

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF THAI FOREIGN
POLICY : ROLE OF INTERNAL
AND EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS

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ROLE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS

The Thais have a traceable history of some 4,000 years. About 2,000 B.C. they migrated from central Asia to eastern China. Forced by the Chinese to move south-wards, on the mile high plateau of Southeast China, they established the independent kingdom of Nanchao. (1) With the conquest of the kingdom of Nanchao by the Mongols in 1253 a great wave of Thai migration into Sukhotai followed. The first Thai king of Sukhotai was crowned as Shri Intaratitya, better known as Phra Ruang. (2) Thus, the history of Thailand began about eight centuries ago, when king Rama Khamheng (1283-1317) fought to unite the several principalities into a single Kingdom. (3) The royal capital of Siam was then Sukhotai, there after Ayutia and later shifted to Thonburi. The present capital is Bangkok. According to an eminent scholar, Theravada Buddhism, tinged with the leftover Hinduism (of the Khmers) and animism (of the animist Thais from China) became the State religion of the early Siamese Kingdom. (4)

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1. D.G.E. Hall A History of S.E. Asia (3rd Edn) New York) 1968 P.173
 2. Phra sarasas. My Country Thailand: Its history Its Geography and Civilization (Bangkok, 1950) P.35
 3. Hall, n.1, P.163
 4. Valentin chu, Thailand Today (New York, 1968) P.32

Thailand does not suffer from intense pluralism. The country is relatively well unified and the great majority of its people are loyal to the king. As a nation composed of migrants who had a long ethnic association with the Chinese, the Thais were virile, resilient, adaptable and syncretic like the Chinese, having a matter of fact approach to life and things. (5) However, unlike the Chinese who underwent the spell of Mahayana Buddhism long ago, the Thais bore the impact of the Hinayana sect which gave them "remarkable strength of social organization, helping in maintaining their international structure and in resisting with outstanding success, The disruptive forces alike of Christian minority activities and western ideas". (6)

From the Nachao era (C. 650-1253), certain themes have been present in Thai foreign policies. The primary goal has always been security and political independence and this to a great extent, has been pursued with a high degree of success.

5. M. Sivaram, The New Siam in making (Bangkok 1936) P. 55
6. K. M. Panniker, Asia and Western Dominance London (1965) P. 173.

The foreign policy of Thailand before world war II has commonly been described as traditional neutrality. It had declared itself neutral in the conflicts of the great powers and successfully strove to uphold its freedom during a time when other countries in the region had undergone the vicissitudes of Western imperialism.

A historical study of mainland Southeast Asia, even earlier to this, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reveals that on the one hand, Thailand demonstrated sufficient political vigour to resist control by outside powers, and on the other, was faced with a series of wars, as was evident, in Burma's expansionist designs pursued by the Ava government under Bayinuang. Siam was one of the strongest and most formidable of the mainland states, although this period of its history was not a very distinguished one. In fact, the state survived the rule of several monarchs who were political liabilities personally. (7) From time to time, Thailand had to clash with Burma and Khmer empire, both of which ironically became the first foddors of European imperialism. However, the series of Burmese invasions of Ayutia left the

7. John F. Cady. Southeast Asia : Its Historical Development (New Delhi, 1976) P.147.

Kingdom completely devastated and prostrated. In the words of an eminent Thai aristocrat scholar, Prince Phani,⁸ the spoliation of Ayutia then was so complete that it took a long time afterwards to recover. It signaled the break down of the state, more especially from the spiritual and moral aspects. The whole administration broke down and with it social frame of the state and the not inconsiderable culture of Ayutian Siam was practically obliterated.⁸⁾

The successors of Siam's heroic deliverer from Burmese rule, King Naresuen, the 'Black Prince of Siam', who died in 1605-AD, were much concerned with establishing diplomatic and commercial contacts with the outside world. It was during the reign of King Rama Khamheng (1270-1317), the architect of a single and united Siam, that the country entered into a phase of developing external ties. This was the period when Thailand witnessed close ties against the Khmers. In a way, retrospectively speaking, Thailand's clashes with Burma and the Khmer empire had served one constructive purpose, namely, the arousal of the Thai pride and a feeling of national consciousness which had been hitherto confined to paying homage and abiding by the dictates of the kingdom's monarchs. Thailand's early contacts with the Asian countries



and the outside world, is characterised by the tremendous flexibility displayed by the Thai rulers in the conduct of the country's foreign relations. In its hey-day, during the Angkor period, the Khmer Kingdom which included the present states of Thailand, Laos and parts of Vietnam within its boundaries, spread from the Bay of the Bengal in the west to the South China Sea in the east. (9) However, the almost unquestioned supremacy of the Khmers over mainland Southeast Asia was threatened, initially, by the Thais beginning from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards. (10) But, it was not till the fall of the Burmese empire of Pagan into the hands of Mongols in 1287, when the three power full rulers, namely, Rama Khamheng (Sukhotai), Mangrai (Chiengrai) and Ngam Muang (Payao) concluded a friendship treaty. (10) In the ensuing years, Thailand was able to consolidate its position and maintain its supremacy. By 1594, Lovek, the Cambodian capital, fell into the hands of the Thais, which heralded a new chapter in the history of mainland Southeast Asia. The fall of Lovek marked the final



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9. B.R. Chatterji, Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia (Calcutta-1926) PP. 211-12.
 10. V.M.Reddi, History of Cambodian Independence Movement (1863-1955) (Tirupathi, 1970) P.I.
 11. See Encyclopaedia Britanica (London 1971) Vol XX I PP 928-8.

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elimination of the Cambodian Kingdom as a power in the region and the rise of Thailand as a strong state. However, this supremacy was short-lived because in subsequent years, Vietnam emerged as a potential rival to Thai supremacy in Cambodia. Vietnam had already embarked upon a career of expansionism after ridding itself of Chinese suzerainty in A.D. 939.

When the Cambodians found the Vietnamese depredations unbearable, they decided to react and " in 1841 the Cambodians rose en masse and affected a general massacre of all foreigners who had been harassing them", and for this they "sought the help from the king of Thailand who readily agreed to provide assistance." (12) The Thais were successful in driving out the 'intruders' but not before annexing the Moulprey and Shingpor provinces of Cambodia. The hapless King Ang-Duong (1841-59) pessimistically stated, "Me, I did not code anything, but they (the Thais) are very powerful, they may take or leave the provinces as they wish." (13) In a way, the present Kampuchean impasse, has its historical roots ^{in Thailand} and Vietnam, both of which have been desirous of securing a strong foothold in Cambodia.

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12. G.N. Jha, Foreign Policy of Thailand, (New Delhi, 1979) PP. 11-12.
13. Reddi, N.10, P.2.

Thailand's geopolitical significance had been of immense help in facilitating her avert imperialist Subjugation. In a more general way, Thai conquests were facilitated by geography. Moving " southward along the Menam, the Thai Kingdom, first under Rama Khamheng, then under later kings, such as Ramadhipati, who moved the capital Southward to Ayutia had no major geographical obstacles to surmount,(14)

... the advantages of geography favoured the Thai position. The stability of Thailand has also been strengthened by the calculated decisions and foresight displayed by the Thai rules from time to time. The three centuries from the thirteenth to the fifteenth marked the formative stage of Thai history. The decline of Khmer power on the one side, and the disappearance of a strong Burma on the other, provided the Thais with an "unrivalled opportunity for expansion," (15) provided they were able to remain united and maintain peace amongst themselves. This was a period when Thailand saw the emergence of three of its greatest monarchs, Rama Khamheng (1283-1317), Ramadhipati (1350-69) and Trailok (1448-88) whose contribution to Thai society and policy are considered remarkably distinctive.

14. D.R.Sardesai, Southeast Asia: Part and present (New Delhi, 1981) PP.61-2.

15. Hall, n. 12. P. 171.

King Rama Khamheng or 'Rama the Brave' (1275-1317) was the actual founder of the Siamese empire. He had already proved himself as a warrior, when as the second son of the conqueror of Sukhot'ai, Sri Indrajit, he succeeded his father to become the ruler of Siam. He has been widely acclaimed as a ruler of wisdom and learning, and Sukhot'ai during his period came to be known as the 'cradle of Siamese civilization.' (16) Sukhot'ai under him, expanded and by the turn of the century his hegemony extended over upper Menam, Upper Mekong and the lower Salween valleys, the last being one of the principal centres of Mon population. (17)

However, Siamese history after Rama Khamheng was plagued by problems of succession, periodic confusion and weak rulers. Nevertheless, the necessary impetus vital for reasserting its position was provided around 1350 by king Ramadhipati (1350-69) who took the reigns barely half a century after Rama Khamheng's death. Ramadhipati was an ambitious ruler and during two decades of his reign, he accomplished the

16. Ibid.

17. Cady n.7, P. 144, Also see Hall n.1 P.172, and Saradesai n. 14, P.64.

the task of establishing the power and influence of Siam. In 1350, he established a new capital at Ayut'ia which remained the main centre of Thai power and culture for the next four centuries. He also recovered control of "the Tenasserein coast upto Martaban and extended his power throughout most of Malaya.⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus, Sukhot'ai emerged as one of the most formidable empires of its time. In fact, it was the Chinese who first identified the name 'Sien'to the kingdom of Sukhot'ai. On the contrary, 'Syam' was the name used by the Khmers for the 'savages' from the middle Menam depicted on the south gallery of Angkorwat."⁽¹⁹⁾ Ramadhipati's greatest contribution is said to be in the field of law. Thai customary law which had been hitherto in practice, dating back from the Nanchao period, was found to be inadequate for the increasingly complex society which now comprised not only of the Thais, but also the Mons, Khmers and Malayas. He promulgated the Siamese law code, combining Thai customary principles with adaption from the Indian code of Manu.⁽²⁰⁾ The new principles of law " persisted for

18. Cady. n. 7 p. 146

19. Hall n.1. p. 175.

20. George Coedes, The Indianised States of Southeast Asia (Honolulu, 1968) p. 126-7.

six centuries until the massive westernization of the legal code taken up by king Chulalongkorn or Rama V, (1868-1910), in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the help of a Belgian lawyer." (21)

Ramadhipati died in 1369 leaving the country consolidated and providing a definite direction for leadership, although many problems remained unsolved.

Ramadhipati was succeeded by his son, Prince Ramesuen who was also Governor of Lopburi. However, he had a brief tenure as he had to abdicate in 1370 because of becoming unpopular owing to his inability to quell periodic disturbances. He was succeeded by his uncle, Boromoriya I of whom Dr. O.W. Wolters writes that " he was more interested in establishing Ayutia's hegemony over the Thai kingdoms of Sukhot'ai and Chianmai, than in pursuing the traditional struggle against the Khmers. (22) The new king remained in power till death in 1388 and was succeeded by his son at the age of fifteen, but the ex-king Ramesuan usurped the throne and put the prince to death. (23) Ramesuen was in power till 1395 and after his death, the period of

21. Sardesai, n.14. P. 66.

22. See Hall n.1 P. 177

23. Ibid.

1395-1408, is regarded as a blank in Siamese history, as nothing substantial is recorded about this period. Rama Raja, a son of Ramesuen, is said to be the ruler during these years. He was dethroned in 1408 by Int'ra raja (1408-24) a son of Boromoraja I and after his death in 1424, the youngest of three sons, Boromoraya II (1424-48) succeeded him, the two elder sons died in a combat in an attempt to become the ruler. He died in 1448. (24)

Prince Ramesuen, who succeeded him as Boromo Trailoknat (1448-88) usually referred to as Trailok, was the third great ruler of Siam, to come to power. He is known for his lasting impact on the country's administrative and social structure. His measures aimed at the creation of a centralized ^{system} of education and organising the central administration on a departmental basis, putting ranking officers in charge. (25) Before Trailok, the various provincial governments have been subject to very little central control. A definitive Code of Palace

24. Hall n. 1 P. 179.

25. W.A.R. Wood, History of Siam (London, 1926) PP. 14-16.

Law was also promulgated by Trailok, in 1450. The code described the obligations of tributaries to the Siamese courts and defined rankings of court personnel and princely dependants." (26)

Trailok's reforms can be classified in several categories, namely, centralization of administration, "distinction between civilian and military functions of the government," ... creation of a social and judicial system based on economic holdings and last, but not the least, the code for governing the royal household (KOTMONTIEN BON OR PALATINE LAW OF 1958).⁽²⁷⁾ Trailok's reign is also characterized for the king's efforts to cope with Chiangmai. This period witnessed almost incessant war with Chiangmai which arose out of the dissatisfaction felt in Sukhot'ai at its incorporation in the Siamese kingdom. (28) Trailok reduced the problems of succession struggles in Thailand, contributing further to the stability of the kingdom by creating the office of heir-apparent, 'BRAH MAHA UPRAJA', or Vice-king. Subsequently, it became customary either to appoint the king's younger brother

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26. Thomas Fitzsimmons Thailand, Human Relations area files, (New Haven, 1957) P. 29
27. Distinction was made between the five great Civil departments of the Government and the military. These departments were interior, local government, Finance, Agriculture and Royal Household. See Hall n.1 P. 179.
28. Fitzsimmons n. 26 pp 30-1.

or eldest son as heir apparent, with a separate palace and ten times the land given to the highest official. Under king Trailok's administration, the highest official held as much as 4,000 acres, whereas the lowest commoner ten acres. (29) Trailok was succeeded by his eldest son, Boromorja III (1488-91) who has nothing much to be attributed to his brief tenure as monarch except that Ayut'ia became the capital, once again. Boromoraya III was succeeded by the Mahāpraja (heir-apparent), Jai jelt'a who assumed the title of Rama T'ib Odin II (1491-1529). With T'ib Odin's accession to the throne a new phase of Southeast Asian history started as he was the first to receive the first envoy of the Portuguese conqueror of Malacca, Duarte Fernadzes who came to announce the victory to the court of Ayut'ia. (30) Though Siam claimed suzerainty over the whole of MALAY peninsula due to its own attention concentrated ^{the} upon ^{of} Chingmai, it was not in a position to create much difficulties for the Portuguese over their new possession. However, it was not before the succession of the new king, Boromoraya IV (1529-34) when a treaty of peace with Chiangmai was concluded

29. H.G. Quaritch Wales, Ancient Siamese Government and Administration (London, 1934) P. 28.

30. Hall. n.1 P. 183.

that for a few years, Siam found breathing space from the interminable struggle with Chiangmai.

Thus, with the increasing European advancement and influence in Southeast ~~Europe~~ Asia during the period from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, there was an overall change in the policies of the countries of the region. On the mainland, the dynamics of domestic politics was governed by traditional elements which had undergone some changes. For instance, there was a drive towards political consolidation in the three major countries of power in mainland southeast Asia-Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. The period which had been hitherto characterized by Thai-Burmese wars, Thai-Vietnamese rivalry for domination over the Khmer empire, ended by the end of the eighteenth century, when all the three states saw the emergence of strong monarchies and were on the way to political consolidation. Vietnam became unified as a single kingdom, whereas Thailand and Burma seemed reconciled to each other's independent existence. But these elements of a strong state, as became evident later on, except in the case of Siam, were not enough to withstand the pressures of the nineteenth century western imperialism. Even Thailand had to make a lot of compromises, in order to preserve its

independent status.

Thailand's distinction in avoiding the experience of colonial rule was creditable. But, it could not keep itself isolated. Thailand could not remain unaffected by the sweeping changes which accompanied the imperial advances on the rest of Southeast Asia, Thailand, however, has the rare distinction of surviving without experiencing colonial rule.

The Chakri dynasty, which still rules Thailand, was instrumental in the formation of a constitutional monarchy. It was Chaophya Chakri who tried to impress upon the Siamese, the need of establishing a strong Siam. He founded the Chakri dynasty in 1782 and made Bangkok its capital, which was at Thonburi, under his predecessor, Piyataskin.⁽³¹⁾ The succeeding monarchs, ever since then, have numbered their reigns in reference to the founder of the dynasty. Thus, the present monarch, king Bhumibol Adulyadej who ascended the throne in 1946, is termed as Rama X.

Rama I's reign (1782-1809) was a period of consolidation and reconstruction. A similar task

31. Prince Dhani Nivat "The Reconstruction of Rama I of the chakri Dynasty" Journal of the Siamese Society 43(1), 1955, pp 22-3.

was being faced by Annamese contemporary, Gialong (1802-20). However his reign was to see another great struggle with Burma, under king Bodawiyā. He was a wise ruler and the new king tried to consolidate Siam's position as a strong power. However, it was because of the constant Burmese threat, that Rama I could not assert too vigorously, his claims on Cambodia. In 1795 Rama I managed to restore power to Cambodia's king, Anh Eng, who had previously taken refuge in Bangkok from the Tay-sons, but annexed several Cambodian border provinces, namely, Battambang, Siemreap(Angkor) and parts of Korat.⁽³²⁾ However, this was a short lived affair as a concession had to be made in 1802, following the unification of Vietnam under Gia long, which emerged again as a rival to Siam for the control of Cambodia. The latter was permitted to acknowledge, the suzerainty of both Bangkok and Hue.⁽³³⁾ Siam, under Rama I had emerged as a strong empire as it had already established its control over the Sultanates of kedah, kelantan and Trengganu which continued to sent 'BUNGAMAS' (Gold-Leaves) as a mark of homage and tribute to Bangkok till 1909 when they passed under British control.⁽³⁴⁾

32. Ibid Also see Hall, n. 1 pp. 395-6.

33. Cady, n. 7 p. 325.

34. Klaus Wenk. The Restoration of Thailand under Rama I (University of Arizona Press, Tuscon, 1968) p. 46.

Isara Sunthon who succeeded his father, assumed the title of Rama II (1809-24). He continued to patronise religion and literature. It was during his period that the epic 'Ramakien' was completed. Rama II, however, "was not an aggressive person and in fact took little active part in the administration of the governmental affairs."⁽³⁵⁾ The threat from Burma continued as in the past, but with its eventual diversion of interests in the direction of India after 1819, which culminated in the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-6, ended the perennial threat to Siam's security.⁽³⁶⁾ Thus, Siam was internally strong, but wary."⁽³⁷⁾ Kingships and government in the nineteenth century in Siam under the Chakri dynasty owed much to the institution of ancient Angkor, and was also similar to Burma's system in many respects. "Social status in Siam, as in ancient Cambodia, depended on royal preferment. The ruler was a reincarnated deity, a 'Chakravartin' or universal emperor and a destined Buddha or Bodhisattva. He was also the occupier of

35. Walter F. Vella Siam under Rama III (1824-51) (New York, 1957) P.8.

36. Ibid.

37. Hall, n. 1. PP 398-9.

the sacred palace site. Brahmin priests performed ceremonial and religious functions at the court, but exercised no influence other wise on governmental administration." (38)

Rama II who died in 1824, was succeeded by his son, Rama III (1824-57) whose reign has been described as a "some what unprogressive one." (39) He was considered to be a traditionalist and quite outdated as he was quite indifferent to the demands of the situation. (40) It was with the death of Rama III in April 1851, that Siam entered upon a new era.

Prince Maha Mongkut who succeeded Rama III and took the title of Rama IV (1851-68) was actually a step brother of the previous king. It was he who was made the heir-apparent after Rama II as he was the eldest son of the king by a royal wife. However, Pra Nang Klao (Rama III) was able to succeed Rama II by virtue of being the eldest son of late king though not through a royal wife, as he was favoured by a strong

38. W.F.Vella, The impact of the west on Government in Siam (California, 1955) P. 312.

39. Wood n. 25 P. 277

40. Britain had expected Siam to join it against its war with Burma but it remained suspiciously aloof. Again in 1833 when the US sent envoys, Burney and Roberts to persuade the king to agree to a treaty regulating the treatments of prospective American visitors to Siam but in Vain. See Hall n.1 PP 467-8.

party at the court at the time of succession.⁽⁴¹⁾ However, with the succession of Mongkut in 1851, Siam saw one of its most remarkable rulers occupy the throne. He emerged as one of the most outstanding Thai rulers and an important architect of Thailand's plans to avoid foreign rule. King Mongkut who succeeded in 1851 at the age of 47, was a keen student of religion and possessed a profound political knowledge. He had the necessary grooming during his early years as a monk when he became famous for his knowledge of Bali scriptures and later, for founding the reformed sect of D'ammayutika'. He is attributed to have studied humanities, mathematics, astronomy, Latin and English. He became an enthusiast of English which became his second language, and as a king he used to sign all state papers in Roman characters.⁽⁴²⁾

Mongkut was instilled with a new outlook which brought him in contact with western ways and views. He had a desire for moderization of Siam, but some scholars have tried to stress that the urge to westernise was stronger in Mongkut's younger brother, Chudha-Mani,

41. See Wood, n.25 p. 281.

42. Sir John Bowering, The Kingdom and People of Siam Asian, Vol. I (London, 1857) p.3.

the then vice-king.⁽⁴²⁾ However, there is no doubt that the friend of western-ization influenced the Siamese kingdom strongly. The democratisation of Thailand was given a practical shape by his ideas as there can be little doubt of that the democratic forms of government practised then by France, the US and England played important role in shaping his policy for his country."⁽⁴³⁾ In a major drive to modernize Siam, Mongkut opened the door for Europe's influence in 1855. He signed treaties of freindship and commerce with the foreign powers and the first major breakthrough came with the signing of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1855. The 'Treaty of Freindship and Commerce with Great Britain, as it is known, was a result of a series of preparations personally looked into by king Mongkut alongwith the British Sir John Bowring, and it facilitated an atmosphere of mutual cordiality and exemption of certain practices. One such exemption for the foreigners was a decree allowing them to approach the 'August Feet' (The Monarch) in any position deemed respectable in their respective countries. Hither-to everyone, including foreigners, were supposed to crawl on all fours while approaching the monoarch.⁽⁴⁴⁾

42. Samuel J. Smith The Siam Repository Vol. I, Bangkok 1869-74. PP.72-3

43. Malcom Smith, A Physician at the court of Siam (London 1946) P.46.

44. W.F.Vella, P. 340.

The three essential features of the treaty were tariff control, the rights of extra territoriality and the Most Favoured Nation clause.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Such treaties⁽⁴⁶⁾ brought Thailand into direct contact with the west. It ushered Thailand into a modern era, but Mongkut while modernising the country proceeded continuously as he was aware of the opposition from the traditional forces. He laid down the foundations for systems of education (facilities for study of foreign languages were introduced) health and public welfare. One important result of the European commercial orientation sponsored by king Mongkut was an end to the Chinese domination of Siam's foreign trade. Soon after the Anglo-Siamese treaty, there was phenomenal increase in Thai foreign trade and Siam was gradually stepping into a new era. Of all the western powers, Britain had influenced Siam the most. Siamese students were sent to Britain for education, more than to any other western country.

45. Virginia Thompson, Thailand: The New Siam (New York 1941) P. 153.

46. On the patterns of the 1855 treaty, treaties were signed with the US and France (1856) Portugal (1859) Holland (1860) Russia (1862) and Belgium, Italy, Norway, Sweden (1868) Ibid.

However, Mongkut is said to have become corrupt at the end of his reign. He in his later years, became vengeful, cruel, petulant and often offensive to the best of his friends beleaguered by real or imagined conspiracies. He was despotic, capricious and fickle, and what corrupted him was the debilitating atmosphere of his court, including the jealousy-ridden sensuality of the harem and the corrosion of character resulting from greed for power and possessions"⁽⁴⁷⁾ However, by the time Mongkut passed away, Thailand had already opened up its doors and was being exposed to European education and scientific ideas. Radical changes were initiated in the economic policy. King Mongkut had set in motion the irreversible process of modernization and turn 'Siam's historical course into a new direction.

King Mongkut who had a sudden death, because of jungle fever in August 1868, was succeeded by his sixteen year old son, Prince Chulalongkom (Rama V) (1868-1910) who reigned for four decades. King Mongkut's reforms met greater impetus.

47. JG. D. Campbell, Siam in the Twentieth Century
(London, 1902) p. 88.

at the hands of the new successor who had been inspired to carry out the necessary reforms in the country under his English Governess, Mrs. Leonowers and later from his tutor, Robert Morant. (48) The liberal reformer that he was, Chulalongkorn continued Siam's modernization process and improvement of relations with the west. The range of reforms introduced by the king was very impressive and embraced many aspects of human activity. During the early years, Chulalongkorn visited Singapore, Malaysia and India where he got an opportunity to acquaint himself with the British and Dutch administration methods which had a deep and ever-lasting impression on his mind. He returned to Siam far more enlightened. (49) Nonetheless, paradoxically enough, "Chulalongkorn's personal status as a king was a substantial barrier to his own modernisation process because despite the king's liberal inclination, ability and masterful temperament, he was in large measure a captive of traditions of Siamese kingship which were inimical to thoroughgoing reforms." (50)

48. Smith, n. 43 P.53.

49. Ibid. Also note that the visits were undertaken by only Chulalongkorn in 1871 as he seized this opportunity owing to the fact that at the time of his father's death he was still a minor, hence the Govt. was placed under regencies till 1873.

50. Cady, n. 7 P. 489

His reforms introduced radical changes into every department of national life. His very first decree issued at the time of his coronation in 1873, abolished the customary practice of prostration in the royal presence. In the following year, he struck a blow at the roots of slavery by issuing a decree, to this effect. The long term results of these measures were very striking, especially in contrast to two of Siam's neighbours; (French) Indo-China & (British) Burma. In the words of Graham, the Siamese society" became a study and independent, class free from ancient thralldom, owning its own land and in fact acquiring a state in the country." (51) He also established a palace school in 1878, as a model to set patterns of secular education. A group of state scholars, on an average of three hundred annually, and many princes were sent abroad to study. (52)

51. W.A. Graham Siam (Vol.I) (London 1924) pp238.9

52. Wendell Blanchard(etal) Thailand: Its people, Its society, Its culture(New Haven, 1955) p. 153.

The major field of reform was administration. He incorporated drastic changes and his administrative reforms introduced as early as 1892, accounted much for the democratization and installation of constitutional monarchy in Thailand by the bloodless coup of 1932. However, most of these reforms could not have been carried out, but with the active support and advice rendered by foreign advisers.⁽⁵³⁾ The total number of foreigners employed by Chulalongkorn was 549 which far exceeded the number employed during king Mongkut's reign.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Under Chulalongkorn, Siam stepped into the twentieth century and witnessed significant changes, both internally and externally. However, internally there was no revolutionary change, as the monarch continued to be the key figure till 1932, around whom everything revolved. Externally, Thailand was now feeling the pressures of the expanded colonial powers, namely, France and Great Britain. French encroachments upon Siam's eastern frontiers were a matter of great concern and alarm to the government.

53. Vella n. 44 p. 342.

54. William J. Siffin : The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional change and Development (Honolulu (1966) p. 96.

Chulalongkorn was a man of integrity, sharp intellect and foresight. He realized that the thing which mattered most in the comity of nations, was an efficient government, characterized by political stability. The greatest accomplishment of Chulalongkorn like his father, was to let Siam stand in a singular contrast to the rest of Southeast Asia by avoiding foreign rule. This was to a great extent facilitated by pursuing an effective policy in which positive steps and timely acts were taken to adjust with the imperial powers. This speaks of the skillful diplomacy of the Thais. Siam felt that both France and Britain, especially Britain, were closing-in, and was disturbed by the possibility of loss of Thai independence. Chulalongkorn said " the greatest difficulty of the present day is the protection of our territory today. We have Britain at our left and France at our right. In our protection of the country three measures can be taken, friendly diplomatic relations, the maintenance of defensive forces, and orderly administration. ⁽⁵⁵⁾ However, both France and Britain acknowledged Thailand as a buffer zone, and it was by their mutual Treaty of 1896, that helped Thailand avert colonial rule. It was its geopolitical significance and the tactical policies of

its rulers that helped Siam avoid imperialist subjugation and hence "The aggressive thrust of new imperialism. (56)

As diplomatic concessions, Thailand had to cede territories to both France and Britain. It was fortunate to have found remarkable monarchs, both in King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn. His reign was very significant and real progress was made possible only through his zeal for reform and exercise of power. The reforms introduced by Chulalongkorn and its impact on the Siamese society continued for another decade or so after his death in 1910. He was succeeded by his sons, (57) Maha Vajiravudh (Wachirawat) (Rama VI) (1910-25) and Prajadhipok (Prachothipok) (Rama VII), (1925-35) who were much less capable successors. Both were educated abroad and deeply influenced by western ideas but " to a deplorable extent, alienated from the cultural and political interests of their people." (58) Wachirawat was educated at Cambridge and on succession appointed his own band of flatterers and a coterie of youthful aristocrats. In continuation of Siam's modernization process, he made primary education compulsory and also established the famous Chulalongkorn university in 1917 named after his illustrious father. (59)

56. Sardesai, n. 14, P. 204.

57. Chulalongkorn had thirty four sons and forty three daughters.

58. Sardesai, n. 14, P. 216.

59. Kenneth Perry Landon Siam in Transition (London 1939) P. 23.

Rama VI alienated the other members of the royal family by appointing his favourites to different positions and more so, offended the regular army by setting up a personal bodyguard known as the "Wild Tiger" scout corps, with himself as the Chief scout General.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This made him quite unpopular and a feeling of discontent persisted. Not surprising therefore, there were two attempts to dethrone him in 1912 and 1917 but he survived both the plots. In a way Rama VI's attempts at fighting the royal absolutism were a contributing factor in bringing about the constitutional crisis of 1932. His reign was, however, notable for some of the achievements made by Thailand in external relations.

During World War I, Thailand had aligned herself with the winning allied powers and was able to preserve her independence. This was due to her opportunistic diplomacy, pursued vigorously by her veteran foreign Minister, Prince Dewawongse. The reforms introduced were meant largely to bring Siam into conformity with western ideas and values to facilitate her acceptance in the comity of nations, in which Thailand succeeded by following her time honoured policy of always alinging with the victorious side.

60. His reign also saw the adoption of the Gregorian calender and women adopting western hair-do and clothes. Hall. N.1 P. 802.

Rama VI died in 1925 and as he was a bachelor, left no son behind to succeed him. The kingship fell on the shoulders of his younger brother, Prachothipok, who was the seventy sixth child of King Chulalongkorn. Prachathipok who took the title of (Rama VII) was the last monarch in the traditional hereditary system. His reign, amongst other notable achievements, is also remembered for the introduction of wireless service and preparation of the Don Muang international airport. (61) His most immediate concern at the time of succession was the drive for economy. Extravagance had played havoc with the state exchequer. He reduced public expenditure by a series of major steps, such as cutting down the royal corps and other budgetary cuts. This period saw the full expansion and role of the army and bureaucracy. New non-royal forces due to the occidental system education had come up and three distinct groups had emerged in Thai politics, the bureaucrats, kingsmen and the military.

The growing discontentment and alienation with each other, amongst the ruling class continued till it culminated in the revolution of 1932. A

61. Hall n.1 P. 808.

group of western educated 'Promoters' attacked the monarchy. Rama VII submitted to this seizure by abstaining from using the police power to counter act them. By 1934 he lost complete control of the situation and a year later he abdicated in favour of his ten year old nephew, then residing in Switzerland.⁽⁶²⁾ It was a time when "important regents took over the affairs of the palace and the monarchy was thus reduced to a mere symbol."⁽⁶³⁾

The immediate cause sparking the bloodless coup of June 24, 1932 was a result of depression and severe economy drive necessitating budgetary cuts. It is also partly attributed to the western educated elite, including the king himself who lost faith in the monarchical system of Siam. The architect of this coup was Luang Pradist Manudharm, better known as Pridi Phanomyong, a Paris educated lawyer and then, Professor of law at Chulalongkorn University. It was he who had drafted the constitution and with the

62. Cady n. 7 P. 497 Sardesai names Ananda, his 40 year old son as successor.

63. Josiah Crosby Siam : The crosswards (London 1945) P. 19.

convince of the military staged the revolution. The other key figure in this revolution was Phibun Songkhram an army colonel. Ever since then, the military has carved a niche for itself in domestic Thai politics and continues to be a force to be reckoned with in the country's politics. As per the scheme of the "Promoters" power was to be vested in the dictatorship of the peoples party, ⁽⁶⁴⁾ But practically the new government was a party dictatorship. Prid's borrowings from the Soviet system was quite evident. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ However, Pridi and his associates did not take over the government in their own hands, and instead decided to put up P'ya Manopakorn as President of the Executive Council.

Siam's constitution was finally drafted and promulgated on Dec. 10, 1932. A marked feature of the constitution was departure from Pridi's Soviet pattern and an attempt to preserve the pattern of monarchy investing the king with some scope for prerogatives on certain minor issues. However, princes were

64. The people were mere spectators in the 1932 coup and did not take part in it.

65. Crostry, n. 63 P. 34

debarred from holding membership in the State council of which half the members were to be nominated by the ruling party and the remaining half to be elected by indirect suffrage. A completely elected assembly was promised within ten years and the constitution continued in this form till 1946, when it was modified by Pridi's Free Thai Party to bring ~~the~~ in prince Seni Pramoj to assume the office of Siam's Foreign Minister. (66) Seni Pramoj had been Siam's ambassador to the US previously. The struggle for power within the revolutionary regime continued unabated. Pridi's radical economic plan was denounced as Communist and he was forced into exile in June 1933. Mean-while, Prince Bavorady and the royalist General Sri Sithi Sonokhram staged a counter coup in October 1933 which was crushed by Phibun Songkhram. The loyalists were crushed forever, and a support^{posed} in Phibun who led the people's army to victory by supressing the rebellion. This opportunity was seized by him for his political emergence. Pridi who later returned from his

66. Fitzsimmons, n. 26 P. 156.

temporary exile, is noted^{as} Thailand's remarkable first, post revolution Prime Minister. After his exoneration of communist affiliations in 1934 he came back to the ~~the~~ cabinet and held the positions of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Finance during 1934-38. It was he who was responsible for the negotiations, finally leading to the liquidations of the unequal treaties. (67)

From 1933 to 1938 Siam's government was headed by Phya Bahol till he resigned and Phibun Songkham, who had been consolidating his position and influence in the government became the premier. He was an ambitious political opportunist, and stressed upon the pride of Siamese race and culture. People of non-Siamese origin, especially the Chinese were discriminated against and to a certain extent the Europeans. However, Phibun himself being a modernizer, he had his own western fads. (68) Other chauvinistic drives, included renaming the country from Siam to Thailand in June 1939. The Siamese were delighted in referring to their

67. Virginia Thompson and Richard Adl-Off, The left wing in Southeast Asia (New York, 1950) PP53-4

68. Crosby, n.63 P.41

country as 'Muang Thai' or the land of the free' However, in 1945 again the original name of Siam was restored but in 1948, 'Thailand', once again became the official name of the country.

In the field of external affairs, traditionally the prime consideration had been the preservation of the Thai independence. Phibun asked his chief of staff in 1942, when the Japanese seemed to be emerging as victorious, "which side do you think will be defeated in this war? That side is our enemy", (69) In fact, the Thai ambassador to the US, Seni Pramoj, on his own decided to keep it a secret that his country had formally declared war on the US in January 1942 Thailand fostered closer economic ties with Japan and the "acceptance of Japanese tutelage from 1940 encouraged both his anti-Chinese and expansionist policies" (70) There was a demand for the restoration of the Cambodian and Laos territories which it had to accede to France during its earlier period. Thai 'irredentism' also stirred up demands for British held territories.

During this period, when Thailand was busy claiming back its late territories, Japan was trying to woo Thailand in its fold. The Japanese emphasized on

69. G.M. Kalin, Government and Politics of South East Asia (Ithaca, 1954) P. 20

70. Lennox. A. Mills (ed) New World of Southeast Asia (Minneapolis, 1949) P. 252-3.

'Asia' for the Asians and the 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere' and also tried to play up the emotional factor in projecting a common reverence of their faith in Buddhism.⁽⁷¹⁾ The Thais, were however, not playing in the hands of the Japanese which the letter did not realise. In a way they had aligned themselves with the Japanese, to win more concessions from the western powers. This was because nationalism in Siam, stood in sharp contrast in its manifestations, from the countries, elsewhere in the region. Their approach was positive, rather than negative in warding-off the pressures of imperialist forces.

At the fag end of the closure of the World War II, when the tide of Japanese fortunes turned in mid-1944 and became evident that it was losing the war, Phibun was forced to resign in favour of a civilian government headed by Kluang Aphaimong. But, it was Pridi Phanomyong, the leader of the pro-Allies underground Free Thai movement who manipulated the the wheels of power. Traditionally, Thai leaders have generally focussed their attention on domestic

71. Crosby, N. 63, pp. 65-7

affairs i.e. on their country's internal development and internal power alignments and distribution. The frequency of the Free Thai movement picked up as the bombings of Japanese controlled installations increased. The former pro-Japanese premier Phibun was detained, and later sent to jail in Japan as a war criminal. However, he was eventually allowed to return to Thailand in 1947.

Thus, Thailand was once again seeking the customary accommodation with the dominant power- the Allied powers and especially with the US, in particular. It not only agreed to expel the Japanese from its soil, but also returned its newly acquired territories. The new government under Pridi extended the most favoured nation treatment to the US and to appease Russia (then, an allied power) also went to the extent of legalising the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). At the end of the war, Seni Pramoj was called back from Washington and made premier for a short while due to the crucial role he had played as Bangkok's ambassador to the US, especially by not announcing that Bangkok had declared against both Great Britain and the US on January 25, 1942. Pridi, however, continued to play the role of a 'Kingmaker'.

Under Pridi's leadership it seemed that Thailand was heading for a constitutional system of parliamentary democracy. But, his alleged involvement in the unexplained and tragic shooting of the young king, Ananda Mahidol in June 1946, precipitated his downfall when he was ousted in a bloodless military coup, in November 1947. Phibun Songkhram, once again seized the opportunity to become Prime Minister.

In short, Thailand was responsive to its intricate domestic problems by its ability to take prompt actions. On the external front, its single concern had been to preserve its independence. Its leaders pursued a policy of accommodation and adjustment. That is the reason, why Thailand never experienced colonial rule as did the other Southeast Asian counterparts, although a lot of concessions had to be made to the different colonial powers threatening Thailand's independent status. The Thais displayed their unique characteristic of 'bending with the wind' to always align with the winning side and then shifting sides, when the odds swing the opposite way. (72)

72. See John Coast. Some Aspects of Siamese politics (New York, 1953) pp. 43-44.