8 Siamese state expansion in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods

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Introduction

This study examines how the polity of Siam was able to re-establish itself and expand its control over the areas that extended to the Lao Kingdoms in the north and northeast and to the Malay Peninsula in the south within the several decades after the destruction of Ayutthaya by Burmese forces. Existing studies have pointed out that thriving maritime trade, especially with China, was of crucial importance to the recovery of Siamese power. The early Bangkok period saw a frequent dispatch of tributary missions to China with a commercial motivation of unprecedented strength. Along with the dispatch of official tributary missions, private junk trade between the two countries also flourished. By fully exploiting the benefits from such trade, Siam quickly recovered from the devastation caused by the Burmese invasion and became one of the major powers in the region by the early nineteenth century.[1]

Besides those studies that emphasise the significance of maritime commercial activities, there is another vein of research that stresses the importance of labour power control, particularly corvée service to the king imposed on all able-bodied men, for the (re-)establishment of Siam as a strong kingdom.[2] It is argued that in the beginning of a new dynasty, the absolute kingship based on a firm control over labour power in the form of corvée was realised; yet such control was to be eroded by the flourishing commercial economy, through its encouragement of corvée evasion as commoners fled or became *phrai som* ("private" freemen serving officials) or *that* (a person under debt bondage) on the one hand, and the employment of Chinese wage labourers on the other. This resulted in the final abolition of corvée by the Chakri reformers in the early twentieth century. However, re-examination of the historiography regarding the Siamese corvée indicates that such an understanding may possibly be a past conveniently constructed by Prince Damrong in the early twentieth century for legitimising political reforms such as the introduction of universal military conscription that he and his contemporaries wished to promote so as to establish Siam as a modern centralised kingdom.[3]

In fact, the actual picture of the Siamese economy and administrative system in the late eighteenth – and early nineteenth-centuries seems tantalisingly obscure. We are still not sure, for example, how the kings in the early Bangkok period secured the supply of commodities to meet the demands from overseas markets. While an extensive collection of *suai*[4] tax from provincial areas combined with the royal monopoly of overseas trade is the most common explanation for the ample supply of export commodities and the lucrative maritime trade, it is still not clear how, after the fall of Ayutthaya, the kings in Thonburi and during the early Bangkok period could build the administrative institutions for *suai* collection and maintain the royal monopoly of trade.

By looking into various records, particularly extant Thai administrative documents, this chapter will examine the process of how the Siamese state re-established itself and expanded its control over manpower and commodities for trade in the Thonburi and Bangkok dynasties. Contrary to the existing understanding that emphasises the importance of manpower control as the basis of royal power, it is revealed that a steady increase in the number of commoners who paid corvée to the king started only from the 1830s; similarly, *suai* tax in kind imposed on and collected from provincial areas also expanded both territorially and in amount only from the 1820s.

Instead of the direct extraction of manpower and other resources in the form of corvée and *suai*, extensive use of money and purchase to obtain resources necessary for the monarchy was obvious. In other words, rather than stressing the disintegrating effects of commercial economy on the state's controlling power, this chapter argues that market exchanges preceded and even encouraged the expansion of forced extraction by the state such as corvée labour in provinces in the later period. Among the various factors that contributed to the expansion of the Siamese state's controlling power into provinces at the beginning of the new kingdom, acquisition of weapons and the role of non-Thai populations seem of particular importance. Through these proposals, I hope to shed light on aspects of premodern Siamese state expansion which have been overlooked by existing studies that are more focused on the Buddhist/cosmological ideology and the charismatic power of the king to secure control of manpower resources.

Processes of state expansion: corvée or suai?

When Ayutthaya was destroyed by Burmese invasions, great chaos prevailed. The palace and temples were turned into ruins and ashes. Many people who had survived the attacks were taken away by the Burmese and those who remained resorted to plundering their own people.[5] It was in this chaotic situation that the Siamese elite allegedly learned the vital lesson of the need for "rigid control of the distribution of manpower in

the formal organization" from their bitter experience of the fall of Ayutthaya.[6] They thus came to introduce more strict and institutionalised measures of labour power control in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods. King Taksin, for instance, introduced tattooing to register the subjects in the mid-1770s, which is considered to have been a direct response to the acute need for controlling labour power.[7] The early Bangkok kings, on the other hand, are claimed to have responded to the problem in a more lenient and practical manner: while granting phased reductions in the period of corvée obligation from six to three months annually, they repeatedly ordered a thorough registration of the population, including both *phrai luang* (royal commoners) and *phrai som* ("private" commoners under the members of royal families and officials), with the administrative units under the supervision of *munnai* (officials in charge).[8]

However, a closer look at the extant administrative records will show that while such endeavours to establish orderly manpower control in the beginning of these dynasties were expressed as royal proclamations, evidence of their actual implementation is very scarce in Thai archival documents. We have very few records of *suai* collection in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods before the 1820s, and almost no records on corvée before the 1820s are available at the National Library of Thailand. While one cannot discount that the absence of records as such may have resulted from loss and damage due to poor preservation conditions, the fact that we can find comparatively thorough records of other processes, such as the tributary relations with China, suggests that the scarcity of corvée and *suai* records before the 1820s may not simply be the result of loss.[9]

In the early Bangkok period, corvée performed by *phrai luang* (royal commoners) in a certain month was recorded in a document called *banchi chamnuan lek phrai luang khao duean* (literally translated, a list of *phrai luang* who "enter the month"). This document is a thick *samut thai dam* style manuscript presumably compiled by the central officials in charge of the administration of corvée. The earliest examples date back in the 1830s; also we find more regular record-keeping practices from the 1840s to the late 1860s.

According to the extant records, there were approximately 2000 to 3000 *phrai luang* performing corvée labour service each month in the 1840s. In fact, this number was on the rise in the mid-nineteenth century. While the number was estimated to be slightly more than 2000 per month at the beginning of the 1840s, it exceeded 3000 at the end of the same decade and then remained at around 3000 to 4000 in the 1850s and 1860s.[10] Considering that there were only 50 to a little more than a few hundred *phrai luang* per month who paid corvée during the last few years of the 1830s,[11] the growth in the beginning of the 1840s should be regarded as rapid.

We also find that those who were to perform a monthly corvée labour were not those who were registered with major *krom* (departments) such

as Mahatthai, which took charge of the northern part of the kingdom, but those registered with a limited number of minor administrative units, primarily related to the court's activities. Read in this context, a royal order addressed to *phrai luang* registered in all administrative units was in fact addressing only the small part of the population registered with those specific minor units, not the population residing all over the kingdom.

The types of corvée service performed by those *phrai luang* (royal commoners) included military expeditions and patrols; guarding palace gates and forts; guarding different types of royal boats, made of teak and other kinds of wood; guarding buildings such as garages for boats and carriages, and shrines; construction of various buildings such as temples, palaces for the royal families and halls in the royal palace, as well as roads, water pipes and rice granaries; shipbuilding; working in the royal rice fields; and fulfilling other duties specifically assigned to the departments to which they belonged, including *ken hat saeng puen* (training for arms), *nalika* (keeping watches and clocks?) and *fi phai* (oarsmen).

Regarding the geographical distribution of the *phrai luang* who performed the monthly corvée services, a concentration within the central plain along the Chaophraya River can generally be observed. For instance, it was recorded that in the twelfth lunar month of 1844, of the 317 *phrai luang* from provinces (*huamueang*) that performed corvée, 95 were from Suphanburi, followed by 80 from Saraburi, 45 from Nakhon Chaisi, 42 from Aranyik, 21 from Lopburi, 14 from Phromburi, seven from Inburi and Ang Thong, and six from Singburi.[12] Similarly, the members of the *phrai luang krom raksa phra-ong sai* (king's bodyguard department on the left) appear to have been in Bangkok and the central region, including the villages with familiar names such as Samsen, Khlong Toei, Bang Rak, Bang Khen, Prathumthani, Wat Mahathat and Krungthep all of which were supposed to be in present-day Bangkok, as well as such places as Nakhon Chaisi, Nonthaburi, Ayutthaya, Mae Klong and Phromburi.[13] Another document, a list of the tattooed registrants of an unknown department (*krom*) compiled in the mid-1840s, also lists about 50 *phrai luang* tattooed in 1846 and residing in provinces in the central plain, that is, in Chachoengsao, Nonthaburi, Ayutthaya, Nakhon Chaisi, Nakhon Khueankhan, Lopburi, Bang Chang, Ang Thong, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram and perhaps Bangkok.[14]

While steady expansion of state control over manpower resources in the form of corvée only started in the 1830s and was geographically confined within Bangkok and the central regions comparatively close to the capital, rapid expansion of *suai* tax imposition began a little earlier and extended widely into more remote provincial areas.[15]

Extant Thai records suggest that *suai* imposition in the early Bangkok period started in the mid-1820s with several products, such as gold, beeswax, eagle wood, lacquer, saltpetre, iron and teak.[16] Contrary to our previous understanding that *suai* was for procuring goods for export, it

seems that many of them, such as saltpetre, lacquer, gold and at least some teak, were intended for domestic use rather than overseas markets. Geographically, Champasak and Attapu along the Mekong River supplied gold, while Nakhon Ratchasima sent various products including gold, lacquer and saltpetre. Phitsanulok, Nampat and Kamphaeng Phet in the upper central areas along the Chaophraya River, on the other hand, sent teak. In addition, Nakhon Sawan and Nakhon Nayok also sent beeswax, as did other places in the upper central region such as Phichai, Phichit, Sawankhalok, Sukhothai, Phitsanulok, Uthai Thani, Suphanburi and Kamphaeng Phet. Lacquer was sent from Nakhon Ratchasima, Phichai and Phitsanulok. Interestingly, the list also includes Phetchabun, from which the medical plant called *khon dok* (*Asclepias gigantia*) and rattan mat, imposed on the Lawa people who settled there, as well as beeswax and saltpetre, were sent as *suai* tax to Bangkok.

More extensive *suai* imposition began in the late 1820s and early 1830s, when the Bangkok authorities established a stronger control over the Mekong Basin and Khorat Plateau after suppressing the Chao Anou "rebellion" of Vientiane Kingdom. *Suai* in silver was first established in 1827 for 11 *mueang* (provinces), namely Champasak, Khamthongnoi, Khongchiam, Khamthongyai, Khong, Saphat, Samia, Sithandon, Salawan, Chiang Taeng and Saenpang, at the rates of seven or four *baht* per person.[17] In 1831, there were 8,519 registered population (*lek*) liable for payment of 34,076 *baht* annually in 12 provinces, with Ubon newly included in the list. By the late 1860s, the total amount of imposition had increased to 61,854 *baht*.[18]

Suai tax on bastard cardamom, or *phon reo* in Thai, which was one of the export items in junk trade with China, was first established at the beginning of the 1830s. The record for 1835 indicates that more than 35 tons of bastard cardamom was demanded annually from 13 provinces in the Lao and Khmer areas in the Mekong Basin and Khorat Plateau, and another 11 tons from a few provinces in the upper Pasak basin including Lomsak, Dan Sai and Loei. In addition, many provinces in the central region, such as Saraburi, Prachinburi and Kamphaeng Phet, also sent *phon reo* as *suai*, presumably imposed on the Lao war captives resettled there.[19] By the beginning of the 1860s, the total imposition had more than tripled to almost 120 tons from more than 30 provinces in the region of Mekong basin and Korat Plateau; however, the imposition on the central regions remained almost the same, while a few provinces in Khmer regions such as Siemrat (Siem Reap) and Phrattabong (Battambang) were added to the list during the same period.[20]

Teak wood was also an important *suai* item taxed on the upper Chaophraya Basin. Beginning with a little over 200 pieces imposed on 89 commoners (*phrai*) in the mid-1820s, the amount of its imposition increased by the beginning of the 1840s to 5000 pieces on over 1200 commoners,[21] and reached more than 5800 pieces in the late 1860s.[22]

"Purchasing" goods, labour and loyalty

As indicated above, manpower control in the form of regular corvée or monopoly of products for overseas trade collected as *suai* tax had not been established until the late 1820s or early 1830s. What then was the source of power that allowed the kings in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods to quickly create "a vast new Siamese empire encompassing Lan Na and much of Lan Sang, as well as Cambodia and large portions of the Malay Peninsula", and how, by the middle of the nineteenth century, did the empire "further expand and seem stronger than ever before"?[23]

While evidence to suggest the existence of regular corvée service and *suai* collection before the 1820s is scanty, evidence implying that the kings actually purchased labour, material resources and political support in exchange for providing cash or other benefits to their subjects can more easily be found. A French source, describing Taksin's initial advance along the east coast from Chanthaburi to Bangkok, notes: "Wherever he passed by, Taksin widely distributed money to everyone. As a result, his little troop was growing larger and larger from one day to another."[24] Similarly, during the famine that occurred soon after King Taksin rose to supremacy in 1769, he was depicted as follows:

> Under these unhappy conditions Phya Tak showed his generous spirit. The needy were destitute no longer. The public treasury was opened for the relief. In return for cash, foreigners supplied them with the products that the soil of the country had refused. The Usurper justified his claims by his benevolence.[25]

Thai chronicle records also noted King Taksin's generosity on several occasions. Having brought Chonburi under his control, Taksin distributed 160 *baht* among the local destitute.[26] Then, following the successful repulsion of the remaining Burmese force in 1767, over 10,000 devastated people, both officials and commoners, in the capital received a donation (*than*) from the newly-enthroned Taksin. In addition, one bucket of rice per person, which was supposed to be sufficient for 20 days, was distributed to his officials.[27] Two years later, in 1769, the campaign against Nakhon Sithammarat was followed by a generous distribution of cash and food to the local population. This time, one *baht* in cash, one bucket of rice and a set of robes per person were given to the Buddhist monks, and one *salung* (one-quarter *baht*) per person was distributed to the poor.[28] It seems that Taksin's expenditure on similar occasions sometimes amounted to a large sum of money. One of the most extreme cases was a reward for the meritorious works performed during the large-scale campaign against Phutthaimat and Cambodia: the king distributed as much as 800 *baht* per person to the ranked officials and 180 *baht* to the commoners.[29]

While gaining the loyalty of his subjects by distributing money and goods, King Taksin sometimes hired (*chang*) wage labourers to secure labour power when needed. To cite an example, according to the royal chronicle, soon after his enthronement King Taksin hired both military and civilian subjects and constructed over 200 abodes for temple monks.[30] It should be noted that the word *chang* is found in the Three Seals Law Code much more frequently than the word *khao duean ok duean* (to perform corvée), suggesting that hiring may have been more commonly practiced in the beginning of the Bangkok dynasty.[31]

Records of the amounts which King Taksin spent on various religious occasions give us details of how goods and labour were acquired on these occasions. For instance, a grand festivity to celebrate the arrival of the Emerald Buddha in 1780 was described as follows: Starting from a three-day and three-night cerebration at the Chao Sanuk pier in Saraburi, the following two months were filled with a series of rituals and events. In total, over 120,000 pieces of fireworks were set off, tens of theatrical performances were staged by day and by night, and more than 6600 people participated in the boat processions consisting of over 280 vessels. All the participants were again generously remunerated. Three hundred *baht* were paid to over 150 craftsmen skilled in fireworks; and 1800 *baht* were distributed among over 6600 people who took part in the processions. Theatrical and musical troops that staged a show were also rewarded with money. In the case of the Vietnamese *mahori* music band, sponsored by Phraya Ratchasetthi (Ong Chiang Sun), for example, a group consisting of 15 Vietnamese received 12 *baht* for their performances staged for two months, while the Chinese *mahori* music band with six Chinese, sponsored by Phraya Ratchasetthi, received 12 *baht*, presumably on a similar performance condition. In total, the whole festivity cost more than 30,000 *baht*.[32]

A similar tendency of extensive usage of cash payment in acquiring the necessities for the king seems to have continued in the early Bangkok period. There is a record to suggest, for example, that when King Rama I tried to obtain about 5000 *kwien* (ox carts) of rice to feed his army during the battle with the Burmese at the beginning of his reign in 1785–86, he could supply two-thirds by using *kha na* (rice field tax collected in kind) in Bangkok and the remaining one-third was collected by purchasing and borrowing from the subjects or as a "gift" from the officials.[33]

It is most likely that these expenditures were, at least partly, afforded by the benefit from the trade with China. J. G. Koenig, who visited Siam at the end of the 1770s, observed that Siam at that time "was amply provided with all sorts of articles from China", and that Taksin was making a great fortune out of "buying the best goods imported at a very low price and selling them again to the merchants of the town at 100 per cent interest".[34]

Instead of *suai*, moreover, farmed-out taxes such as *akon* and *phasi* appear to have been an important source of both cash revenue and

materials in kind that the monarchy needed for their own use and overseas trade. Tin, which was also an important export commodity produced in southern Siam, especially on the island of Phuket, was obtained by King Taksin and the early Chakri kings as *phasi* (a farmed-out tax): for every one *phara* (three piculs) of tin produced (or traded?) by the local people, the king claimed one *chang* (one-fiftieth picul) as *phasi*.[35]

One of the earliest records of *akon* revenues compiled in 1809–10 gives us an idea of how the royal revenues were generated in terms of amount, composition and geographical distribution.[36] There were six kinds of farmed-out taxes, of which the total amount of revenue was 290,123 *baht*. The largest revenue among the six came from the tax on distilling and sales of spirits (190,514 *baht*), followed by fishery tax (36,292 *baht*), market shop tax (25,028 *baht*), gambling den tax (20,416 *baht*), garden and orchard tax (17,213 *baht*) and lastly boat tax (660 *baht*). The spirit tax, for instance, was collected from 21 different areas, covering Sawankhalok, Sukhothai and Phisanulok to the north, Nakhon Ratchasima to the east, Kamphaengphet to the west, and Songkhla to the south.

Above all, the most important single source of revenue was the spirit tax collected in Bangkok and its surrounding areas: its revenue amounted to 80,000 *baht*, and was farmed out to a Chinese, who also had a right to collect a market shop tax in the same area for 14,216 *baht* per year. The revenues generated from the Bangkok areas, including Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan (Paknam), were most important, as they accounted for almost 40 per cent of the total amount in the list. Besides Bangkok, 30,400 *baht* of spirit tax was collected from various provinces in the central delta, such as Ayutthaya, Ang Thong, Phromburi, Singburi, Inburi and Lopburi. Chanthaburi also seems to have been important as 16,000 *baht* of spirit tax was collected from this province alone, which was farmed out to the governor, Phraya Chanthaburi.

Acquisition of arms

Of the goods obtained through the market, one important element for the expansion of the Siamese kingdom was arms and weapons. It is revealed that the Siamese monarchy paid keen attention to obtaining arms and ammunition, mainly through English country traders via local powers in the Malay Peninsula.

Actually, Siamese maritime trade activities after the fall of Ayutthaya seem to have involved two major channels, one extending eastward to China and the other extending westward to the Indian Ocean. The latter seems to have been as important as the former since it provided access to arms such as guns and cannons. After the loss of Tavoy, Mergui and Tenasserim to Burma, and prior to a direct contact with the Europeans at the

port of Bangkok, it is observed that the Siamese court tried hard to obtain arms via local powers in the Malay Peninsula.[37]

Taksin and his officials had a keen interest in acquiring arms and luxurious textiles in exchange for products such as tin, pepper and aromatic woods. Noting Taksin's strong interest in arms, a French observer commented that the best present to please Taksin was arms. Siamese royal chronicles also recorded each occasion in which a new acquisition of weapon was made. It claimed, for instance, that heaps of arms were obtained in the successful military campaigns against Burma,[38] and it recorded the amount peacefully purchased from the Malays and Europeans. It was noted, moreover, that some *khaek* (presumably Malay people) from Terengganu and Jakarta brought 2200 flintlock guns and presented them to Taksin in 1770.[39] This was followed by another donation of 1400 guns (*puen*) to Taksin by an unknown local power in 1776–77.[40]

Letters exchanged with the European merchants during the Thonburi period also suggest the existence of active arms transaction. A letter from the Phra Khlang, written in late 1776 and addressed to the Danish Governor of Tranquebar, documented a transaction of weaponry with Francis Light, known as "Kapitan Lek". According to the letter, Francis Light had purchased 1000 flintlock guns for King Taksin in Tranquebar. The same letter also suggested that Taksin proposed to make another purchase of 10,000 flintlock guns from Tranquebar and invited Tranquebar merchants to trade their guns with tin, ivory, aromatic wood (*nuea mai*) or any other commodities that they wished to obtain, either at Thalang (Phuket) or in the capital.[41] It is impossible to know whether or not this particular request was implemented; however, another letter addressed to "Kapitan Bangku", who came to Thalang to receive the tin paid for those guns, suggests that in 1777, 1826 muskets to be sent to Bangkok arrived at Thalang (900 from Francis Light and 926 from "Kapitan Bangku"), and an additional 490 were also received from "Kapitan Bangken" for local use in Thalang.[42]

Taksin's strong interest in the acquisition of arms is also expressed in the letter of appointment issued to the *chaomueang* (governor) of Nakhon Sithammarat in the same year. It ordered the governor to make a quick purchase of weapons, even if it meant borrowing money from someone rich in the locality without waiting for money from the capital, and advised him to be always well-equipped with arms.[43]

Tin produced in Thalang was the principle medium of exchange in the transaction of arms. Interestingly, it was around 1777 that Taksin (re-)introduced a tax (*phasi*) on tin at Thalang to secure the product to be exchanged for arms. According to the stipulation, which allegedly followed the Ayutthaya custom, the king would receive one *chang* for each *phara* of tin (presumably traded), and this rate was maintained at least into the Rama I period.[44]

Evidence from Taksin's campaign against Phutthaimat in 1771, for example, suggests how Taksin furnished his troops, who were at least

partly Chinese,[45] with weapons to be used in the battlefield. The officers and soldiers were equipped with 2700 guns, while 770 cannons were installed on over 260 war vessels.[46] We may also be tempted to speculate that the frequent purchase of weapon between 1776 and 1778 was by no means a coincidence. At this time the Siamese were waging large-scale military campaigns to subjugate the Lao Kingdoms, including Chiang Mai, Vientiane and Champasak, during these years.

In the early Bangkok period, it seems that the acquisition and control of arms and ammunition still remained crucial to the kings: the kingship was in the process of establishing its legitimacy, and the Burmese were still a great threat to Siam. In 1785, King Rama I issued a decree by which he placed the influx of weapons under strict surveillance.[47] Citing an incident in which a Chinese merchant who came to trade in Bangkok had not unloaded the arms and ammunition on his boat as ordered by the law when he entered Bangkok, the decree stipulated that all the Siamese commercial boats coming into Bangkok had to report and unload all arms and ammunition on board at the interpreters' office of the Kalahom department (in charge of military affairs and southern Siam). Further, it required that all outgoing ships reload the weapons they had unloaded on their arrival from the same Kalahom officer. This stipulation was also applied to foreign commercial ships, the stipulation requiring them to unload all weapons at the office of Krommatha (Department of Port) in Samut Prakan. Any violation of these rules was punishable under the laws of treason.

While thus checking the influx of arms into Bangkok, the monarchy continued its attempt to acquire arms through various channels. While the Burmese forces were still threatening Siam by staging occasional attacks, King Rama I requested 2000 pieces of bronze armour from China when he sent a tributary mission to China in 1786, citing the war against Burma as the reason that the armour was needed.[48] Although this request was declined by Emperor Qianlong, King Rama I was successful in obtaining arms from European merchants. Simmonds, examining the set of letters written in Thai addressed to Francis Light and other English country traders between 1773 and 1794, summarised that among the 19 requests for purchasing guns recorded in the letters, 17 mentioned a specified quantity, totalling 50 cannons and 8372 flintlock muskets.[49]

The last in this set of letters was dated 1794. However, the transaction of arms through this channel seems to have continued in the nineteenth century. An administrative record from the beginning of the Rama II period, for example, reveals details of the purchase of arms by the Governor of Nakhon Sithammarat in preparation for the expected fighting against Burma in 1809. Various arms, including a Macao-style boat worth 2000 *baht*, 26 cannons worth more than 3600 *baht*, iron and other smaller items, to a total value of 6000 *baht*, were purchased by Phraya Nakhon Sithammarat in Penang with a loan from Francis Light and other Chinese merchants.[50]

The Siamese kings in the early Bangkok period thus accumulated a substantial amount of weaponry. A list of cannons under the Kalahom's control compiled in 1807 suggests that the Thai state held almost 2500 cannons of various types at that time, in addition to another 2800 that had been discarded from the list as broken or for other reasons. Among the 2500 listed, a little fewer than half, or about 1100 of them, were installed in 32 provinces, and another 1200 were placed in storage around the capital, while the remaining 200 were installed on 16 royal junks.[51] Another list of guns compiled in the early 1820s reveals that the number of guns which the Siamese court obtained between 1808 and 1823, and which were still in use as of 1823, was over 57,000.[52]

Expansion of the Siamese state: non-Thai populations as war captives

Successful military campaigns waged by the Siamese kings brought back a large number of prisoners of war. Having been forced to resettle in the capital and nearby areas in the central plain, they formed an important labour force to serve and fill the immediate needs of the king and officials. At the beginning of Taksin's reign, when Taksin defeated his political rivals in Phisanulok and Phimai, for instance, a large number of people were forcibly brought down from these places and resettled at the new capital. According to the descriptions given by the French missionaries, they lived under miserable conditions, which were worsened by the prevailing food shortage.[53] In 1775, when Siam successfully fought back against the Burmese invasion, it is alleged that some 2000 Burmese were captured and compelled to labour on public works projects.[54] Three years later, Siam's attack on Lao kingdoms again provided another 3000 prisoners of war. A French source even claimed that the number would have been much higher if twice as many had not been lost on the way home. At the arrival in the capital, these Lao prisoners of war were divided into groups of three to five families and distributed among the officials as house servants.[55]

The succeeding Siamese kings in the Bangkok period continued to pursue similar evacuation campaigns. A series of successful battles against Burma, Cambodia, and the Lao and Malay kingdoms in the early Bangkok period brought back fresh supplies of people from these areas into central Siam. Following the war with the Burmese in 1786, hundreds of Burmese prisoners of war were again taken to the Siamese capital, and some 400 Vietnamese who fled from the Tayson rebellion were also captured and taken to Bangkok in 1790. This was followed by another supply of 800 Lao immigrants in the late 1790s. These persons were, according to a French source, taken to a public work site in provinces located about two to three days from Bangkok.[56]

The dynastic chronicle of the first reign of the Bangkok era also suggests that the important construction works in the new capital were mainly

undertaken by non-Thai populations, especially Cambodian and Lao. The Ropkrung Canal, one of the major canals in the capital, was allegedly constructed by 10,000 Cambodian labourers. Then 5000 Lao from Vientiane were also conscripted to complete the construction of the capital. In addition, the king sent royal orders to the provincial officials all the way up to the Laotian territories along the Mekong River, requesting them to come to the capital city to help with construction works such as digging foundations for the walls around the capital and building parapets on the walls.[57]

By the end of Rama I's reign, a large number of non-Thai people were resettled in the central plains and incorporated into the central and provincial administrations. The list of the officials and nobles who received *bia wat* (a money allowance distributed annually by the king to the members of the royal family and officials as a token of the king's recognition of their loyalty) in 1806–07 indicates that a large number of these people were formally organised into central administrative units called *krom* or placed under provincial officials.

The number of non-Thai officials who received the *bia wat* annual allowance from the king is listed in Table 8.1. At first glance, these figures may not seem so impressive. However, if we compare them with the figures of other major administrative units, they assume a different significance. The number of officials who received *bia wat* in Mahatthai, which was one of the major departments responsible for the administration of the central and northern provinces and civilian affairs, for example, was 85, whereas Kalahom, in charge of the southern provinces and military affairs, had 65 officials. Sasadi, on the other hand, which was supposed to be in charge of the whole administration of population registration, had even fewer officials, 55 in total; and Na, in charge of rice tax, had only 23. In fact, the

Table 8.1 Bia wat payments: non-Thai officials in the central administration (1806–07)

Administrative unit	*Number of officials*
Mon	345
Westerners	166
Ironsmith sub-unit in Inner Treasury (Vietnamese and Chinese)	123
Chinese smelters	115
Burmese	77
Cham volunteers	43
Khmer under Phaya Kalahom	26
Lao Phuan	21
Chinese artisans of tin plate? (*chin chang phae dibuk*)	20
Lao raising elephants in Ayutthaya	10
Japanese volunteers	8

Source: NL.CMH.R.I, C.S.1168 No. 5.

Table 8.2 Bia wat payments: provincial officials (1806–07)

Province and sub-unit	*Number of officials*	*Total amount (baht)*
Ratchaburi governor	1	400
Khmer	279	4928
Lao	80	1616
Phetchaburi		
Customs House (*dan*)	52	344
Lao Phung Dam	17	224
Lao Phuan	13	160
Pak Nam	45	1256
Saiyok	41	852
Thongphaphum	36	720
Chonburi[1]	1	20
Tha Chin[1]	1	20
Mae Khlong [1]	1	12
Chanthaburi	3	800
Trat	1	200
Ayutthaya Lao[2]	51	596
Khaek (takia)[2]	51	596
Saraburi Lao	324	4792
Lopburi Lao	6	120
Lao Phranon?	10	150
Others	1	40
TOTAL	1014	17,846

Source: NL.CMH.R.I, C.S. 1168 No. 5.

Notes
1 Responsible for transport boats for junks.
2 Making roof-tiles.

number of officials in the Mon unit, as many as 345, was the fourth largest among all the central administrative units included in the list.[58]

The predominance of non-Thai people was even more conspicuous in the case of provincial officials (see Table 8.2). Almost 85 per cent of over 1000 provincial officials who received *bia wat* in that year were Lao, Khmer, and Khaek (Malay). These were the chiefs of the resettled populations. Heavy concentrations of Khmer populations around Ratchaburi, and Lao in the Saraburi area, are especially notable.[59]

Some of those non-Thai people were valued for their special expertise. Besides the Lao and Khaek roof-tile producers listed, some Lao and Burmese were often found engaged in the construction of junks as iron-smiths, carpenters and wood carvers.[60] Around 1810, some Lao from Phuan state were also made to work on processing sulphur in Kanchanaburi, and the king ordered the official in charge to provide them with enough rice to survive.[61]

Concluding remarks

The revival of Siam as a viable kingdom and its territorial expansion in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods was made possible not by maritime trade linked with the extensive *suai* collection and the tightened corvée service, as is often claimed by existing studies, but by procuring necessary resources mainly through the market using the revenues from commercial activities and tax farming, which were often in the hands of the Chinese. It is also suggested that acquisition of arms and ammunition mainly through English country traders via local powers in the Malay Peninsula in exchange for local products, such as tin, was another important factor contributing to the expansion of the kingdom. By utilising those resources, Siamese kings in the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods vigorously waged wars against Burma and other neighbouring powers and through these wars obtained non-Thai populations as prisoners of war, who then came to constitute an important part of labour power, often with special expertise that the king needed. Such territorial expansion also increased economic resources, which the Siamese kings could tap.[62] Siamese state expansion at the beginning of the new dynasty, realised through a combination of coercion and the market economy, was a prerequisite for establishing a more solid state consolidation with coercive extractions such as corvée and *suai* tax in provincial areas in later periods from the 1820s.

Notes

1 A few examples: Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652–1853* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977); Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984); Jennifer W. Cushman, *Fields from the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1993); Nithi Ieosiwong, *Watthanatham kradumphi kap wannakam ton rattanakosin* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1982).

2 See for example Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782–1873* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1969); David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Chiang Mai and Bangkok: Trasvin Publications, 1982), pp. 154–5, 187. Some take the strong controlling power of the king over manpower as "theory" and examine the gap between the theory and practice. See Anchali Susayan, *Khwam plian plaeng khong rabop phrai lae phonkrathop to sangkhom thai nai ratchasamai phrabat somdet phrachunlachomklao chaoyuhua* [Changes of the Phrai System and their Effects on Thai Society in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn], MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1981.

3 Koizumi Junko, "King's *Man*power Constructed: Writing the History of the Conscription of Labour in Siam", *South East Asia Research* 10, 1 (2002): 31–61.

4 *Suai* is generally understood as capitation tax in kind in lieu of corvée service imposed on the provincial population residing in remote areas.

5 J. J. Boeles, "Note on an Eye-witness Account in Dutch of the Destruction of Ayudhya in 1767", *Journal of Siam Society* 56, 1 (1968): 101–11; M. Turpin, *History*

of the Kingdom of Siam and of the Revolutions that have Caused the Overthrow of the Empire up to AD *1770*, transl. B. O. Cartwright (Bangkok: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1908), p. 161.

6 Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society*, pp. 125–6 and Chapter 4.

7 Ibid., p. 57. In 1774, King Taksin issued a decree on population registration, requiring that commoners have the name of the province (*muang*) of their residence and the name of the official in charge (*munnai*) tattooed on their wrist, "Phraratcha Kamnot Kao" [Old Royal Decrees] No. 34, in *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Three Seals Law Codes] (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1994), vol. 5, pp. 95–6.

8 Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society*, pp. 54–9. See also "Phraratcha Kamnot Mai" [New Royal Decrees] Nos 4, 5, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 39, in *Kotmai tra sam duang*, vol. 5, pp. 202–7, 237–42, 254–67, 270–2, 350–3. The law on the registration of commoners issued in 1810 prescribed the reduction in the corvée obligation from four to three months annually for administrative units which succeeded in increasing the number of registrants. See Sathian Lailak *et al.* (ed.), *Prachum kotmai pracham sok* [Collected Laws] (Bangkok: Nitiwet, 1935), vol. 4, p. 7.

9 For instance, most of the copies of the royal letters exchanged between the Siamese and Chinese courts from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries are still available in the National Library of Thailand.

10 Based on my own calculation from the unpublished manuscripts entitled *banchi chamnuan lek phrai luang khao duean* categorised under the *chotmaihet* [administrative records] during the first, second, third and fourth reigns of the Bangkok period, preserved at the National Library of Thailand. Hereafter, unpublished manuscripts held in the National Library of Thailand will be referred to by an abbreviated form NL.CMH.R. As for *banchi chamnuan lek phrai luang khao duean* for the third reign, see for instance, NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1203 No. 97; C.S. 1203 No. 97, ko; C.S. 1204 No. 92; C.S. 1206 No. 206; C.S. 1206 No. 210; C.S. 1206 No. 212; C.S. 1207 No. 288; C.S. 1208 No. 138; C.S. 1208 No. 138, ko; C.S. 1208 No. 138, kho khai; C.S. 1208 No. 138, kho khwai; C.S. 1209 No. 160; C.S. 1210 No. 180; C.S. 1210 No. 180, ko; C.S. 1212 No. 133; C.S. 1212 No. 149 kho khai.

11 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1199 No. 61. This document is partly illegible and partly discontinuous. Other records from the mid 1820s show that 674 *phrai luang*, including 80 Lao, under the Front Palace paid labour obligations in the eleventh lunar month of 1825. See NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1187 No. 13. Two months later, the total number had decreased to 626. See NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1187 No. 11.

12 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1206 No. 210. It should be noted that besides those who were noted as "from the provinces", there were over 2000 *phrai luang* who were to perform corvée included in the same list.

13 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1203 No. 98.

14 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1208 No. 147.

15 For more details of the imposition, collection and commutation of *suai* in the Mekong basin, see Koizumi Junko, "The Commutation of *Suai* from Northeast Siam in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23, 2 (1992): 276–307.

16 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1186 No. 31, in Phranangklao, King of Siam (Samnak Nayok Ratthamontri) (ed.) *Chotmaihet ratchakan thi sam* [Administrative Documents of the Third Reign] (Bangkok: Khana kammakan chaloem phrakiat 200 pi Phrabat somdet Phranangklao chaoyuhua, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 85–9.

17 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1192 No. 14, in Phranangklao, *Chotmaihet ratchakan thi sam*, vol. 5, pp. 47–52.

18 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1193 No. 21; NL.CMH.R.IV, C.S. 1230 No. 169.

19 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1193 No. 27; NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1197 No. 7.

20 NL.CMH.R.IV, C.S. 1226 No. 304.

21 NL.CMH.R.III, C.S. 1186 No. 31; NL.CMH.R.III. C.S. 1204 No. 97.

22 NL.CMH.R.IV, C.S. 1230 No. 169.
23 Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 139.
24 Adrien Launay, *Histoire de la Mission de Siam 1662–1811* (Paris: Société des Missions-Étrangères, 2000), vol. 2, p. 269. The Thai translation is given in "Rueang chotmaihet khong phuak khana batluang farangset" [Records of French Missionaries], in *Prachum phongsawadan, phak thi 39 lem 23* (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1968), p. 90.
25 Turpin, *History of the Kingdom of Siam*, pp. 178–9. See also Wyatt, *Thailand*, p. 141.
26 "Rueang phraratchaphongsawadan krung thonburi, chabap phan chanthanumat" [The Royal Chronicle of the Thonburi Kingdom, Phan Chanthanumat Version], in *Prachum phongsawadan, phak thi 65 lem 40* (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1985), p. 11.
27 Ibid., pp. 17–18.
28 Ibid., p. 27.
29 "Chotmaihet raiwan thap samai krung thonburi khrao prap mueang phutthaimat lae khamen muea pho so 2314" [Daily Administrative Records of the Thonburi Period on the Occasion of Suppressing Phutthaimat and Khmer in 1771–72], in *Prachum phongsawadan, phak thi 66 lem 40* (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1985), p. 141.
30 "Rueang phraratchaphongsawadan krung thonburi", p. 19.
31 Koizumi, "King's *Man*power Constructed", pp. 48–9. The term *chang* is found in more than 25 clauses in the entire law code.
32 Yim Panthayangkun *et al.* (ed.) *Prachum mairapsang phak thi 1 samai krung thonburi samai* (Royal Instructions, Part 1, the Thonburi Period) (Bangkok: Khana kammakan phicharana lae chatphim ekkasan thang prawattisat, Samnak Nayok Ratthamontri, 1980), pp. 33–45.
33 J. G. Koenig, "Journal of a Voyage from India to Siam and Malacca in 1779", *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26 (1894), p. 161.
34 NL.CMH.R.I, C.S. 1163 No. 3.
35 Sutthiwong Phongphaibun, *Phraratchaphongsawadan yo lamdap kasat lae sadet phrarat-chadamnoen pai mueang nakhon lae songkhla* [The Abridged Royal Chronicles and King's Visit to Nakhon Sitthammarat and Songkhla] (Songkhla: Sunsongsoem Phasa Lae Watthanatham Phak Tai, Mahawitthayalai Sinakharinwirot, n.d.), p. 61.
36 NL.CMH.R.II, C.S. 1171 No. 6.
37 For the involvement of the Chinese in arms trade, see Dhiravat na Pombejra, "Administrative and Military Roles of the Chinese in Siam during an Age of Turmoil, circa 1760–1782", in Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-keong (ed.), *Maritime China in Transition 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 335–353, pp. 350–1.
38 Launay, *Histoire de la Mission de Siam*, vol. 2, p. 268.
39 "Rueang phraratchaphongsawadan krung thonburi", pp. 18–29, 39–40.
40 Ibid., pp. 29, 67.
41 "Munhet haeng kan tit to kha khai kap farang chao tawantok nai phaen din somdet phrachao krung thonburi" [The Origin of Commercial Relations with the Westerners during King Taksin's Reign], *Sinlapakon* 9, 5 (1966): 25–31, see pp. 29–30. The suggested price (exchange rate) was six guns for one *phara* (three piculs or *hap*) of tin.
42 E. H. S. Simmonds, "The Thalang Letters, 1773–94: Political Aspects and the Trade in Arms", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, 3 (1963): 592–619, see p. 612. See also Sutthiwong, *Phraratchaphongsawadan yo*, p. 38.
43 "Samnao kot: Rueang tang phrachao nakhon sithammarat khrang krung thonburi" [Establishing the Governor of Nakhon Sitthammarat in the Thonburi Period], in *Ruam rueang mueang nakhon sithammarat* [Cremation Volume for Phon-ek Chaophraya Bodintharadechanuchit (Yaem na Nakhon)] (Bangkok: Krom Sinlapakon, 1962), p. 179.
44 One *chang* equals 80 *baht* (1.2 kg). Sutthiwong, *Phraratchaphongsawadan yo*,

pp. 27–9, pp. 61–2. Examples of the rate of exchange include 100 *phara* of tin for 926 guns and one *phara* for six guns. See also Sutthiwong, *Phraratchaphongsawadan yo*, pp. 5, 38.

45 The administrative records of the campaign to attack Phutthaimat also included frequent reference to the Chinese in the Siamese forces. "Chotmaihet raiwan thap samai krung thonburi", pp. 142, 145, 146 and 151. In fact, Chinese soldiers seem to have been conspicuous in Taksin's military force. In the royal chronicles of Taksin's reign, his force was almost always referred to as *phrai thahan thai chin* (Thai and Chinese commoner soldiers) or *kong thap bok thap ruea thai chin* (Thai and Chinese army and navy) or *phon thahan thai chin farang* (the Thai, Chinese and Westerners' military force). In addition, a French missionary reported that Taksin valued Christians for their special knowledge and valour and that at least some of Taksin's guards were Christians, possibly the descendants of the European residents during the Ayutthaya period. "Chotmaihet khong phuak batluang farangset", p. 114. See also Koenig, "Journal of a Voyage", p. 166. In his extensive study on King Taksin and his era, Nithi Ieosiwong has pointed out that Taksin primarily promoted those who were outside the old Ayutthaya elite as his close officials and that the Chinese, Vietnamese and Khmer were found among the core members. Nithi Ieosiwong, *Kanmueang thai samai phrachao krung thonburi* [Thai politics in the era of King Taksin] (Bangkok: Matichon, 1993 reprint), pp. 272–319.

46 "Chotmaihet raiwan thap samai krung thonburi", pp. 133–7.

47 "Praratcha kamnot mai 11", *Kotmai tra sam duang*, vol. 5, pp. 234–6.

48 Kong Chotmaihet Haeng Chat, Krom Sinlapakon (ed.), *Samphanthaphap thaichin* [The Relationship between Thailand and China] (Bangkok: Krom Sinlapakon, 1978), pp. 34–8. Masuda Erika, "Rama issei no taishin gaiko" [The Diplomacy of King Rama I toward China], *Tonan ajia rekishi to bunka* 24 (1995): 25–48, see pp. 36–7.

49 Simmonds, "The Thalang Letters", p. 612.

50 NL.CMH.R.II, C.S. 1171 No. 2 in Munlanithi Phraborommarachanuson Phrabat Somdet Phraphuttha Loetla-naphalai (ed.) *Chotmaihet ratchakan thi song, c.s. 1171–1173* (Bangkok: 1970), pp. 19–29.

51 NL.CMH.R.I, C.S. 1169, No. 1.

52 NL.CMH.R.II, C.S. 1185, No. 5.

53 Launay, *Histoire de la Mission de Siam*, vol. 2, pp. 270–1.

54 Ibid., p. 277.

55 Ibid., pp. 298–9.

56 Ibid., pp. 320–1, 325–6, 330.

57 Thadeus Flood and Chadin Flood (transl. and eds), *The Dynastic Chronicles of Bangkok Era: The First Reign* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 58–9.

58 The list also indicates the importance of maritime trade: *Krommatha* (Department of Port in charge of maritime trade and foreign communities in Siam), which was allegedly staffed by wealthy Chinese merchants, was one of the largest units with 220 officials who received *bia wat*.

59 NL.CMH.R.I, C.S. 1168, No. 5.

60 NL.CMH.R.II, C.S.1177, No. 14.

61 NL.CMH.R.I, C.S. 1148, No. 3.

62 It was the Chinese, according to Koenig, who cultivated pepper plantations in Chanthaburi, and whom Taksin relied on when he procured 80,000 piculs of pepper from the area. Koenig also noted that *mai kritsena* or aloes wood of inferior kind was a tribute from the inhabitants of "Ischanthebuhn [Chanthaburi], Cambodia, and Concao [Cancao]" conquered by Taksin, and that the Cochin-Chinese Christians in Chanthaburi were also supplying this special wood to the king as tribute. Koenig, "Journal of a Voyage", pp. 160–1, 177–8, 180.