sciences, Thai, and English, thereby standardizing and improving the overall quality of military education.

Prince Chakrabongse also introduced the Russian military annual final examination system. Each subject was graded on a scale of 12 marks, and this standardized approach was designed to enhance student motivation (Royal Thai Army, 1987, pp. 68–69). A key innovation was the introduction of handbooks for all students, a new method of study at the time. The course syllabus was modernized, emphasizing practical application over theoretical learning. Furthermore, the prince made the military school accessible not only to the nobility but also to common citizens. In 1909, he established the Command and General Staff College, modeled after the Russian system. This two-year program, divided into four semesters, aimed to further professionalize the army. The curriculum included general subjects such as mathematics, foreign languages, and world geography, as well as military subjects like ordnance, astronomical mapping, and nursing. For his efforts, Prince Chakrabongse was honored with the title "Father of Chief of Staff" (Bunnag, 2006, p. 98).

4.7 Publication

Prince Chakrabongse's deep interest in history was evident from his academic achievements, where he consistently earned full marks in all his history exams (Chakrabongse, 2018, p. 221). At the military school, he personally taught students and was actively involved in translating, writing, and publishing numerous military textbooks. These works, still available online for those interested in Thai military history, include titles such as *General Strategies*, *History of the Art of War*, *The History of Warfare*, and *History of Militia* (Bunnag, 2006, pp. 95–100). In his book *General Strategies*, the prince outlined the duties and responsibilities of young officers,

emphasizing the importance of their spirit and dedication. This book, along with his other writings, reflects his military ethos, which was greatly influenced by the modern European military style.

In addition to his books, Prince Chakrabongse contributed articles to the *Yuttakot* journal and encouraged military students to publish their own work in it (Bunnag, 2006, pp. 95–100). His commitment to reading and the dissemination of knowledge was profound. After 1906, the number of articles published in *Yuttakot* increased significantly following the return of Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath. Apart from writing articles himself, His Royal Highness also supported military officers and cadets in presenting their works in *Yuttakot*. These articles often reflected personal opinions and drew comparisons between Thailand's military strategies and those of other nations, emphasizing the need for modernization in line with Western standards. One notable article authored by His Royal Highness is "Chronicles of Changes in Warfare" (Prince of Phitsanulok, 1909a, pp. 937–958). This article highlights developments in military tactics, weaponry, and organizational strategies, with examples drawn from significant historical empires such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The article aimed to provide readers with insights into the evolution of military strategies and tactics on a global scale. Another significant article is "Guidelines for Combined Arms Exercises" (Prince of Phitsanulok, 1909b, pp. 499–590). This work focuses on military strategy and the integration of various military units, such as cavalry and engineers, to ensure effective collaboration during wartime. These ideas became a foundational framework for modernizing the Thai military during that era.

4.8 Military spirit motivator

One of Prince Chakrabongse's key responsibilities was overseeing both personnel and operations within the Siamese military framework. The establishment of the first Royal Military Academy in Siam in 1885 and the creation of the Ministry of Defence in 1892 were pivotal events that elevated the role of the Siamese military and army. During this period, the Ministry of Defence received the largest share of the national income, underscoring the critical importance of selecting capable military leaders. In his high-ranking position, Prince Chakrabongse worked closely with the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Thai Aide-De-Camp Department. The Prince was dedicated to imparting his knowledge and experience to other officers, driven by his pride in his educational achievements and professional background. Having studied and trained in Russia, he was keenly aware of the advantages his experiences could offer to the Siamese military, particularly for those who had not had the opportunity to study abroad. (Rittakanee, 1987, pp. 371–372).

He expressed his commitment to enhancing the knowledge of soldiers, acknowledging his own good fortune in receiving education in advanced countries. He stated:

I would like to say that I have wanted to enhance the knowledge of the soldiers, but I by no means say that I am an expert in anything. But, I was so blessed to be educated in very much developed countries. I am very lucky, and I want to share this fortune and knowledge with you, friends. (Bunnag, 2006, p. 67)¹

As soon as Prince Chakrabongse arrived in Siam, he began working as an assistant in the military education department of the Ministry of Defence in 1906. That same year, his father appointed him as the director of the Royal Military Academy and the Army Training Command. The prince dedicated himself to managing and improving military education in Siam. He emphasized the importance of officers inspecting their men both in times of peace and war, and he believed that they should practice independently rather than relying on foreign experts. Prince Chakrabongse clearly outlined the qualifications required for officers, stating:

The officers are the leaders. They must know how to communicate and how to get into their men's hearts. This will make the men willing to do their job. The officers must be wise and know how to command. They should train their men well during peacetime and lead during wartime. More importantly, they must behave and maintain their discipline and competence. (Bunnag, 2006, p. 71)²

He took the welfare of the officers and men seriously, establishing a nursing home for the military school to treat students and staff. He also appointed a nutritionist to inspect the diet contractor for each primary and secondary school (Command and General Staff College, 2025).

Prince Chakrabongse played a crucial role in the military education of the Siamese army. His efforts to improve military education demonstrated his focus on the responsibilities of officers, educational management similar to European armies, and the establishment of European-style military institutions and academies. By aligning classes and the chain of command with European standards, he ensured that Siam was prepared to send troops to join World War I in 1917. A year later, he established the Army Aviation Center, which later

¹ Field Marshall Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's speech in the instruction of the Chief of Staff of the Royal Siamese Army.

² Field Marshall Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's speech mentioned in the opening ceremony of Field Marshall Chakrabongse Bhuvanath's Monument at Fort Chakrabongse, Prachinburi.

developed into the Royal Thai Air Force. In the same year, Fort Chakrabongse was built as the first Siamese fort in Prachinburi (2nd Military Circle) (Command and General Staff College, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The collection of Chakrabongse's Letters provides invaluable descriptive information and is a significant resource for historical study. Prince Chakrabongse was the only one of King Rama V's sons to receive education in Russia, highlighting the importance of English and European culture during a time when Siam faced threats of European colonization. King Rama V strategically sent Thai children to study abroad to foster alliances with European countries, balancing the powers of Britain and France by cultivating a strong relationship with Russia. The prince's life in these foreign countries serves as a compelling case study of the responsibilities borne by royal family members. Despite being prohibited from using "His Royal Highness" in England to ensure he focused solely on his studies, Prince Chakrabongse consistently upheld his royal family's honor. His proficiency in foreign languages enabled him to manage Siamese relations with foreign armies and envoys, beginning this role during his final year in Russia. Notably, he represented the King of Siam at the wedding of Duchess Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and German Crown Prince Wilhelm on June 6, 1905, in Berlin (Chakrabongse, 1896–1915, Chakrabongse to Rama V, June 1, 1905).

From a young age, the prince demonstrated intelligence and a soldier's spirit, evident in King Rama V's decision to send him to study in England and Russia. Having Phum accompany him served not only as companionship but also as a competitive incentive, reflecting the king's strategic acumen. Beyond academic achievements, the prince assimilated Western traditions and technology during his time abroad. His great sense of responsibility and dedication enabled him to return to Siam and significantly contribute to creating a professional army, fulfilling his father's vision.

Throughout his military career, Prince Chakrabongse devoted himself to military education and the development of a professional, European-style army. His extensive education, observations, and experiences in European countries profoundly shaped his thoughts and approaches, leaving a lasting impact on Thai military education and the army's professionalism to this day.

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DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI-assisted tools to improve language and readability. The author reviewed and edited all content and takes full responsibility for the manuscript.

3. Data availability statement

The study is based on archival materials, primarily the Chakrabongse Archive (British Library, Or 15749; 1896–1915; 256 Thai-language letters), and related Thai archival records, accessible through the respective repositories subject to access conditions.

4. Ethics statement

This study is based on archival research and involved no human participants; ethical approval was not required.

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Nathatai Manadee: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Resources

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