Introduction

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Introduction

The present issue of ASIAN REVIEW offers six contributions, which largely concern the history of Thailand in relation to some Asian and European countries. Starting with the paper of Sukanya Suchxaya, which discusses the adaptation of the Tai-Laos people's traditional beliefs to Buddhism through 5 important Lan Xang literary works. These literary works are traditionally oral tales, which in the process of re-creating into written forms, some episodes and significant characters have been transformed to accommodate to Buddhism.

In the second paper, Piyanart Bunnag focuses on the religious contacts between Sri Lanka and Thailand during the pre-colonial period, in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. She concludes that Sri Lanka, as the first giver of Theravada Buddhism to Thailand, had a cultural influence on Thailand in terms of Buddhism. Later on, Thailand had a chance "to repay her debt" to Sri Lanka by reviving the declining Buddhism in that country.

Suthachai Yimprasert considers the role of the Portuguese in Siam and Pegu after the Portuguese conquest of Melaka. He reveals that the Portuguese were not only traders but also mercenaries and advisers in the armies of both kingdoms. Thus, in the wars between Burma and Siam from 1548 to 1605, there were many Portuguese mercenaries who fought for both sides.

Turning to Dhiravat na Pombejra, he examines the roles played by employees of the Dutch United East India Company [VOC] in late seventeenth and in eighteenth century Ayutthaya society. Finally, he summed up how the Dutch and the Siamese sides perceived the role of the VOC in Siamese society.

Pipada Youngcharoen makes a comparative analysis on the progressive women in Japan and Thailand during the modernization period. She points out that while Thai progressive women were mostly
from the upper class, the Japanese ones were from the lower class. Both groups’ activities reflected alertness in trying to raise women’s status in their own societies.

The last contribution considers a particular aspect that is different from the first five papers. Chuleeporn Virunha examines changes, which occurred within the Penang western mercantile community during the early twentieth century through an examination of its official organ, the Penang Chamber of Commerce. She indicates that Penang provides an example of the way in which western capitalism and colonialism, through its mercantile agents, could absorb a once relatively independent port and transfer it into a trading link serving its own interests.

It is to be hoped that the contributions to this issue of ASIAN REVIEW may again testify to the usefulness of the contributors’ efforts to look at present-day Thailand [Siam], Thai - other Asian relations and Asian-Europe relations through the perspective of the past.

Finally, the editor wishes to express her gratitude and appreciation to the readers of the articles published in this issue: Assistant Professor Dr. Busakorn Karnchanachari, Dr. Dhiravat na Pombejra and Acharn Chalong Soontravanich from Department of History, Assistant Professor Dr. Saowalak Suriyawongpaisal from Department of Eastern Languages, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University and Professor William Klausner, Institute of Security and International Studies.

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