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**การเคลื่อนไหวของพ่อค้าและสามัญชนในหัวเมืองฝ่ายเหนือ  
ในช่วงเปลี่ยนผ่าน: กำเนิดรัฐสมัยใหม่สยามในศตวรรษที่ 19**  
Mobility of Traders and Commoners in the Lower North during a  
Transitional Period: A Birth of Siam's Modern State  
in the Nineteenth Century

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสร้างคำอธิบายแบบใหม่เกี่ยวกับการก่อตัวขึ้นของรัฐสมัยใหม่สยาม ด้วยการมองไปที่การเคลื่อนไหวของพ่อค้าและสามัญชนในบริเวณหัวเมืองฝ่ายเหนือที่สัมพันธ์กับความเปลี่ยนแปลงทางเศรษฐกิจและการเมืองในระบบอาณานิคมในช่วงปลายศตวรรษที่ 19 ซึ่งส่งผลให้หัวเมืองฝ่ายเหนือกลายเป็นพื้นที่ “ชุมทางการค้า” ที่เต็มไปด้วยผู้คนหลากหลายกลุ่มและหลากหลายสถานภาพทางสังคม ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเจ้าภาษีนายอากรชาวจีน, สามัญชนชาวสยามและชาวจีนรายย่อย, พ่อค้าชาวต่างชาติและคนในบังคับต่างชาติ ผู้คนเหล่านี้ต่างประกอบกิจกรรมทางเศรษฐกิจที่หลากหลายเพื่อสะสมทรัพย์สินและเงินตรา แต่การประกอบกิจกรรมดังกล่าวสัมพันธ์อย่างแนบแน่นกับความขัดแย้งและความรุนแรง ไม่ว่าจะเป็นการลักขโมย, การฉ้อโกง, การแย่งชิงทรัพย์สินสมบัติ พ่อค้าสามัญชนจึงต้องการให้เกิดการควบคุมอำนาจและบทบาทของกรมการเมืองท้องถิ่นด้วยระบบกฎหมายสมัยใหม่ที่มีมาตรฐาน ในแง่นี้ระบบราชการสมัยใหม่จึงมิได้เกิดขึ้นมาจากชนชั้นนำและขุนนางผู้มองการณ์ไกลเพียงอย่างเดียว หากแต่เกิดขึ้นมาจากการเรียกร้องของพ่อค้าสามัญชนจำนวนมาก

**คำสำคัญ:** สามัญชน, พ่อค้า, หัวเมืองฝ่ายเหนือ, สยาม, รัฐสมัยใหม่

## Abstract

This article aimed to construct a new explanation of the formation of Siam's modern state by looking at the mobility of traders and commoners in the lower north of Thailand that related to the economic and political changes during colonial period in the late nineteenth century. These were therefore important factors in transforming Northern principalities to be “trade center” with plenty of people from various groups and social statuses, including Chinese tax-farmers, Siamese and Chinese commoners or small-scale traders, and foreign aliens and colonists. These people could conduct various forms of economic activities in order to accumulate properties and money, but these trading and accumulation of wealth from various economic activities had escalated forms of violence and conflicts, including robbery, fraud, and disputation over properties.

Commoners and traders were calling for a measure to control local powers and authorities and a strengthening of the structure of modern state with a legal standard that satisfied them rather than previous administrative system. As a result, modern bureaucracy could thereby be formulated and institutionalized by the request of numerous commoners and traders, rather than merely led by far-sighted nobles and elites.

**Keywords:** commoners, traders, northern principalities, Siam, modern state.

## Introduction

The 1960s was an exciting decade that young-blood enthusiastic historians started to raise their question on the old school of historical writings that deeply attached to the concept of royal nationalism (Kasetsiri & Sawasdsri, 1975, 1976). Nidhi Eoseewong, a shrewd young mind of that time, had remarked revealing limitations of historical writings of the Damrong School, the official representative of royalist nationalism historiography (Eoseewong, 1976). Throughout his career, Nidhi dedicated a capacity to challenge the historical writings of Damrong School. On the one hand, he dissected a hidden-script political agenda of the royal “chronicles” – historical evidences that were highly valued by the Damrong School. The revision of chronicles, especially during the early Bangkok period, made it full of bias and alienated from reality (Eoseewong, 1980). On the other hand, Nidhi attempted to deconstruct the mainstream historical writings. His works led to readjustment and new periodization of historical timeline that did not tie to royal dynasties. For him, economic, social and cultural changes were important factors for indicating historical period. In his explanation, the economic, social and cultural structure during the early Bangkok was deeply related with the reformation period in the late nineteenth century rather than with the Ayutthaya era as

understood. The expansion of market oriented economic system in the late eighteen century had enormously upgraded the bourgeois status. The emerging humanism, nascent empiricism and rationalism in the early Bangkok society became a foundation that equipped the Siam's elites to adjust themselves in facing external surging influences, i.e. political and cultural power from the West, without creating harsh conflicts (Eoseewong, 2005).

Outlining history in accordance with economic, social and cultural changes as framed by Nidhi was shouldered on younger-generation historians in expounding Thailand's historical change especially in the 1932 Siamese revolution. Fine examples were Atthachak Sattayanurak's study on changing thoughts and attitudes of Thai elites between the reign of King Mongkut and the 1932 revolution (Sattayanurak, 1987) and Nakharin Mektrairat's four de force monograph on the 1932 Revolution in Siam (1992), two leading academics who were directly influenced by Nidhi. Publications of other young-blood academics also suggested an effort to restructure the historical explanation by following Nidhi's footsteps (Sakul-leaw, 2009; Wisahrom, 2016).

However, Nidhi's explanation was not sufficient for the historical changes of economic and social factors driven by various groups of people. Especially, he had not paid enough attention on the continuity of proactive movement and expansion of traders as catalysts for the transition to modern state of Siam during the reign of King Chulalongkorn as Nidhi portrayed as part of the development since the early Bangkok. Even though Atthachak's path-breaking study that focused on changing thoughts and attitudes of Thai elites was significant in explaining political and ideological changes from the reign of King Mongkut to the 1932 revolution, unfortunately it paid little attention to the economic movement and social changes of various groups of the populace that were crucial parts

of the earlier change. The roles of traders and commoners were, thus, passive but would be livened and recognized again in Nakharin's re-explanation of the 1932 revolution.<sup>2</sup>

This article aims to fill the gap of aforementioned historical explanation by emphasizing the expansion of traders and vibrant movement of commoners during the early Bangkok era with “critical roles” on the institutionalization of Siam's modern state that centralized and replaced the fragmentary orders of local powers and authorities in the feudal system. Commoners and traders were important “historical actors” who were calling for a measure to control local powers and authorities and a strengthening of the structure of modern state with a legal standard that satisfied them rather than previous administrative system. In this situation, modern bureaucracy could thereby be formulated and institutionalized by the request of numerous commoners and traders rather than merely being led by far-sighted nobles and elites. Thus, the formation of modern state must eventually arrive in Thai's history regardless the visionary reformation of nobles and elites at that time.

However, this article limits the scope of its observation only to Northern principalities due to the limitation of time and huge number of relevant documents that were beyond the author's capacity to completely conduct a comprehensive study of the movements and changes of traders and commoners throughout Siam within the same period. Nevertheless, it is hopeful that this article could offer a sufficient explanation of the

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<sup>2</sup> The publications of Kullada Kesboonchoo-Mead (2004) and Chaiyan Rajchagool (1994) that also intended to explain the relationship between modern state's institutionalization and “economic and social context” at national and international level. Nevertheless, these authors only took into account the roles of Thai elites in explaining the process of modern state's institutionalization. The movement of commoners and traders was only identified as “part of changes”.

economic and social changes in relations with the formation of Siam's modern state in Northern principalities and could be a comparative perspective for further similar study in other areas.

## Objectives

1. To describe the socio-economic change in the Lower-Northern Principalities at the late nineteenth century.
2. To explore the role of traders and commoners in the formation of Siam's modern state.

## Methods

This is the qualitative research that explores and analyzes historical evidences in the National Archives, especially in the King Rama 4 and 5 reigns, by using historical method. I construct the explanation and argue with the previous research to demonstrate how the ordinary people could get a significant role in the Thailand's history and how they could build up Siam's modern state.

## Research Results

### 1. From Border Area to Trade Center: Northern Principalities during the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries

In the late nineteenth century, the role of Northern principalities had remarkably changed from “border area”,<sup>3</sup> that focused on security-related responsibilities such as strengthening manpower and producing forest products, to “trade center” that benefited Bangkok in the form of

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<sup>3</sup> It was a term created by the Bangkok court to call Northern principalities until the reign of King Mongkut. The responsibilities of border areas were to monitor people, checkpoint, and investigate the general situations in neighboring countries (see NL R4 CS1227 no.24/2).

money collected from commoners for the exemption of annual conscription and from tax-farming system (Chantarochanee, 1991). The change was apparently related to world economic and political system during the early colonial period. The British colonization, which started and expanded in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, had respectively created a new political, social and economic phenomenon. Siam was gradually coerced to be part of the world capitalism. Trading in major cities like Bangkok, Moulmein and Chiangmai grew up spectacularly and made these cities to be trade centers for distributing industrial products from abroad and local products manufactured in the region. Eventually, this context affected the change in Northern principalities since it was geographically related to all these three major trade centers of mainland Southeast Asia. Some trade ports were also upgraded to be the larger cities. The fine examples were Nakornsawan, Tak and Utaradit. Nakornsawan was the river-based trade port that flowed products from lower Chaophraya River basin to Lanna and other northern cities. Meanwhile, Tak was located along Moulmein-Chiangmai trade route and was a stopover of Bangkok-Chiangmai route that travelers could change their transportation mode from river to land. Similarly, Utaradit was a conjunction among Bangkok, eastern Lanna and Luang Prabang.

Apparently, these changes had generated many impacts. On the one hand, it gradually supported the expansion of monetary economic system. Originally, Northern principalities manufactured, collected and sent forest products to enrich Bangkok and their exchanges with foreign products (NL R3 CS1199 no.28; NL R4 CS1221 no.211/1). “Mai Khon Sak” or teak logs were important forest products from this region for building or renovating palaces or Buddhist temples, including seafaring ships for international trade (NL R4 CS1213 no.146; NL R4 CS1214 no.45/3). Nevertheless, Bangkok was not successful in conscripting commoners to

work as part of its tributary system. Many proven evidences obviously revealed the chaotic conscription system. Some nobles and governors had long over-due delayed in sending forest products that they obliged to send, as tribute, to Bangkok until the Bangkok court had to keep reminding them repeatedly on the tribute collection. However, the amount of tributes sent to Bangkok was usually below expectation and obligation. (NL R3 CS1198 no.58; NL R4 CS1223 no.328; NL R4 CS1225 no.136/2; NL R4 CS1225 no.136/3). There were many reasons why city governors could not send requested tributes to Bangkok, but the main reason should be the structure of tributary system that was too complicated and inappropriate with the expanding monetary system. The expansion of market-oriented economic system attracted commoners and traders to travel frequently for conducting trades, and it was greatly difficult for the local government to follow and conscript them (NL R4 CS1215 no.7). Finally, the government came up with a manageable policy in asking commoners to pay money instead of laboring for the government (NL R4 CS1222 no.306/3; NL R3 CS1198 no.55; NA R5 RMS Vol.17 CS1249 no.110).

In return, Bangkok court had allocated monetary income obtained from commoners to purchase necessary goods at the market price rather than urged commoners sending their goods to the government. The evidence on the renovation project of Wat Mahathat temple during the reign of King Mongkut had reflected a combination between the conscription under tributary system and goods purchasing under the monetary system. At that time, the government had conscripted around 100 commoners from the Northern principalities to work on the renovation (NL R4 CS1216 no.15/1; NL R4 CS1218 no.234). However, commoner conscription of the Sakdina system alone could not bring further the accomplishment of renovation. The government



thus needed to spend money to buy necessary materials, even though some materials could be procured from conscripted commoners. For example, the government purchased lime for 30 Chang because the lime manufactured by conscripted commoners in Fang and Tron was not enough (NL R4 CS1216 no.15/1). Such example obviously demonstrated the interdependence between tributary system and monetary system to cope with state administration. The interdependence was largely implemented until the early King Chulalongkorn period that conscription system almost stopped functioning. The court was, then, willing to pay money to hire commoners rather than conscript them (NA R5/1 CS1237-1238 no. 2; NA R5/1 CS1237-1238 no. 3; NA R5/1 CS1237-1238 no. 55).

Besides the expansion of monetary system, the arrival of various groups of commoners and traders also made Northern principalities to be “trade center”. The location of Northern principalities that connected to several trade routes attracted sea merchants, especially the Chinese conducting trade in Bangkok. During the reigns of King Rama III and King Mongkut, Chinese merchants had rarely reached out to Chiangmai or Lanna for their economic activities, but usually stopped at some cities located along the route such as Nakornsawan, Tak and Utaradit (Ruangs, 2013, p. 70,118). Hence, the maritime trade was almost monopolized by Chinese merchants (Na Chiangmai, 1995, p. 62).

Additionally, the Bowring Treaty in 1855 had escalated the complexity of trade when Siam was obligated to grant extraterritorial rights to imperial subjects and allow these foreign merchants to trade freely in any areas of their wishes. After 1855, we found foreign traders who travelled around the Northern principalities (NL R4 CS1217 no.144; NL R4 CS1221 no.121/2; NL R4 CS1225 no.113/1; NL R4 CS1227 no.161; NL R4 CS1228 no.334), and during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, trade

of foreign aliens, especially Karen and Chinese merchants registered as foreign subjects in the Northern principalities, were thus a common situation.

Economic and political changes during colonial period were therefore important factors in transforming Northern principalities to be “trade center” with plenty of people from various groups and statuses, including Chinese tax-farmers, Siamese and Chinese commoners or small-scale traders, foreign aliens, and commoners registered as colonial subjects. Additionally, local governors and authorities had tried to conduct trade and economic activities legally and illegally in order to accumulate their wealth obtained from modern economic system. The next issue that should be considered was the expansion of trade that increased the complicated interaction of people coming from different groups and statuses. This complicated interaction would become significant factors in weakening the Sakdina system in the perspective of commoners and traders.

## **2. Wealth vs Disorder: Duality of trade center in the late Sakdina system**

In the late nineteenth century, every group of people was arguably wealthier due to the expansion of modern economy. Commoners and traders could conduct various forms of economic activities in order to accumulate properties and money. A fine example of such wealthy folk was Nai Chai, who was a common folk but had lots of properties and money including golden accessories, money, 2 elephants, 2 slaves and so on (NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/2 Kampangpet’s dispatches, March 103-2 May 110). In addition, the increasing number of robbery cases was another alibi to indicate the expansion of wealth among commoners. Some commoners were reported victims of robbery cases, and the amount of robbed money was huge; for example, Nai Imm’s money was stolen more

than 15 Chang<sup>4</sup> (NA R5 RMS CS 1239-1242 no.7), and Amdang Sorn was attacked by tramp burglar to get her properties and money more than 19 Chang (NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches, January 102-November 106).<sup>5</sup>

A close relationship between trading and accumulation of wealth from various economic activities (Sakul-leaw, 2016) had escalated forms of violence and conflicts including robbery, fraud, and disputation over properties among family members. Those conflicts had become more apparent since the reign of King Mongkut. These conflicts had become rather complicated due to two factors. The first factor was the case that usually related to the people coming from different groups and statuses. These cases' phenomena were based on increasing interaction between merchants and other groups of people, namely commoners, governors, local authorities, and foreign aliens (or merchants registered as foreign subjects). The second factor was local governors and authorities that were the mechanism of Sakdina system. Apparently, this mechanism could not cope with conflicts, or even, helped to escalate the conflicts from illegal traffics and corruption. The wealthier of commoners, the stronger of local corruption and unfair administration including collecting extra tax from commoners, asking money from criminal suspects or associating with gangsters, and so on (Sakul-leaw, 2016).

In the late nineteenth century, the Northern principalities were on two controversial characteristics of social, economic and political circumstances. On the one hand, the economic expansion that helped to increase trading and economic activities had further made commoners

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<sup>4</sup> A traditional unit of money in Siam.

<sup>5</sup> During the reign of King Chulalongkorn, money around 5 Chang were enough to build an office building with 8 meters length, encompassed by balcony, floor and wall made by lime and covered with tile roof (NA R5 M 2.12Korkai/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches, March 102-November 106).

and traders wealthier. On the other hand, it also increased criminal cases, conflicts and corruptions as well as piles of dead cases due to inefficiency of the existing system. Thus, the economic, social and political relationship among people associating with different groups and statuses during the transitional period was full of conflicts, disorders, and complications. It thereby urged every stakeholder of various people to look for new mode of administration that could guarantee the security of their lives and wealth.

### **3. The expanded boundary of life and the informal patronage network**

Because they had to travel to many places for trading and conducting economic activities, merchants expanded the network to incorporate many people. For example, Amdang Somboon, a commoner who was the money lender, had appealed to many people that travelled to big cities in the north such as Pichai, Sawankalok and Nakornsawan to warn and urge her debtors to repay debts, otherwise she would submit the petition to the city governors (NA R5 RMS Vol.27 CS 1250 no.791; NA R5 RMS Vol.27 CS 1250 no.790; NA R5 RMS Vol.27 CS 1253 no.44). Additionally, economic activities had increased the multiplicity of relationship among different groups of people, especially the relationship with foreign aliens registered as colonial subjects. For example, a British subject named Mong Kang had travelled to Northern principalities for trading livestock. His economic activity would lead him to build up a wide-range relationship with people from different groups and statuses, such as the British Consulate, local governments, folk laborers (Chiangmai and Nan commoners who later stoled Mong Kang's properties), as well as commoners who sold livestock to him (NA R5 RMS/2 CS 1239-1242 no.220).

Teak-logs trading was another fine example reflecting the power

interaction among different groups of people because trading teak-logs needed big investment. Thereby, such business was rather limited to wealthy merchants such as tax-farmers or few foreign subjects. This trade, however, required many workers to cut off and flow teak-logs from Northern principalities to Bangkok. Plenty tiny conflicts occurred in teak-wood trading such as a robbery of small teak-logs would disturb the relationship of involved people, namely Siamese commoners, foreign subjects, local governors and authorities, the central government and high-position authorities as well as foreign courts. An example of these relationships was the case of Tan Soon Kim, the Chinese who equalized power at different levels such as local authorities, Siamese commoners, Chinese commoners, Burmese commoners, those registered as colonial subjects (British, French and Dutch), officials of harbor department, minister of Foreign Affairs, minister of Interior, and the German Consulate (NA R5 RMS/9 CS 1247 no.98).

Economic activities and trade benefit had attracted people from different groups and power statuses to generate a massive influx of the complicated interaction. Evidently, economic activities had generated Siamese-Chinese commoner's disputes that were easily related to power representatives of western colonial regime. The case of Chin Tan Soon Kim, in Sukhothai, was that the local governors and authorities could not make final decision since it involved with the Siamese and the British, the French and the Dutch subjects. Finally, the central government had to take charge of this case as a good example. Another case of Chin Nguan Li who claimed to be a Portuguese subject, was that the Nakornsawan's governor had to report the case to Bangkok in order to avoid being infringed with the imprisonment of foreign subjects. The local government, then, needed to depend on the prestige of the King (NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/2 Nakornsawan's dispatches).

Apparently, the economic expansion had also enlarged the relationship boundary between traders and other people holding different power statuses. Such experience informed them that there were categories and levels of power available, and each could lead them to different problems in solving and handling. In the commoners and traders perception, the power of local governors and authorities in the Sakdina system were gradually declined because it could not cope with conflicts, and cases were passed on to the Bangkok court. Furthermore, some cases specifically needed the power of Bangkok. Eventually, the life and wealth of merchants would be more secured if they knew how to negotiate with different power. For instance, it was the case of Amdang Mieng who had a sexual affair with different authorities because she hoped that those authorities would save her from legal penalty. A dispatch from Nakornsawan stated that “[Amdang Mieng] was afraid of guilt. She had sexual affair with Kamnan Meun...asked Kamnan Meun to appeal the case...Kamnan Meun was later afraid of guilt and withdrew the appeal...Amdang Mieng did not want to be penalized...[she then] had sexual affair with Kamnu Tong-Su who was a foreign subject, aimed for his help” (NA R5 M 2.12/4 Nakornsawan’s dispatches, January 102-November 106).

Being adhere to different categories of power such as the power of central government in Bangkok, foreign subjects, and the local government made many commoners realize that those powers would help them on trading, protect them from exploitations, and increase their power or prestige. Chinese merchants, therefore, registered as foreign subjects or claimed that they were foreign subjects in order to get respect from local authorities in their trading facilities. According to evidences, cases of impersonation to be foreign subjects were quite common (NA R5 RMS Vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.4; NA R5 RMS Vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.99).

Besides registering as foreign subjects, adherence to the power

of local governors and authorities was also a popular choice. We found that many commoners and traders offered a bribe to local governors and authorities to help them in filing lawsuit. A number of gangsters accepted to be under the patronage of local governors and authorities as well. Threatening these defenders for bribe and association with gangsters were common behaviors found among local authorities. These behaviors created many problems to commoners and traders who were not in the patronage system of local government.

However, adherence to the Sakdina power had many constraints. It generated both security and insecurity to commoners and traders at the same time. On the one hand, commoners and traders would be more secure while conducting their (legal or illegal) profession. On the other hand, they would also suffer from economic and political insecurity. Such insecurity would further escalate social and economic disorder, especially when some powerful commoners and traders freely used their power to support their economic activities such as illegal traffics. Association with gangsters to protect interests of their own or take advantage from other groups would eventually increase the conflicts and disorders inside trade circles. That disorder was generally found in teak-logs business, (NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/42 Nakornsawan's dispatches box no.3-4, RE 106-110; NA R5 RMS/11 CS 1248 no.114; NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches, January 102-November 106).

Aforementioned situations also happened in other businesses. It could conclude that Chinese merchants, foreign aliens registered as foreign subjects, and Siamese traders horizontally and vertically built the network to protect interests of their own. These behaviors had not only led to a number of conflicts and disputes among patronage networks in the Northern principalities, but also led the growth of "influential persons" who freely used their power for their benefit. Another consequence was

the increasing number of robbery and crimes that was frequently found at city boundary that was difficult for victims to report crimes to responsible local governments. Spending several days to report the cases at local government, robbers would already flee far away (NA R5 M 2.12/8 [18] Jameunchaiphusa considered the robbery cases in Pichit (12 September 108-18 November 109); NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/2 [89] Kamphangpet's dispatches, March 103-2 May 110). Hence, it was quite chaotic to see commoners who "needed to take half an hour or an hour of travelling carried weapons". (NA R5 M 48/5 Official order of Ministry of Interior, Tak, 5 April 109-14 April 111).

Nevertheless, the patronage network was a choice only for some commoners and traders. A number of merchants could not take that option because network building required huge social, economic and political investment. Many commoners and traders who had suffered from so-called lawless society. Travelling to ask for justice at Bangkok judicial court was thereby another way local commoners and traders took to negotiate with local patronage network.

#### **4. Appeal and Prosecution at Bangkok Court of Justice: The Power of Royal House in a Hand of Commoners**

Continuously, the expanded boundary of (practical and ideal) life had made local authorities as political and administrative mechanism obliging for civil protection and fair conflict-settlement between commoners and traders meaninglessly. Litigants did not subject to the power of local authorities in the Sakdina system, particularly when dispute parties were foreign subjects. Thereby, commoners started to ask for "external" power with higher capacity than local power to deal with their problems. Hence, travelling to appeal and prosecute lawsuits at Bangkok judicial court had frequently appeared during the reign of King



Chulalongkorn because the power of central government was more acceptable, or decisive, than the power of local government.

Regularly, commoners and traders who faced unfair judgment of local government would appoint their relatives or relevant people to sail to Bangkok for case appeal or prosecution at Bangkok court of justice (Damrong Rachanuphap, 1972, p. 23). Commoners usually took all kinds of cases, from small cases such as inheritance division, financial fraud, extra-tax collection, and all cases that the judicial process was delayed at the local level, to important cases including robbery and homicide, to Bangkok court. After the jury finished consideration, the verdict would be submitted to Minister of Interior to seal the Rajasiha emblem before sending it back to local authorities for reconsidering the cases. In some cases, Minister of Interior assigned the officials to make the consideration at the local court. And many times, the Minister ordered local governors and relevant authorities to defend themselves in Bangkok. Otherwise, the lawyer could be assigned as their representatives. The situation that commoners called for the resolution of Bangkok judicial court became a chance for the Bangkok government to expand their power in intervening problems of commoners that local governments or influential persons could not avoid or deny. In this particular context of economic expansion and extraterritoriality, commoners thus chose higher power of the Bangkok judicial court and central government to deal with lower power of local authorities. However, commoners choosing this option were wealthy and could invest in transportations and accommodations, and costly fees were required from the Bangkok judicial court in order to access a fair justice procedure and reliable written statements.

This article would argue that movement of commoners was significant in the formation of Siam's modern state. They put money and effort to request for a fairer judicial procedure and bring the power of

Bangkok court and central government to regulate the behaviors of local authorities, including keeping reminding the local government to seriously follow regulations and policies implemented by the central government. The local governments were supposed to have a careful and proper enforcement, otherwise they would infringe the laws. The situation that local governments needed to comply with regulations and policies of the central government was arguably an initial point of a formation of the modern state that centralized power of control and service provision through the modern bureaucratic system.

The standardized justice and reliable written regulations of state affairs were very critical for commoners and traders living during this hectic transitional period because it could notify local authorities on proper and fair enforcement that was serious problems for commoners in their daily encountering. Instructions issued by the central government in Bangkok usually kept reminding local authorities to comply with regulations without any ambiguity. By doing so, Bangkok government could gradually centralize its power and coopt the local governments that used to be quite autonomous in the past and further led to the formation and institutionalization of modern bureaucracy. We then could say that the roles of commoners to pursue for justice from Bangkok could be a starting point to generate a common criteria for the interaction among different groups of people at the local level to be under the same standard endorsed by reliable written regulations, backed up by the Bangkok government. Such circumstance helped to significantly establish the formation of absolute monarchy afterwards.

“Modern state” with standardized legal system and reliable administrative power that could be officially endorsed by written regulations was always required. The establishment of modern state, from this perspective, benefited people from all groups and statuses including

elites in Bangkok and all levels of commoners, traders, and slaves. A large number of historical evidences from this transitional period confirmed that commoners and traders wanted a new administrative mechanism that was healthier, more predictable and standardized than the ancient Sakdina system. Apparently, administrative mechanism in the Sakdina system was unable to cope with complicated conflicts and disputes. The movement and request of commoners and traders in the Northern principalities became, thereby, a social power that accommodated the expanded power of central government. Little by little, it helped to monitor and interfere with the enforcement of its power and regulations with local authorities in which the Bangkok's power and regulations were enforced.

With such perspective, the relationship between “central” and “local” during the transitional period of modern state formation might not be merely considered on the basis of duality between “active” and “passive” parties. No matter how we tackle with this formation, it was greatly necessary to aware that the achievement, or failure, of this Chakri Reformation was also driven or pushed forward by other social movements and forces. “Modern state” was, thus, not realized only by visionary far-sighted elites, but a movement and request of commoners was also mattered. A number of proven evidences demonstrated that commoners and traders proactively supported and participated in modern state formation through the implementation of the so-called public interest events. Commoners and traders had supported the royal charity whether it was donation of the land or money to construct government's buildings, temples, roads, and bridges. In this case, modern state posited the King as a focal person in mobilizing the people coming from different groups and statuses to join activities organized with a mutual focus on public interest before the purpose had changed to the nation building in the succession decades.

## Conclusion

Living in unstable economic and political situation, the commoners and traders educated themselves the power relationship within the colonial condition and an opportunity to use a central government's power as a mechanism in negotiating with local governments. As the capitalist economy was expanding in a larger scale, the power of Bangkok court was a powerful negotiating instrument of commoners and traders to achieve justice and fair treatment delivered by local governments. Many commoners and traders had, therefore, an important role in formation and institutionalization of Siam's modern state by the wealth and experiences that obtained while trading and conducting economic activities in the market system.

Additionally, the situation that commoners and traders came to call for justice at Bangkok judicial court occurred before the reformation policies proposed by elites during the reign of King Chulalongkorn would start. It was arguable that commoners and traders were significant supporters for political changes, no matter what the visionary perspective of elites at that time would be. At the same time, the movement of commoners and traders as social power helped to equip the Royal House to expand power into local governments. Thus, the foundation of "political reformation" or the formation of state centralization had undeniably come from the movement of commoners and traders.

Another important issue that should be discussed was that despite massive support from commoners and traders, the duration of absolute monarchy or so-called modern state was short-lived and eliminated in 1932. According to historical evidences recorded before the political reformation in 1892 collected at National Archives, the majority of historical evidences especially dispatches and proclamations (including reports during the reign of King Mongkut) were about livelihood of

commoners and traders, particularly their economic activities. It reflected that the court's gate was opened for learning commoners and traders' livelihood. Some public policies launched while Siamese elites were struggling for political centralization could, thus, greatly respond to social problems at that time.<sup>6</sup>

However, when political reformation was stable, the gate of absolute monarchical regime was totally closed. The Bangkok court increasingly separated itself from commoners' livelihood. Historical evidences during this period kept at the National Archives were full of official administration, while local incidences were records that were based on the perspective of officials authorized by central government. The information of livelihood and problems of commoners that were found such as in previous historical evidences disappeared. Separation from commoners and launching policies without listening to the voice of commoners became significant barriers blocking the ability of elites and political regime to adjust itself to economic system, social and cultural relationship. By the collaboration of various groups of people, the absolute monarchy regime was finally collapsed on 24 June 1932.

Hence, interaction between commoners and central government for mutual benefit and satisfaction had gradually increased around a century before the modern state was formulated and institutionalized. In the opposite, the separation of court from social interaction led to the downfall of absolute monarchy. "Social power" today was healthier, and

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the author analyzed that the policy on robbery suppression and court establishment for speeding-up the court verdict was launched in order to respond "internal" problems occurring in Siamese society, rather than copy from "external" party such as British colonization established in India and Batavia. Nevertheless academics looked at the abolition of slavery as a political tool of King Rama 5, leader of "Young Siam Society", historical evidences obviously presented that commoners strongly requested for and supported the policy implementation.

the absolute separation between government and social interaction was a confirmation that the government would not be able to have proper adjustment timely and could lead to a next round of political reformation in the near future.

## References

CS = Chula Sakkarat; M = Ministry of Interior (Krasuang mahatthai); R = Rama; RMS = Royal Secretariat Office with Minor Seal of the Royal Emblem (Krom ratchalekhathikan – Tra noi); RS = Ratanakosin Anno (started from 1782 CE)

### National Library (NL), Manuscript Collection, Bangkok

NL R3 CS1198 no.55 Dispatch from Muang Phatchaboon, informing the tribute.

NL R3 CS1199 no.28 Dispatch from Muang Kamphengpet, informing the procured *Amomum vilosum* delivery, CS 1199.

NL R4 CS1213 no.146 Luang Suntornpitak reported the arraignment of the case of teak-log tax for palace's building.

NL R4 CS1214 no.45/3 Letter to Maung Phetchaboon, Maung Loomsak, Maung Vichein, requested for recruiting Pai people log and sending them to Bangkok for renovating Baromnivet and Baromnivas temples.

NL R4 CS1215 no.7 Draft letter to Phraya Sawankalok, appointing Saming Nara Jumpon as Nai Kong Saming Phaisan, deputy chief of teak tribute station.

NL R4 CS1216 no.15/1 Dispatch copy from Uttaradit, reporting about the renovation of Mahatat Temple, the sanctuary, the pagoda and the parillion of Maung Tung Young.

- NL R4 CS 1217 no.144 Passports and the 2 translated copies of the passports of Muang Moranaeng which Angoyebeng, the Regent of Maotamlern, issued to 24 Tongsu traders.
- NL R4 CS1218 no.234 The number of people in 8 Northern cities that was obliged to build Mahatat Temple, Maung Tung Young and the pagoda in Maung Sawang Khabury.
- NL R4 CS1221 no.121/2 Letter to Phraya Tak, Phra Vichit Raksa, on facilitating and protecting of Sir Robert.
- NL R4 CS1221 no.211 Draft letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Uthai of Muang Uthai Thani, acknowledging the sappan wood tax of Laung Rittikamheang.
- NL R4 CS1222 no.306/3 Draft letter of Tan Ton Chuek to Phraya Uthaithani, requesting of unpaid Caesalpinia sappan tax money.
- NL R4 CS1223 no.328 Draft latter of Chao Phaya Chakri to Phaya Sawankhalok, Pha Satern Burintorn and Phaya Phichai, informed the receiving of teak logs from Sawankhalok, Tern and Phichai.
- NL R4 CS1225 no.113/1 Draft letter to the cities along the way, requesting for facilitating Mong Toon and his opanions partisan in a journey to Chiangmai.
- NL R4 CS1225 no.136/2 Letter to Phraya Phichai, Maung Phichai, on the arrival of the money in substitute of teak logs and copper.
- NL R4 CS1225 no.136/3 Letter to Phisanulok, on the arrival of received teak logs.
- NL R4 CS1227 no.161 Draft Letter to Phaya Phisanulok, Phraya Sukothai, Phraya Sawankalok Phraya Phichai and Phraya Pichit, about Mr.Gertib.
- NL R4 CS 1227 no.24 Draft of the royal instruction for Phra Sayamsimanurak.

NL R4 CS 1228 no.334 Draft letter to Phraya Uthai Thani and the deputy chief of Uthai Thani, requiring to provide the vacant land or the paddy field for renting to Mr Piti and other Burmese subjects of Great Britain, in accordance with their convenience.

### **National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok (NA)**

NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/2 Kamphangphet's dispatches, March RS103 – 2 May RS110.

NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches (January 102-November 106).

NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/42 Nakornsawan's dispatches box no.3-4 (RE 106-110).

NA R5 M 2.12/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches (January 102-November 106).

NA R5 M 2.12/8 [18] Jameun Chaiphusa considered the robbery cases in Pichit city (12 September 108-18 November 109).

NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/4 Nakornsawan's dispatches (March 102-November 106).

NA R5 M 48/5 Official proclamation of Ministry of Interior, Mueng Tak (5 April 109-14 April 111).

NA R5 RMS/1 CS1237-1238 no. 2 Letter of the city government of Maung Nakhonthai, Nakhonchum, Dansai, Phukrang, Loei, to Maung Kantao, aung Phetchaboon, the governor of Maung Phichai, the protectorate of Maung Pakhaungnongkhai, about the request of Phraya Phitsanulok to resettle the people of Dansai, Phukrang to Maung Pakhaung, Maung Kantao.

NA R5 RMS/1 CS1237-1238 no. 3 Dispatch to Phraya Sukhothai, requesting to acquisition of rice from people in Sukhothai and transfer to Phichai.



- NA R5 RMS/1 CS1237-1238 no. 55 Letter to Nampad, Pakhueng, and Keantaw, requesting to stock rice for official services,
- NA R5 RMS Vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.4 Maung Nakornsawan, reporting of Nai Imm's lawsuit, who claim himself a Dutch subject and alleged Phra Yodmuengkhang.
- NA R5 RMS Vol.2 CS1239-1242 no.7 Maung Nakornsawan, A case of Nai Imm, an employee of an subject of Dutch, was robbed and injured.
- NA R5 RMS Vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.99 The Flag case, Mr.David Michigel American Consul requested to arrest trading ship, except the ships in the consulate services, displayed fake Americanflag.
- NA R5 RMS Vol.17 CS1249 no.110 Maung Phisanulok, requesting to release Umdang Soon, Luang Chiyot's wife back to her home, in preventing her to pick a quarrel with the labors.
- NA R5 RMS Vol.27 CS 1250 no.790 Muang Sawankalok, requesting send Luang Phakdiphubeth and the debtors to Phraya Sukhothai and Ja Reangnganrudrad for the arraignment in the case of Amdaeng Somboon and Amdaeng Puk.
- NA R5 RMS vol. 27 CS 1250 no.791 Muang Phichai, order to capture Laung Phakdibhubet, the assistance and the debtors of Amdaeng Somboon and Amdaeng Puk.
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- NA R5 RMS/2 CS 1239-1242 no.220 Mong Keang, the British subject trader, in his acquiring of the cattle, horses and elephants, in northern

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