

Letters reveal thoughts of Siamese ally of Lincoln

by Sophie Tanapura

A King of Siam Speaks

by M.R. Seni Pramroj and M.R. Kukrit Pramroj
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A King of Siam Speaks is a selection of letters and laws written by Thailand's fourth king, Rama IV, of the still-serving Chakri Dynasty. King Mongkut, as he is also known, reigned from 1851 to 1868. The American envoy, Townsend Harris, while delivering a letter from the President of the United States to the King, described him as "the wisest and most enlightened monarch of the East." The documents, which were either originally written in English by the King, or translated by the authors, beautifully convey the quality of leadership provided by Mongkut who, as the authors said, "managed to safeguard the independence of this country through the most critical period of her history." Since the Revolution of 1932, Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy, so that the powers which had rested in the king, today are in the hands of the Thai prime minister and parliament. Both authors are former prime ministers, and Kukrit Pramroj today is regarded as the country's elder statesman.

In introductory remarks provided by the authors, the threat to Siam, as it was then called, is briefly described: In 1824, the British and Dutch empires signed an agreement dividing southern Asia between them. During the reign of Rama III, the British subjugated both China (in the Opium Wars) and

Burma. France was increasingly dominating Southeast Asia, and in 1863 forced the King of Cambodia, a vassal of Siam, to sign a treaty placing Cambodia under the "protection" of France. Siam was surrounded in all directions.

Rule of law

The tradition exemplified by Rama IV in Thailand is the tradition that has made Thailand one of the closest and most loyal allies of the United States in Asia. King Mongkut was himself a close ally of President Abraham Lincoln, beginning an alliance with America that has weathered many years.

Mongkut's outstanding quality was his belief in rule by law. This was fashioned in him in part by his 1833 discovery, during his 26 years as a Buddhist monk, before becoming king, of both the throne and stone inscriptions of one of the nation's earliest leaders, Prince Ramkamhaeng of Sukhotai. Sukhotai was the first Siamese kingdom, thriving in the second half of the 13th and early 14th century, known as Thailand's classic or golden age. Mongkut's research was truly the beginning of the nation's identification with its own heritage in the most profound sense. The name, "Wajiraneano," given King Mongkut by his religious colleagues, reveals the manner in which his co-thinkers revered him at the time. In the King's own explanation, sent to friends of his in America, he translated the name as meaning, "he has lightness of skill like a diamond."

The throne Mongkut discovered was used by Sukhotai's Ramkamhaeng to pass judgment on the law. The inscription, dated 1292, both described the Kingdom of the period and laid down the law. It was engraved in a script invented by

Ramkamhaeng and thus, he has become known as the Father of Thai writing. What marvelous discoveries for the future King! The authors chose a quality of English like that in King James' version of the Bible to translate extracts from this inscribed stone legal document: "Conspire not with thieves. Consort not with receivers. Seeing thy neighbors harvest, be thou not covetous. Seeing thy neighbors property, be thou not jealous."

Ramkamhaeng goes on to establish that all citizens have access to him personally, in order to insure that justice is done: "Should any citizen suffer the pain and anxiety running up and down between his heart and stomach arising out of any litigation whatsoever, the Prince saith unto him. 'There is no trouble at all. Let him hence to the palace gate and ring the bell which is hung up there. When the signal is heard, Prince Ramkamhaeng will come forth to try the case for him rightly.' "

It is worthwhile to note here, although the authors do not, that the first competent English translation that captured precisely the sense of law based on morality was made by Cornelius Beach Bradley in 1909. Cornelius Bradley was the son of Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, a Protestant missionary who, through his medical practice from 1835 to his death in 1873, helped establish the authority of Western science in the Kingdom. The doctor also taught the King English and introduced Siam's first printing press.

When Wajiraneano became King, he revived Ramkamhaeng's practice of making himself accessible to any resident of the country, to pass judgment on their petitions, as in a Supreme Court. Mongkut stipulated in a special notification issued on the subject: "In drawing up such a petition truth only shall be presented, as falsehood will unnecessarily prolong the trial. The language used in the petition is required to be concise, and care shall be taken to avoid subtlety, prevarication, and circumlocution."

In another related notification, he warned against the trustworthiness of the newspapers of the time. The document read in part: "Newspapers usually believe the stories of people who have reached the end of their wits. Particularly speaking, in regard to dead cases thrown out of Court for the lack of merit, such carcasses of law are picked up and put into the newspapers in efforts spent by hook or by crook to gain revival, the futility whereof is all too apparent. It is better for a man to have a clean heart than a clean body; for in a clean heart lies the man, whereas a man with a dirty mind is no man, and our association with him is no better than our association with monkeys. Out of kindness and condescension, we throw bananas and sugar cane to the monkeys, but we love them not as our brothers."

In an "Act on Abduction" he confirmed the rule of free will of a woman, giving her the right to choose her husband as opposed to being sold into marriage by her parents. Likewise, King Mongkut denounced the selling of children into bondage: "A decision shall be given laying down the rule that

no parents own their children as if they were cattle, which can be disposed of by sale at a price. Nor are children slaves belonging to the parents, who can be disposed of in the like manner as slaves are sold for the price of their bondage."

In a proclamation entitled "Concerning Religious Freedom and Superstition," Mongkut establishes suicide, and all forms of flagellation, as an act both inconsistent with the Buddhist faith and "deplored by all religions." Significant in particular in this law is his insight into the fraudulent use of the argument that it is "religious freedom" which permits one to take his own life. The King points out that "such acts may appear to be praiseworthy in the eyes of those who are about to lose their mind, having been led to believe in the merit of such acts by reports and hearsay or by scattered brain and aberrant sermon of some priest unlearned the the Holy Tri-pitaka, whose mind is about to go as well." Therefore, not only was suicide not permitted, but failure to prevent a suicide by either not intervening forcefully enough, or out of sympathy for the victim, was punishable under the law.

Protecting the nation

Rama III, Mongkut's predecessor, on his deathbed had said: "Beware of the Farangs [foreigners]. Learn from them as much as possible, but do not worship them blindly. Don't let them take the country away from you." Indeed, it was Mongkut's skill in adopting the best from the West and at the same time insisting on his own nation's sovereignty under the law that successfully steered Siam through that dangerous era. As an example of this commitment, in a proclamation concerning foreign investment, just then beginning, he stipulated that French, British, and American subjects being "good and skillful artisans, may set up industries to manufacture a variety of goods and articles of use surpassing in novelty and quality those which have been previously manufactured in the City [Bangkok], which newly manufactured goods and articles, when disposed of by sale and otherwise among the people, will not only bring down the price of imported goods and articles of the same nature, but also become samples for the City artisans to study and imitate, thus promoting the growth of local art and crafts. Moreover, the French, British, and Americans are well versed in agriculture, having studied the subject from various books and treatises. Wherefore, should they, by dint of patience and industry, develop rice fields and gardens out of our forests, our plains, and our wastelands, a considerable increase in the revenue of the Realm may be expected as a result of new taxes and duties collected therefrom."

However, the King also recognized the threat of especially England and France at the time. In an 1864 letter to his ambassador to the French court, Mongkut concluded that possibly France and Britain had "contrived beforehand to divide our country among themselves!" Thus he accepted that vassal states such as those on the Malaya peninsula or Cambodia would have to be sacrificed to the imperial powers,

and they were. Also, the Kingdom's economic and military weakness left Mongkut no choice but to negotiate trade agreements which were advantageous to the adversary powers.

Thus, fully recognizing his weaknesses, Mongkut advised his ambassador upon what power to draw. "It is sufficient for us to keep ourselves within our house and home: It may be necessary for us to forgo some of our former power and influence. Being, as we are now, surrounded on two or three sides by powerful nations, what can a small nation like us do? Supposing we were to discover a gold mine in our country, from which we could obtain many million catis weight of gold, enough to pay for the cost of a hundred warships: Even with this we would still be unable to fight against them, because we would have to buy those very warships and all the armaments from their countries. We are yet unable to manufacture these things, and even if we have enough money to buy them, they can always stop the sale of

them, whenever they feel that we are arming ourselves beyond our station. The only weapons that will be of real use to us in the future will be our mouths and our hearts, constituted so as to be full of sense and wisdom for the better protection of ourselves."

The brutal military pressure exerted on Thailand today by Soviet surrogates Vietnam and Laos, as well as the insane U.S. policy to gradually hand Asia to the Soviets, raises the question of how Thailand's leadership will deal with this most serious crisis since the Mongkut era. The challenge to the nation is to rise above the Byzantine no-issue debates which characterize the government and opposition parties to the level of "wisdom" achieved more than 100 years ago.

The book may be ordered for \$7 plus postage from Khun Anothai Nantitat, The Siam Society, GPO 65, Bangkok 10501, Thailand; or EIR Co. Ltd., Silom-Surawongse Condominium, 6th Floor, 43/53-54 Soi Anuman Rajdhon, Surawongse Road, Bangkok 10500 Thailand.

Precursors to Project Democracy

by John D. Morris

The Landing at Vera Cruz 1914

by Jack Sweetman

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The historian can draw many striking parallels between the Reagan administration's current intervention in Central America, and the actions of President Woodrow Wilson in 1914. President Wilson applied his own misinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine in his relations with the countries of the southern hemisphere, with effects as deleterious as the Reagan administration's actions today.

The Landing at Vera Cruz 1914 is an anecdotal narrative of the events surrounding the invasion and occupation of a coastal port in Mexico by U.S. naval forces in the period immediately preceding World War I.

The author, Jack Sweetman, a professor of history at the U.S. Naval Academy, provides an adequate survey of the individuals involved in debating the crisis in Mexican-American relations, but fails to provide any coherent understanding of the historical process which created and determined the Vera Cruz action.

The interventions carried out during Woodrow Wilson's presidency can be seen as a precursor to those of Lt. Col. Oliver North's "Project Democracy" secret government grouping today. Sweetman includes Wilson's reply to a query from William Tyrell, the private secretary to British Foreign Secretary Edward Gray, concerning Vera Cruz. Wilson states, "I am going to teach the South American Republics to elect good men." Respecting Mexican Provisional President Victoriano Huerta, the heir to Mexico's decaying governmental structure, Wilson's policy was "to isolate General Huerta entirely; to cut him off from foreign sympathy and aid, and from domestic credit whether moral or material, and so to force him out."

Another clue to the deeper influences on Mexican-American policy at that time, is the description of one Robert J. Kerr, an American lawyer and translator of the Mexican legal codes, who was asked by the Navy to head the civilian government of Vera Cruz while it remained under military occupation. Kerr was rejected by the Wilson administration because of his opposition to Wilson's Mexico policy, which Kerr claimed to favor "the government or the set of individuals, or the political party, or the mob of bandits, pledged, if they get into power, to do things which will be favorable to the Standard Oil interests."

Sweetman avoids any overt attempts at political analysis. An unfortunate omission is the absence of any discussion of the Monroe Doctrine, developed by John Quincy Adams to ensure a community of interests between the United States and other sovereign nations of the hemisphere. Without considering how this doctrine was perverted, there can be no understanding of how treasonous elements behind the Woodrow Wilsons and the Standard Oils have not halted their efforts to obscure crucial issues of natural law in all the 212 years of the United States' nationhood.