From Siam to Thailand: What is in a Name?

Charnvit Kasetsiri

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/arv

Part of the Asian Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.ARV.12.1.3
Available at: https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/arv/vol12/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Chulalongkorn Journal Online (CUJO) at Chula Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Asian Review by an authorized editor of Chula Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ChulaDC@car.chula.ac.th.
As national leader, Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram was well known for his two main styles of leadership; the Than Phunam/Leader style during the war years; and the beloved Paw Khun/Father-figure style of leadership during his second administration ... It is apparent that throughout his lengthy premiership, Phibun strove to present himself as a national leader, replacing the absolute monarchs of bygone days...

Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian: 1995

Introduction

As a student of Thai history, I have always been puzzled by the change of the name of my country, since 1939, from Siam to Thailand. I had no love for the hybrid word Thai+land and I used to participate in some sort of literary movement for the change of the name “Back to Siam”. In the late 1960s while studying in the United States, I joined a group of Thai students writing small articles regularly and had them printed back in Bangkok. They became rather well received by the public; and eventually our articles were collected and printed in book-form of two pocket-book volumes. They were curiously titled Kid Thung Muang Thai (Thinking of the Land of the Thai). By using the word Muang Thai (Land of the Thai) for our writings, my friends and I did not see the contradiction of the usage and we went on proposing: “Back to Siam”. Our proposal did not get anywhere. Nevertheless, upon my return home I still held on to my belief that Siam was more appropriate and that I, at one time, had my name card printed with my address as Bangkok, Siam. My name card did not take Siam anywhere either.

Having been a history teacher at Thammasat University, Bangkok, since 1973, my main assignment has been teaching modern Thai political history. Here, I often asked my students their opinion about "Siam or Thailand". To my puzzlement they always preferred Thailand; some of them even gave me funny looks; to them I must have been so boran (old, ancient and somewhat outdated) With this kind of experience plus my wish to participate in the 16-18 December 1998 International Conference on Post Colonial Society and Culture in Southeast Asia, held in Myanmar, the country which also has her name changed; I feel that it might be the right time, at least for myself, to try to understand the Thailand-Siam case: why the change in the first place, and why it has remained so since 1939, despite various attempts to return to Siam.

The Siam-to-Thailand name-change took place during the first Phibun Government, 1939- 1944, which coincided World War II. It was the period which Thailand was dominated by energetic and aggressive brand of nationalism both domestically and ‘internationally’. Phibun and his men like Phra Ratchathammithet, Luang Wichitwathakan (instrumental for the name-change), Luang Yutthasatkoson, Luang Phromyothi (commanding troops against French Indochina in 1940), Luang Wichiariphaet, Luang Saranupraphan (who composed the nationalistic words for the National Anthem, still in used\(^2\)), Sang Phatthanothai (responsible for nationalist radio-talk program: Nai Man and Nai Khong), and others, have been seen and linked with military dictatorship, Nazism and Fascism. Partly this is because Thailand moved into areas on the mainland Southeast Asia which had been satisfactorily divided up between two European powers: France and Great Britain. Partly it is a result of military actions which humiliated the West in Asia, especially the French and the British; before the Pacific War Thailand already took Siemreap, since 1932, Siam/Thailand has been having the National Anthem as well as the Royal Anthem. The Royal one was commissioned by King Chulalongkorn for his own use, replacing God Save the Queen which Siam since the time of King Mongkut copied from Great Britain. The new Anthem was composed by a Russian. Right after the 1932 coup, the People's Party commissioned an official musician, Phra Chenduriyang, a half Mon and half German-American, to write up a new one; it was reported that the Frech La Marseilles was the model. The first version of words for the new Anthem used both Siam and Thai. But when the name was changed to Thailand, a new word had to be written and Siam was out, Thailand in. See Sukri...

\(^2\) Since 1932, Siam/Thailand has been having the National Anthem as well as the Royal Anthem. The Royal one was commissioned by King Chulalongkorn for his own use, replacing God Save the Queen which Siam since the time of King Mongkut copied from Great Britain. The new Anthem was composed by a Russian. Right after the 1932 coup, the People's Party commissioned an official musician, Phra Chenduriyang, a half Mon and half German-American, to write up a new one; it was reported that the Frech La Marseilles was the model. The first version of words for the new Anthem used both Siam and Thai. But when the name was changed to Thailand, a new word had to be written and Siam was out, Thailand in. See Sukri...
Battambang, Champasak and Saiyaburi from French Indochina\(^3\). Partly, too, it derives from the fact that the Thai joined the Japanese “enemy” in eliminating Western influence by proclaiming war against the United States and Great Britain. And during the War Thailand took parts of the Shan States (Keng Tung)\(^4\) and four Malay States (Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terangganu) from the British. Phibun, therefore, was "put down" and linked with defeated leaders of major powers like Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo, not “lifted up” and associated with leaders of newly born nations such as Sukarno, Hatta, Aung San, etc. We will see here whether the Thailand case can be seen in the light of “Nation and Nationalism” of Southeast Asia\(^5\).

**From Siam to Thailand**

On June 24, 1939, in a swift and dramatic political move, Major General Luang Phibunsongkhram, aged 42 (he became a Field Marshal in 1940, after Thailand took Siemreap, Battambang, Champasak and Saiyaburi from French Indochina) who was appointed the Prime Minister through parliamentary process just barely six months earlier, declared that the name of the country was to change from Siam (Prathet Syam) to Thailand (Prathet Thai). According to the Announcement “whereas the use of the name of the country had been both ‘Thai’ and ‘Siam’, whereas, since the Thai people esteem to call ‘Thai’, the Government, therefore, deems it to be a *ratthaniyom* (*‘cultural mandate of the state’*) that the name of the country should be in accordance with the name of race and the esteem (niyom) of the Thai people”\(^6\). Hence (for the use) in the Thai language, names of the country, the people and nationality are Thai, while in the English they are Thailand and Thai respectively.

---

\(^3\) Territories taken from French Indochina were renamed after Phibun and his associates. Siemreap, meaning. Siam defeated in the Khmer language was renamed Phibunsongkhram. Saiyaburi became Lan Chang, or a million elephants which was an old name of the Lao kingdom in the 13\(^{th}\) century.

\(^4\) Again, this part of the Shan states was given a new nationalistic name as saha rath Thai doem, meaning united states of ancient Thai.


\(^6\) Ratthaniyom...
The change from Siam to Thailand was a well calculated political move. On the same day the Phibun Government took other political initiatives. For example there were celebrations of wan chat or National Day as well as of new treaties signed with foreign countries. June 24 was declared a National Day and it was the first time that a holiday was not related to religious or dynastic celebrations. June 24 was the date of the coup of 1932 which ended absolute monarchy and brought the new elite (middle-rank officials, many from common background) to power, for example Premier Phahon, whom Phibun succeeded and Pridi who was to follow up, etc. In addition to celebrating June 24 event, a foundation stone for the construction of the highly symbolic Democracy Monument was laid in the middle of the Royal Ratchadamnoen Avenue. The Avenue is a Thai version of the Champs E'lysee, connecting the old Grand Palace and the new Western-style Court of King Chulalongkorn. As for the new treaties the Government explained that this was a happy time when the country obtained full independence vis-a-vis the Europeans, Americans and Japanese with whom former Thai Kings, since 1855, had to sign unequal treaties giving away part of her sovereignty.

The night before, Premier Phibun had a 50 minute-long speech on the Radio; his main topic was “the love for the nation”. Of this he proposed that it was neccessary to introduce what he called prapheni niyom pracham chat or ‘national traditionalism’ and that the Government should periodically proclaim ratthaniyom, or cultural mandate of the state, a kind of guidance for the country and behavior of the Thai people. To him these ratthaniyom would not only make the Thai as araya (civilized) but also prove the amnat mahachon, power of the people, which derived from mati mahachon, people’s opinion.

---

7 June 24 remained wan chat or National Day from 1939 until early 1960s when it was abolished by the Sarit Government which reversed it to December 5, the King's birthday.

8 Pramuanwan, June 27, 1939. During the first Phibun's Government, 1938-1944, there was a series of ratthaniyom announcements by the Office of the Prime Minister:

1. Ratthaniyom on the Use of Names for the Country, People and Nationality (24 June 1939)
2. Ratthaniyom on Preventing Danger to the Nation (3 July 1939)
3. Ratthaniyom on the Further Use of the Name of the Thai People (2 September 1939)
As a member of the People’s Party who staged the ‘democratic’ 1932 coup against the monarchy, Phibun had to be conscious with ‘the people’ and various democratic forms of expressions. Before the actual name change and other nationness-creations like national day, national anthem, songs, plays, dresses, monuments, culture, customs, etc., the Government had been rather keen in getting support and participation from the general public, at least and especially from those educated in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. Speeches were aired on radios, which had increasingly become instrumental for government’s propaganda, or they would be printed in favorable newspapers. Sometimes the public was invited to contest for example essays on the ‘Importance of National Day’⁹, etc.

In this case, the name-change was discussed and early on approved by the Cabinet some time in late May, 1939. By early June the Ministry of Defense took the lead in propagating the use of the new name. The Ministry, or to be precise it was Phibun who was directing the sounding out whether the new name would be generally accepted. In his kham chakchuan (persuasion word), Phibun cited five points in favor of Thailand:

1. The name Siam does not correspond with Race.

4. Ratthaniyom on the Saluting the National Flag, the National Anthem, and the Royal Anthem (8 September 1939)
5. Ratthaniyom on the Calling the Thai to Consume Products which are produced in Thailand (1 November 1939)
6. Ratthaniyorn on the Tune and Words of the National Anthem (10 December 1939)
7. Ratthaniyom on Persuading the Thai to Build their Nation (21 March 1940)
8. Ratthaniyom on Changing the Word Siam to Thailand in the Royal Anthem (1 April 1940)
10. Ratthaniyom on the Dress of the Thai People (15 January 1941)
11. Ratthaniyom on the Daily Activity of the Thai People (8 September 1942)
12. Ratthaniyom on the Treatment of Children, the Aged and the Handicapped (28 January 1942)

⁹ See award winning articles on the topic, Khwam samkhan khong wan chat (The Importance of National Day) published on the occasion of the National Day Celebration, 1940.
2. The name Siam is contradicting to the Nationality of the Thai people.
3. Siam was a province of the Khom (Khmer) who once ruled over the Thai Nation; and when Phra Ruang gained freedom, the name Siam was dropped.
4. Siam has been used in written not speaking language.
5. The Thai Nation is great and it is only appropriate to name the country in accordance with the prestige of the Thai Race.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition, in order to appear democratic and parliamentary, after the announcement of the Office of the Prime Minister, the matter was processed through the Parliament. On September 28, 1939, three months later, 158 members of the Parliamentary members (half elected and half appointed), including the President, held a meeting and all of them voted for the first amendment of the 1932 Constitution to the effect that the name of the country was to be Thailand\textsuperscript{11}. Therefore, with the final constitutional act, the country has become Thailand eversince and that all the later numerous Constitutions which Thailand has been writing and rewriting, one replacing another, including the latest (Number 16) in 1997, all of them goes by the name Thailand. In effect as a politician \textit{par excellence}, a leading military man, and the longest in the office of the Prime Minister (fifteen years), of many of Phibun’s controversial ethno-nationalist policies, the name change is one of the most successful.

Nevertheless, needless to say that the name change did not face any objection and opposition. While nationalism and ethono-centrism were running high among the new Thai elite of 1930s and 1940s, a kind of ‘contested nationalism’ appeared in some newspapers. In the daily, \textit{Pramuanwan}, June 13, 1939, there was an article ridiculing the use and spelling of Thai. The unknown author asked the readers whether they ever wondered why the word \textit{wai} was

\textsuperscript{10} Pramuanwan, June 6, 1939.

romanized as “Thai” which the farang (white foreigners) would pronounce as “thigh”. He (or a she?) went on to explain that the word “thigh” means that part of the body between knees and waist, etc. In order to make more fun and being critical at the same time, the author pretended to discuss something which eventhough he felt rather irrelevent. He said he saw another romanization of the word ประเทศไทย as Prates or Prades Thai. Prates or Prades are Thai render of two Pali words: Pra and desa mean land or country. And it should be pronounced as pra, one word and tes, another word. Again the author claimed that any farang would pronounce it like the English word “grades” which is one, not two words. Amusingly he went on to explain that there is an English word: prate or prates which means talkative! Therefore, according to him, in a reversed, the mistake and mis-pronoucing of such romanization is the stupidity of the readers not of the writers (or rather those who have it written, meaning Phibun et. al.?).

Writing some thirty years later, Pridi, the civilian leader of the People's Party, and at one time the Regent and Prime Minister of Thailand, recalled that there was a minority opposition among cabinet members on that epoch-making day. Pridi was then Phibun’s Minister of Finance. They worked together closely well before splitting up during the Second World War. He recounted that six months after Phibun became Premier, Luang Wichitwathakan, then a Minister without portfolio and at the same time the Director of the Fine Arts Department, went on a visit to Hanoi. Luang Wichit brought back a French map which showed the Thai Race living in various parts of Indochina, Southern China, Burma and Assam. Luang Wichit was a staunch nationalist, upon his return he went on air ramphan, lamenting about the Thai Race in different lands and then propagating maha anachak Thai or the Great Thai Empire. To Pridi this was like what “Hitler was doing in Europe”.12

Pridi went on to say that at the forementioned cabinet meeting, Luang Wichit elaborated that the word Syam stemmed from Sanskrit: Syama which means black. Therefore, it did not fit to be the name of

---

12 Pridi Banomyong, Khwam penma khong chu Prathet Syma kap Prathet Thai (The Development of the Names Siam and Thailand), 1974. pp. 4-5. See also his Ma Vie Mouvementee.
the country in which the Thai Race was not black but rather yellow (!?). On top of that, as claimed by Luang Wichit, Syam (Siam) also stemmed from Chinese: Siam-lo, making it even more inappropriate at the time when the Government had become anti-Chinese. Pridi said he objected by showing evidence from old Thai laws of King Rama I. For him, the word Syam (Siam) derived from Pali i.e. Sama which means black, yellow and gold. Therefore, it fitted with the land of gold or Suwannaphum (Suvarnabhumi). Pridi explained further that after the change of the name, the Government also change the words of the National Anthem with a phrase like this “Thailand combined the blood and flesh of the Thai Race”. He said he disagreed with this for there were many races within our country. Anyway, He concluded that he was a minority in the cabinet.

Pridi’s version of the name change is rather complicated and in some way rather hindsight. Claiming to be on the minority side, he accepted the change. However, according to him, he only admitted the change within the use of the Thai language. He said, at the meeting, he had proposed that in the English and French the name should remain Siam just like the German call their own country Deutschland leaving Germany to the English and Allemagne to the French. It was the same in the case of China and Chine; Japan and Japon. To Pridi, no matter how chauvinistic the Japanese were, they did not puzzled the world by forcing the use of the country’s name in the Japanese language which is Nihon or Nippon. Nevertheless, Pridi went further on, even if the word “Thai” was to be used, it should not be attached with the word “land” which would make it a hybrid and more like those English and French colonies in Africa! Pridi explained that when Ireland became independent the name was changed to Eire, and “land” was dropped. When his version of “Thai” without “land” was not accepted he

---

13 See also Lawrence Palmer Briggs, “The Appearance and Historical Usage of the Terms Tai, Thai, Siamese and Lao”, Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 69, 1949, pp. 60-73; it was partly translated by Yupha Chumchan and published in Chulasan khrongkantamra.3:4 July-September, 1976. Of course the best academic treatment of the use of all these names is by Jit Phumisak in his magnum opus: Khwam penma....

14 Pridi, ibid., p. 7.
proposed another alternative i.e. *Muang Thai*. The majority did not agree either.¹⁵

**What is in a Name?**

Having gone through what happened in the process of name-change, we now come to two questions why the change in the first place and, second, why the persistence of the name Thailand?. Of these, I think the answers lie partly in the interaction of the nature of the Thai states, a dynastic versus a national one, and partly because of the relationship between internal politics and modern historiography.

In, his most famous work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson hypothesized three types of global polities: religious communities, dynastic realms and nation-states; the last are the most modern. He called them: ‘imagined communities’. Anderson showed that nations and nationalism are the products of the eighteenth-to-twentieth centuries; they rose up in the New World then moving to Europe and finally spread to Asia and Africa. Thus by the beginning of this century various nationalist movements and nationalist leaders appeared in colonized Southeast Asia: Boedi Octomo, Serakat Islam, Dohbama Asiayone, Sukarno, Hatta, Aung San, U Nu, etc.

Siam, though not fully and conventionally colonized, was also effected by these waves of nationness and nationalism. However, as Anderson points out, the brand of Thai nationalism was different and it was an official one. He compared the two Kings: Chulalongkorn and

¹⁵ Pridi’s version of the name change was rather peculiar, however. For at the end of the Second World War, he had emerged one of the most powerful Thai. He became the Regent of Thailand since King Rama VIII was still residing in Switzerland. His regency enabled him to lead the underground movement, the Free Thai, against the Japanese. When Japan surrendered, Pridi, as the Regent, issued the “Royal Proclamation issued by the Regent of Thailand in the name of King Anada Mahidol on August 16, 1945”. He “The Regent, in the name of His Majesty the King, thereby, openly proclaims on behalf of the Thai people that the declaration of war (by Phibun) on the United States of America and Great Britain is null and void...” The Proclamation served as bases for Thailand to negotiate peace treaties with the victorious Allies and not to be punished for joining the Japanese during the War.

Please note that Pridi used the word Thailand not Siam! Again, in 1946, Pridi had a new Constitution proclaimed replacing the 1932 version. Of this he countersigned the new version. The name Thailand not Siam was used!
Vajiravudh. All through his long reign, 1868-1910, King Chulalongkorn strove to reform his country, borrowing and emulating heavily from colonial administrations of the British in Singapore and India-Burma, and Of the Dutch in Batavia. Academically, it has been accepted by Thai and international that by the turn of the century Siam had become a modern and already a nation-state\textsuperscript{16}. But Anderson argued differently; to him Siam had been re-organized and centralized in such a way that it had become, then, a dynastic realm\textsuperscript{17}:

Nonetheless, Chulalongkorn regarded himself as a modernizer. But his prime models were not the United Kingdom or Germany, but rather the colonial beamtenstaaten of the Dutch East Indies, British Malaya, and the Raj. Following these models meant rationalizing and centralizing royal government, eliminating traditional semi-autonomous tributary statelets and promoting economic development somewhat along colonial lines. The most striking example... was his encouragement of a massive immigration of young, single, male foreigners to form the disoriented, politically powerless workforce needed to construct port facilities, build railway lines, dig canals and expanded commercial agriculture. This importing of gastarbeiter paralleled, indeed was modeled on, the policies of the authorities in Batavia and Singapore. And as in the case of the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya, the great bulk of the labourers imported during the nineteenth century were from southeastern China ... Indeed the policy made good short term sense for a dynastic state, since it created an impotent working class ‘outside’ Thai society and left that society largely ‘undisturbed.’

But by the time his son, Vajiravudh, came to the throne (1910-1925), things had changed. Monarchies around the world were being threatened and abolished, beginning with the end of the Ching in

\textsuperscript{16} See Wyatt, Kasern and Neon.

\textsuperscript{17} Dr. Somkiat portrayed King Chulalongkorn’s state as of Absolutism ... while Chaiyan Ratchakul treats it as internal colonization. See
1911, the Romanov in 1917, and those in Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman soon disappeared. Domestically, King Vajiravudh faced the rise of the previously imported Chinese, Sino-Thai middle class, urban educated, his Father's bureaucracy and the spread of liberalism, democracy and parliamentary system. Therefore, the King turned to official nationalism: a “willed merger of nation and dynastic empire”. To Anderson:

Wachirawut (Vajiravudh), his son and successor (r. 1910-1925), had to pick up the pieces, modeling himself this time on the self-naturalizing dynasts of Europe. Although - and because - he was educated in late Victorian England, he dramatized himself as his country’s ‘first nationalist.’ The target of this nationalism, however, was neither the United Kingdom, which controlled 90 per cent of Siam’s trade, nor France, which had recently made off with easterly segments of the old realm: it was the Chinese whom his father had so recently and blithely imported. The style of his anti-Chinese stance is suggested by the titles of two of his most famous pamphlets: The Jews of the Orient (1914), and Clogs on Our Wheels (1915).

Anderson, then, concluded:

“Here is fine example of the character of official nationalism - an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community ... It goes without saying that Wachirawut also began moving all the policy levers of official nationalism: compulsory, state-controlled primary education, state-organized propaganda, official rewriting of history, militarism - here more visible show than the real thing - and

\[18\] pp. 94-5.
endless affirmation of the identity of dynasty and nation.”

Vajiravudh died in 1925 and his younger brother, Prajadhipok became the last and unsuccessful absolute monarch. As mentioned before, on June 24, 1932, a group of middle ranking army-navy-official, educated urban middle class of over one hundred males formed themselves as the People’s Party and staged a bloodless coup against the King. Some compromise was worked out, while the monarchy was preserved, a Constitution was promulgated along with convening a Parliament, and power was passed from the Chakri princes to the aristocrat and official class. The first constitutional Premier was Phraya Mano, a senior lawyer and an aristocrat; he was supposedly seen as a compromising figure.

At first glance political change in Siam seems to be rather peaceful and compromising, leading to a misconception of the "uniqueness and power of assimilation" of Thai politics. However, a close look tells a different story. In fact the post 1932 coup was a period of instability and political conflict between the new elite and the old regime. Less than a year, the Parliament was closed and some clauses of the Constitution were suspended by the conservative-aristocratic Phaya Mano Government. The 1932 coup leaders countered, on June 20, 1933, by staging another coup. This time Phaya Pahon, the coup leader himself became the Prime Minister. But in October 1933 a serious armed clash broke out. Prince Boworadet, a former Minister of Defense of the absolute monarchy days, led a troops from outer provinces trying to seize Bangkok, demanding that the Phahon Government resigned immediately. The Government fought-back and the rebels were badly defeated. But the Boworadet attempt-coup had severe repercussions on the relations between the Throne and the Government. After the incident the King

19 Ibid. p. 101.
20 The Government troops, led by Phibun, used heavy artillery in suppressing the rebels. Fighting broke out between Bangkok and the Airport and continued on up through the rail-way to the Northeast. The Government lost 59 soldiers including one of its member of the People’s Party, a soldier friend of Phibun. The Commander in Chief of the rebels, Phraya Si Sitthisongkhram (Din Tharap), was killed in a battle up the Khorat Plateau. (The Commander was maternal grand-father of the present Commander in Chief of the Army: General Soorayuth Chulanont. See Samut...
decided to leave for England, claiming to have gone there for his eyes medical treatment and, in 1935, after unsuccessful negotiation and bargaining with the Government, the King decided to abdicate.

Conflicts and political infighting between the old and new elite continued right up to the time Phibun became Premier. In fact feeling threatened by the royalists and old regime, with three-time attempts on his life, Phibun gave a severe blow to his adversaries. Within one month of assuming premiership Phibun arrested some forty people on charges of treason. It was his first major action against the royalists, the aristocrats, including members of the Parliament, and personal rivals within the Army. They were put on trial by a specially appointed military court; and eighteen of these were immediately executed, twenty six were condemned to life imprisonment, a son of King Chulalongkorn, Krommakhun Chainat, was stripped off his princely rank, and others were expelled from the country. With his first move to consolidate his power crushing old hostile political elements, Phibun soon shifted his main energies to the more positive task in building popular support for his regime among the mass of the population.

To Phibun and his nationalist colleagues, the best way of gaining mass support was to “awaken, focus and mobilize a specially national consciousness”. The people were now often reminded by the Government that they were now living in a “new society” and a “new time” which were in the process of rebuilding themselves. In fact Phibun was responsible for introducing into the Thai language, word and action of sang chat or Nation Building. It was official and first used on March 21, 1940. This was his Ratthaniyom (R. No 7), a cultural mandate of the state, on “Persuading the Thai to Build their Nation” (see note 4 below). From June 24, 1939, since having the country’s name changed up to early 1940, Phibun had brought the issues of nation and nationalism as central point in Thai politics and the main focus of his policy. In his Ratthaniyom everyone in Thailand should now be Thai, no more separation into northern, Isan, southern, nor Islamic Thai; 8.00 in the morning the tri-color Thai flag was flown up and 6.00 in the evening flown down, accompanied by the National Anthem (now with new version of words, singing Thailand instead of
Siam), of this everyone in the vicinity had to stand up to salute\textsuperscript{21}. Though the Royal Anthem was not abolished, its wording was also changed to fit with new Thailand. In the meantime along with his economic nationalism (mainly against the local Chinese\textsuperscript{22}) people were encouraged to use Thai language and Thai products, etc.

Note that the word ratthaniyom which is here roughly translated into English as “cultural mandate of the state” derived from two Pali words. Rattha or state and niyom which can be variously translated as to admire, to favor, to prefer, to like, to desire, to accept popularly and to esteem. An addition if it is attached to any word which reflects any idea or belief, it is equal to an “ism”. For example sangkhom (social or society) plus niyom, becomes sangkhomniyom meaning socialism. Therefore ratthaniyom can be translated as “statism”, a kind of implication of alternative, to put it mildly, or, unless strongly, in opposition to royalism or ratchaniyom. Thus whereas in the absolute monarchy time ratchaniyom or royalism was supreme it was now being replaced by ratthaniyom or statism. The center now was moved from the Palace to the Nation. They were no longer identical.

Nevertheless, Phibun’s version of nation and nationalism borrowed a great deal from Vajiravudh’s official nationalism. In fact he was an admirer of the the King for his nationalistic policies. Phibun, himself, had a Monument of Vajiravudh constructed and standing in front of the King’s Lumbini Park. However, Phibun’s nationalism, though remaining in its official characteristics, was a break away from nationalism which was dominated by the monarchy, and the hybrid form of dynastic realm and nation-state. For Phibun the monarchy and

\textsuperscript{21} Standing for the National Flag and Anthem has been required in Thailand until today.

\textsuperscript{22} Here is the origin of kueteo phat thai or Thai fried noodle which is now very popular not only among the Thai but also tourists. Obviously, noodle is Chinese. To make it Thai is to fried it with dried cheap shrimps not more expensive pork which is associated with Chinese. A lot of vegetable is mixed in, bean-sprouts, green onion leaves and banana flower, lime juice, chili, etc. Another example of Phibun’s nationalist invention which still survives and actually has become very popular and very national now is the ramwong. Actually this is an adaptation from western ball-room or correctly beerhall dance in which man and woman dance together in pair. Phibun’s version is to have them in pair, which is rather non-Thai, moved along tother though not touching nor holding hands.
the Nation are two separate things. The heart of the Nation was defined with “the people” or the *khon Thai* or *chua chat Thai* (Thai race). Such separation and distinction can be seen by making Siam connected to the monarch and dynastic state. At the same time linking it with foreigners and outsiders. Phibun, including Luang Wichit and others, argued repeatedly that Siam had been used by “others” not the Thai themselves, the Chinese, Khmer, Malay, Portuguese and all otherfarangs.

Historically, this argument is not far-fetched for the type of traditional Thai states were defined by their centers rather than territorial boundaries. Therefore, Ayutthaya was the name, as we would call now, of the capital and of the country at the same time. Even though foreigners called it Siam, the Thai ruling class in premodern time could not care less. However, by mid nineteenth century at the height of colonialism and spread of western ideas, things were different. It was King Mongkut who began to conceive himself as the King of Siam; he actually signed his name so in letters to foreign friends, diplomats (including the famous Sir John Bowring), and European monarchs. After the 1855 unequal treaty with Great Britain, it is noticeable that Mongkut’s Proclamations frequently used the word Syam (Siam), this time in the Thai language, for himself and the country.\(^{23}\) King Chulalongkorn, himself, signed his name in Thai as Syamin, a coinage of Syam (Siam) and Indra (God Indra who is King in Heaven); therefore, the Indra or King of Siam. By the time of Vajiravudh Syam (Siam) and Thai were used inter-changeable, especially in literary writings. It is interesting to see that the King himself used this dualism in his poetic writings but for his prose and nationalistic essays he seemed to preferred the word Thai.

It seems that the use of Siam by colonial powers finally was accepted by the Thai ruling elite which now saw themselves and their country vis-a-vis the West as Siamese and Siam respectively. But it is ironic to see that below things may have move in a different direction. In his 1896 Thai-French-English Dictionary, one of the first ever to be compiled, Bishop Pallegoix, an outstanding French missionary and a

\(^{23}\) See *Prachum prakat ratchakan thi 4* (Collected Proclamations of the Fourth Reign), two volumes, 1851-1861, 1861-1868, Bangkok 1968.
personal "friend" of King Mongkut, listed the two words ไทย (Thai) and สIAM (Siam) this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Thai</th>
<th>Free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ไทย</td>
<td>Thai libre</td>
<td>free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ไทย</td>
<td>les Thai,</td>
<td>the Thai, the Siamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Siam</td>
<td>les Siamois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>สIAM</td>
<td>Siam, les Siamois</td>
<td>Siam, the Siamese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mot nors d'usage)</td>
<td>(term out of used)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To Bishop Pallegoix who had much contact with local people, Siam had become *mot nors d'usage* or term out of used! Therefore, if we go along with Pallegoix, Siam was already out-dated but somehow it was still associated with the monarchy and its dynastic realm. This goes along with the instability of internal politics discussed above in which the new elite, especially the Phibun Government was pursuing its nationalist policy vis-a-vis *regime ancien* and in particular in the change of the name. And here we come to our second question and answer: why the name Thailand was accepted and has persisted?

As we can see that Pallegoix could neither be right nor wrong about his "*mot nors d'usage.*" He was not right since kings, nobilities, educated Bangkok Thai still used the word Siam then. But he was not wrong either since among the general population, particularly in Bangkok and the central plain, the word Thai have been popular and widely accepted, giving him the impression that Siam was out of use. In fact there is firm evidence that, in speaking language, the word Thai for the country (with prefix Muang) and for the people (with prefix khon) have been in used as far back as in the seventeenth century. With the coming of print and press in the nineteenth century, together with modern education, plus a sizable number of readers and writers by the first quarter of the twentieth century, the word Thai not Siam had become more prominent at large. In effect, the Bangkok and central Thai learned to think of themselves and their country as Thai and Muang Thai, not Siamese and Siam.

---

24 See de la Loubere.
25 The same process would continue on with other people who were not called or thought of themselves as Thai, like the Lanna people, who rejected the word Lao and called themselves Khon Muang; and the people of the Northeast who formerly preferred the word Lao, but Isan was applied to their region, and eventually admitted the word for calling themselves. See David Streckfuss, "Creating 'Thainess': The
In order to illustrate the point it should be noted that the use of the word Thai had to be understood along with modern historiography. Modern history writing was constructed together with the question of race, a product of latter part of the nineteenth century and a legacy of Western academy and colonialism. Wilatwong Phongsabut, a former history professor of Chulalongkorn University, pointed out that, around 1900, works by *farang* or Western scholars had made a major impact on the thinking (a “who-are-we” type) and historiography (“what-we-were”) of the Thai elite. She said starting from Terrien de la Couperie, a linguist at London University, who, in his 1885 work on *The Cradle of the Shan Race*, was the first to suggest that the origin of the Thai was in central China. From there the Thai migrated south. The linguist concluded this by comparing different Tai dialects of Southeast Asia and those spoken in China. About the same time of de la Couperie there were others who came to the same conclusion, for example Archibald Ross Colquhoun who did a survey in Assam, Southern China, and Northern Indochinese peninsula. In his 1885 article “Across Chryse” Colquhoun suggested that the Thai were from Yunnan. He was further confirmed by E.H. Parker, a British Consul in Hainan (Hoihow?) in his extremely influential 1894 article “The Old Tai Empire”. This was when Nan Chao, in Yunnan, was identified as a Thai kingdom. Nan Chao flourished with a long list of “Thai” kings until it was captured by Kublai Khan.26

To the British while expanding their empire from upper Burma into Yunnan this line of academic interpretation fit very well with the notion that southern China was not originally Chinese and that there were all kind of ethnics, especially Shan, Tai or Thai. To the Thai elite the hypothesis of their ancestors migrating south, searching for better home and maintaining freedom and independence was more than


26 See Wilatwong, pp. 2-5. As mentioned before that the theory of China as the original homeland of the Thai and the its mighty kingdom was Nan Chao, was finally, in 1914, accepted by Damrong. We have seen elsewhere that it was further developed by Luang Wichitwathakan in the 1930s and 1940s. See also Luang Wichitwathakan, Ngan khonkhwa ruang chon chat Thai, 1961, reprint 1969. Luang Wichit reproduced part of Parker’s influential article on Nan Chao together with a long list of its kings from Si Nu Lo on to P’i Lo Koh, Koh Lo Feng, etc. These are taken as Thai kings before Sukhothai. pp. 177-91.
appropriate. Race and original homeland seemed rather relevant vis-a-vis colonialism. On top of linguistic interpretation, still, there was this archeological study which put more emphasis on the questions of races. Ancient sites, pagodas, Hindu-Buddhist statues and images, artifacts, were studied, dug up, identified and classified by English, French, Dutch, German scholars. Races and names of sites had been scholarly identified for example Dvaravati Mon, Angkorian Khmer, Champa Cham, so on and so forth. Where were (we) the Thai, then, before the thirteenth century and before here, in Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, or Chiangmai? “We must be elsewhere.” Thus China and Nan Chao being proposed out of ‘scientific’ exploration were not only appropriate but archeologically (*borankhadi*) corrected\(^\text{27}\).

It should be added that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Western style of antiquity study had become fashionable among the Thai elite. Their contact and frequent visit to Western colonies in Southeast Asia plus their first hand knowledge of civilized Europe put them in touch with gentleman's learned clubs like the Royal Asiatic Society, Ecole Franciase d'Extreme Orient, various museums, libraries and journals. In effect a series of activities and institutions were set up domestically. In 1904, the Siam Society was established with the just return-home Crown Prince Vajiravudh as its Patron. The Society started to publish its Journal in the same year\(^\text{28}\). Among the first articles was Prince Damrong’s “The Foundation of Ayuthia”.\(^\text{29}\) In some ways the Thai Past was discussed, proposed and created here, by top Thai elite, princes and nobility, along with their Western counterparts. In 1905 the Ho samut samrap phra nakhon or the Bangkok Library\(^\text{30}\) was established, again with the Crown Prince as its President. It is not entirely brand new since it came out from the older one which was Vaj

\(^{27}\) The word *borankhadi* which is now taken as archeology is very interesting and revealing in connection with race and homeland. It literally means studies or affairs of old things. Since old things were labelled as Mon or Khmers, the Thai must be originally elsewhere.

\(^{28}\) The *Journal of the Siam Society* has appeared regularly since 1904. However, it’s name was changed to the Journal of the Thailand Research Society, between 1939-1941, understandably, due to pressure from the Phibun Government.

\(^{29}\) A good account on the early years of the Siam Society is by Michael Smithie in his introduction to the reprint of.

\(^{30}\) The Library’s name is usually translated as National. However, in the Thai it was the Library for the Phra Nakhon (Nagara), meaning Bangkok rather than National.
irayana Library, set up earlier in memory of King Mongkut. In 1907 the Royal Research Society (Samakhom subsuan khong boran nai prathet Sayam, the name was, later changed to Borankhadi Samoson) was also established; it original name reflected what was intended to be activities, i.e. to research, investigate for old things in Siam. These are mechanism to search and learn about anything Thai in the process of official nationalism. If it were today we might call it Thai or even Southeast Asian studies. But such studies of antiquity seemed to have a more profound political and psychological impact on the Thai elite as well as the lower echelon of urban educated.

By the 1920s and 1930s the construction of the Thai past in close connection with race became even more intensified, especially after the 1932 ‘democratic’ coup. This is partly due to Vajiravudh’s official nationalism's campaign, partly to the growing number of educated middle and official class, and partly from colonial and missionary writings. We shall see that rising new educated middle class put more emphasis on the race issue; it became almost the major central theme in their own version of Thai history. As I have presented elsewhere this new dynastic-national historiography was linear and that it had intimate relationship with modern territorial nation. Here we see history of the Thai as a long march from China into “the golden land” of Southeast Asia, with their centers around and along the linear chain of kingdoms, from central China (Mung, Lung, Pa, Ai-lao kingdoms, etc.), to Nanchao; and once the last one in China was destroyed by Kublai Khan, it went on to Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, then Bangkok (and Thonburi).

Here we see the proliferation of articles and books on Thai linear racial past. The three most influential books along this historiographical line were probably, first, Lak Thai (Thai Pillars) by Sanga Kanchanakkhaphan (better known as Khun Wichitmatra), second, Prawatsat sakon (International History) by Luang Wichitwathakan, and third, Ruang of chat Thai (Story of the Thai

32 This linear history had already been developped by the turn of the twentieth century, mainly through the works of Vajiravudh and Prince Damrong, a misnomer “Father of Thai History”. By 1914 Prince Damrong, “History of Siam in the Period Antecedent...” in Miscellaneous Aarticles ... 1962.
nation) by Phya Anuman. *Lak Thai* won an award, in 1928, from King Prajadhipok. The book immediately became very popular and went on a second printing of 1,000 more copies the following year. It is a linear-southern-march history of the Thai race, as mentioned above. The author stated frankly that it was meant, primarily, to encourage Thai to love their nation, secondly to have faith in the Buddhist religion, and thirdly to be loyal to the king. Of the three ‘pillars’ the author was much more interested in the first. He ended his book by emphasizing the love for the nation and the *rao-Thai*, We-the-Thai.

As for the voluminous *Prawatsat sakon*, it is more like what we would call world history today, i.e. focussing on major civilizations West and East. It is interesting that Luang Wichit managed to put Thai history in and proved that the Thai race was one of the greatest. His opening line for the chapter on the Thai was that of the centrality of the race.

To illustrate my point further it is worth to notice that books along this line were very much encouraged and wide spread. They regularly appeared, sponsored by government agencies, published and distributed free-of-charge during Buddhist kathin ceremonies, or at cremations. Praphasiri’s *Wikhroa ruang Muang Tai doem* (Analysis of ancient Tai country), 1935, is a good example; another is a Military Academy text, also 1935, *Naeo son prawatsat* (Guideline for teaching history), by Major Phra Wisetphotchanakit (Thongdi).

Together with new elite middle class writings, again, we see Western works, not only initiating linear racial idea but had helped to perpetuate and consolidate it to a certain degree. Of all the Western writings at this point, William C. Dodd’s *The Tai Race-Elder Brothers of the Chinese*, 1923, was probably most influential since the days of Parker's Nan Chao-the Thai-and Kublai Khan. Dr. Dodd, an American missionary lived and worked in Chiangrai for over 30 years. Between 1886-1918, he travelled widely, mostly on horse-back, to the Shan states, Yunnan, and southeast China. In his various accounts, later compiled, edited, and published by his wife, he met all kind of Tai speaking people (notice Tai not Thai), literate and illiterate, Buddhist and animistic; he was very impressed by their hospitality. His book immediately became popular among Bangkok Thai educated middle class. It was translated into Thai, first serialized and later on published
at least three times during this period (1935, 1939, 1940). Dr. Dodd's first hand field-experiences made linear racial Thai past exceptionally real and convincing. Needless to say that it made itself into the highly centralized Ministry of Education, pre and especially post absolute monarchy, and finally and firmly written down in all school textbooks. Thai students learned to memorize strange sounding names of Nan Chao kings whom their ancestors in early Bangkok and Ayutthaya probably never heard before.

At the beginning, race, original homeland, successive kingdoms, was probably rather unconscious. But slowly the emphasis of the past shifted away from palaces and kings. And by now the Thai, especially those modern educated, thought of themselves as Thai; and as living in a territorial boundary of Muang Thai, country of the Thai. Here, again, we can see that a new society of a more horizontal, instead of hierarchical, was taking shape. Although race is general, abstract, intellectually difficult to identify but it could easily be associated with that same vague idea of "the people". To follow up the distinction between dynastic realm and 'imagined communities', it is probably a basis of transformation from dynastic to nation-state. Phibun's Thailand fit better because it was modern, indigenous, popular, and national, while Siam was old-fashioned, foreign, hierarchical, and monarchic.

Conclusion

Almost sixty years have passed since the name-change, many things have happened in Thailand. When World War II ended, Phibun and his men were charged as war criminals. They were acquitted, however. It was during this brief post War period, 1945-1948, that the name Siam was brought back. However, its use was only in the English and foreign languages, while in the Thai, Prathet Thai or Thailand persisted. Liberal and royalist Premiers like Thawi, Khuang and Pridi, respectively did not try to change the name in the Thai. As mentioned early, his version of the 1946 Constitution which Pridi, himself, counter-signed it was the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (ratchanachak Thai), not Syam or Siam.

In 1948 Phibun staged a come-back and became Prime Minister for another nine years. The name of his country is Prathet Thai in the Thai and Thailand in the English. At this time during the
1949 Constitution drafting, Siam or Thailand was reconsidered by a committee. Thailand narrowly won the battle and was in used throughout the anti-Communist and Cold War period. In 1957 Phibun was overthrown by a military coup, led by his Defense Minister, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat; he went into exile and died in Japan. At the beginning of a long military regimes of Sarit-Thanom, 1958-1973, and a long process of drafting a new constitution, 1958-1968, the question of Thailand or Siam was brought back and discussed at length by the Constitution Drafting Assembly. The Assembly met three times, (June 22, July 6 and 20, 1961), well-known Thai elite, Luang Wichitwathakan, Phin Choohavan, and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, took turn for the debate on the two names. Finally, votes were counted; it was 134:5 for Thailand over Siam\(^33\). This should be enough to put Siam to rest. But as I mentioned earlier, the 1960s saw the trying-to-go-back of Siam, intellectual circle led by Sulak Sivaraksa and his respectable journal: *Sangkhomsat Parithat*, along with some academics took the lead. But the movement did not get anywhere despite it was during the 1960s that the monarchy has been brought back to the fore of the society. The present King Bhumibhol has been able to restore the power and prestige of the monarchy to its height. But it is obvious that Rama IX is the King of Thailand not Siam. Nevertheless, after the student uprising of 1973 which overthrown Thanom-Prapat military regime, the question of Siam or Thailand was again reconsidered by the 1975 Constitution Drafting Committee. However, this time it received very little attention. Siam or Thailand seemed like a dead issue. Then in the latter part of 1980s when Thai “bubble economy” was at its peak, Caraboa, a popular young male folk-rock band, struck their guitar cords and shout one of the most well-known top-hit songs “Made in Thailand”. Thailand seems to be firmly established though no one knows if the same question will be raised again\(^34\).

\(^33\) See *Syam rue Thai chak kan aphiprai nai sapha rangratthathammanun*, (Siam or Thailand from debates by Constitution Drafting Commission), 1961.

\(^34\) I would like to add here that recently two things very interesting have been going on in connection with Thailand, Thai, Tai, and the problems of race and original homeland. As mentioned above the linear southward migration theory had become a monstrous Thai past. The theory remained unchallenged through the 1950s. It is Federick Mote who in 1964 first challenged the validity in his short but influential article “Problems of Thai Prehistory.” The anti-thesis remained within the archacademic circle, until Sujit Wongsdes, one of the most well-known popular writer of contemporary
Thailand, visited Yunnan and pouring out his persuasive and somewhat humorous argument against migration theory. His major works are, for example, Khon Thai mai dai ma chak nai (The Thai do not come from Anywhere), 1984; Khon Thai yu thini (The Thai are here), 1986; and Khon Thai yu nai usakhane (The Thai are in Southeast Asia), 1994. Therefore, in many way the theory of original homeland and especially the Nan Chao as a Thai kingdom have been damaged and somewhat rejected. I do not know if this will effect the name Thailand. But it seems to me that the word Thai will stay on but with different interpretation and with much broader meaning. This was why one of Sujit’s antiracial writings was very popular. In 198?, Sujit, after coming back from a visit to Laos, wrote another half-serious and half joke travelogue by the title of Jek pon Lao, or Chinese mixed with Lao, which probably he himself who has Chinese and Lao Puan blood from his parents. In effect Sujit was saying that Thai people are mixed batch.

Second, it seems that Phibun and Luang Wichit have been down-played and criticised for their extreme nationalist policies and their overly done concept of the Thai race. However, government agency like the National Cultural Commission, obviously a left over from Phibun days, is still active in promoting the same lines of racial interpretation of the Thai past and culture. In 198?, it organized a huge seminar on Khon Tai nok Prathet (The Tai outside the country); it was presided over by Princess Kalayani, and attended by some 500 academic and education people. See its publication. Royalties, officials and academics frequently visit areas inhabited by Tai in Vietnam, Laos, Yunnan and Burma.

As of now a well-known academic, Dr. Chatthip Nartsupha, is leading a big team of scholars working on a research on the Tai (outside Thailand), with handsome support from the Thailand Research Fund. I wonder whether a larger “immagined community” of Phibun-Luang Wichit days is still lingering on with us?

A good example of periodic debate on the name Siam is a letter by Somnuk Pejrprim, “It’s time to help restore the name Siam”, Bangkok Post, September 17, 1995. The writer cited various good reasons in favor of bringing back the name Siam, for example Sir Rabindaranath Tagor eulogised the name Siam beautifully in his poem, Sir Winston Churchill was reported to have said “Don’t worry; it’ll come back to Siam again”, etc. He many unfavorable points for Phibun, as Nazi and fascist, in changing the name to Thailand, etc.