

บทคัดย่อ

## **Dynastic Diplomacy in the Fifth Reign: Siam's Relations with German Bridgeheads**

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การเด็จพระราชดำเนินเยือนทวีปยุโรปในปี พ.ศ. 2440 ของพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว พระมหาปาริชร์ชากลที่ห้าแห่งราชวงศ์จักรี (พ.ศ. 2411-2453) นับว่ามีความสำคัญทางการทูตอย่างลึกซึ้ง ในแง่ที่เป็นนโยบาย ‘ป้องกันไว้ก่อน’ (pro-active) เพื่อรักษาอธิปไตยของสยามหรือประเทศไทยในปัจจุบัน การเด็จฯ ยุโรป อย่างเป็นทางการครั้งนี้ได้เป็นทิศทางของภัยคุกคามความมั่นคงของสยามประเทศจากการเมืองสมัยล่าอาณานิคม

ขณะนั้น สยามในสายตาของชาติมหาอำนาจอาณานิคม มีฐานะเป็น “รัฐกันชน” (buffer state) [ระหว่างอินเดียซึ่งเป็นอาณานิคมของอังกฤษและอินโดจีนของฝรั่งเศส] สยามจึงมีทางเลือกไม่มากนักเพียงสองทางคือ หากไม่ยอมรับฐานะเป็น ‘รัฐกันชน’ ก็จะต้องดำเนิน ‘ยุทธศาสตร์กันชน’ (buffer strategy) ด้วยตนเองเพื่อความอยู่รอดของประเทศ และเมื่อพิจารณาจากสภาพการณ์ที่สยามจำต้องอยู่ “ให้รอด” ท่ามกลางความขัดแย้งและการแย่งชิงความเป็นใหญ่ในภูมิภาคโดยมหาอำนาจอาณานิคมแล้ว พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวจึงทรงเลือกดำเนินนโยบาย ‘ยุทธศาสตร์กันชน’ ซึ่งสามารถสรุปเป็นหลักการสำคัญดังนี้ คือ 1) การแสวงหาอาณานิคมเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างไม่หยุดยั้ง (ของมหาอำนาจ) 2) อำนาจอธิปไตยของสยามจะไร้เดียงสาหากต้องอยู่ในฐานะ ‘รัฐกันชน’ 3) ความจำเป็นที่จะต้องปฏิรูประบบการปกครองและปรับปรุงระบบสาธารณูปโภคขั้นพื้นฐานให้ทันสมัย การส่งเสริมความ

## สารสารยุโรปศึกษา

ก้าวหน้าทางเทคโนโลยี และการพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจ 4) การตระหนักรถึงสภาพความไม่แน่นอนในฐานะรัฐอานานิคม 5) ชาติกรรมของราชวงศ์ 6) การตกลงใจเสริมสร้างพันธมิตรกับผู้นำต่างๆ ในยุโรปด้วยวิธีเจริญสันติไม่ตรีเป็นการส่วนพระองค์ 7) การแสดงทามหามิตรจากราชวงศ์ยุโรปที่สามารถสืบสานมิตรไม่ตรีและกระหึ่บประสานความร่วมมือระหว่างกัน 8) เน้นและเพิ่มพูนให้ ‘ยุทธศาสตร์กันชน’ เชิงแกร่งขึ้นโดยการเสริมสร้างสัมพันธภาพกับราชสำนัก อันเป็นศูนย์กลางการปกครองประเทศต่างๆ ในยุโรป 9) เชื่อมโยงสัมพันธไมตรีระหว่างสยามประเทศกับประเทศและราชสำนักยุโรปที่มีความสำคัญทางยุทธศาสตร์เหล่านั้น

พระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวทรงเล็งเห็นประโยชน์ของการเยี่ยมเยือนระหว่างกันของราชวงศ์ยุโรป ในฐานะภาคันตุกุการเมือง (Reisediplomatie) ดังนั้นการเด็จเยือนยุโรปอย่างเป็นทางการในฐานะภาคันตุกุการเมืองจึงเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของนโยบาย ‘ตีนตัว’ หรือนโยบาย ‘ป้องกันไว้ก่อน’ ของพระองค์ท่าน การเด็จฯ เยี่ยมเยือนระหว่างราชสำนักยุโรปและราชสำนักสยามจึงนับเป็นเครื่องยืนยันความพยายามที่จะเสริมสร้างสัมพันธไมตรีอันดีระหว่างกัน อีกทั้งยังส่งผลให้บรรดาราชวงศ์ยุโรปยอมรับพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวว่าทรงมีฐานะเท่าเทียมกันกับบรรดาขัตติยราหงส์ของยุโรป อาจกล่าวได้ว่าการเด็จฯ เยือนยุโรปของพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวได้รับผลลัพธ์ทั้งโดยส่วนพระองค์และได้ผลทางการเมือง โดยที่พระองค์ทรงได้รับการถวายพระเกียรติยศและความเคารพยกย่องในฐานะที่เท่าเทียมจากราชสำนักต่างๆ ในยุโรป อีกทั้งประเทศไทยได้รับผลกระทบจากกลัทธิเสวนาหารานิคมดังกล่าวไม่รุนแรงนักเพียงในระดับปานกลาง และยังคงรักษาอิปไตยของชาติได้จนถึงทุกวันนี้

## **Dynastic Diplomacy in the Fifth Reign: Siam's Relations with German Bridgeheads\***

Karl E. Weber \*\*

*“... diplomacy is ... a substitute for force; it is the means of obtaining the maximum national advantage without the use of violence and ... with the minimum of friction and resentment....”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Members of the royal family speak German fluently, more fluently than English perhaps. This may be because they always keep contact with their royal cousins in Germany. Their German blood is not yet quite diluted.”<sup>2</sup>*

Siam, as modern-day Thailand was officially named at the time to which the gist of this paper has relevance, preserved her independence during the period when colonialism was at its zenith. This is the more remarkable, as even on the “old continent”, in

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\* Dedicated to Prof. Dr. Somsakdi Xuto in celebration of his Sixth Life Cycle on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> Assorted facts based on articles featured in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as indicated by references to its volume number and page(s): EB volume number: page(s). Here EB7: 472.

<sup>2</sup> *Klai Ban*, Letter dated 24 June 1907, p. 133.

## การสารยุโรปศึกษา

Europe, with its “motherlands” of the colonial powers of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia and Spain, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, several now independent countries still were under foreign rule. They include 17 present European countries, namely, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Eire, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malta, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Incidentally, eleven of these countries are either member countries of the European Union, by now, or in the process of attaining full membership.

To succeed in safeguarding her independence, Siam did not have to resort to warfare, as had the rulers of Afghanistan who defeated the British and scared off the Russians. Neither was Siam invaded by imperialist powers, in contrast to China. Nor had Siam to experience any formal division of her territory into interest spheres as happened to Persia. There must be no doubt that the interfacing of numerous factors had the salutary effect of enabling Siam to uphold her independence throughout four centuries of colonial expansion that kept encroaching at her periphery. Of certainly decisive significance, indeed, was the diplomacy practiced by King Chulalongkorn, Rama V of the Chakri Dynasty (1868-1910), who resolved to be its principal actor by assuming the role of diplomat *par excellence*.

It has been assumed that the threat of colonialism had vanished by the time when King Chulalongkorn resolved to travel to Europe, heading there in 1897. Such perception of a *fin-de-siècle* completion of empire building, some kind of having reached the

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finishing line of colonial expansion<sup>3</sup>, is not supported by historical evidence, indeed. Close to Siam, the expansion of colonial empires continued. Several principalities on the southern Malay peninsula were brought firmly under British rule, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The United States took control of the Philippines in 1898, ending their “300 years in the convent”, i.e. under Spanish rule and entering into what is called “50 years in Hollywood”. Japan occupied Formosa (as Taiwan was also known by then), the Liaotung peninsula of northern China and Korea. Germany occupied the port city of Tsingtao in China and bought altogether six remotely scattered Pacific island archipelagos and one isolated island. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire led to the expansion of British, French and Italian control over large territories in Northern Africa and the Middle East, in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To conclude, the peak of expanding colonialism had not been reached yet by the time when King Chulalongkorn set out onto his first journey to Europe in 1897. The rationale of such unprecedented initiative by a Siamese monarch was as much a reaction to thoroughly analyzed constellations and tendencies as it was the monarch's resolve to take a pro-active stance, for the sake of averting the very real threat posed by colonialism and protecting Siam from it.

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<sup>3</sup> Nish, p. 13.

### **Synopsis of Asian Regional Constellations and Conflicts in the Final Decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century - *en lieu* of an introduction**

Claiming stakes was an age-old practice of all expansionist regimes, the world over. To this day, ever more evidence is found in the form of monuments, inscriptions or documents.

For Siam, the conquest of Malacca in 1511, a sultanate that had been a vassal of Siam, marks the first European incursion into the sphere of Siamese might, by the Portuguese. In staking their claim, they had routinely “erected the boundary stones of the royal arms of Portugal (*padrões*)”<sup>4</sup>. In 1516, a “treaty of friendship and commerce was signed between Portugal and Siam. It was the first time Siam had allied itself with a European nation.”<sup>5</sup> Soon after, King Ramathibodi II (1491-1529) authorized the Portuguese to erect at Ayutthaya a *padrão*.<sup>6</sup>

Like during the 350 years since the arrival of the Portuguese, European powers watched with envy how any one of them wooed Siam, what advances were made, and which favors were secured from the court of Siam.

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<sup>4</sup> van der Cruyssse, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> op.cit., p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> op.cit., p. 10.

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### **Colonial Expansion**

The threat to the independence and territorial integrity of Siam evolved through a process of accelerating and intensifying proliferation. How the occupation by colonial powers of lands after lands in the regions surrounding Siam in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century evolved is sketched hereunder. It highlights the prevailing tendencies and emerging constellations.

Particularly during the Fifth Reign (1868-1910), historical documents were purported as of salient significance in that the British and French colonial powers arbitrarily pursued certain claims, some shaky and others well-founded, of their newly subjugated territories to lands yet unoccupied that bordered Siam. In like manner, the said colonial powers entered into vested interests or customary rights earlier exerted by their new colonies or protectorates over such yet unoccupied lands.<sup>7</sup>

### **Tightening of the Colonial Noose, as of the 1890s**

From the observation post of Bangkok, the advances of colonial powers and the expansion of their annexations in the vicinity and beyond in the region were closely watched.

The island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka, before and after the colonial era) was firmly under British rule, with its economy controlled by the colonial administration and attuned to the requirements of the

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<sup>7</sup> Kraichitti, p. 77.

## វារសារយុវវិបត្រិកម្មា

“motherland”. The ancient kingdom of Kandy had long ceased to exist.<sup>8</sup>

Dutch overlordship on Java<sup>9</sup> and control over the surrounding, vast archipelago had grafted an export economy onto the indigenous socio-economic system.<sup>10</sup> The native powers, Siam’s erstwhile allies or opponents, as it were, had become early examples of empires sunk into oblivion.

The peninsula of Mainland Southeast Asia and its nearby islands, once under Siam’s supremacy<sup>11</sup>, had been brought under British control. It started with the proclamation of a crown colony, in 1867, including the four disparate territories of Penang, Province Wellesley, Malacca, and Singapore. This was followed by the formation of a federation, under British suzerainty, of another four territories, i.e. Perak, Selangor, the Negri Sembilan, and Pahang (1895). Four more territories, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Trengganu, were the foci of tensions and conflicts between Siam, the old regional power, and Great Britain, a new regional power.<sup>12</sup> Of greater significance than merely that of a historical footnote is the fact that the founder of independent Malaya was born a Prince of Saiburi, in the Grand Palace of Bangkok<sup>13</sup>. Saiburi was the Siamese official name of the present-day sultanate of Kedah.

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<sup>8</sup> EB5:221.

<sup>9</sup> EB12:975.

<sup>10</sup> EB12:173.

<sup>11</sup> EB14:678.

<sup>12</sup> Nakirak, pp. 61 and 68; EB14:679.

<sup>13</sup> Confirmed by H.E. Y. T. M. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj in personal conversation with the author on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1984.

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On the subcontinent, then British India, the rulers of some 560 principalities had vowed allegiance to the crown, after the old Indian aristocracy had been replaced by British officials, the last Mogul emperor had been tried for complicity in the revolt triggered by the Sepoy mutiny and condemned to exile, the British crown had taken over the government of India, centralization under the crown had been accomplished<sup>14</sup>, and Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1876.<sup>15</sup>

In Nepal, a buffer state under British protection, the powerless royal family had been confined to the palace for half a century, by then.<sup>16</sup>

Siam's immediate neighbour to the west, Burma, had lost territory after the defeat in the war waged by the British, which in hindsight was to become known as the First Anglo-Burmese war, 1824-1826. Assam, Arakan and Tenasserim had to be ceded to British India.<sup>17</sup> The defeat in the Second-Anglo-Burmese war led to the annexation, by the British, of the province of Pegu in 1852.<sup>18</sup> The incorporation of the annexed territories of Pegu, Arakan and Tenasserim as a province of British India, in 1862, made the latter an immediate neighbour of Siam. The Third Anglo-Burmese war resulted in the annexation of the kingdom and its feudatory states.

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<sup>14</sup> EB12:148.

<sup>15</sup> EB23:125.

<sup>16</sup> EB16:222.

<sup>17</sup> EB4: 441-442.

<sup>18</sup> EB4:422.

The king was deposed, and the whole of Burma was formed into a province of the Indian empire, in 1886.<sup>19</sup>

China was forcibly pushed to grant concessions of dire consequences. Challenged by British naval power and conceding defeat, the cession of the island of Hong Kong to Britain and the opening of the five ports to foreign merchant vessels were sealed through the treaty of Nanking 1842.<sup>20</sup> Other western countries took advantage of China's debilitation, including the U.S.A., France, Belgium and Sweden.<sup>21</sup> The treaties of 1842-44 and 1858-60 weakened Chinese sovereignty and threatened her territorial integrity, even her existence as a state.<sup>22</sup> Additional ports had to be opened and territories ceded on the Kowloon promontory to Britain, east of the Ussuri with a long stretch of coast to Russia, east of the upper Mekong and Kuang-chou Wan in Kwantung to France, and Tsingtao to Germany, by 1897.<sup>23</sup>

Farther to the east, the western powers' aggressions against China aroused the greed of Japan. Her government strived to achieve equality with the colonial powers.<sup>24</sup> Efforts to revise the treaty conceding extraterritoriality, initiated in 1871, met with success in 1894.<sup>25</sup> Ignoring the protest of the Chinese court, Japan annexed

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<sup>19</sup> Nakirak, p. 61; EB4:442.

<sup>20</sup> EB5:584.

<sup>21</sup> EB5:584.

<sup>22</sup> EB5:584-585.

<sup>23</sup> EB5:584-586.

<sup>24</sup> EB12:908.

<sup>25</sup> EB12:908.

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the kingdom of the Ryukyu Islands in 1879<sup>26</sup>, defeated Chinese troops in Korea, China's most important tributary state, in 1894<sup>27</sup>, and forced China, through the peace treaty at Shimonoseki in 1895, to recognize the independence of Korea, cede Formosa, the Pescadores Islands and the Liaotung peninsula to Japan, and grant Japan all rights enjoyed by European powers, amended by the opening of new treaty ports.<sup>28</sup>

In the Pacific, the Hawaiian Islands had, after decades of threats to the independence of the former kingdom, succumbed to foreign intervention, ceded the port of Pearl Harbour to the United States of America, and been transformed into a republic.<sup>29</sup>

The likely greatest, impending menace was the French colonial intrusion into territories bordering the eastern flank of Siam. Upon the invasion of Annam in 1858, the France-Annamite treaty of 1862 ceded the southern territory to France.<sup>30</sup> In their pursuit of regional expansion, the French revived an old claim of Annam to territory as far west as the Mekong<sup>31</sup> and beyond, encompassing the whole of Cambodia.<sup>32</sup> A treaty defining the status of Cambodia as that of a French protectorate was signed in 1863.<sup>33</sup> Siam's suzerainty over Cambodia was reduced to only the two western

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<sup>26</sup> EB12:908.

<sup>27</sup> EB12:908.

<sup>28</sup> EB12:908.

<sup>29</sup> EB11:175-177.

<sup>30</sup> EB23:146.

<sup>31</sup> EB13:713.

<sup>32</sup> Nish, pp. 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> EB 4:681.

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provinces of Battambang and Siam Rath, through the treaty of 1867.<sup>34</sup> Upon consolidation of French supremacy by assuming protector status over North Vietnam through the treaty of Saigon in 1874, the installation of the candidate selected by France as new emperor of Annam in 1885, and the creation of a governor-generalship for all territories in 1887<sup>35</sup>, France maintained that the territory on the left bank of the Mekong river was part of what meanwhile had become French occupied Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> To lay emphasis on that claim and to exert pressure on Siam, in 1893 two French gunboats forced their way past the Siamese forts at Pak Nam upstream to Bangkok.<sup>37</sup> Under duress, Siam rescinded her suzerainty over Lao territories east of the Mekong, evacuated the provinces of Battambang and Siam Rath, yielded to the demand for occupation of the provinces of Chanthaburi and Trat as well as the island of Si Chang, and later relinquished parts of the old Luang Prabang and Champassak kingdoms which were west of the Mekong.<sup>38</sup>

### **Old Order in Jeopardy**

Steeply hierarchical relations among Asian regional powers and overlord – vassal systems within their own hierarchical realms had, at first, proven sound in reacting to early contacts made by European countries. In the context of the time-honored concept of

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<sup>34</sup> EB22:20E.

<sup>35</sup> EB23:146.

<sup>36</sup> EB22:20E.

<sup>37</sup> EB22:20E.

<sup>38</sup> Nakirak, p.61; EB13: 713 and EB22:20E.

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concentric rings, the conquest of Malacca, a vassal territory of Siam, by the Portuguese was absorbed as another change of local power that would hardly touch on Siamese suzerainty. This, however, rapidly turned into a serious challenge.

In Europe, the supremacy of a single power had long vanished. By name only had the vestige of the Holy Roman Empire lingered on until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during which colonialism reached its peak. In comparison with Asia, the relations among European countries resembled a flat and, moreover, volatile hierarchy. For several centuries, European countries had been engrossed in bitter rivalry. This had been a driving force in the exploration and exploitation of sources of wealth overseas. In this competitive spirit the newly arrived European players demanded recognition as equals rather than recognize the supremacy of any traditional Asian suzerain.

Two intertwined principles were challenged. The calculability of geopolitical constellations was shattered. What had evolved over centuries of holding competitive powers in check, of building networks with tributary vassals, and of forming alliances sank into oblivion. The old order was going to pieces.

China, the very center of power in the region, had become vulnerable to aggression. The imperial court in Beijing was put under pressure by foreign invaders, restrained in exerting power, humiliated, and denied respect. The once supreme center of regional power was deprived of its might, had its myth shattered, and no longer acted as the guarantor of stability in the region. The fountain of honor, values, norms and sanctions had ceased to exist.

## การสารบัญ

The once awesome focal point had become obscured. Tributary relations had become ineffective, pointless, obsolete, as the pillar of strength had crumbled.

China lost Korea, her most valuable vassal territory.<sup>39</sup> The annexation of some of her own coastal areas by European colonial powers threatened her existence as a state. Not any longer was China the supreme regional power and shield against intrusion into her erstwhile sphere of influence.

The paradigm of concentric rings had become obsolete. Powers from outside the region kept wedging in between Siam and old allies by intruding into Siam's immediate neighboring countries to the north, west and south, occupying parts of their territory, and entire territories to the east. Annam no longer was a potential ally of Siam, as when Cambodia had been their common enemy. Once France had annexed Annam and made inroads into Cambodia, Siam faced both the enmity of Cambodia and France.

Tributary vassals to the court of Siam ceased to exist. Foreign claims were, first, increasingly superseding her own stakes and, then, obfuscating what had signified her old-established order.<sup>40</sup> Enemy territories formerly held in check became the deployment zone for further expansion by the new overlords. While Siam's former enemies had been inferior to her might, all signs pointed to the likelihood that the new enemies might have superior power.

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<sup>39</sup> EB12: 908.

<sup>40</sup> Nakirak, p. 61.

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### **German Interests**

From the viewpoints of the 25 member states of the German empire, as of 1871, the prospects of catching up with the senior European colonial powers were dim. Australia and New Zealand were firmly in British hands. Independent countries of the Americas had come under the sway of the United States, by virtue of the Monroe Doctrine. Upon the division of Africa, resolved by the Berlin Conference in 1878, Asia was the continent where seemingly there still were regions to be divided up into spheres of influence or colonies. Japan, however, already commanded that kind of respect for her might which served as a deterrent. After the annexation of Central and Northeast Asia by Russia, that of the subcontinent and parts of Mainland Southeast Asia largely by Great Britain, of parts of Mainland Southeast Asia by France and of insular Southeast Asia by Spain and the Netherlands, there remained only three sub-regions that had not yet been brought under the firm control of colonial powers. They were the Near and Middle East, from the Ottoman Empire to Afghanistan, the core area of Mainland Southeast Asia identical with Siam, and East Asia with China and Korea.

For the German empire, the first opportunity materialized through the annexation of northeastern New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago and the Northern Solomon Islands, in 1884. Soon after, West Samoa became a German colony, in 1889. Next, China's Shantung peninsula was claimed and the port city of Tsingtao annexed in 1897. Upon the defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American war, the regional colonial powers gave their assent to the comparatively junior German empire's resolve to buy

from Spain, in the years 1898 and 1899, the dispersed Pacific islands of Chuk (formerly Truk), Yap, Kosrae and Ponape (four states constituting the present Federation of Micronesia), the Mariana Islands, Palau and Nauru.<sup>41</sup> These outposts were minor additions to the far-flung German colonies in East Asia and the Pacific.

With seagoing vessels as the major means of transportation and communication, and naval forces required to secure the sea routes and control colonial territories, it was imperative to have ports-of-call in friendly countries. Attempts were made by the German empire to secure a strategic foothold on the Malay peninsula.<sup>42</sup> In this pursuit, the support of Siam was deemed essential. For centuries, Siam had swayed suzerainty over the principalities on the Malay peninsula, including the small archipelago close to its southernmost tip, then known as Tumasik or Temasek, modern-day Singapore.<sup>43</sup> Being on good terms with the monarch of Siam was, hence, a prudent stance to be taken by the German empire. Incidentally, that German initiative purportedly triggered the creation, by the British, of the crown colony comprising of Malacca, on which the North German Federation was suspected to have designs, as well as Singapore, Penang and the Province Wellesley, in 1867.

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<sup>41</sup> Nish, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Nakirak, p. 68; Nish, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> EB14:678.

### **Crisis Management Options**

Facing the increasing gravity of provocations and confrontations, the challenge before Siam was which course to steer. Any past crises of a similar nature would have been tackled by putting up resistance, assuming a hostile attitude, even going to war. Finding an alternative mode of conflict resolution was a formidable task. This was imperative for the simple reason that the third option of surrender, conceding defeat and accepting colonial status, was not to be considered and, therefore, dismissed.

### **Reactions to Threats**

Historical evidence cast a plainly fearsome scenario. Since the onset of colonial escalation, the European powers had been victorious. Regardless of certain temporary set-backs, their naval power, make-belief benefits of compacts of association, tactics of *divide et impera*, 'divide and rule', and occasional connivance among contesting powers had been instrumental in building their empires. Once powerful countries like China had succumbed to threat and aggression. Others like Annam and its vassal territories had been defeated and annexed. Still others had been degraded to the lowly status of a province, like Burma upon its incorporation into British India.

As a direct consequence, the old paradigm had become obsolete that called for the formation of alliances with distant neighbors so as to strike a blow to any common, immediate enemy.

As earlier experienced by Siam's less fortunate neighbors, tactical procedure in the pursuit of colonial strategies entailed likely

escalating expansion into targeted countries and their degradation in status. China's imperial court, the epitome of the power system of old, was no longer in a position to deal with the colonial powers on the basis of equality. By custom rooted in cosmology, the emperors had treated all official visitors as representatives of tributary territories, Asian and Non-Asian alike. In this vein they regarded envoys of colonial powers as bearers of tribute. The Chinese court was, therefore, ill prepared for encounters with agents operating under the umbrellas of distant countries with superior naval power. As evident from the fate of Siam's neighbors, whatever reactions such as shrugging off threats, ignoring demands, resisting pressure, countering aggression, or going to war had not offered any relief. Without any allies coming to the recourse of any of Siam's neighbouring countries, the colonial powers appeared to be invincible.

### Pro-active Stance in the Face of Threats

Predecessors of King Chulalongkorn had laid the foundation for a pro-active stance. Especially King Mongkut, Rama IV (1850-1868), took initiatives toward establishing foreign relations. Various treaties concluded with western countries facilitated the setting-up and operating of consular systems during the Fourth Reign.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bunnag, p. 47.

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### **Foreign Affairs**

King Chulalongkorn reserved foreign affairs as his royal prerogative. The chief minister, *Samuanayok*, of the royal government oversaw five ministries, among them that of 'foreign affairs and eastern seaboard'. Upon the introduction of a new system in 1892, it was one of twelve ministries.

Under the absolute monarchy three criteria continued to have a strong bearing on foreign affairs, indeed. The monarch, by exercising royal command, had absolute control over the ways and means employed to meet objectives. With regard to communication and interaction the ruler was the sole representative of the country. Moreover, appointees to ministerial posts were members of the royal lineage, princely ministers as such.

Foreign relations reserved by monarchs as their prerogative was a tradition in European countries as well. In Great Britain with her constitutional monarchy, Queen Victoria, the contemporary of King Chulalongkorn, attached great importance to the "tradition that in foreign affairs the crown had a special part to play".<sup>45</sup>

### **Foreign Relations**

Typically the task of a foreign mission sent to Siam and accorded an official welcome was completed once the foundation for formal relations had been laid. Such was the case when Siamese –

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<sup>45</sup> EB23:127.

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German relations were established, in the first instance, between Siam and the Hanseatic Republics, the nomenclature on record for the German city republics of Bremen, Hamburg and Lübeck, with Hamburg as the representative and leading negotiator.<sup>46</sup>

### Foreign Service

The ground for the establishing of diplomatic outposts and the posting, appointment and accreditation of government representatives had been prepared by missions, upon making official contacts. It had been consolidated by individuals already on location and volunteering their services. In the case of the Siamese – German relations, these were members of the Siamese royal lineage, princes and noblemen enrolled at universities or cadet schools in states of the German empire. Siamese consular services in the German empire were provided by the owners of some commercial enterprises with branch establishments in Siam. Some German entrepreneurs who had established themselves in Siam provided German consular services.

### Educational Journeys – “*Bildungsreisen*”

As a youthful monarch, King Chulalongkorn had accepted invitations by European powers to visit their colonies. Following first visits, in 1871, to Singapore, a British crown colony since

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<sup>46</sup> Stoffers, pp.28-29.

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1867, and Batavia on Java in the Dutch East Indies, the king visited British India as well, traveling there extensively.<sup>47</sup>

Much has already been written about how impressed King Chulalongkorn was by the state of affairs in the colonies. As behooves a royal guest, the king was not sparing in giving praise and expressed appreciation of accomplishments in various fields, including administration, technology and infrastructure.

It might well be assumed that the personal experience of his early travels and sojourns, which could be likened to the educational journeys or “*Bildungsreisen*” deemed *de rigueur*, arranged for and undertaken by male adolescent members of European royalty, led King Chulalongkorn to resolve to send several of his sons and other noblemen of royal lineage to Europe, to receive their higher education, military training, or do fact-finding.<sup>48</sup>

### ***“Reisediplomatie”***

The tradition of a Siamese monarch not going abroad<sup>49</sup> had already been abandoned when King Chulalongkorn traveled in Southeast and South Asia. The option of the king himself visiting with monarchs of European countries might have emerged upon the visit to Bangkok of the king of Hawaii.<sup>50</sup> King Kalakaua (1874-

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<sup>47</sup> H.R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, pp. 233 & 225; Chitrabongs, p. 122; Wright & Breakspear, pp.67-68.

<sup>48</sup> H.R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, pp. 233-239.

<sup>49</sup> Wright & Breakspear, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> Communication by Prof. Charnvit Kasetsiri, in discussion at the International Conference to Commemorate the Centenary of King

1891) had set out on a journey around the world to secure support for upholding the independence of his country, after repeated interventions by Spain, Great Britain, the United States of America, and France. The meddling of foreign powers in Hawaiian internal affairs and the abolition of the monarchy in 1894, leading to the annexation of Hawaii by the United States in 1898, might have strengthened the resolve of King Chulalongkorn to visit, first and most of all, with the monarchs of European countries.<sup>51</sup>

By that time, King Chulalongkorn certainly was familiar with the custom of mainly European monarchs visiting with each other, in the interest of state affairs, not only privately for royal family reunions. Among the many monarchs who made state visits were Tsar Nicholas I. of Russia, King Louis Philippe and Emperor Napoleon III. of France, King Victor Emmanuel II. of Italy, and Emperor Pedro II. of Brazil, who had visited Europe in 1871, 1876 and 1886.

“*Reisediplomatie*” at the highest level had become a significant feature of taking a pro-active stance in the fostering of bilateral relations.

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Chulalongkorn’s First Visit to Europe in 1897, CUESP, Bangkok, 6-7 November 1997.

<sup>51</sup> “A visit to Europe had been on the agenda since the beginning of the reign. The threat of imperialism made it imperative that the King visit Europe ...” as pointed out by Kesboonchoo-Mead, p. 21; likewise Chitrabongs, p. 123.

### **Paradigm Shift to 'Cosmopolitanism'**

King Chulalongkorn had likely formed two impressions, derived from witnessing the multifarious direct and personal contacts cultivated by European royalty, which had a slowly yet steadily growing impact on the status and role of Siam. Of broad relevance was the recognition of the advantages of multilateral relations for the affairs of state, external and internal as well. Of high significance was the king's appreciation of the European "royalty network".

With regard to the recognized relevance of multilateral relations, Siam's active commitment to international arbitration was solid evidence. Siam participated in both ambassadorial conferences, in 1899 and 1907, at The Hague, to define rules for arbitration and revise the rules of war.<sup>52</sup>

The king felt delighted about the "networking among royalty" which, later on, when in royal company at Windsor Castle, he described in a personal letter as follows: "There is solidarity among members of the royal family, who are very close to one another".<sup>53</sup> Any similar such opening and widening of the circle of Siamese royalty did, however, not happen. Princes and noblemen were not granted royal permission to marry European ladies. In one particular instance, the secret marriage of one of the king's sons with a Russian lady met with royal anguish.<sup>54</sup> Yet there seems

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<sup>52</sup> EB7: 473.

<sup>53</sup> *Klai Ban*, Letter dated 24 June 1907, p. 133.

<sup>54</sup> H.R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, pp. 258-260.

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to have been an intention to arrange the marriage of the Siamese crown prince with a Japanese princess, a daughter of the emperor.<sup>55</sup>

### Convergence of Opportunities

Member countries of the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*), first, then those constituting the North German Federation, and ultimately the German empire had been eying Siam as a potential base for commerce and trade. As one of the very few countries in Asia not incorporated into any colonial empire, Siam appeared to offer economic opportunities much in the same vein in which especially the North German Federation had facilitated free trade among member states of its economic (customs) union (*Zollverein*) and affiliated states, the latter being the grand-duchies of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz. Making contact with the ruler of Siam, getting to know the Siamese polity, exploring the possibilities, not to say the potential of incorporating Siam into the German sphere of influence, testing the reactions of the big colonial powers in Southeast Asia, i.e. Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, and seeking to establish formal relations with Siam were the objectives, overt or covert, of official missions and of semi-official as well as private visits.

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<sup>55</sup> Communication by H.S.H. Prince Subhadradis Diskul, in discussion at the International Conference to Commemorate the Centenary of King Chulalongkorn's First Visit to Europe in 1897, CUESP, Bangkok, 6-7 November 1997.

### **“Buffer Strategy”**

For Siam, old nets were torn, as the constellation of concentric rings had been derailed and gone to pieces. Siam's own neighbouring 'buffer' states or territories were lost. China, since long the supreme regional power, was incapacitated. Siam herself was declared a 'buffer state'. Siam was encircled by opponents, not merely sandwiched in between. Threats were looming of any further agreement between France and Great Britain to annex more Siamese territories, eventually to divide the country. King Chulalongkorn criticized the treaty, pointing out that it was only advantageous to France and Great Britain since the two countries would not have to fight over the territory adjacent to their colonies.<sup>56</sup> The King was determined to lead his country out of this precarious situation.

Siam had two options. One option was to accept the status of a 'buffer state' and accommodate herself in the firm embrace of two powerful guardians. That held the prospect of becoming another protectorate, or worse even, another con-dominion.

The alternative was to develop a survival strategy. Its main objective, as it eventually materialized, was to loosen the grip of colonial neighbors on Siam by literally inviting those countries which neither had any colonies in Southeast Asia nor any such design, given the likely repulsion by the colonial powers in firm control of the region. It was in this perspective that Siam was pursuing her own "buffer strategy", and looking for allies to

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<sup>56</sup> Nakirak, p. 70; Bunnag, p. 47.

partner her in the development of her administration, infrastructure and economy.<sup>57</sup>

Japan was one potential ally, considering her success in emulating western colonial powers. As it worked out, through the treaty concluded with Siam in 1898, Japan was even granted extraterritoriality. The United States of America were building their own colonial empire, enlarged upon the defeat of Spain, as it were, in 1898. Eligible European countries, albeit colonial powers themselves elsewhere in the world, included Belgium with her huge colony in Africa, Denmark with her possessions in the Atlantic, Italy with her colonies in Africa, and the German empire with its colonies in Africa and in the Pacific. Building and strengthening relations with these countries was like opting for the lesser of two evils. To neutralize this residual concern and make it work to her advantage became a major objective of Siam's foreign affairs. As an act of confidence in her independence, Siam alone granted Spain free passage to her *armada* in 1898.

### **Missions**

With a narrow focus, first, on the German Confederation, thereafter the North German Federation along with few non-member German states, and ultimately the German empire, to sketch the evolution in parallel with the Fourth and Fifth Reigns of the Chakri Dynasty, Siam welcomed official German missions. First was the mission, in 1859, from the City States of Bremen, Hamburg and Lübeck, on historical record as the mission of the

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<sup>57</sup> Nakirak, pp. 62 and 65.

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Hanseatic Republics, under the leadership of the *Hansestadt* Hamburg. The second mission, in 1862, represented the North German Federation together with the grand-duchies of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz, led by Prussia and headed by Count Eulenburg.<sup>58</sup> Both missions representing the said German states concluded treaties with Siam.

Assignments to be performed by such missions included dispatches about the course of events, in other words, progress reports, and the preparation of a detailed final report. By-products were publications of personal accounts and impressions, some in the format of private diaries, and some in the form of books featuring topical information and data gathered alongside with such assignments.<sup>59</sup>

### **Felicitations**

Given the close relationship among European royalty and their members' inclination to visit with each other frequently, the next best action was to have messages of congratulation, felicitations or condolence, as it were, conveyed in an elaborate and dignified manner. Much to the delight of the young King Chulalongkorn, the king of Prussia as head of the North German Federation was the first monarch of a western country to do this honor on the Siamese king's coronation in 1873.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Graf Fritz zu Eulenburg, selected correspondence documents, 1861/1862; also, Wenk, pp.25-30 and Stoffers, pp.38-54.

<sup>59</sup> Stoffers, pp.54-57, 60.

<sup>60</sup> Wright & Breakspear, p. 67.

### Visitors

The court in Bangkok availed of opportunities to receive visitors on their world tour, on official mission to countries beyond Siam such as China and Japan, on their journey to outposts of colonial empires, or to outlying areas such as Russia's Far East.

Ground-breaking were the visits by the Russian Crown Prince Nicholas, Prince George of Greece, and Prince Waldemar of Denmark, all of the House of Oldenburg. Their enthusiasm had been incensed by the royal reception given them by King Chulalongkorn. What had begun by paying courtesy visits to King Chulalongkorn and a warm royal welcome grew into lasting friendship.<sup>61</sup> It led the princes to entice interest and admiration among members of European royalty, among them Queen Alexandra of Great Britain and Empress Marie of Russia, sisters of Prince Waldemar. The first among the royal visitors and guests from any German states was Prince Johann Albrecht, heir apparent of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, in 1883 who, as Grand Duke of both Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz as well as Duke of Brunswick, visited Siam again, in 1910.<sup>62</sup>

These eminent visitors carried personal letters from their monarchs, addressed to King Chulalongkorn, presented and received personally, typically along with gifts befitting a king. These gifts remained, for a long time to come, conversation pieces. They ensured that the donor, the relationship with the recipient,

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<sup>61</sup> H.R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, pp. 235-236; Bunnag, p. 124.

<sup>62</sup> Stoffers, pp. 82, 84; Wenk, p.30.

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and the occasion of their presentation were well remembered and gave rise to conversation, time and again.

Conversation was cultivated as an art. While the opening of a conversation would be directed by protocol, formality would often be dispensed with in the course of talking informally, with formality required again only to conclude it.

Exchange of information was not hurried. As long as it pleased King Chulalongkorn, and as soon as a congenial atmosphere enveloped host and guest, news was exchanged, opinions were voiced, information was gathered, and suggestions were volunteered. If so desired yet unfeasible at once, a conversation would be carried on through successive 'sessions'. The duration of a conversation was hardly dictated by anything such as a modern-day "busy schedule" of meetings not exceeding ten minutes each, in the tight course of hurried events during a one-day visit. The manner in which conversations were conducted had the salutary effect of exponentially increasing information. Royal hospitality facilitated to extend the sojourn of visitors who, like the host, formed profound and lasting impressions.

### **Level**

Visitors of high social standing, especially members of ruling houses and of royal families, or members of the *ancienne noblesse* and higher nobility, old aristocracy, had been rare, early on. As others followed in the tracks of early aristocratic travelers, they pleased the Siamese court, on account of their status and affinity which mutually imparted prestige. Visiting European aristocrats

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obviously were different from the agents and interlopers of trading companies of yore, from the entrepreneurs engaged in commerce and trade, and from the officers of colonial administration services stationed in neighboring territories, with some notable exceptions though. On realizing the importance of social status and prestige for the quality of bilateral relations, the German empire's foreign service reacted as deemed appropriate.

### **Intelligence**

It stands to reason that much thought had been spent as time elapsed, leading to junctures at which decisions were made, preceding subsequent events duly documented as historical moments. It is, therefore, assumed that at King Chulalongkorn's court, the course of events was monitored, and supplementary evidence was taken into consideration. This likely process is reconstituted, in the paragraphs and sections hereunder, following an intuitive approach.

### **Intelligence Gathering in Bangkok**

From the viewpoint of Bangkok, trading has likely been the most significant vehicle of exchanging news, far and wide. Before the use of the telegraph, the slow speed of communication, equal to that of transporting commodities and people, mostly in tandem, had two implications, one disadvantageous, the other advantageous in nature. With time elapsed when information was received, the likelihood of subsequent events was high. This shortcoming was remedied, to a certain extent, by the likely collation of several, independent accounts and their thorough scrutiny. This was done

in an inductive manner, with a view to taking a balanced stance and conceptualizing an appropriate reaction. The process may be likened to the motto of *festina lente*, of 'making haste slowly'. Its effect was twofold. One was the drawing of inferences, or conducting a trend analysis, in modern-day parlance. The other was the formulation of a strategy. Its net result was a pro-active stance, the underpinning of King Chulalongkorn's fresh initiative geared to pave the way and boost external relations.

### **Missions**

Missions sent to Siam by western countries in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century likely transmitted much more than only that which was contained in official portfolios. Missions accomplished in a mutually satisfying manner led to higher travel frequency, likely at greater intensity in the direction of Siam rather than to Europe.

Travelers of noble ranks received by King Chulalongkorn as visitors or as guests carried news, responded to royal inquiries about conditions in their own countries and prospects of various kinds, and shared information, perhaps voiced opinion as well.

The court of Siam had, indeed, recognized the usefulness of sending officials to Europe. A Siamese embassy had been sent to Great Britain in 1857<sup>63</sup>, not long after the chief minister of Nepal had visited there, during 1850-1851<sup>64</sup>. In like manner, China's

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<sup>63</sup> Wright & Breakspear, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> EB16:222.

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imperial court had sent a Manchu prince to Europe, in 1866<sup>65</sup>. During the years 1881-1888, Prince Prisadang Jumsai traveled widely in Europe. As ambassador of Siam, he presented his credentials to the queen of Great Britain (1881), to the French president (1882), to the kings of the Netherlands, Sweden & Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Spain and Portugal (1883), to the German emperor and the king of Italy (1884) and to the emperor of Austria-Hungary (1886) as well as to the United States of America. Also, the Pope granted the Siamese prince an audience in the Vatican.<sup>66</sup> The Siamese minister of foreign affairs, Prince Devawongse, a brother of the king's queens, embarked on a European journey in 1887.<sup>67</sup> In the year before King Chulalongkorn's first journey to Europe, in 1896, Prince Bhanurangsi, one of the king's brothers, toured European countries on an informal, private fact finding mission.<sup>68</sup>

A major purpose, not to say assignment of such missions was to observe existing conditions, gather information, appraise the potential benefits that Siam might expect from intensifying relations, and cast all this intelligence into reports.

Accumulating information seemed to occur at random. Information was gathered as the opportunity arose. Information gaps were closed after much time had elapsed, given the means and slow speed of communication. Dissemination of information

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<sup>65</sup> EB5:585.

<sup>66</sup> Jumsai, n.p.

<sup>67</sup> Stoffers, p. 85.

<sup>68</sup> Loc.cit.

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was always filtered through biased perspectives. Above all, what had not been recorded in writing remained unknown to many. This blank rather than gray area beyond documented evidence must not be perceived and misjudged as voids in terms of activities. The issue addressed hereunder is one of mind over matter. Considering the prevailing conditions, it is assumed that much intelligence work was done to conceptualize a “buffer strategy”. By induction, inferences are drawn from circumstantial evidence. An intuitive approach is chosen to imagine how *realpolitik* was conceived. Induction not only facilitates but it requires to search for the profane and trivia. This is not to be confused with speculation. The ultimate objective is to contribute to the rendition of wholesome evidence. The inductive process offers flexibility in that it allows taking into consideration evidence-at-large including results of deduction. In contrast, deduction would rather narrowly be focused on verification of an existing conceptual framework or theory, as it were. Deduction has led to the conclusion that Siam “survived” in the shadow of the competing and, at times, conflicting, regional hegemony of the colonial powers.

### **Targets and Sources**

Much like the varied accounts of Siam that have been perpetuated in the West and woven into an exotic tapestry<sup>69</sup>, the images of western countries formed by the court of Siam and the interested public were kaleidoscopic. In terms of social research methodology, the task to be tackled was to complement secondary

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<sup>69</sup> Chitrabongs, p. 119.

information with primary data. Evidence is strong that this had been recognized as a task and systematically pursued.

In characteristic fashion, targets of intelligence work were matters on which King Chulalongkorn focused his activities and gathered information and data by himself as well.<sup>70</sup> Documents recording the king's travels within his own dominion tell of the monarch's personal, keen interest and great attention to detail. One such example is the survey on the marketing of assorted agricultural produce and their pricing in a remote rural area.<sup>71</sup>

### Personal Contact Scenario

Official visitors to Siam were well looked after. Private visitors extended a royal welcome enjoyed superb attention. Numerous members of the royal family and an even larger number of noblemen of the royal lineage were assigned, by royal command, to take care of guests and their entourage. Assisting the king by acting as hosts of formal dinners, guides on excursions, or chaperones at events offered ample opportunity to exchange information, in the broad sense. In other words, such intensive contacts of members of the royal family and lineage were a source of first-hand knowledge.

Considering the fact that official visits to Siam were lengthy sojourns, many opportunities would be availed and much time spent to engage in conversation. As a result, information exchange

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<sup>70</sup> H.R.H. Prince Chula Chakrabongse, pp. 229-230.

<sup>71</sup> Chitrabongs, p. 125.

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was an incremental process rather than limited to a single instance. Moreover, in the course of repeated such exchanges, with likely many actors engaged on the sides of both the Siamese host and the foreign visitors including their entourage, the content of information grew exponentially.

Similar to the art of conversation, correspondence was cultivated. Personal acquaintance and familiarity with the correspondence partners' personal living environment were thought highly desirable. Such desire would trigger invitations, followed by visits. Consequently, any particular correspondence would be enriched through such spin-off.

With regard to the German empire, particularly those of its states which had, at various levels, built and maintained relationships with Siam, the dispatches, letters, messages or reports of travelers contributed substantially to the formation of an image of Siam. Furthermore, with a view to formal relations between Siam and the German empire, the praise of Siam's monarch and his court by German visitors of noble ranks made favorable impressions on the royal courts of Mecklenburg, Prussia, and Bavaria, to name some such.

At the court of Siam, impressions formed of things German did likely carry little weight in terms of political power. Based on decades of trading, first formalized through the treaty of 1859 between Siam and the Hanseatic Republics and, soon after, expanded upon conclusion of the treaty with the North German Federation, in 1862, economic prowess was attributed to the German empire. The latter was hardly a match for the colonial

powers of Great Britain, France, or the Netherlands. Prussia was by far the largest of the 25 German states, while most were small in size and population, somewhat like the tributary principality of Phrae in Siam. One peculiarity, however, was the web of alliances formed through marriages by the ruling houses of certain small German states such as Saxe-Coburg-Gotha with several European countries, including Great Britain and Belgium, among others.

### Analysis

Sufficient evidence is documented of the reaction of King Chulalongkorn and his royal government to the drastic changes in the region. Seldom taken into consideration, though, is the likelihood of a certain measure of preparedness. This lends itself to assume that intelligence gathered was analyzed to the effect that Siam eventually took a pro-active stance under the biggest constraint, that of a “buffer state”.

In analyzing the scenario as it evolved, Siam had first-hand experience of how western powers expanded their colonial empires in the region. A domino effect had finally affected Siamese territory, all the same. In the process, Siamese observers had witnessed the proliferation across mainland and insular Southeast Asia and the escalation across the whole range, from the status of a country making seemingly minor concessions to its terminal status of a colony, or crown colony, as it were. In some other cases, an intermediate status, such as that of a protectorate, entailed a demotion of its rulers’ rank, as manifest in the hierarchy of the overlords’ empires. Worse even, some monarchs had been deposed, to make way for a successor put onto the throne by the

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colonial overlord. In the worst event, a monarchy was abolished and the new status of the land defined as a province. The attempt at liberating a territory from colonial rule would trigger an intervention by a new colonial power taking advantage of a weakness of the old colonial power. In the region, the events in Korea of 1895 and in the Philippines of 1896 were proof of such power play.

Beyond the obvious impact, which King Chulalongkorn's recognition and appreciation of achievements in the fields of administration, infrastructure and market economy in the Dutch and British colonies, formed during his visits there, had on the development of Siam<sup>72</sup>, it stands to reason that the traveling monarch, himself a keen and sharp observer, formed impressions that strongly influenced his attitude toward colonial powers. Status and role of the erstwhile ruling houses in monarchies on the island of Java in the Netherlands Indies and in British India bore little semblance of their historical might, for they hardly were of political significance any longer. Surrounded by colonial officers, the old aristocracy had to deal with persons most of whom held a social status that was distinctly lower than that of members of the old aristocracy, notably of the ruling houses in the "motherlands" of the colonies. While such interaction most likely elevated colonial officers in status, it probably violated traditional Asian court protocol and etiquette.

Receiving royal visitors to Bangkok most probably were delightful events. Though no reigning monarch of any European country had

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<sup>72</sup> Bunnag, p. 47.

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traveled that far, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some royal visitors held the rank and title of crown prince at the time when they were received by King Chulalongkorn.

The purposes of such visit were most likely varied, including a strong measure of pursuing, in the region, a certain vested interest of the royal visitors' own countries. This, one should assume, was well known to King Chulalongkorn. With the colonial powers of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands competing to further expand their control, with Siamese territories targeted as well, yet standing united against any intrusion by other colonial powers, contacts with the latter appeared to be conducive to corroborating Siam's "buffer strategy".

In this vein, the visit by the tsarevitch, the Russian heir apparent, occurred while *en route* with a Russian squadron to the far eastern port and naval base of Vladivostok. Likewise, Grand Duke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Mecklenburg-Strelitz, later Duke of Brunswick as well, and other princes were the guests of King Chulalongkorn, when on their way to the German colonies in the Pacific. Sailing up to the bar of Siam and calling on the port of Bangkok was no necessity such as finding safe passage. Not only were the colonial powers on peaceful terms with each other but the alliances of the European ruling houses at that time implied that the said royal travelers were relations of the royal families of Great Britain and the Netherlands. The sea-routes in their colonial waters and their ports were open to the said travelers whose itineraries included Siam by purpose of strengthening relations with Siam, in the face of regional colonial powers.

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As it turned out such visits carried much weight in establishing friendly relations. They prepared the ground for the recognition, by European royalty, of King Chulalongkorn as a peer among his peers.

Rather than trying to compile the wealth of details, which were expertly presented by learned historians anyhow, and could not possibly be covered through such intuitive brief, the knowledge accumulated and insights gained are likened to analytical inferences. These were likely drawn at the court of Siam. Salient features bearing on the resultant “buffer strategy” that point to the bold, unprecedented step by a Siamese monarch to visit Europe are summarized, as follows.

- Colonial expansion in the region without any evidence or indication of restraint, irrespective of the gist of treaties concluded between western powers and regional countries.
- Uncertainty about the balance of power between the surrounding colonial empires with regard to the territorial integrity and independence of “their buffer state”.
- Recognized necessity of administrative reform, infrastructure modernization, technology advancement, and economic development preferably in cooperation with countries that neither would nor could want to pursue any colonial scheme.
- Awareness of the adverse affects of any variant of colonial status for Siam with regard to upholding her independence, exercising her political volition, preserving her cultural fabric, and maintaining her status equal to that of countries

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other than her immediate colonial neighbors, notably France and Great Britain.

- Concern about the role of the monarchy reflected against the background of drastic, not to say disastrous changes to which dynasties in neighboring countries had been subjected.
- Resolve to establish rapport with rulers of European countries through personal contacts, rather than to become ever deeper drawn into confrontations with emissaries sent by regional colonial administration headquarters.
- Appreciative appraisal of the web of dynastic relations among the royal families and ruling houses in Europe and the inherent opportunities for networking, in modern speak.
- Reinforcement of the “buffer strategy” through breaking with convention and making a diplomatic foray into Europe, there right into the nerve centers of statehood, the courts of the ruling imperial, royal and ducal houses.
- Insight gained from royal visitors, no less, made King Chulalongkorn realize the potential underpinning of his endeavor. The intricate linkages between the royal families in most European countries were anchored, through their common ancestry, in certain ruling houses of some member states of the German empire. These nodes and webs appeared to lend themselves as bridgeheads virtually throughout Europe and, hence, were deemed as of strategic significance for King Chulalongkorn’s diplomatic mission.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kesboonchoo-Mead, pp. 26-27.

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This gist has, in its approach, some similarity to the so-called Albert period during the reign of Queen Victoria in which “importance was given to the establishment of a private (because royal) intelligence service abroad”.<sup>74</sup>

### **King Chulalongkorn - A Cousin among Cousins**

As of 1871, the newly constituted German empire, the *Deutsches Reich*, not yet named Germany (*sic!*), consisted of 25 member states, in continuation of the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*) of 1815, and of the North German Federation (*Norddeutscher Bund*) of 1866, after repeated reductions in size of territory and numbers of states, though. The German empire comprised of 22 hereditary monarchies, including four kingdoms, six grand duchies, five duchies and seven principalities, and three “republican” city states. Accordingly, 22 ruling families constituted the highest echelon of German aristocracy, among them ten of royal status, including the grand ducal houses. The ruling houses of some grand duchies and duchies and of one principality counted among their members King Chulalongkorn’s contemporary ruling monarchs of Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Russia. Moreover, relations were close with the royal houses of Sweden and of Habsburg ruling Austria-Hungary, and through the latter with the royal houses of Italy and Spain as well.

By traditional protocol, members of the aristocracy would refer to those of equal rank as their cousins, distinguishing between male

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<sup>74</sup> EB23: 127.

and female persons by using the French words of *cousins* and *cousines*. As used, the term ‘cousin’ covered relationships by one or two of three criteria. Consanguineous relationships were common among European royal families, especially those rooted in Central European aristocracy. The convention of arranging marriages preferentially between members of highly similar distinguished ancestry resulted in an ever more closely knitted web. An example is the marriage of Queen Victoria of Great Britain and Prince Albert, first-degree cousins, and the alliances formed through arranged marriages of their royal children. This explains why Queen Victoria was affectionately called the “Grandmother of Europe”, with 37 living great-grandchildren in ten ruling houses, by 1901, the final year of her 64-year reign.

The circle of cousins was widened by including certain aristocrats, who were of equal standing though not related by either blood or marriage. Historical evidence renders proof that such recognition by inclusion occurred selectively rather than liberally. As a consequence, cousins by “classification” or “statutory” cousins were rare.

Upon the arrival of the king of Siam in Europe, the first monarch to recognize King Chulalongkorn as his cousin was the Russian emperor, Czar Nicholas II. The emperor, whose dynasty was that of Oldenburg-Holstein-Gottorp-Romanow, was the son of a Princess of Denmark, of the house of Oldenburg, and married to a Princess of Hesse, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. To lend support to the mission of his Siamese royal cousin, the emperor got a news item featuring King Chulalongkorn’s visit to the Russian imperial court, complete with

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a photograph showing the Russian emperor together with the Siamese king<sup>75</sup>, into the French weekly news magazine named *Illustrations*. This was intended to create public awareness and raise interest so that the government of the French Republic would become kindly disposed toward officially welcoming the king of Siam. As intended, that news was published and had the desired effect.<sup>76</sup> In the spirit of assisting his cousin, the Czar sent a personal letter to Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria-Hungary, by then in the 49<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. A niece of the emperor happened to be the queen of Spain. The tsarina, a Princess of Hesse by birth, was closely related to other grandchildren of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Among them were the German emperor William II, the ruling grand duke of Hesse, a prince of Battenberg (later renamed Mountbatten), the queen of Rumania, and a princess of Greece. Close relations included the kings of Greece, Bulgaria, Belgium, and Portugal.

With such royal cast the stage seemed to be exceptionally well set for the visits by King Chulalongkorn, a cousin of virtually all European royalty, to their respective countries. The king of Siam visited Italy, the Vatican, Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, travelling in both Austria and Hungary, Russia, Sweden & Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Monaco, and the German empire.<sup>77</sup> In the latter, the king visited the states of Saxony, Prussia, Mecklenburg-Schwerin,

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<sup>75</sup> H.S.H. Prince Subhadradis Diskul, p. 1; Chitrabongs, p. 124.

<sup>76</sup> H.S.H. Prince Subhadradis Diskul, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Stoffers, p. 88.

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Hamburg, Baden and Hesse<sup>78</sup>, among others. The documentation of this historic series of singular events, produced in celebration of the centenary, relates the progressing of King Chulalongkorn's visits, from royal bridgehead to royal bridgehead.<sup>79</sup>

### **Mission Accomplished**

King Chulalongkorn's visit to Europe had met with success regarding two broad interrelated matters, in several aspects. These can be distinguished as personal gains and political achievements.<sup>80</sup>

King Chulalongkorn was accorded the respect and honor befitting a monarch among monarchs of equal standing. The king of Siam was recognized as of highest status and eminent stature. This differed grossly from the attitude of the governments of colonial "motherlands" reflected by the manner in which colonial executive officers dealt with the last king of Burma, the dowager empress of China, a deposed emperor of Annam, and the last Moghul emperor of India.

The personal prestige of the king of Siam, enhanced through the numerous events in the way of official reception and personal welcome on his European tour, augured well for his country. The king's bridging endeavour proved a most effective element of the

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<sup>78</sup> Stoffers, p. 89.

<sup>79</sup> The Siam Society, pp. 11-13 (Monaco, rarely ever mentioned, was visited *en route* back to Siam, sailing from Portugal via Monaco, Italy and Egypt.

<sup>80</sup> Nish, p. 17.

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“buffer strategy”. Great Britain was committed to honor the treaty of 1896 and, thus, remained a steadfast guarantor of Siam’s independence, though not of her territorial integrity. The government of the French Republic seemed sufficiently impressed to respect the spirit of that treaty, albeit coercing Siam into accepting amendments that adversely affected the expanse of her territory. Overall, the salutary effects were the continued independence of Siam and a moderating impact on further colonial expansion.

Given her first-hand experience, it seems only logical that Siam was invited, soon after, to participate in the first international conference on arbitration, convened in The Hague, in 1899.<sup>81</sup>

During his second sojourn in Europe, on private visits in 1907, King Chulalongkorn relished the respect shown to the monarch of Siam. This is evident from the king’s letters to Princess Nipanophadon, his daughter.

Accounts of visiting with the Grand Duke of Baden and the Grand Duchess, herself a Hohenzollern Princess of Prussia, daughter of Emperor William I., convey the congeniality such as when King Chulalongkorn wrote: “The Grand Duke has a healthy complexion and radiates the same friendly air like before. Although he seems to have become frail, he exudes unchanged cordiality. The Grand Duchess seems to be in poor health, yet she is determined not to let it show. She appears to rally much strength ... The Grand Duke has already reached the age of 80 years ... The Grand Duchess is

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<sup>81</sup> Soontharanich, p. 34.

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69 years old. By the time when I wanted to bid farewell, they did not want me to leave yet. They guided me to view rooms of this palace that was built 200 years ago. I was accompanied onto the balcony in the center of the palace. People passing by in front of the palace waived handkerchiefs cheering loudly and joyously. Apparently they feel a loving affection. When I finally left, requesting not to accompany me ... the Grand Duchess joined me up to the top of the stairs ... so as not to put any strain on the Grand Duke, I hurried downstairs ... half way, on turning my head, I saw the Grand Duke, assisted by two valets, following to farewell me, once more, before I got into my automobile.”<sup>82</sup>

The jubilant welcome given King Chulalongkorn upon his arrival in the city of Kassel, where the King was received by the German Emperor William II. as his guest at Wilhelmshoehe Castle, was another demonstration of the respect and admiration for the King of Siam, at the highest level. Although a private visit, by protocol, the population of this Prussian city, formerly the capital of the Electorate of Hesse-Kassel, showed great affection and enthusiasm.<sup>83</sup>

The royal welcome extended by an old friend, Grand Duke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg and simultaneously Duke of Brunswick, two German states, who had been received by King Chulalongkorn

<sup>82</sup> *Klai Ban*, Wednesday, 5 June 1907, p. 44. Translation from the Thai text by Karl E. Weber.

<sup>83</sup> Stoffers, p. 92 referring to Klaus Wenk, “*Aus dem Reisetagebuch Chulalongkons – Die Begegnung mit Wilhelm II. in Kassel*”, in: Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Volker- und Naturkunde Ostasiens, 87/1960:14-28.

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when visiting Siam in 1883, is evident from a picture postcard in commemoration of that auspicious event.<sup>84</sup>

The king's impressions of his visit with the British royal family at Windsor Castle convey the same sentiment, as expressed by King Chulalongkorn : "King Edward was waiting at the castle gate. The Queen, Princess Victoria, the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess of Hesse Darmstadt were waiting inside. The Grand Duchess was visiting for the first time. Prince and Princess Andrew of Greece came to talk to me ...".<sup>85</sup> These sentences reflect the welcoming of a cousin, the King of Siam, into the private circle, with King Edward VII. of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (later renamed Windsor), Queen Alexandra and the Russian Empress Marie, sisters and princesses of Denmark by birth, of the house of Oldenburg, the Grand Duke of Hesse, a nephew of King Edward, and Prince Andrew, a descendant of the royal house of Denmark and, thus, of the Oldenburg dynasty, together with other members of European royalty enjoying a family reunion.

It becomes obvious how exceptional King Chulalongkorn's diplomatic achievement was, reading between the lines of his letters in which he shares his observations such as during a party in the park of Windsor Castle. "There were three Indian princes, to whom the King (*i.e. King Edward VII. / author's comment*) walked

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<sup>84</sup> Picture postcard photographed by King Chulalongkorn "Zur Erinnerung an den Besuch des Koenigs von Siam in Braunschweig" ("Souvenir of the visit by the King of Siam to the Duchy of Brunswick"), reproduced in *King Chulalongkorn's Visit to Europe*, p. 109.

<sup>85</sup> *Klai Ban*, Saturday, 22 June 1907, p. 117

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over to talk with for a long while. They were waiting in line and did not join our tents. They were in the same tent as other diplomats. I found out in the newspapers later that one was a major. His name was the Maharaja of Bikaner. Another was the Maharaja of Alva. The third prince was called Raja Vudukauta.<sup>86</sup> Light onto the difference in status and rank could hardly have been shed more glaringly, and in a time warp at that, upon alternative courses of events. There were three once powerful and fabulously wealthy Indian maharajas, vassals of the king of Great Britain and emperor of India, sighted by the king of independent Siam, cousin of European royalty.

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<sup>86</sup> *Klai Ban*, Saturday, 22 June 1907, pp. 118-119.

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