

Multi-Power Interaction in the “Border Areas” & Commoners’ Calls for Modern State Intervention

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ABSTRACT

In the early Rattanakosin era, Northern Principalities were a broad border area that Bangkok entrusted to police either the common *phrai* not to escape from its grips or the outsider not to intrude its inner territory. Foreigners coming to Siam with the purpose of trade were allowed to conduct their exchanges only within specific border principalities. The situation, however, was changed after Siam signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855, obliging Siam to grant extraterritorial rights to foreign aliens and allow these merchants to trade freely in any areas of their wishes. Northern Principalities then became a trade entrepôt of Thai, Chinese and the British subjects that were frequently travelling to trade in the area. Due to such context, the Northern Principalities were a place of interactions, conflicts, and negotiations among commoners of various groups and statuses, for instance the network of powerful local governors and local authorities, authorized tax agencies, and foreigners, particularly the Chinese and the Karen (Tong-su) registered as the British subjects, and including other indigenous commoners who were not affiliated with the Sakdina system and were involved in small-scale trading of their own.

Conflicts among various groups with multiple statuses in the commercial space weakened and undermined the local administration of Sakdina system. Local authorities could no more handle this problem and tended to violate the law themselves. Commoners thus questioned the existing administrative structure and mechanism and increasingly called for the power of central government under the authority of the Bangkok court to intervene in these conflicts by enforcing civil and criminal regulations. Arguably, the calls of commoners corresponded with the demands of the Bangkok court to replace local authorities with a “modern” bureaucracy. Thus, the establishment of modern bureaucracy that would finally institutionalize the absolute monarchy was not only far-sightedly led by nobles and elites in Bangkok, but also coincided with demands from below made by commoners. Popular consensus was therefore decisive in establishing modern state bureaucracy in the region.

KEYWORDS: Commoner, Northern Principalities, Siam’s Modern State, Reformation.

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Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate the expansion of trade in the Northern Principalities (or the lower northern region in Thailand today) was a result of the relationship between Siam and the world economic system that stimulated different groups of people to participate in various economic activities. The role of Northern Principalities had remarkably changed from security-related responsibilities to a “trade center” with plenty of interactions, conflicts and negotiations of commoners coming from different groups and statuses, for instance the network of powerful local authorities, tax farmers, and foreign aliens, particularly the Chinese and the Karen registered as the British Subjects, and including the commoners who were unaffiliated with the Sakdina system and were involved in small-scale trading of their own.

These conflicts planted seeds of doubt among commoners in the Sakdina administrative system towards the local governors who through corruption and inefficiency could no longer satisfy commoners. Many commoners, particularly those who were frequently travelling to conduct their trades in the Northern Principalities, increasingly called for a Sakdina reform and sanction from the Bangkok’s governmental authority in order to mitigate conflicts by enforcing Bangkok’s civil and criminal regulations. The call of commoners was thus corresponded with the demands of Bangkok to replace the local authorities with a modern bureaucracy.

Northern Principalities as Border Arena in the Early Rattanakonsin Era

Because of several important roles, Northern Principalities became one of “border areas” where Bangkok expected to strengthen their armed force and manpower. However, due to some limitations on Bangkok’s authority, it could not extend its power to effectively and comprehensively govern over the far-flung border area. On one hand, the Northern Principalities were in charge of collecting forest products from cities in the remote area, namely, Tak, Sawankhalok, Phichai, Lomsak and Phetchabun. On the other hand, it gave them the capacity to control trade-route and economic activities at the entry point to access forest products flow from Lanna and Lan Chang or Laos (Kwanmuang 1991).

Forest products were necessary for the international trade interests of the Bangkok court. According to documents from the reign of King Rama III, in 1837, the Bangkok court could order Phetchabun to conscript 150 commoners to collect cardamom or “Phon Rew” for some 50 habs¹ because “[The king] wanted cardamom to exchange with products from foreign traders” (NL R3 CS 1199 no.28), or

1 Traditional measure of quantification; 1 hab is equal to 60 kilograms approximately.

the official document, in 1859, sent to Uthaithani governor in 1859, to urge Luang Rittikhamhang, his subordinate to collect sappan woods or “Fang” in order to serve many foreign traders’ interests in Bangkok (NL R4 CS 1221 no.211).

Besides international trade between the Bangkok court and foreign traders, forest products were important to the court’s efforts to represent itself as the “mandala center”. Thereby, the shortage of forest products would be likely to emerge when the court in early Bangkok period planned to do costly projects such as building and renovating a number of Buddhist temples (NL R4 CS 1223 no.291). According to the evidence, the court comprehended the necessary supply of teak wood or “Mai khon sak” in renovating the capital city and facilitating its international trade. The appointment order in 1829 during the early reign of Rama III indicated that “[The king] really wanted to use it [teak wood] for building new temples and enlarging the capital city. Government authorities then allocated the budget to purchase it from traders selling it in Bangkok, costed about 1,000-2,000 logs every year” (NL R3 CS 1191 no.1). Teak wood was also utilized for building seafaring brigs and patrolling coasters needed in international trade.

Another important role of Northern Principalities was policing circumstances related to security and controlling commoners not to escape or cross the borderline into neighboring countries (NL R4 CS 1215 no. 3). As stipulated in a 1853 report during the reign of King Rama IV, the court usually ordered governors of Uthaithani, Tak, and Phichai to monitor the border and assign government’s agents to secretly investigate the situations occurred in neighboring countries (NL R4 CS 1215 no. 47; NL R4 CS 1216 no.14). The importance of Northern Principalities could be confirmed by the appointment, in 1854, of the position entitled “Phraya Siamsimanurak” in Tak with the responsibility to especially command the work of local authorities in border areas (NL R4 CS 1216 no.47).

The Transition to “Trade Centers”

In 1865, the king reminded “Phraya Siamsimanurak” to seriously monitor commoners and traders travelling to and from the Northern Principalities, especially, the Karen and the Burmese merchants, including commoners from Chiangmai, Lampang, Lampoon, Thoenburi, Tak and Kamphaengphet who would like to go to Mottalerm in Burma for trading purpose (NL R4 CS 1227 no.24). Moreover, evidence from this period reveals that traders and commoners frequently travelled to Northern Principalities for trading, reflecting a large number of traders and commoners travelling north and south, inside and outside of Siam (such as NL R3 CS 1200 no. 86); NL R3 CS 1202 no.147; NL R3 CS 1206 no. 155; NL R3 CS 1207 no. 253; NL

R4 CS 1215 no.63).

Chinese merchants were one of remarkable elements in the Northern Principalities during the reign of King Rama III and IV (NL R3 CS 1200 no.86; NL R3 CS 1201 no.279; NL R4 CS 1216 no.81). Moreover, the Chinese kept increasing in the Northern Principalities as confirmed by the Chinese enlisted in 1835 which could be categorized by cities as table below (NL R3 CS 1196 no.52).

<i>Cities</i>		<i>Number of People</i>
Uthaithani	248	persons
Nakhonsawan	56	persons
Phitsanulok	1,112	persons
Tak	26	persons
Phichit	88	persons
Phichai	150	persons
Kampaengphet	44	persons
Sukhotai	246	persons
Sawankhalok	52	persons

In response to the increasing number of Chinese commoners and traders living in the Northern Principalities, Bangkok firstly appointed the position of Chinese Captain or “Nai Amphoe Chin” in Nakhonsawan in 1842 to oversee many the Chaozhou and Fujian Chinese residing in the city. Yok Sai Hui was the first Chinese captain appointed in 1842 and his task was mainly overseeing that Chinese commoners and traders were not involved with criminal incidents and illegal trafficking (NL R3 CS 1204 no.18). In addition, the notification on appointment of Nakhonsawan captain in 1845 had shown that a lot of Chaozhou, Fujian, and Teochew Chinese lived and worked for the cotton field and other businesses in Nakhonsawan (NL R3 CS 1207 no.48). Another Chinese was appointed as its captain in 1865 to work in Uthaithani as well because of many Chaozhou, Fujian and Teochew Chinese commoners found living and working for sugar-cane factories and paddy fields in that city (NL R4 CS 1227 no.4). The increasing numbers of traders and commoners made economic activities even more complicated as we seen in several reports during the reign of King Rama III, which demonstrated the expansion of market economy through taxation system collected from products and production activities that gradually became complicated and detailed (for instance, see NL R3 CS 1207 no.274).

The expansion of trade and transportation in relation to commoners led to the establishment of new cities in the Northern Principalities during this period.

According to some reports during the reigns of King Rama III and IV, Banphotphisai was established in 1857 when the Bangkok court was concerned that the duration traders and commoners spent for travelling from Kamphaengphet to Nakhonsawan took about 8 nights whereas few villages located along the route for their stopover. It was therefore risky for traders and commoners to be attacked and robbed by gangsters while using the route. Moreover, victims of robbery would take a long time to report the case to either Nakhonsawan or Kamphaengphet governors. As a result, the robbers would already have escaped. Besides the security reasons, Ban Dan village, located in the center of Kamphaengphet and Nakhonsawan, was a potential location to establish a new city. Hence, Ban Dan was up-graded to be Banphotphisai (name of city) in 1857 with the purpose to be another place for storing of agricultural products and manpower (NL R4 CS 1219 no.29). Likewise, Bangkok had also ordered to elevate Ban Payuhadan to be Phayuhakhiri in 1862 for the same reason (NL R4 CS 1224 no.142).

With the expansion of trade and market economy, it had also brought about the forgery of counterfeit money, called “Ngoen Dang” (NL R3 CS 1206 no.155; NL R4 CS 1217 no.235; NL R4 CS 1218 no.201). It is arguable that counterfeit money was a consequence of the expansion of a modern economic system in the Northern Principalities. Though “Ngoen Dang” manufacture was a dangerous and illegal traffic that could result in heavy punishment, it was nevertheless considered it worth breaking the law by some people. Definitely, the emergence of such illegal incidents was related with the expansion of provincial markets, in terms of size, commodities and trade-transaction, in almost every cities. In addition, the relationship between commoners became even more complicated, especially in terms of borrowing money or selling family members such as wife or child to be slave in order to get money to invest in trade (NL R3 CS 1206 no.166). Litigation related to debt evasion gradually increased during the reign of Rama III (see, for examples, NL R3 CS 1206 no.174; NL R3 CS 1207 no.259; NL R3 CS 1210 no.196).

During the reign of King Rama V, the Northern Principalities obviously transformed in status to become a trade center. Memoirs and journals of foreigners and Siamese elites visibly expressed the impression of big city markets. James Fitzroy McCarthy (Phra Vipakphuvadol) noted that Uttaradit was a trade center of products from Laos and Yunnan that would be sold in Bangkok and other cities (McCarthy 1900, 73). Prince Damrong Rajanubhab had also recorded the trade and transportation of commoners and traders in Uttaradit that “Few boats found in the city in this season because many commoners had loaded products to sell at Paknampho [Nakhonsawan], and would be back again in December or January when traders

from Phrae, Nan and Luangprabang in Laos travelled down to trade in Uttaradit” (NA R5 M 2. 14/2; NA R5 M 48/2).

Even though the expansion of trade, transportation, and economic activities of commoners had generated some conflicts, the latter did not enormously disturb the political structure of the Northern Principalities during this transitional period. The dramatic change occurred in its political system when the authorized tax agencies attempted to enforce their power during the reign of King Rama III, and on trade conducted by British subjects during the reign of Rama IV. Those two developments rapidly and strongly abolished the local administrative authority of the Sakdina system.

The Expansion of Tax Farm

The tax-farming system was largely portrayed as part of the adjustment of Siam towards the expansion of monetary economy system that came together with the failure of commoner enlistment system, because it could guarantee the monetary income sending back to Bangkok. The tax-farming system flourished during the reigns of Rama III and IV as evidenced by the fact that the types of taxed products notably increased and embedded themselves in commoners' lives. In addition, majority of tax-farm holders were Chinese that were licensed to collect taxes from the Bangkok court and were appointed as quasi-authorities with the title of Khun or Muen.² Thereby, they could make decision concerning litigation related to taxation and most of their decisions were supported by elites and high-level nobles (Phannee 2002, 13). Consequently, their political power and status was higher than commoners.

The tax-farming system was a financial mechanism used to extract monetary benefit for the Bangkok court and the great nobles that directly interfered with the tribute collection that was mainly under the control of local governors. The expansion of tax-farming system in big cities had frequently brought conflicts between the authorized tax-agencies and local authorities and commoners, especially during the period when tax-agencies were just expanding to the Northern Principalities (NL R3 CS 1205 no.65; NL R3 CS 1208 no.118). In some cases, the conflict was rapidly escalating throughout the Northern Principalities such as a case in 1845 that the city-governors and local authorities of Kamphaengphet, Phichai, Lablae and Phitsanulok prohibited their commoners from paying tax of wheel-cart or “Arkorn Kweanlorsali” to tax-farmer. Later, the incidence spread out to other cities such as

² Khun, Muen, Phra, and Phraya were government's traditional official position that would be used until its abolition after the 1932 revolution.

Phichit, Sukhothai, Phichai, Phitsanulok and Sawankhalok. The governors and local authorities of these cities also prohibited their commoners from paying tax. More confusingly, the commoners who had already paid tax also would like to ask for their moneys back as well (NL R3 CS 1207 no.48).

In another dimension, conflicts increased and escalated among commoners, because the tax-farming system had deeply disturbed their livelihood and local production processes. For example, in 1860, 29 commoners of Tron who distilled liquor by using a certain iron stove declined to pay the tax on firewood, reasoning that their liquor was made to worship the forest spirits on a fixed schedule 2-3 times a year (NL R4 CS 1222 no.146). More than fifty commoners living in Ban Watsai, Nakhonsawan refused to pay tax on bananas in 1863 because they thought the tax collection was duplicated (NL R4 CS 1225 no.196). Meanwhile, around thirties commoners living in Ban Banglamung, Nakhonsawan, had a conflict with a tax-farmer who called upon them to pay tax on water in the lagoon around the Boraphet lake when they fished and planted lotus in pond as had in the past. The following statement helps illustrate the interaction between traditional livelihood and modern tax-administration as well as the negotiating skill of affected commoners.

“The authorized tax-agency would like to sell rights over the lagoon that the common folks used for planting lotus to another common folk for farming fishes. Commoners who sold lotus-seeds disagreed with the determination of authorized tax-agent. The commoners and the authorized tax-agent thus fought over the ownership of lagoon, since the authorized tax-agency claimed that the lagoon belonged to him, whereas commoners said it was the public domain. The authorized tax-agency assumed that commoners planted lotus in the lagoon because they did not want to pay tax to the Bangkok court. However, Siam did not collect tax from lotus cultivation. It was therefore not rightful to prohibit commoners from planting lotus because it was their livelihood. Commoners planting lotuses reserved the right to benefit from their cultivation. According to the annual level of lagoon water, commoners could benefit from selling lotus in September, October and November, meanwhile the duration between November and January when fish swam across fields and rivers to the lagoon until the end of March, the authorized tax-agency could look after the lagoon and took that opportunity to sell a right over fishes that found in the lagoon and sent tax to the court. Commoners could return to plant lotus again in April or May and sell their lotus again at the end of the year...Phraya Nakhonsawan had abide to inform the common folks accordingly” (NL R4 CS 1218 no.60).

Another fine example of conflict between commoners and tax-farmers could be found in Sawankhalok. In 1861, a tax-farmer had registered to collect the tax on stoves and learned that Amdang Khamdee used an iron stove to grill fish, so he called for Amdang Khamdee to pay the tax. However, Amdang Khamdee doubted that the tax-farmer would send her money to the court, she henceforth would “ask him to repay her in the next life” (NL R4 CS 1223 no.237). Phraya Sawankhalok had ordered local officials to investigate the case and found that Amdang Khamdee just used a stove to prepare food in her daily life. Finally, the consideration of the Bangkok judicial court turned out in 1861 that “Phraya Sawankhalok and local authorities already knew that stoves normally used in the household were tax-exempt; in order to prevent a similar conflict between commoners and the tax-farmers in the future, Phraya Sawankhalok must inform commoners” (NL R4 CS 1223 no.260).

Evidently, conflicts in the Northern Principalities such as those mentioned above had gradually become more serious until they were beyond the capacities of local officials to cope with. A number of commoners eventually took the risk of pledging their petition to the court in Bangkok during the reign of Rama V.

Distribution of the British Subjects

“British subjects” was another significant factor stimulating the complexity of trade and conflicts among commoners and traders in the Northern Principalities. In the past, due to her security reason, Siam was quite concerned with people of various ethnic origins that taking residence in the kingdom, i.e. the Laotian captives from Viang Chan after Prince Anuwongs’ rebellion, or the Mon migrants that had fled the Burmese authorities and seek the protection from Ayudhaya. They would, thus, be under a surveillance and were designated a specific location for their communities. Generally, foreign merchants that embarked at the Bangkok port could stay and trade only within Bangkok and certain limited area. Merchants and missionaries that were desirous to travel inland, for example to the cities of the north, they would need permission, and by case. This convention had clearly remained in practice during the King Mongkut’s reign when he had issued a royal ordinance in 1856 that foreigners, i.e. American, British, French, or their oriental subjects, could take residence only within an area of one-day trip from Bangkok; explaining that they would be robbed or bullied by the Siamese, hence needed protection. For those merchants who took inland trade-routes from abroad, they could only trade within border cities, such as Tak or Uttaradit, and could not trespass into the inner cities. The local authorities in the lower north, thereby, would not familiar in dealing with the foreign nationals. However, the situation was changed when the British Empire took over the lower

Burma during the reign of Rama III. The above-mentioned restriction was disrupted and caused not a least distress both for the local authorities and the Bangkok court. The archival documents during the Rama III recorded that the British colonial governor had sent the Karen subjects to traverse across the border at Tak, in order to submit their official letter to the Bangkok court. An archival dispatch in 1845 reported that a group of Karen was coming to Kamphaengphet before requesting to the governor of Kamphaengphet for his permission in their travelling to Bangkok, reasoning that they were assigned by the British governor in Mottalerm, in lower Burma, to submit the official document to the court of Siam. Waiting for three months was unbearable long and they were afraid of penalty from the British governor if they were not able to accomplish their mission as assigned (NL R3 CS 1207 no.135). Phraya Kamphaengphet, thus, ordered Khun Pinijarsorn, the clerk, to issue a document that requiring the Karen group to wait for a notification from Bangkok until the end of October. The Karen, however, decided to continue their travelling to Bangkok via Nakhonsawan after had been waiting for two months in Kamphaengphet. The prosecutor (Yokkrabat) of Nakhonsawan had opined that “the Tong-Su Karen had never taken any document to Bangkok by passing through Nakhonsawan and they must not be allowed to do so” (NL R3 CS 1207 no.101). Then, the governor and local authorities of Nakhonsawan forced the Karen group to take another route to Bangkok, i.e. by passing through mountainous Uthaithani, and kept warning the common folks living along that route not to sell foods and livestock to these Karen, because the city-governors and local authorities in the Northern Principalities had shared a similar mind that “The request of Karen in going to Bangkok on behalf of the British governor by passing though Nakhonsawan had never happened before.”

However, reports during the reign of King Rama IV demonstrated the differential treatment between the Burmese, including the Karen, and other foreign nationals. The Bowring Treaty required that Siam had to allow and facilitate British subjects to trade in all ports and cities surrounding Bangkok. Hence, a number of the British subjects requested permission to explore the Northern Principalities for various reasons, including evangelism, mineral surveying, and especially trade-related transportation (such as NL R4 CS 1217 no.144; NL R4 CS 1225 no.161; NL R4 CS 1227 no.161; NL R4 CS 1228 no.334). Usually, Siam warned the city-governors and local authorities to keep guard and protect their cities not to be harmed by any crime.

During the reign of King Rama V, the Karen traders regularly travelled throughout the Northern Principalities as noted in the record of McCarthy that Burmese traders usually would take the route via Rahang or Tak to trade in Siam, meanwhile

they would travel through Sukhothai, Phitsanulok or Phichai, along Nan River and Mekong River to Luang Prabang, Chiangkan and Nongkhai. Burmese traders and commoners alike travelled almost all over the Mekong River basin. The products they sold were copper buttons, knives, matches, needles and many other things. These traders would then buy elephants, silk, and fragrant frankincense and bring them back to Burma (McCarthy 1900, 119). In 1892, Siam had conducted a survey on the background of traders and commoners residing in Phichai and concluded that:

“The Chaozhou and Hinan Chinese living in the surveying area were boat-merchants who loaded products such as textile, thread, brass instruments and iron utensils from Bangkok for selling to the Yunnan Chinese and Laotian commoners in Lampang, Lampoon, Phrae, Nan and Luang Prabang. Some traders purchased the flagrant frankincense, shellac, rhino horn, ivory, leathers and tobacco back to sell in Bangkok around 1 to 3 trips a year... At Phichai, Chin Laiteng who was a British subject and Chin Yek were appointed to be leaders of these merchants. In Uttaradit, Chin Hakang and Chin Yeab were leaders of the Chaozhou and Hainan Chinese traders, respectively” (NA R5 M 51/5).

In addition, traders from Luang Prabang, Nongkhai, Champasak, Nan, Phrae, Lampang, and Chiangmai moved to reside with local commoners in Lablae, Dan Nangpru, Tron, Fhang, Namphat, and Chiangkan. These foreign traders made a living ranging from agricultures such as paddy field, fruit orchard, tobacco and sugar cane to log-cutting and work on the iron and gold mine. Moreover, around forty Karenese commoners who were the British subjects had moved to reside at Namphat, including three Chinese who were the French subjects and another Dutch subject. Mostly, they dwelled in boat-houses in Phichai and Uttaradit and made a living from teak-log manufacture and paddy field, meanwhile some would purchase cows and herding back to sell in Molmein in Burma (NA R5 M 51/5). Increasingly, the ordinary political administration was not suitable for effectively coping with problems related with many foreigners living in Siam and Northern Principalities.

The Variety of Power Interactions in the Trade Area

The growth of trade and economic development inevitably brought increased conflicts. Evidence confirms that “litigation” was unavoidable in the world of trade and investment. For example, in 1848 Nai Reung filed suit against a group of persons, i.e. Chin Pang, Chin Kon, Nai Tong, Nai Toob, Nai Jam and Nai Aom, for many cases at the same time (NL R4 CS 1210 no.192). In 1852, Luang Pratet filed suit against

around three dozen of his debtors living in Sukhothai and Sawankhalok respectively (NL R4 CS 1214 no.134). Similarly, during 1888-1891, Amdang Somboon filed her debtors living in Nakhonsawan and Phichai (NA R5 RMS vol.27 CS 1250 no.791; NA R5 RMS vol.51 CS 1253 no.44).

When the Northern Principalities became a trade center consisting of commoners and traders from various origins, different ethnics, statuses and powers, conflict was inevitable. This diverse context encouraged “common traders” to build a “power relationship” with different groups of people that, in turn, further escalated a number of “litigations”. Incriminations between local and foreign commoners were normally found, as many legal cases in the Thai National Archive demonstrate. The enlarged economic network of commoners and traders required the expansion of relationship and interaction between people. For instance, during 1878-1879, Chin Kak filed a lawsuit against Ai Aum and Ai Phram (servants of Phra Pramune in Phitsanulok), Ai Pia (servant of Khun Sribawornnnyomprai in Pichai), Ai Pheung (a commoner living in Ban Wangkham, Bhrompiram) and Ai Kha (who had escaped from Tak prison and took a refuge with Nai Bua – the servant of Phra Phonlamuang, Phitsanulok) (NA R5 RMS vol.3 CS 1240-1241 no.89). Another confusing case was of Nai Joi who asked Nai Noot, his elder brother, to enquire whether Nai Jui had stolen his buffaloes. Nai Jui declared that he bought the buffaloes from Nai Rong living in Ban Lanhoi, Sukhothai. Nai Jui and Nai Rong, then, consulted with Nai Muang, who was the village headman, to endorse their rights over the buffaloes in dispute. In 1880, Phraya Kamphaengphet requested that Phraya Sukhothai had to extradite Nai Muang and Nai Rong to Kamphaengphet. Nevertheless, Phraya Sukhothai responded that the evidence was not enough to extradite both accused commoners as requested (NA R5 RMS vol.4 CS 1242 no.16). Apparently, both cases were related to many people living in different areas and cities, and the traditional legal procedure was no longer sufficient for making decision over the cases.

Local governors were more careful to take into account cases relating to people under foreign jurisdiction and usually transferred the cases to the consular court in Bangkok. For example, the case of Chin Ngunlee who was the owner of liquor manufacture in Nakhonsawan and was involved with stolen livestocks purchasing from robbers in Ban Hatsoong, Nakhonsawan. The governor of Nakhonsawan finally decided to submit the referral letter to the Bangkok judicial court to consider the case of Chin Ngunlee, because he was a Portuguese subject (NA R5 M 2.12 Korkai/2).

Interestingly, some cases had shown that the economic activities of western subjects were heavily related to the livelihood of local commoners. A good example was a request of the French consulate to make consideration on the case of Chin

Tan Seng Yu who assigned Chin Hong to loading products in boats to sell in Nak-honsawan. During 1877-1880, Chin Hong deposited money to buy rice from local farmers namely Amdang Nu, Amdang Phu, and Amdang Jan who were living in Chainat. However, none of them delivered rice to Chin Hong as committed (NA R5 RMS vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.49). Likewise, Chin Taehorkew, the Dutch subject, filed a group of local traders, i.e. Amdang Bang (wife of Chin Mak), Amdang Sub (wife of Khun Pantakij), Amdang Klai (wife of Khun Bamreur), Chin Kimchei, Chin Jeng, Amdang Tet, Chin Naktim, Amdang Chim, Chin Yongchai, Amdang Eung, Chin Kui, Chin Kengyee, and Amdang Puang, that these people did not pay for ordered liquor (NA R5 RMS vol.2 CS 1239-1242 no.49).

The evidence mentioned above strongly suggests that the expansion of trade and transportation could enlarge the network of commoners who had built the relationship with people under different statuses. It was highly possible that local commoners such as farmers or petty traders would create conflict with the ones working for local governor (i.e. formal servants and robbers who informally affiliated with local authorities) and with people being under the foreign jurisdiction, including France, Holland, or Britain. Or at least, they would have heard of conflicts between local common folks and those people under the foreign jurisdiction. Local commoners would then learn about the legal procedure and litigation from either their own direct experience or the experience of other local commoners usually happened in everyday life, until they would realize that there were other kinds of “power” that was beyond the power of local governor, including power of central authorities in Bangkok or power of foreign nations. Local commoners were likewise aware that the importance of local governors had gradually reduced. Remarkably, local authorities did not have sufficient power to effectively deescalate conflicts or problems between people usually occurring in the economic world. I would argue that such conditions became an important factor in stimulating commoners and traders to call for the expansion of the Bangkok court’s power in order to systematize and standardize economic and political activities. Social power coming from commoners and traders was, thereby, a significant foundation in establishing the modern state of Siam.

Conclusion

The expansion of a monetary economy offered the opportunity for people hoping to improve their life’s quality and economic status. In the Northern Principalities, it attracted a large number of people, including the Siamese, the Chinese, and the Karen, many of whom were British subjects, to build up a complex relationship focusing on economic profit. Conflicts generated by this new economic system could range from

a small-scale with few peoples involved to a big-scale relating to a large number of people from different origins and statuses. In some cases, these conflicts would be related to inter-state relationship, such as the conflict between the tax-farmer, local authorities, people under the foreign jurisdiction, and local commoners. The problem-solving mechanism at local level used by local governors that based on the Sakdina system was no longer effective and sufficient. Therefore, the standardized and modern legal system and procedure was increasingly needed in response to modern economic system and livelihood of the commoners at all levels. The Bangkok court, thus, expanded its power to sanction local principalities with a support of local commoners and traders, at least those who were living in the Northern Principalities, who expected more “standardized” mechanism than the existing one. A large portion of archival evidences had illustrated a proactive collaboration between commoners, traders, and officials in the new Thesaphiban bureaucratic system initiated in 1892. An excellent illustration of this explanation would be a collaboration of local officials and merchants, the Siamese and the Chinese alike, in Phichit, Phitsanulok, Phichai, Sawankhalok and Sukhothai that invested about 6,000 Baht to establish the club called “Phichit Samorsorn.” The club was officially opened on 16 November 1906, exactly in the same day with the enthronement of King Rama V. In short, this article would argue that the establishment of Siam’s modern state was not a bottom-down policy led by far-sighted Siamese elites as admonished for time either in textbooks or popular imaginations, but its emergence was based on economic and social changes that taking shape throughout Siam and becoming a significant factor in stimulating commoners and traders alike to calling for a more effective and standardized political and legal system. Without this social power, the establishment of modern state and absolute monarchy in Siam would not have happened smoothly, and successfully.

References

ACS = 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 CS 1191 no.1 The appointment of the tax farmers, CS 1191.

NL R3 CS 1196 no.52 The income statement and the Chinese poll tax, CS 1196.

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

NL R3 CS 1200 no.86 Letter to Phraya Nakhonsawan issued by Chao Phraya Chakri, summoning to catch the ship plunders to the arraignment uncompromisingly.

NL R3 CS 1202 no.147 Draft letter of Phraya Prasert Songkham, Muang Vichien prefect inform of forwarding a lawsuit of Nai Mi and Nai Phon in accusation against Phraya Phetchabun.

NL R3 CS 1204 no.18 Draft letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Nakhon Sawan, on appointing Chin Yok as Khun Nikhom Prathet, Chinese Sheriff and draft commitment of Chin Yok.

NL R3 CS 1204 no.78/1 Draft letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Phitsanulok, Phraya Phichit, Phraya Phichai, Phraya Sawankhalok, Phraya Sukhothai, appointing Aueng, Sab, Aem as the shared tax collectors of the markets in 5 Northern Principalities.

NL R3 CS 1205 no.65 (1) Letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Kamphaengphet, appointing Chin Noi as Muen Thep Akorn Somphatsorn of Mueang Kamphaengphet.

NL R3 CS 1206 no.155 Draft letter of Phraya Maha Aummat to Phra Chaiyaboon, Munag Phitsanulok Prefect, concerning the complaint of Nai Thad against Chin Eang and Miss Yam that sell themselves to Nai That but ran away, summoning Phra Chiyaboon to send Chin Eang and Amdaeng Yam to Nai That, the master.

NL R3 CS 1206 no.166/1 Draft letter of Phraya Maha Aummat to Phraya Nakhonsawan, concerning Chin Huat filed a lawsuit to the jury court about many of his debtors lingering in Nakornsawan, the king summoned to bring the case to trial in Bangkok.

NL R3 CS 1206 no.174 Draft letter of Phraya Maha Aummat to Phraya Phitsanulok, concerning Chin Kert filed a lawsuit to the jury court in the case of Ee Puk, Chin Kert's slave, requiring Phraya Phitsanulok's admonition.

NL R3 CS 1207 no.48 Letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Muang Nakhonsawan, appointing Chin Moon as Khun Nikhomprathat.

NL R3 CS 1208 no.118/2 Letter of Phraya Maha Aummat to Phraya Pichai, concerning Chin Ko's accusation against Phra Lablae and Luang Na, Muang Phitsanulok, and sending the suitor and the defendant to trial by Phraya Pichai.

NL R3 CS 1210 no.192/2 Phichit, Phraya Maha Aummat to Luang Phalat, a Phichit city-councilor, concerning the accusation of Nai Rot, Nai Oon, and Miss Ket against the Phichit councilors, requiring that the accused shall be arrested to be trialed in Bangkok.

NL R3 CS 1210 no.196 Dispatch of Phra Nakon Sawan, the governor, sending the accusation of Luang Sri Rajkosa against Phraya Phitsanulok in 8 cases.

NL R3 CS 1212 no.44 Letter to Phitsanulok governor, summoning to deliver the people resisted to pay the cart tax to Bangkok.

NL R3 CS 1214 no.134 Letter to Phra Chongronnarit, in charge of Maung Phitsanulok, summoning the commissioners to arrest the suspect of Chao Khun Tonchuak's embezzlement.

NL R4 CS 1215 no.3 The military concerns of the Chieng Tung's battle.

NL R4 CS 1215 no.47 Letter to Muang Uthaithani, Muang Tak, summoning to appoint the officer to capture the 12 run-away Mon families.

NL R4 CS 1215 no.63 Draft letter to the City governor and councilors, in summoning to trial the debtors of Nai Mi, the escort.

NL R4 CS 1216 no.14 Draft letter to Phraya Uthaithani, regarding the dispatch which Khun Chaithepkiri had to deliver to Bangkok on appointing of Khun Maeunkongdan Atama, assigned for espionage service in Muang Maotamlerm.

NL R4 CS 1216 no.47 Letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Tak, Phra Sakdaraungrit, and Phra Wijitraksha, the Tak councilors, on appointing of Phra Phonsongkhram, the outpost chief, as Phra Syamsimanurak Chang Wang in order to control over Phra, Laung, Khun,

Muen, and the outpost people in all 4 outpost stations.

NL R4 CS 1216 no.81 Letter on Chin Nguan's inquired of the trade permit in Muang Tak.

NL R4 CS 1217 no.144 Passports and the 2 translated copies of the passports of Muang Moranaeng which Angoyebeng, the Regent of Maotamlerm, issued to 24 Tongsu traders.

NL R4 CS 1217 no.235 Letter to Phraya Uthaithani, the city councilor, requiring the arrest and the trial of monks and folk who were collaborated in making the forgery coins.

NL R4 CS 1218 no.201 (1) Letter to Phitsanulok governor, on the case of money forgery by Ai Acharn Phoo, the Phrai chieftain of Prince Itsaraphong.

NL R4 CS 1218 no.60 Draft letter to Phraya Nakhonsawan, permitting the people cultivate the lotus products before authorizing the tax farmer in charge between 1st day of the waxing moon in the 2nd lunar month to the end of the 4th lunar month.

NL R4 CS 1219 no.29 Letter to Phraya Kamphaengphet, Phraya Nakhonsawan on appointing Laung Thammathikan as Phra Banphotphumthikan, the governor of Muang Banphotphisai.

NL R4 CS 1221 no.211 Draft letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Phraya Uthai of Muang Uthaithani, acknowledging the sappan wood tax of Laung Rittikamheang.

NL R4 CS 1222 no.146 Letter to Phraya Phichai on the firewood tax between the tax farmer and Muang Tron prai laung, the iron tax of Prasaeang mine.

NL R4 CS 1223 no.237 Draft letter of Chao Phraya Chakri to Praya Sawankhalok, the governor of Muang Sawankhalok, summoning to issue the prohibition of levy the household stove tax by the tax farmer.

NL R4 CS 1223 no.260 Letter to Muang Sawankhalok, summoning Phraya Sawankhaolok to put the tax farmer who levied the household stove tax on trial.

NL R4 CS 1223 no.291 Pra Wichitraksha, the deputy chief and the city-councilors, inform the transferring of Phra Inkhiri's tax money to purchase 300 tubes of Lacquer varnish.

NL R4 CS 1224 no.142 Letter to Muang Manorom and Muang Nakhonsawan, on assigning the officials to conduct a cartographical survey from Manorom to Nakhonsawan.

NL R4 CS 1225 no.196 Account of Muen Phakdi, the tax collector of Muang Nakhonsawan, accusing the people who refused to pay the banana tax.

NL R4 CS 1227 no.161 Draft letter to Phraya Phitsanulok, Phraya Sukhothai, Phraya Sawankhalok, Phraya Phichai, and Phraya Phichit concerning Mr Ger Thip's request for a permission to establish a cotton mill in Tha Lo village, Muang Phichit.

NL R4 CS 1227 no.24 Draft of the royal instruction for Phra Sayamsimanurak.

NL R4 CS 1227 no.4 Draft letter to Muang Uthaithani, appointing Chin Noi in the position of Luang Phinitphasa Changwang, the Chinese captain of Muang Uthaithani.

NL R4 CS 1228 no.334 Draft letter to Phraya Uthaithani and the deputy chief of Uthaithani, 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 Kamphaengphet's dispatches, March RS103 – 2 May RS110.

NA R5 M 48/2 Report of Prince Damrong Rajanupap, on his Nakhonsawan region's inspection.

NA R5 M 51/9 Report of the Thesaphiban governor, on the administrative system in Phitsanulok Region.

NA R5 RMS vol. 2 CS 1239-1242 no.9 Muang Phichit, requesting to arraign the case of Chin Tae Ho Que, the Dutch subject, who was deceived of his liquor payment.

NA R5 RMS vol. 3 CS 1240-1241 no.89 Muang Phichai's verdict on Chin Kuk's robbery case.

NA R5 RMS vol. 4 CS 1242 no.16 Muang Kamphaengphet's verdict on the case of buffalo robbery that Nai Noot accusing against Nai Jun, the defender.

NA R5 RMS vol. 27 CS 1250 no.791 Muang Phichai, order to capture Laung Phakdibhubet, the assistance and the debtors of Somboon and Amdaeng Puk.

NA R5 RMS vol. 51 CS 1253 no.44 Muang Sawankhalok, if Amdaeng Somboon would like to file her debtors, do accept the case, but if considering that the register of the case had any objections, the case should then referred to consult the jury in Bangkok; the case of Amdaeng Somboon pledged her appeal.

NA R5 M 51/5 Official proclamations of Muang Phichai, 17-22 October RS111.

NA R5 M 2.14/2 Report of Prince Damrong Rajanupap, on the inspection of Monthon Krung Kao, Phitsanulok, and Nakhonsawan Regions, and his travelogue, 30 September-15 August RS119.

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