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The Portuguese in Siam: a quinquacentennial retrospect

Edward Van Roy

Abstract

Thailand’s present-day population of “Thai of Portuguese descent,” concentrated at Bangkok, represents a scarcely discernible remnant of Portugal’s erstwhile Asian empire, created between 1507 and 1527 via a chain of strongpoints stretching from Muscat, Ormuz, and Goa to Malacca, Macao, and the Spice Islands. Along that route the Portuguese Crown in 1516 established diplomatic relations with the kingdom of Siam, and Portuguese settlements emerged at Ayutthaya and other Thai ports soon thereafter. The quinquacentennial anniversary of that historic watershed presents an opportune moment to reflect on the distinctive contribution made by Portuguese merchants, mercenaries, missionaries, and mestizos to Thai history and the means whereby the Portuguese communities at Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Bangkok managed to retain their ethnic identity for some five centuries half a world removed from their cultural roots.

From visitors to residents

Diplomatic contacts

A dozen years after Vasco de Gama’s historic voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to India’s Malabar coast, the Portuguese in 1510 established a strongpoint at Goa, which thenceforth served as the cornerstone of their Eastern empire. Alfonso d’Albuquerque, the second Viceroy of Goa, extended the Portuguese presence further eastward in 1511 by leading a naval squadron across the Indian Ocean to seize the well-situated port of Malacca. Discovering that Malacca was a distant vassal of Siam, he immediately dispatched Duarte Fernandez to Ayutthaya (by Chinese junk) to inform Siam’s king, at Ayutthaya, of the

Portuguese *coup de main*. Fernandez was well received at the Siamese court and was pleasantly surprised to find that no objection was raised against the Portuguese initiative. He returned to Malacca by the overland route from Ayutthaya to the Andaman coast, visiting the Siamese vassal ports of Tenasserim and Martaban along with another Portuguese embassy that had been sent to establish friendly relations with those principalities. And so, Portuguese relations with the Siamese kingdom started off on the right foot (Bidya, 1998: 29–76; de Campos, 1959; and da Silva Rego, 1982 cover the general background).

A second Portuguese envoy, António de Miranda de Azevedo, visited Ayutthaya in 1512. After a two-year stay during which he explored diverse trade opportunities for the Portuguese crown he returned to Malacca and then Goa accompanied by a Thai embassy. In 1516 Malacca dispatched yet another ambassador, Duarte de Coelho, to Ayutthaya. The resulting “treaty of friendship and commerce” between the kingdoms of Siam and Portugal was the first Siamese compact with a European power. It specified that the Portuguese would be permitted to set up trading posts at Ayutthaya and other Siamese ports, that they would supply Ayutthaya with guns and powder, and that they would be allowed to practice their religion openly and freely. The Portuguese settlement that subsequently emerged at Ayutthaya was headed by a series of captains-major (capitanãos-mor) appointed by the Estado Português da Índia, instituted in 1505 and headquartered at Goa. “But in practice the Estado interfered little. The Portuguese settlements and mercantile activities in the region were mostly in private hands and sometimes acted in defiance of Portuguese royal orders” (D’Ávila Lourido, 1996: 76).

Relations between Ayutthaya on the one side and Goa and Malacca on the other were disrupted during the period of Portugal’s merger with Spain from 1580 to 1640. During that interregnum Manila, Spain’s main Asian base, served as the center of Iberian interests in the Orient, as is reflected in the several embassies that voyaged between Siam and Manila in those years. The sixty years of Spanish hegemony, during which the conjoined kingdoms of Spain and Portugal unleashed the Great Armada against England, with tragic consequences, bled Portugal of manpower and treasure. It
was blamed in hindsight as the turning point in Portugal’s Asian fortunes (Boxer, 1969: 111, 114). In the wake of that “Spanish interlude” the Portuguese were in 1639 expelled from Japan, Malacca was taken by the Dutch in 1641, and Colombo fell to the Dutch in 1660. (Some of the Portuguese traders evicted from those ports found their way to Siam, bolstering the small Portuguese community at Ayutthaya.) With the loss of those outposts the role of Macao increased. “From 1660 to 1680, Macau traded [increasingly] with Siam and with ships from the Siamese Court, which at times came through Macau to obtain provisions, goods, and also take on seamen” (Seabra, 2005: 20). Early in the seventeenth century the Dutch and English established trading posts at Ayutthaya, and starting in 1673 the French dispatched a series of increasingly impressive missions that succeeded in building a strong presence. In an effort to revive Portuguese interests at Ayutthaya in the face of that growing international competition, an embassy led by Pero Vaz de Siqueira was sent from Macao in 1684. Though cordially received, the mission ultimately proved unsuccessful, and the Portuguese position languished (Seabra, 2005).

While many contemporary sources attest to the close links between Portugal and Ayutthaya, Portugal’s relations with Siam’s vassals along the maritime trade routes are scarcely mentioned. But there can be no doubt that they were significant nonetheless. For instance, the trading post at Pattani, a Siamese vassal port on the opposite shore of the Peninsula from Malacca, sheltered 300 Portuguese residents as early as 1538 (Suthachai, 1999: 44, citing Pinto, 1989). Along the Andaman coast, the ports of Mergui, Ye, Tenasserim, and Martaban received a number of official trade missions over the course of the sixteenth century. As important way-stations linking the Indian Ocean sea lanes with the overland routes, the Elephant Trails (thanon khot), crossing the Tenasserim Cordillera to Ayutthaya, they developed strong alliances with both Malacca and Goa. Martaban, for instance, boasted ninety Portuguese residents and a number of brick warehouses for their merchandise as of 1568 (Harvey, 1925: 175, 178). “The trans-peninsular route... was favored over the Straits because of pirates... and contrary winds at certain times of the year, which could make a
Map 1 Ayutthaya and environs
trip via the Straits six times longer than normal” (Andaya, 1999: 133). However, the relentless Burmese advance into the Irrawaddy lowlands made life along the Andaman seaboard increasingly insecure. Finally in 1765, Siam permanently lost suzerainty over the Andaman coast, cutting it off from its overland route to the west and forcing the remaining Portuguese resident merchants to flee to Goa, never to return (Sunait, 1999: 115–6).

Merchants

Throughout its two-and-a-half centuries of trading relations with Western merchant-adventurers, the Ayutthaya entrepôt built up a well-deserved reputation for openness, tolerance, and adaptability. The arrival of (what local people considered) the hairy, stinking, uncouth, bellicose, religiously intemperate Westerners (ferangi or farang, a term of Portuguese derivation) presented a challenge to those Thai cultural predispositions. But, unlike the later-arriving Spaniards and Frenchmen, and to a lesser degree the Dutch and English, the Portuguese proved relatively well-disposed, honest, and intrepid, and not so haughty or obstinate as to interfere with the spirit of compromise necessary for successful trade negotiations (Bidya, 1998: 194–223 and D’Ávila Lourido, 1996: 84–94 provide the general background).

The Ayutthaya emporium had from the outset straddled the cultural divide between the resource-rich inland reaches and the maritime transport routes to overseas markets. A number of itinerant Armenian and Italian traders, even the Venetian merchant-adventurer Marco Polo (1254–1324), are said to have passed through the kingdom long before the Portuguese arrival. With the establishment of cordial relations with the Portuguese, Siam’s King Prachai Racha (r. 1534–46) appears to have found the Portuguese, in addition to the South Asian and Arab Muslims as well as the Chinese, to be profitable trading partners and decided to improve Ayutthaya’s access to the sea by having a number of transport canals dug. During his reign, a shortcut canal was excavated across a great ox-bow bend, creating the river course through Bangkok-Thonburi known today, by-passing the sinuous route known today as the Bangkok Yai and Bangkok Noi canals.

The initial Portuguese trading missions searched unsuccessfully
in Siam for the cloves, nutmeg, mace, black pepper, and other rare spices that would maximize their return on the difficult and dangerous homeward journey. "After an initial flurry of interest in the 1510s and 1520s, Portuguese officials concluded that Ayutthaya would not be an important source of goods for Portuguese crown trade, and Portuguese involvement in Ayutthaya was left to private traders thereafter" (Breazeale, 1999: 44). Taking advantage of the opportunity, growing numbers of "private and unauthorized merchants came to Ayuthaya from 1515 onwards. Mostly they came from the lower classes and wanted to try their luck in Ayuthaya. A Portuguese community was set up at Ayuthaya probably from these years.... Through this community, the Portuguese merchants and mercenaries appeared in the kingdom. It is known that some of them were on board a Siamese ship [i.e., a Sino-Siamese junk] around 1520" (Suthachai, 1999: 42).

Left in private hands, at least on the Portuguese side, the Siamese export trade flourished with a miscellany of agricultural and extractive goods such as nipa-palm wine (arrack and jaggery), rice, tin, ivory, sappanwood, scented woods, sticklac, raw gemstones, and occasionally elephants, as well as such transit wares as Chinese silks and ceramics. In return the private traders found a ready market in Siam for such manufactures and processed goods as guns and gunpowder, printed cotton textiles, cut and polished gemstones, opium, aromatics, and medicinal concoctions. Like other European traders along the Andaman coast and at Ayutthaya the Portuguese relied primarily on barter in their entrepôt commerce, with a great variety of silver and gold coinages serving as measures of value and residual mediums of exchange (Ferrand, 1920). They sought unsuccessfully to corner the principal indigenous money supply of the day, the cowrie shell (bia), by seeking to wrest the cowrie trade from the sultanate of the Maldives, which held virtual monopoly control over the variety used in the marketplaces of Siam (Hogendorn and Johnson, 1986: 28–36).

An early reference to the Portuguese inter-port trade at Tenasserim is contained in the journals of Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a Dutchman in the employ of the Portuguese archbishop of Goa during the 1580s. "He reported that a large
volume of the trade at Tenasserim was in Portuguese hands.... Tenasserim was renown[ed] for its fine nipa-palm wine, which was shipped in large ceramic containers (generally known as Martaban jars) and distributed widely in India” (Sunait, 1999: 107). Tenasserim was also well known by the French and English in the seventeenth century as a way station on the route to Ayutthaya.

At Ayutthaya in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs (krom phra khlang) was placed largely in the hands of officials drawn from the resident non-Thai trading communities, including the Portuguese. The head of the Western Trade Department (krom tha khwa) was generally a resident Muslim of Persian extraction carrying the title Phraya Chula Rachamontri. Under him served two “harbormasters” (chao tha). One dealt with the Muslim community of Arabs, Persians, Turks, Indians, and Malays (the wide array of peoples ranging from the Malay Peninsula through the Indonesian Archipelago). The other dealt with the Christian community of Europeans (except the Dutch, who were classed with the Japanese), Vietnamese (who were classed with the French), Armenians, and South Asian Christians. The Portuguese resident captain-major was traditionally designated as harbormaster for Ayutthaya’s Christian community (Breazeale, 1999: 11-12, 49-50).

Malay served as the language of convenience in Thai dealings with farang through the Western Trade Department. Some of the local Portuguese who served the Thai bureaucracy as import-export agents, river pilots, cargo inspectors, and trade tax and fee collectors were proficient Malay interpreters.

Successive generations of Portuguese-Asian residents (Christians with mixed Portuguese, Thai, Mon, Indian and other Asian ancestry) were frequently employed by the Thai government as interpreters, helping to tie Ayutthaya into the diaspora of Portuguese-Asian communities, which extended from the seat of the Portuguese viceroy at Goa in India to Macau on the southern Chinese coast and to Timor in the eastern part of the archipelago. (Breazeale, 1999: 11)

With the fall of Malacca to the Dutch in 1641 and with subsequent Burmese encroachments on the Andaman coast, Siamese-Portuguese trade links swung to Macao. But Macao, too,
entered a difficult period after the expulsion of its merchants from Japan in 1636, termination of its participation in the Manila trade in 1640, and disruptions in the China trade following the Ming-Ching dynastic transition of 1644, in addition to the unrelenting pressure exerted by the Dutch. Under those increasingly difficult conditions both west and east, the Portuguese community at Ayutthaya fell on hard times. Certainly over the course of Ayutthaya’s inward-oriented Ban Phlu Luang dynasty (1688–1767), there is nearly no evidence of Portuguese trade with Siam.

**Mercenaries**

“[The] Portuguese soldiers who were sent out as cannon-fodder to the colonial battlefields during the whole of the seventeenth century were only too often forcibly recruited from gaol-birds and convicted criminals.” (Boxer, 1969: 116–7). They were widely disparaged as ill-trained and ill-disciplined. Nevertheless, Ayutthaya on several occasions negotiated with Portuguese envoys to secure the services of those mercenaries (Bidya, 1998: 171–93). The Andaman coast principalities may be presumed to have had a similar interest.

The tale of Felipe de Brito y Nicote is symbolic of the early Portuguese mercenary influence along the Andaman coast. Initially stationed at Goa, De Brito entered the employ of the king of Arakan and participated in 1600 in the conquest of Syriam, a seaport along the Irrawaddy delta coast. With a complement of fifty Portuguese comrades he was left in command of that strategic outpost. However, with the approval of Goa he set himself up as the independent governor of Syriam, exacting a bounty of trade taxes and anchorage fees from passing ships. In due course he deputed his son to Martaban, extending his control from the delta to the Andaman coast. The landlocked Burmese chafed under de Brito’s trade block and in 1613 attacked Syriam. The port city was taken, de Brito was captured and put to a horrible death, and his Portuguese troops were carried off into Burmese captivity. Martaban also was besieged and de Brito’s son was assassinated. But the Siamese, aided by bands of Portuguese mercenaries eager to avenge de Brito’s fall, were able to repel the Burmese advance and retain their suzerainty over the Andaman coast (Harvey, 1925:185–
9). All this exemplifies the role played by the long-forgotten Portuguese adventurers at Ayutthaya.

Some 120 Portuguese mercenaries led by Domingos de Seixas served in the bodyguard of King Prachai Racha. They and their successors functioned as instructors in the use of Western firearms-initially jingals (light artillery) and arquebuses and later muskets, mortars, and heavy cannon—and also introduced cannon founding, gunpowder manufacture, and gun-smithing techniques (Boxer, 1965). As a reward for their services they were provided with land for their residences and a church, the first one in Siam, at Ban Din (later known as Ban Portuket) in the vicinity of Ayutthaya, where they produced weaponry and trained gunners (Harvey, 1925: 340–1; Pinto, 1989: 400). In the 1549 Burmese siege of Ayutthaya, the weakest section of the city wall was manned by a contingent of fifty Portuguese mercenaries under the captaincy of one Diogo Pereira (Harvey, 1925: 159). And again in later Burmese sieges of Ayutthaya the use of Portuguese gunners by both the defenders and besiegers is mentioned repeatedly (Damrong, 2001: passim).

Ayutthaya appears to have withstood the 1549 siege largely due to the Portuguese-manned artillery deployed atop the city’s earthen ramparts. That skin-of-the-teeth deliverance from Burmese conquest led King Chakraphat (r. 1548–69) to undertake major improvements of the city’s defenses. In 1550 the old stockade was replaced with a wall of stucco-covered brick and mortar filled with an interior of brick rubble and tight-packed mud. The new wall was built atop the earthen ramparts that had formed the base of the former stockade. The new brickwork wall, along with its sturdy gates and bastions, was designed with Portuguese technical assistance. It was capable of withstanding cannon fire—itself of Portuguese derivation—which had not been the case with timber defenses. It should be noted, however, that as soldiers of fortune, Portuguese contingents served the Burmese kings just as fervently as they did the Thai. In the 1548–9 campaign against Ayutthaya, the Burmese king was attended by a bodyguard of 400 Portuguese retainers (Harvey, 1925: 159). Again in the 1568 siege of Ayutthaya the Burmese army included 400 Portuguese mercenaries who mounted guns on high platforms, fired over the city walls, “totally changing the nature of [Southeast Asian] warfare.” Burmese
superiority in military technology was evidently a major factor in the fall of Ayutthaya in 1569 (Baker, 2001: xxxiv). The Burmese army that defeated Ayutthaya in 1569 “was considered the largest force Southeast Asia had ever seen. It included more than a thousand Portuguese mercenaries [evidently a substantial exaggeration] with flintlock guns and artillery” (Sarassawadee, 2005: 115).

In addition to their material innovations, the Portuguese introduced the military tactic of “direct, fast, and efficient attack where troops were pushed to the limit and men killed indiscriminately in order to gain a victory” (Terwiel, 2005: 38). But that ruthless mode of combat was adopted with greater effect by the Burmese than the Thai, which aided the Burmese in overwhelming Ayutthaya in their several military confrontations of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Only under the generalship of King Taksin (r. 1767–82) were these techniques perfected by the Thai. Through such technical contributions the Portuguese introduced a new phase in Southeast Asian warfare, setting on course a sequence of cumulative changes in the region’s history over the succeeding centuries.

**Missionaries**

With the Portuguese settlers came Catholic friars and priests, first the Franciscans and Dominicans and later, in the footsteps of Francis Xavier, who visited Malacca in 1545, the Jesuits. The Franciscans were renowned for their humanism, the Dominicans for their fearsome zealotry, and the Jesuits for their intellectual excellence and tenacity. And so it was in Siam, with the Dominicans brushing aside the Franciscans and the Jesuits (with French backing) ultimately outperforming the Dominicans (Bidya, 1998: 237–43 and Pallegoix, 2000: 303–402 provide the general background).

The missionary presence was a fundamental element of Portuguese community life at Ayutthaya. The friars and priests were, in concert with the Portuguese captain-major, the effective heads of the community. In addition to their sacral duties they served as principal upholders of Portuguese custom, teachers of language and manners, arbiters in disputes, repositories of
knowledge and lore, archivists of the rites of passage, directors of school and orphanage, and stewards of church, convent, and cemetery. Their presence was considered so essential that both Goa and Macao regularly sponsored their recruitment and financed their travel and subsistence. During periods of weak or absent clerical leadership, the Portuguese community at Ayutthaya languished.

Following the investment of Goa with the archbishopric for East Asia in 1557, the Andaman route took on redoubled significance as the most convenient means of missionary passage between South Asia and Ayutthaya. Initially, the government at Goa, and later Macao, sponsored the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries in Siam, but that material support to the Portuguese settlements evaporated with the empire’s declining fortunes in the seventeenth century. The first Dominican missionaries, Sebastião de Canto and Jerônimo de Cruz, arrived at Ayutthaya from Malacca in 1566; the first Jesuit missionary, Balthazar de Séqueira, arrived overland from Tenasserim in 1606 (Suthachai, 1999: 49, 52). Thereafter, however, the union of cross and crown, which empowered the Portuguese dominion worldwide, was progressively attenuated at Ayutthaya with the declining interest of the Portuguese state in Siam’s trade prospects (Boxer, 1969: 228).

Three churches were built at Ayutthaya’s Portuguese settlement, reflecting the social divisions among the community’s several parishes, stemming from the tensions between the respective clerical orders. The first, apparently dating back to at least the mid-1500s, was St. Augustine’s Church, established by Portuguese Franciscans. It was situated at the upstream end of the settlement, nearest the walled city. By the close of the sixteenth century it was well-established, but it apparently floundered thereafter and had been abandoned by the mid seventeenth century. The second was St. Dominic’s Church, under the stewardship of Portuguese Dominicans. It was built about 300 meters downstream from St. Augustine’s probably in the late 1500s, and it became the community’s most imposing landmark. Third was St. Paul’s Church, built around 1606 or shortly thereafter by Portuguese Jesuits, but taken over by French Jesuits sometime after 1662. It was located at the downstream end of the Portuguese settlement, some 500 meters south of St. Dominic’s.
Clerics serving with the powerful and well-financed Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris, established in 1658, revived the missionary spirit at Ayutthaya with the arrival of Bishops François Pallu and Pierre de la Mothe-Lambert in 1662, accompanying the first French diplomatic mission, followed by Msgr. Pierre Lanneau in 1664. They found eleven Portuguese missionaries—four Jesuit, two Franciscan, and three lay brothers (but strangely no mention of the Dominicans)—already in residence (Suthachai, 1999: 53). The French missionaries established a fourth church at Ayutthaya, St. Joseph’s, in 1665. King Narai (r. 1656–88) awarded them a plot of land and building materials for the construction of that church and seminary nearly four kilometers upstream from the Portuguese settlement. The well-situated site, along the river not far from the Tanao Si (Tenasserim) Customs Station and Chakrai Yai...
(Ambassadors') City Gate, was awarded in appreciation of the brilliant engineering services that the Catholic priests had provided in strengthening the fortifications at Ayutthaya and downstream at the Thonburi guard post. Failing in their efforts to convert the Thai and attract the local Portuguese population, the French priests expanded the mission school into a seminary catering largely to Vietnamese youths imported from Tonkin. Its fame overshadowed the lesser Portuguese churches downstream and aggravated the enmity already existing between the Portuguese and French, both laity and clergy, an irritant that persisted well into the Bangkok era.

**Mestizos**

Antonio van Diemen, Dutch governor-general at Batavia from 1636 to 1645 and well experienced in combating the Portuguese commercial hegemony in the East, observed that “most of the Portuguese in [Asia] look upon this region as their fatherland. They think no more about Portugal. They drive little or no trade thither, but content themselves with the interport trade of Asia, just as if they were natives thereof and had no other country” (quoted in translation in Boxer, 1969: 120). He continued:

Virtually all of the male Portuguese who sailed from Lisbon to Goa during [the centuries of empire] went out to the east in the service of the Crown – the missionaries as soldiers of the Cross... and the great majority of laymen as soldiers of the King. [Those] who married... were usually allowed to leave the royal service if they so wished and to settle down as citizens or traders, being termed *casados* or married men. The remainder were classified as *soldados* and were liable for military service until they died, married, deserted, or were incapacitated by wounds or disease. (Boxer, 1969: 296)

But married or not, a goodly number of the young men brought east in royal service decamped at the first opportunity to seek their fortune as private traders or mercenaries, or both, in the many port cities and inland kingdoms ringing the Indian Ocean.

They were creoles—migrants to the outposts of empire—for a single generation, and then mestizos—Eurasians, the product of local intermarriage—forevermore (Bidya, 1998: 77–170 and Boxer, 1963 provide the general background). The very word “*mestiço*,”
carrying all the pejorative overtones of its English equivalent, attests to the prevalence of "miscegenation" between the Iberians and the "native" populations. The mestizo community grew through intermarriage with the "native races," through conversion (including "rice converts," indigents in search of assured subsistence, as well as those seeking to avoid conscription, or corvée), through the "adoption" of orphans, slaves, seminarians, and the progeny of "sexual indulgence." Over successive generations, progressive loss of distinguishing physical traits, relaxation of custom and mannerism, and decline of Portuguese linguistic fluency and literacy left them virtually indistinguishable from the local population. "Nothing is more erroneous than the common conception that all [those who consider themselves members of the Portuguese community in Asia] have a considerable dose of Portuguese blood in their veins. The great majority are [actually of local stock], though their centuries-old adoption of the Roman Catholic religion, and of the Portuguese language and mores, together with their assumption of Portuguese names, have firmly integrated them in the Portuguese cultural orbit" (Boxer, 1969: 305).

Initially some 200 to 300 Portuguese are said to have settled near Ayutthaya. By the mid seventeenth century, through repeated intermarriage, the three parishes at the downriver site that came to be known as Ban Portuket (Portuguese Village) amounted to 400–500 members each (Pallegoix, 2000: 303). Another estimate has it that around 1662 the Portuguese settlement was 2,000 strong (Suthachai, 1999: 53). By the 1680s the number of households (containing an average of perhaps seven or eight members each) was reported to have risen to 700–800 (Bidya, 1998: 138). In summary, it has been posited that Ayutthaya's Portuguese community grew from some 2,000 during 1516–69, to 3,000 during 1569–1653, and then 6,000 during 1653–1767 (Bidya, 1998: viii).

Though the most prominent members of the community were merchants and mercenaries, the majority were artisans, men of lesser distinction but perhaps more lasting influence—iron founders, armorers, gunsmiths, ships' navigators, cartographers, able-bodied seamen, shipbuilders, sail-makers, rope-makers, interpreters, pharmacists, surgeons, to name only a few of their
myriad skills. Among those mestizo artisans may well have been descendants of Portugal’s marranos, Jews who had ostensibly converted to Catholicism to escape the Inquisition and Expulsion, some of whom had then joined the voyages of discovery and conquest east and west. They carried with them the highest skills, such as mathematics, finance, linguistics, astronomy, cartography, navigation, surgery, pharmacy, and metallurgy, and were sought after as valuable companions on the Iberian Odysseys of exploration and commerce (Kaplan, 1992). It can be speculated that one such crypto-Christian was Fernão Mendes Pinto (1509?–1583), a much-traveled Portuguese adventurer-explorer of the Far East, part-time Jesuit, mercenary, diplomatic envoy, spice dealer, and arms trafficker, author of the Pérégrinacão, in which he describes his visits to Ayutthaya, Martaban, and Pattani in the mid sixteenth century (Suthachai, 2007).

Catastrophe and revival

The sack of Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was an exceptionally cosmopolitan city. Its far-reaching renown as “emporium of the Eastern Seas” and “marvel of Oriental splendor” was evidently one of the envies that drove the Burmese on their course of pillage and destruction in the 1760s. In the initial, aborted assault on Ayutthaya in 1760 the Dutch trading post was “reduced to ashes” while “the Christian quarter alone was respected,” possibly at the behest of Portuguese mercenaries serving in the Burmese army (Turpin, 1997: 86–7). In the 1766–7 siege, however, such immunity was not extended, and the Portuguese community, despite desperate resistance, suffered greatly. “The Portuguese, at a distance of two leagues from [St. Joseph’s Church,] gave signal proof of their courage. They sabred a crowd of Burmese who had attempted to storm their college” (Turpin, 1997: 107). On 7 March 1767 the Burmese attacked St. Joseph’s, but the defenders succeeded in holding them off. That was partly due to the fact that the main Burmese force in that sector had been deployed to attack the Chinese port, which they took despite the combined strength of the Chinese and Portuguese defenders. The
Portuguese quarter capitulated on 21 March 1767. Those of its residents who had not already fled were placed in fetters and carried off to Pegu and Ava, never to return. The Portuguese settlement, including its churches, was annihilated (Pallegoix, 2000: 377–80).

Much the same happened at the downriver guard-post at Thonburi in 1766. From at least 1680, the defenses at Thonburi, much strengthened with the assistance of the French clerics who had arrived with the French diplomatic mission in 1662, were manned by some 400 soldiers, of whom about 100 were Portuguese. It has been speculated that Thonburi's mestizo garrison was drawn from the Portuguese village at Samsen (Ban Portuket Samsen), some four kilometers upstream from the Thonburi fortress (Tomosugi, 1993: 228–9). Its households were clustered around the Church of the Immaculate Conception, which had been founded in 1674 (Pallegoix, 2000: 332). The Portuguese military contingent that had served with the garrison at Thonburi was extinguished. As reported by the surviving priests, “Bangkok, a fortress which had been defended, was destroyed, and the gardens laid waste. A college established by the Missionaries in the vicinity [apparently at the Portuguese village at Samsen] was razed to the ground.” (Turpin, 1997: 103).

In the turmoil following Ayutthaya’s fall on 7 April 1767, the Christians and Mahommedans who would have been slaughtered together, were sentenced to transportation to Pegu to swell the ranks of the royal slaves…. An unforeseen occurrence was the cause of great rejoicings on the part of the [Portuguese]. At this period these unhappy people, expecting no human aid, had given themselves up to God alone. They saw a young Portuguese half-caste who had just arrived from Pegu [as a mercenary in the employ of the Burmese] come on board their vessel. He offered to be their liberator on condition that they would follow him to Pegu to minister to the Christians who had no pastor in that country. This young man, Jeanchi [i.e., Jean Chi] by name, was a native of Macao in China. He had been carried off as a slave from Mergui by the Burmese in 1760, and had been taken to Pegu where, by his industry [as a ship’s pilot], he had found a means of gaining his freedom. His abilities were well known and well rewarded. (Turpin, 1997: 98, 113)

Through such quirks of fate did many of the local Portuguese find
their way to safety.

Those who managed to escape did so by the skin of their teeth. Those who were captured were tortured mercilessly to disclose their hidden wealth. Their daughters were taken (though a strange quirk of chivalry, it is said, prevented the Burmese from interfering with those who were already married). Buddhist monks were especially harshly treated and many died, and the Catholic priests fared little better. The temples were destroyed and their grounds were piled high with corpses. The rivers were filled with putrid cadavers giving off a revolting stench and breeding myriads of flies and virulent diseases that tormented the Burmese troops and their enslaved captives alike (Turpin, 1997: 109–15). A senior Buddhist monk later recalled in vivid terms that those who remained were left in dire straits.

Some wandered about, starving, searching for food. They were bereft of their families, their children and wives, and stripped of their possessions and tools.... They had no rice, no fish, no clothing.... They found only the leaves of trees and grass to eat.... In desperation many turned to dacoity.... They gathered in bands, and plundered for rice and paddy and salt. Some found food, and others could not. They grew thinner, and their flesh and blood wasted away. Afflicted with a thousand ills, some died and some lived on. (quoted in translation in Wyatt, 1984: 136–7)

Refugees at Thonburi

By good fortune and the judicious use of their remaining resources a goodly number of the Portuguese refugees from the terror at Ayutthaya were able to escape to Cambodia on Chinese junks (Turpin, 1997: 112–3; Pallegoix, 2000: 380). There they found safe haven with the local Christian communities that had emerged under the tutelage of French missionaries. Phraya Taksin, the Sino-Thai military hero and future king of Siam who had himself escaped from Ayutthaya to the eastern seaboard neighboring Cambodia, convinced a number of those refugees to join his army in counterattacking the Burmese and resurrecting the Siamese kingdom. At the new capital of Thonburi, King Taksin rewarded “the Portuguese who had fought for him” with a favorably situated settlement site half a kilometer downriver from the walled citadel and grand palace, directly alongside Kudi Chin,
an old Chinese trading post (Mendonça e Cunha, 1976: 143). Furthermore, in recognition of their loyalty they were provided with privileged employment in the Royal Pages Corps (krom mahatlek) and Royal Bodyguard (krom thahan raksa phra ong) (Manich, 1972: 333, 340).

No Portuguese priest accompanied the returning refugees. But within a year of the kingdom’s revival under King Taksin two French priests, Msgr. Coudé (alternatively Corré, Cordé, or Condé) and Bishop Lebon, attached to the Missions Étrangères, arrived to minister to Thonburi’s Christian community of no more than a few hundred households. They were joined in 1770 by a third French priest, Msgr. Garnault. That year they led the community in building a small church, Santa Cruz, by which name the settlement came to be known. However, as religious leaders of the Portuguese community at Santa Cruz—later commonly referred to as Kudi Chin—these French clerics did not fit well. Their fluency in Portuguese or Thai language was weak, their acquaintance with Portuguese custom was limited, and their liturgical conventions differed from the forms preferred by the local community. Also, the strained relations between the French and Portuguese clerical orders at Ayutthaya were well remembered.

In 1769 Fr. Gore, who had fled from Ayutthaya to Cambodia with the Portuguese refugees, arrived at Thonburi. He was apparently not well received by the resident French priests. The households at Kudi Chin that had refused to accept the authority of the French clerics then departed with him to establish a new settlement as Ton Samrong, a vacant site along the east bank of the river some 2.3 kilometers downstream. They took with them their most treasured possessions, two holy icons carved of wood, the “Mother of the Holy Rosary” and the “Corpse of the Lord Jesus,” both of which had been saved from the flames of Ayutthaya. They built for the safekeeping of those and other treasures a small plastered brick sacristy including a prayer chamber and small room for a caretaker. As they had no priest of their own after the death of Fr. Gore in 1773 they returned, begrudgingly, to attend weekly mass at Santa Cruz (Joseph, 1997: 10–8).

A crisis in the Portuguese community’s relations with the Thai state sprang up in 1775 when three members of the Kudi Chin
community serving as senior officials in the Thonburi government refused to partake of the “water of allegiance,” water consecrated by Buddhist monks for use in royal rites of fealty. Their refusal was instigated by Bishop LeBon, who considered this a pagan practice, not least because its apparent blasphemous parody of the use of holy water in Catholic rituals. King Taksin was deeply offended and had the three officials imprisoned until they repented two months later, whereas the unrepentant priests remained in shackles for nearly a year (Pallegoix, 2000: 387–90; Terwiel, 2005: 51–3).

In 1779 Bishop Lebon and Msgrs. Coudé and Garnault were together deported from Siam, the victims of their own narrow-minded opposition to “heathen practices.” After the death of LeBon and the change of reign in 1782, Coudé made his way back to Phuket along the Andaman coast, where he served as bishop until his death in 1785. Garnault managed to return to Bangkok, was elevated to bishop in 1787, and stayed on until his death in 1811 (Pallegoix, 2000: 392–3). In his footsteps followed an uninterrupted sequence of French bishops at Bangkok up to 1965, when the Church finally acceded to the installation of its first Thai bishops in Siam (Assumption, 1995).

In the disturbances at Thonburi leading to the dynastic overthrow of 1782 the rebel forces besieged the grand palace only to be stopped by the concentrated cannon and musketry fire of the Royal Guard of perhaps a hundred men, led by thirty-six Portuguese guardsmen (Pallegoix, 2000: 393–4). However, the Portuguese eventually abandoned their posts when the rebels raided their homes at Kudi Chin, abducted their families, and used them as human shields. A royal memoir later recalled that

the [Portuguese] guards followed the king’s command and fired the cannons off, hitting and sinking the enemy’s boat[s]. The rebellious side seized hold of the wives and children of the [Portuguese] guards and set them up front to be fired upon, and when day broke, the [Portuguese] guards could see their faces and knew that these were Thai people [rather than Burmese invaders], whereupon they abandoned [their] posts and jumped over the [palace] wall to join their family members. (quoted in translation in Flood, 1990: 21)

That event was crucial in the history of Siam, as the loss of Taksin’s
Portuguese bodyguard left the grand palace virtually defenseless, leading directly to the king's abdication and the Chakri revolution.

In the aftermath, the new regime dismissed, interrogated, and briefly imprisoned the Portuguese guardsmen for their alleged dereliction of duty. "This did not prevent the camp of the Christians from being looted by the people. The church was completely stripped; everything they could find there was taken away, sacred bowls, ornaments, wine for the mass, etc. Only a few images and the stripped building were left. Thus the loyalty of the Christians toward the King... was rewarded" (Pallegoix, 2000: 394). With that incident the traditional Portuguese role in the Royal Guard and Royal Pages Department came to a permanent end, though they eventually returned to play an important role in the Royal Artillery.

From integration to assimilation

Consuls

The years of Siam’s recovery from the fall of Ayutthaya coincided with a period of exceptional turmoil in the Western world—the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and more. Those preoccupations turned Western attention away from the East. Though the outposts of Portuguese empire had fallen into decline, only Portugal sought to revive its diplomatic relations with Siam. A Portuguese envoy arrived at Bangkok from Macao in 1786, bearing a royal letter from Lisbon. That was Siam’s first formal contact with a Western power since 1767, and it proved to be the only one until 1820 (Fine Arts Department, 1963: 2–9, 211–20). In response to that missive King Rama I, recalling past Siamese-Portuguese relations, sent a letter stating: "The King will not in future cause Your Majesty the inconvenience of sending troops and ammunition, but requests that orders be given to the Government of Goa to send three thousand muskets during 1787. Should Your Majesty’s subjects wish to establish a factory, the King is willing to grant land for this purpose." (Mendonça e Cunha, 1971: 143; da Silva, 1997: Vol. 2, 141). Apparently, nothing came of that initiative, as in 1816 a letter was sent from Macao stating that orders had been received from
Map 3 Portuguese Settlements at Thonburi/Bangkok
Portugal "to endeavour to renew the old relations between Macao and Siam. [Such a letter had already been sent] in 1811, but unfortunately the ship that was bound for Siam had been lost and no one had been saved" (da Silva Rego, 1982: 15).

In a further attempt to revive official trading ties, a Thai official was sent to Macao in 1818, and in response a Portuguese mission headed by Carlos Manuel de Silviera arrived at Bangkok in 1820. He brought with him the draft of a treaty aimed at restoring diplomatic and commercial relations between the two kingdoms. The treaty was duly negotiated and adopted, and in confirmation Siam ceded to Portugal a plot of land well downstream from the walled capital, at Ton Samrong, for the "factory" (trading post) and residence of the Portuguese consul. The plot stretched 144 meters along the river and 100 deep, with two landings. Accompanied by a small staff and garrison reporting to Macao, de Silviera took up residence there in 1821. He was awarded the title of Luang Aphi Wanit in the Siamese nobility—*wanit* referring discreetly to his commercial role as an arms trafficker (da Silva Rego, 1982: 15–7; Mendonça e Cunha, 1976: 145–7; da Silva, 1997: Vol. 3, 41–2).

The arms sold by de Silviera on behalf of the authorities at Macao were used to strengthen the defenses at Paknam (at the mouth of the Chaophraya River) and other fortified positions against a threatened Burmese invasion. However, the consul's further efforts to develop Portuguese state trade with Siam did not succeed, as no Portuguese vessels visited Bangkok during the 1820s after the initial arrival of arms. But some private trade between Bangkok and Macao did develop, principally in munitions and rice carried on Chinese junks. In his lonely vigil de Silviera in 1828 befriended Carl Gutzlaff and Jacob Tomlin and their wives, the first Protestant missionaries to arrive at Bangkok. He provided them with residential quarters at the rear of the consular compound, later on a rental basis. With the arrival of additional missionaries that presence in later years expanded into Siam's first Baptist Mission. Finally in 1829 de Silviera departed Bangkok, having served as the first and only recorded Western consular resident at Bangkok prior to the fourth Chakri reign.

Following closely on the heels of that Portuguese diplomatic contact, the governor-general of British India in 1821 sent John
Crawfurd to negotiate formal trade relations with Siam. Crawfurd records that he was met by a Portuguese interpreter upon his arrival at Paknam, and then by the harbormaster, whom he referred to as a "native Christian." He later met with another local Christian, Pascal Ribiero de Alvergarias, who was particularly well educated, as he could converse in Thai, Khmer, Portuguese, and Latin, and who was said to hold "a high title, and a post of considerable importance" in the Siamese bureaucracy (Crawfurd, 1967: 72, 83, 179). Crawfurd estimated that Bangkok's population of Portuguese descent was 800 and that Siam's total Portuguese population amounted to some 2,000 (Crawfurd, 1967: 451–2). The physician accompanying the Crawfurd mission estimated that some 200 to 300 of the kingdom's Christians (presumably all Portuguese) lived at the eastern seaboard port of Chanthaburi, which boasted its own church (Finlayson, 1988: 255–8).

Following the departure of Portugal's first consul at Bangkok, the post was downgraded to "political and commercial agent." In 1832 it was returned to its former status, and a succession of nine consuls followed through the end of the fifth Chakri reign (1910), interspersed with several periods of vacancy during which the post was temporarily filled by local merchants serving as honorary consuls. In the 1870s the consulate was rebuilt, but not to everyone's satisfaction. With maintenance funding lacking, the compound was, sometime before 1902, "divided into four parts, three of which were rented out" (Morbey, 2006: 51–4; da Silva Rego, 1982: 22). During the sixth Chakri reign (1910–25) the post was finally upgraded to ambassadorial level, but the physical facilities were not improved commensurately (Azeredo, 2007).

A new treaty of trade and friendship was promulgated by Portugal and Siam in 1859 as one in the series of standardized compacts concluded between Siam and the Western powers in the wake of the path-breaking Bowring Treaty of 1855 (da Silva Rego, 1982: 19–21). Of particular interest was its extraterritoriality provision, giving Portugal jurisdiction over all Portuguese subjects, or protegés, in Siam. Exempt from prosecution under Siamese law, local Portuguese subjects—identifiable primarily on the basis of their families' vital records maintained at their churches—found themselves in an advantageous position. Most importantly,
Portuguese subject status exempted them from the annual labor conscription obligations under the Thai patron-client (*nai-phrai*) system. Furthermore, as Bangkok’s principal importers of wines and other spirits, the merchants under Portuguese protection were long able to circumvent Siamese efforts to regulate the trade in alcoholic beverages.

In the 1860s the United States consul, James M. Hood (at Bangkok 1865–8), innovated the sale of “protection papers” providing the privilege of extraterritorial status to non-Thai Asian residents in Siam. That entitlement was especially sought after by the local Chinese, as China had not entered into a treaty relationship and thus had no extraterritorial rights. Hood was soon recalled by his government for his gross misuse of his consular powers for personal profit, but the idea had caught hold, and the Portuguese consul, among others, took to selling protection papers to local (mainly Chinese) residents seeking the advantages of tax exemption, immunity from police harassment, privileged status in the courts, and other benefits (Pimpraphai, 1998; da Silva Rego, 1982: 20–2). For instance, certain Chinese-operated pawnshops managed to frustrate the Siamese government’s efforts to control their nefarious dealings in stolen property by acquiring such Portuguese protection (Tomosugi, 1993: 123–31). One favored means whereby applicants for diplomatic protection secured the sympathetic consideration of the Portuguese consul was for them to convert to Catholicism, which contributed to the growing Chinese element in the congregation attending the nearby Rosary Church. Only in 1925 was Portuguese extraterritoriality finally ended under a new treaty (da Silva Rego, 1982: 22–3).

**Settlements and churches**

Churches, more than any other landmark, have historically defined Siam’s Portuguese settlements. Their crucifix-topped steeples stand out against the brilliant tropical skyline as a proud proclamation of their ethnic otherness. For their congregants they offer a sense of unity and symbolic communal shelter and security. Initially located only at Ayutthaya, rudimentary churches were built by the Catholic missionaries over the centuries at a number of provincial centers, from Phuket and Songkhla in the south to
Chanthaburi in the east and Phitsanulok and Chiang Mai in the north, though the congregations were invariably very small. By extraordinary coincidence, Bangkok at an early date came to replicate Ayutthaya in its three Portuguese riverside parishes, each boasting its own church (Conception, Santa Cruz, Rosario), and in its fourth, French cathedral (Assumption) situated well away at the old Western anchorage. (A fifth church, Xavier was added in the 1850s to accommodate a newly-arrived community of Vietnamese war captives.) But unlike Ayutthaya, where the three Portuguese churches stood near enough to one another for their separate parishes to coalesce into a single sprawling Portuguese settlement, the churches at Bangkok were separated by kilometers distance, creating three distinct Portuguese villages. Today they continue to be referred to as “Portuguese” neighborhoods though, with the fading away of many distinctive ethnic indicators, it would be more appropriate to speak of them as peopled by “Thai Catholics of Portuguese descent.”

(a) Ban Portuket Samsen and the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The first Portuguese settlement in the vicinity of present-day Bangkok was founded during the seventeenth-century reign of King Narai by a troublesome faction that had been expelled from the Portuguese settlement at Ayutthaya for reasons unknown. They were granted a new settlement site along the Chaophraya River at Samsen, some 4.2 kilometers north of the Thonburi guard-post. The site’s relatively high ground—in the Chaophraya delta a meter in elevation can make a world of difference—today still avoids much of the annual flooding for which Bangkok is notorious. There, in 1673, they built the Church of the Immaculate Conception, served by a Dominican friar. How that small community survived over the following generations, particularly the Burmese depredations of the 1760s, is not recorded. Whatever its original population, the Portuguese settlement at Samsen has not grown by much over the subsequent three centuries of its existence, as it had reached only 900 by the mid nineteenth century and today is said to be a mere 500-600 strong (Pallegoix, 2000: 405; Kittisak, 2007).

At the start of the first Chakri reign, in the immediate aftermath of a Siamese military expedition against Cambodia
(1781–2), a group of 400 to 500 Christian Khmer arrived at Bangkok, apparently accompanying the several thousands of war prisoners brought back from the Thai campaign. They were assigned to join the Christians at Ban Portuket Samsen, and the holy icon they had brought with them from Cambodia, the delicately carved "Santa Maria de Mendese," continues to grace the Conception Church chapel today (Kittisak, 2007). The small settlement was strung out along the riverfront, with the church and cemetery to the rear. The upstream stretch contained the Khmer households, most of whom were market gardeners and livestock raisers (ducks, pigs, some milch cows). The southern section consisted of Portuguese, many holding military posts in the Royal Artillery. A leading artillery officer residing at Ban Portuket Samsen during the early Bangkok era was Phraya Wiset Songkhram Pakdi, progenitor of the Wiset-rak and Wong-pakdi lineages.

Early in the Bangkok era the Portuguese friars who had formerly served at the Church of the Immaculate Conception were replaced by French priests of the Missions Étrangères. Msgr. Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, the most renowned of that series of French pastors, served at Ban Portuket Samsen from 1830 to 1862. In 1834 he had an impressive new church building erected directly in front of the original one, which had become badly dilapidated. The old structure, a small, low-roofed brick and mortar chamber, remains in use today as the sacristy, along with a bell tower added in 1883. Msgr. Pallegoix was befriended by Prince Mongkut (the later King Rama IV) during the prince's residence as a monk at a Buddhist temple situated alongside Ban Portuket. In remembrance of that friendship the king attended the bishop's funeral at Ban Portuket in 1862.

(b) Kudi Chin and the Santa Cruz Church. The largest of Bangkok's Portuguese settlements is clustered around the Santa Cruz Church, overlooking the river not far downstream from the old Thonburi citadel. The settlement is popularly referred to as Kudi Chin, a name that commemorates an old Chinese shine nearby. Its population today stands at 1,550, a doubling of its size as of the mid-nineteenth century (Pallegoix, 2000: 405; Kriengchai, 2007). At the settlement's founding in 1768 it was likely no more than 400 to 500. That population was reduced by perhaps a third
when a dissident faction split off in 1772 to form a new settlement downstream at Ton Samrong. Despite that disruption, Kudi Chin remained Siam’s premier Portuguese settlement throughout the Bangkok era (Francis, 1999: 9–22). Until the founding of Assumption Cathedral far downstream in 1821, it served as the residence of Siam’s Catholic bishop (Assumption, 1995). An unbroken line of French priests officiated at the Santa Cruz Church until 1942, when the first Thai pastor, Ansalm Sangiam Ruamsam, was installed. Since then all the officiating priests at Santa Cruz have been Thai (Kriengchai, 2007).

“The land the King gave these Christians was formerly considerable, but the river undermined it every year” (Pallegoix, 2000: 407). That increased the residential crowding along the riverside, with the community’s vegetable gardens and fruit orchards pressing from behind. Succumbing to one of the periodic scourges afflicting villages built of bamboo and attap, the entire settlement, church and all, burned down in 1833, and it was not until 1845 that the rebuilt church was inaugurated. As of 1852 it was described as a fine brick-built sanctum that had replaced the former “low and swampy shed where the altar had become a shelter for snakes” (Pallegoix, 2000: 407). It was rebuilt again, along more elegant European lines, in 1913–6. The architectural style and artistic motifs of that still-standing structure, including the central dome and interior frescos, offer a faint evocation of the Anantha Samakom Throne Hall of Bangkok’s Dusit Palace, built around the same time, suggesting that the Italian craftsmen recruited by King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910) for the construction of that palace played a role in this project as well (Francis, 1999: 13–4).

Over the course of the nineteenth century a number of Kudi Chin’s residents pursued careers in the Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs. Others entered the import-export trades or engaged in the mechanical arts as gunsmiths, nautical engineers, watchmakers, architects, and the like. In addition to arms manufacture, arms dealing via Macao (apparently in close concert with the Portuguese consul) appears to have been a lucrative pursuit for the merchants of Kudi Chin. During the 1830s and 1840s the Siamese government, much absorbed in military campaigns against Vietnam to the east and Muslim insurrections in the south, actively
sought Western firearms. Robert Hunter, a British trader who had received permission to establish a residence along the river directly adjacent to Kudi Chin, collaborated with a leading local Portuguese arms dealer called Joseph by the English (though José in his own community). Hunter did much business with the court and was awarded the title of Luang Awut Wiset Prathet Phanit (awut referring to his association with armaments, phanit to his commercial role). In 1844, however, he was expelled from Siam for opium smuggling and other transgressions, and Joseph was left on his own (Moore, 1914–5). By 1851 the main arms trafficker was the Kudi Chin firm of Messrs Joaquin and Joseph. Apparently Joseph had taken on a new partner with the expansion of his business following Hunter’s expulsion in 1844, and in 1855 he was called on to serve as the principal interpreter at the Bowring negotiations (Battye, 1974: 56, 96).

Robert Hunter had another important association with Kudi Chin. In 1825 he married Angelina Sap, a descendant of Constance Phaulcon (16??—1688) and Marie Pinar de Guimar, scion of a leading family of Ayutthaya’s Portuguese community. Phaulcon, despite his problematic status as a Greek adventurer initially in English employ, had risen to ministerial rank in the government at Ayutthaya, ultimately suffering execution in the dynastic overthrow of 1688. Some years later his widow was appointed mistress of sweets (khanom) and fruits (phonlamai) in the royal kitchen. Several generations later Jean Chi, the mestizo immigrant from Macao remembered as a saviour of Ayutthaya’s Portuguese community at the time of the Burmese conquest of 1767, married her granddaughter, the great-grandmother of Angelina Sap (Turpin, 1997: 98). Hunter thus married into the very heart of Siam’s Portuguese community. And carrying that tradition further, the son of Robert Hunter and Angelina Sap, Robert Jr., around 1844 married a daughter of Kudi Chin’s leading citizen, Pascal Ribiero de Alvergarais (Hudson, 1983).

Robert Hunter, Jr. (c.1826–65) in turn became a leader of the Kudi Chin community. He was sent to England for his education and upon return was appointed secretary and interpreter to Chaophraya Si Suriyawong (Chuang Bunnag), minister of military affairs and the south. In that capacity he served as a liaison officer in
the hosting of the Bowring mission of 1855. Following promulgation of the Bowring Treaty that year he was appointed Bangkok’s harbormaster, with the title of Luang Sura Sakon. His house stood in front of his mother’s home along the Kudi Chin waterfront, upstream from his father’s former residence, which had been converted to the State Guest House for visiting embassies.

Yet another remembered nineteenth-century personality of the Kudi Chin community was Francis Chit or Chitrakhan (1830—1891). He was a lifelong member of the Santa Cruz Church, with his home standing along the riverbank near the church. As a young man he helped introduce to Siam the latest techniques of photography and was recruited as official court photographer by King Rama IV (r. 1851–68). In that capacity he received the title of Luang Akhani Naroeemit. Beyond his official duties, he set up a photography workshop in 1863 in a raft-house on the river in front of his Kudi Chin residence. In the 1880s he relocated his shop to a rowhouse along Bangkok’s fashionable New Road, becoming the city’s first studio photographer. Among his other business ventures he operated Bangkok’s first gas works, located at the Sao Chingcha marketplace, founded in time to illuminate the coronation festivities for King Rama V in 1872.

(c) Talat Noi and the Holy Rosary Church. The dissident faction that separated from Kudi Chin in 1772 established a new settlement on the opposite bank of the river well downstream at Ton Samrong. Initially, that settlement was referred to as Rosario, after its church. In the twentieth century the neighborhood came to be known as Talat Noi (the Small Market) in contradistinction to Sampheng, the neighboring Chinatown, which was sometimes called Talat Yai (the Large Market). The Holy Rosary Church (Rosario) was not built until 1787, after the services of Francisco de Chagas, a Dominican friar, had been secured from Goa through the good offices of the governor of Macao (Mendonça e Cunha, 1976: 143). The original congregation was only 137; by the mid-nineteenth century it had grown to 350, and as of 1901 it had reached 700 to 800 (Pallegoix, 2000: 405; Joseph, 1997: 24). The admixture of many Chinese congregants over the subsequent century complicates any later assessment of the Portuguese population at Talat Noi.
The original church at Rosario was a simple attap-roofed wooden structure raised on piles to escape flooding. It consisted of a rudimentary chapel and sacristy backed by a small dormitory for the resident cleric, with the community cemetery directly behind. The "Mother of the Holy Rosary," the church's iconic namesake, was installed as the centerpiece in the chapel and the "Corpse of the Lord Jesus" was stored in a cabinet in the sacristy, to be taken out for procession once a year on Good Friday. In the absence of a resident cleric, a French priest from Santa Cruz occasionally visited to conduct mass. In 1822 one of their number was accepted as Rosario's first resident priest. The church was rebuilt in 1838 and again in 1852. Yet another reconstruction was initiated in 1891. Upon completion in 1897 the enlarged, Gothic-style edifice was renamed the Calvary Church. A convent was built alongside at around the same time (Joseph, 1997: 18–24).

The community's economic interests from the outset focused on the nautical trades, including shipbuilding, forging and casting of ships' iron, sailmaking, rope-making, mechanical repair, and ships' chandling. With the foreign trade boom of the second half of the nineteenth century the workshops along the Rosario waterfront profited greatly from the bustling Western river-port directly downstream at Bang Rak. In view of the many small foundries and forges lining Cooking Pan Lane (Trok Rong Kratha, referring to the Chinese-style iron cooking pans that were produced for export), visiting British sailors in the nineteenth century came to refer to the area as "Vulcan's Kitchen." Unlike Bangkok's other Portuguese communities, Rosario found itself in the midst of the city's economic boom, surrounded by such major firms as Markwald and Co. (1858–1917), a German agency house, rice miller, and petroleum importer; the Bangkok Manufacturing Co. (founded 1901), an American- and British-owned producer of ice, soda water, and cold storage services; the Nai Lert Co. bus terminal (founded 1907), providing horse-drawn and later motorized bus service across Bangkok; Kiam Hao Heng and Co., one of Bangkok's main department stores in the early twentieth century; and the Siam Commercial Bank branch office at Talat Noi (established 1912). On the downriver side, across the Phadung Krung Kasem Canal, lay the original Customs House (1856–87) and the
Portuguese Consulate, and on the upriver side were located the headquarters of the Public Works Department (from around 1888) and Harbor Department (from 1892). Furthermore, the neighborhood was administratively integrated with Chinatown upon the establishment of Samphanthawong District, and with major improvements in land transport the influx of Chinese shophouses from the neighboring Chinatown accelerated (Van Roy, 2006). All those developments led to the progressive dilution of the neighborhood’s Portuguese character, making Talat Noi the most cosmopolitan of Bangkok’s original Portuguese settlements, and ethnically the least Portuguese.

Rosario’s integration into Bangkok’s increasingly commercial economy under the free trade regime that was introduced in the later half of the nineteenth century is illustrated by the careers of several of its leading citizens. One was Luiz Maria Xavier (1840–c.1910). Of full Portuguese descent (his parents had immigrated from Macao), he received the title of Khun Phasa Pariwat as an interpreter serving with the Harbor Department from the 1860s. In the 1880s he established the Louis Xavier Rice Mills, with his main mill situated adjacent to his residence along the Phadung Krung Kasem Canal, within 300 meters of the Holy Rosary Church (Wright and Breakspear, 1994: 152, 153). His son, Celestino W. Xavier, was educated in England and then served as charge d’affaires with the Thai legation in Paris. After his return to Bangkok around 1890 he served as under secretary of state (equivalent to deputy minister) of foreign affairs with the title of Phraya Phiphat Kosa, supervising the Harbor Department. He was one of the four senior officials who collaborated in 1906 in building Si Phraya Road, a major Bangkok thoroughfare running behind his family residence and rice mill. He was held in such respect that for some time during the sixth Chakri reign (1910–25) he was called upon to serve as honorary consul for Portugal.

A similar case was F. V. de Jesus. Born in Bangkok in 1864 and heir of a well-to-do Rosario family, he was educated in Singapore. Upon his return to Bangkok in 1879 he joined Grassi Brothers, a leading construction firm later absorbed into the East Asia Company, one of Bangkok’s foremost agency houses. He was promoted to manager of the firm’s sawmill around 1894. In 1906
he accepted an offer from Chaophraya Surasak Montri, former chief of the Siamese army and minister of agriculture, to manage the Sriracha Company, a logging enterprise along the eastern seaboard. He joined the firm's board of directors in 1908 and eventually retired a wealthy man (Wright and Breakspear, 1994: 179). These examples speak to the close participation of the Talat Noi community in Siam's economic boom and its progressive integration into the larger Thai world. And in fact the Portuguese roots of Rosario/Talat Noi were largely forgotten as the twentieth century progressed.

Assimilation

Ethnic identity is an elusive concept, primarily because its indicators are defined by the subject population itself. It arises ultimately from a social group's struggle to distinguish itself from its neighbors in cultural terms for its collective self-preservation and wellbeing. Its objective indicators range across language, place of origin, folklore, kinship, religion, occupation, technology, architecture, cuisine, and so forth (Van Roy, 2008: 1–2). As one of Siam's smallest minorities, the Portuguese community historically sought to maintain its ethnic integrity through such means as clearly delineated communal boundaries, endogamous marriage, hereditary vocations, and strict adherence to Roman Catholic traditions. However, the most powerful instrument of ethnic identification, adherence to a distinct language or dialect, long ago faded away. By the late nineteenth century Portuguese language fluency had virtually vanished from the Siamese scene. The situation in Bangkok was similar to that which has been described elsewhere in the early twentieth century: "[There] is still a colony of [Portuguese] descendants, with high-sounding names they cannot pronounce, round the Catholic church at Mergui" (Harvey, 1925: 202).

A century ago Bangkok's separate Portuguese neighborhoods resembled little closed societies. Without exception their residents were members of the local church congregation and adhered closely to Roman Catholic doctrine. The households maintained close relations and treated one another as kin, and in fact most of them were literally kinsmen through their preference for endogamous
marriage. Conformity to community norms and standards was resolutely enforced through peer pressure and the invocation of religious dogma. Each parish lived in the shadow of its church and under the spiritual aegis of its resident priest, participating in an endless cycle of worship and ritual. The children received a rigorous religious and secular education at the convent school. Most of the men pursued their artisanal trades from their homes. Many of the women produced their popular sweets for sale in the local marketplaces. Their one sin, if it could be called that, was low-stakes gambling, a pastime of card-playing and dicing that remained well controlled by communal proscriptions against excess (Francis, 1999: 18–9).

Other than their conspicuous church facades, Bangkok’s Portuguese settlements were scarcely distinguishable from the many Thai villages lining the river bank. Careful observation revealed, however, that their dwellings with roofs of attap and walls of bamboo or planking were set directly on the ground, some with slight clearance, but none in the eminently practical, flood-resistant Thai style atop raised pilings. Furthermore, the women and girls differed in their looks from the Thai by letting their hair grow long (avoiding short-cropped hair), preferring Western dress (fully covering the upper torso), and generally avoiding betel chewing (and thus blackened teeth). The casual visitor would also note that they bore Christian names such as José, Domingo, Jaime, Manuel, Maria, Rosa, Anna, Marta, and that many retained Portuguese surnames such as Gomes, Ribeiro, da Cruz, Fonseco, Diaz, Rodrigues, de Paiva, Lopes, de Souza. Several members of the present-day Bangkok elite have sought to revive that remembrance of their Portuguese ancestry. For instance, Pathorn Srikaranonda, a well-known local concert musician, today appends his Portuguese lineage name of “de Sequeira” to his signature though that surname was long ago Thai-ized as “Srikara.” Thus, a lingering pride of Portuguese ancestry can be glimpsed.

Modern Thai cuisine also retains vestiges of the Portuguese past. It was the Portuguese, in concert with the Spanish, who brought to Siam such New World crops as potatoes (known as man farang, or “Western tuber”), maize, cassava, tomatoes, peanuts, and chili pepper, all staples of the modern Thai diet. They also
introduced tobacco and such popular snacks as candied egg-yolk (foi thong, thong yip, and thong yot), egg-and-coconut custard (sangkhaya), sponge cake (khanom farang), fried pork skin (nang mu krop), as well as bread (khanom pang), and also possibly such dishes as curry puffs, stews, and stuffed omelets (khai yat sai) containing beef tongue, ox tail, pigs' trotters, tripe, and the like. It is further speculated that roast suckling pig (mu han), today prepared in the Chinese style by splitting the carcass and turning it on a spit over a grill, is a refinement of the Portuguese practice of roasting whole skewered pig (Azevedo, 2007; Saengdoean, 2007).

Over the past century a vortex of cultural crosscurrents has roiled the former ethnic integrity of Siam's Portuguese community. But much of the information on that history remains inferential, piecemeal, and anecdotal, based on informants' personal recollections more than the official records, as most of the old archives have been consumed over the years by fire, mildew, and termite infestations, and as many developments have been suppressed or sanitized in the retelling. As already alluded to, major forces of change have included the evolving authority of the Church and the expansion of Bangkok as a cosmopolitan commercial hub, as well as the fading influence of Portuguese diplomatic contacts and the rise of Thai nationalism.

The Roman Catholic Church arrived in Siam together with Portuguese culture, but while the latter has waned the former has not slackened its hold. Early on, the Portuguese missionaries gave way to the French. And throughout much of the Bangkok era it was the French-based Missions Étrangères that continued to control the Siamese pastorate, with French-speaking clerics officiating in the Portuguese churches and schools. As a compromise, Thai came into use as their language of convenience, leaving Portuguese by the wayside. French priests served as parish heads up to the Second World War, and it was only with the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) that the first Thai bishop at Bangkok, Fr. John Nittayo, was appointed after several centuries of French prelates. Under that sort of ecclesiastical colonialism, the Church consistently emphasized a generic form of Euro-centric Catholicism rather than promoting and protecting any specific ethnicity. The Portuguese heritage slackened in the face of that unrelenting pressure.
With the continuing emphasis on Roman Catholicism as distinct from Portuguese ethnic identity, Bangkok’s ethnically Portuguese community has struggled in recent decades to maintain its sense of self. Additionally, the loss of congregants at the Portuguese parish churches through conversion to Buddhism, primarily due to recurring instances of intermarriage with members of the surrounding Buddhist community, has played a part, though that is a topic not gladly delved into by local informants. But it is clearly a significant issue, as the Portuguese community has barely grown over the course of the Bangkok era, in striking contrast to the rapid growth of the population at large. Here, reliance on endogamy may well have proved counterproductive as a critical means of promoting ethnic survival and wellbeing.

Out-migration from the fast-fading Portuguese community has also been motivated by the progressive commercialization and industrialization of the Thai economy. Over the course of the twentieth century a number of households migrated from the old Portuguese settlements to the commercial districts of Bang Rak and Yannawa to find work with Western firms as clerks and compradores, executives and technicians, using their Christian connections, their convent school education, and their vocational and linguistic skills to secure preferred positions. Their move from the traditional home-based vocations to salaried employment in centrally located offices and factories promoted their social secularization. It accelerated the Thai-ification process from ethnic integration (the maintenance of close cross-cultural working relationships) to assimilation (the effective abandonment of distinctive cultural norms and traditions). Many of them have melted into the cosmopolitan scene, having fully crossed the ethnic divide from “Portuguese” to “Thai of Portuguese descent” and finally “Thai Christians” or simply secular “Thai.”

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