

# The Invention of “Isan” History

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**ABSTRACT**—In 1899, a new name, *Monthon Tawan-ok Chiang Nuea* (Northeastern Circle), was introduced into the incipient provincial administration system by the Siamese government to replace the former name, *Monthon Lao Kao*. The term *Lao*, denoting “racial” peculiarities from the Siamese point of view, was removed from the new name indicating directions from the centre, Bangkok. The following year, the name was changed again to “Isan” (from Pali: Northeast) “for shorter and easier pronunciation”, according to the Regulation signed by the Minister of Interior, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap. The designation of “Isan” thus was of the centralizing Siamese origin, being an invention in order to conceal the non-Siamese racial identity of most of the region. It could be argued that the French, after 1893 the overlords of the Lao domain, had to be prevented from using the Lao living on Siamese territory as a tool for further territorial expansion so the Lao-ness was henceforth negated by the Siamese state. In this article, a typescript text of “Isan” history, replete with handwritten marks of erasure and modification, is introduced to demonstrate how the ruling elite of Siam consciously manipulated historical source materials for the purpose of negating the Lao. Importantly, the printed version of this text, which was seriously altered, is contained in the “prestigious” *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Collected Histories) series, of which publication started in the early 20th century. As the *Prachum Phongsawadan* has long been considered essential source material for studying Thai history, a radical reappraisal of the whole pantheon of modern Siamese historiography might be suggested from this case study.

## Introduction

[Entering Udon Circle at Mueang Chonnabot, local people look different....] Since olden days people in Bangkok used to assume that they were Lao. Today, however, we have come to realize quite well that they are Thai, not Lao. (Damrong 1974 [1944]: 304).

The “central Thai” state of Siam, which was established in 1782 with Bangkok as the royal capital, largely inherited the legacy of the Ayutthaya kingdom at the onset. However, this Siam of the Bangkok Dynasty adopted a new guise of a “racially” heterogeneous “empire” by exercising minimal control over outlying frontiers and marginalizing them

as *prathetsarat*.<sup>1</sup> From the mid-19th century onward, Siam evolved into an expansive, modern territorial state. During this expansion, part of the outlying regions designated as *prathetsarat* under the existing system of control gradually became incorporated into the incipient modern territorial state of Siam.

At the time, Siam was striving to establish a centralized, unified system of administration that would bring the whole of the newly settled space under her suzerainty, i.e. her geo-body (Thongchai 1994). This state building project was carried out by Bangkok-bred royalty and the elite class, who served the government of the fifth king of the dynasty, Chulalongkorn (1853-1910, r. 1868-1910). One of the half-brothers of King Chulalongkorn, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap (1862-1943), led the reform as head of the Ministry of Interior. Prince Damrong became the Minister of Interior in 1892 and held the post until 1915. During his prolonged tenure, Prince Damrong inaugurated and gradually implemented the *Thesaphiban* (control over territory) system of provincial administration. The major territorial unit of the *Thesaphiban* structure called *monthon* (circle)<sup>2</sup> was conceptually novel in that it was delineated based on geographical features and placed under jurisdiction of the *khuang thesaphiban* (superintendent royal commissioner) dispatched directly from Bangkok (Tej 1977: 101).

These elites, while engaged in the abovementioned state building enterprise in key roles in government and administration, also took a keen interest in building a history for the emerging Siamese state. In this field as well, the most conspicuous figure was Prince Damrong, who was later to be exalted as “the Father of Thai historical science” (*bida haeng wicha prawattisat thai*) (Chatchai 1991: (8), etc.) or “the Father of modern Thai history.”<sup>3</sup>

As an example of an early attempt at new Siamese historical writing, the author of this paper earlier examined one such elite official of Siam under the Fifth Reign, Chaem Bunnag (Phraya Prachakit Korachak, 1864-1907). I argued that a “story” synthesized by Chaem and titled *Phongsawadan Yonok*<sup>4</sup> (1906) was related to the audience in the

<sup>1</sup> *Prathetsarat*, literally meaning royal state, is often rendered as *tributary* or *vassal* (kingdom). In relation to Siam, a *prathetsarat* theoretically belonged to a hierarchy, on top of which was the supreme overlord, the king of Siam. However, in practice, the rulers of a *prathetsarat* could pursue protection from other powers, and such submission on the part of the *prathetsarat* did not prevent it from attempting to preserve its own autonomy or “independence” in other extensive areas excluding some token obligations bound to the overlord (Iijima 2008: 40).

<sup>2</sup> The English word for *monthon* was finally standardized as “circle” in 1921 (Toem 1999: 355).

<sup>3</sup> Wyatt wrote, with a handful of early 20th century Siamese writers in mind, “writing modern history—modern, that is, in terms of how it was structured rather than what it covered” (Wyatt 2002: 82).

<sup>4</sup> The original *Phongsawadan Yonok* serialized in the *Wachirayan* journal was styled “Prawat Lao Chiang” and “Phongsawadan Lao Chiang” (“Prawat...,” *Wachirayan*, Vol. 10, no. 55: 600-656; “Phongsawadan...,” *ibid.*, no. 55-58 (Apr.-July, 1899). It may be rendered as “History of Lao Chiang.” “Lao Chiang” was the 19th century Siamese nomenclature for the region that from 1900 onward would be designated “Northwestern Provinces (*Monthon tawantok-chiang-nuea*, later *Monthon Phayap*). Damrong’s use of *prawat* or *phongsawadan* for *history* rather than *chronicle* is discussed by Chatchai (Chatchai 1991: 214-225). Apparently, Chaem, who died in 1907, was not familiar with the word *prawattisat* meaning *history* in English, which was supposed to be King Wachirawut’s coinage (*ibid.*, 218).

capital Bangkok and served to connect the separate history of a northern *prathetsarat* Chiang Mai to the dynastic history of Siam and to place the lineage of the ruling Chiang Mai family appropriately within the Siamese domain (Iijima 1994; Iijima 1996).

The *Phongsawadan Yonok* is listed in a bibliography of "South-east Asian Historical Writing," which contains writings by Southeast Asians about their past for a domestic audience, published in the 1980s with the comment, "a monumental work on the kingdom of Chiengmai (sic.)" (Reid and Marr eds. 1982: 421). Since Prince Damrong's many references to *Phongsawadan Yonok* in his "Commentary" to the *Royal Chronicle of Royal Autograph Edition* (Damrong 1914), the *Phongsawadan Yonok* has been frequently utilized as the principal reference source for the history of the northern domain of the modern Siamese state. Recent historians have been aware of the *Phongsawadan Yonok*'s secondary and compiled nature (Wyatt 1993: 7), but the attitude is sometimes indifferent, as is the case in recourse to it without adequate criticism (Grabowsky 1999: 48, for example).

The author-compiler Chaem Bunnag himself briefly explained the background of the book by stating that having searched for indigenous *tamnan* chronicles, he copied them by transliterating from the Lao or northern Thai script (into the standard or central Thai script), attempted to grasp only the essentials, and then wrote a concise narrative (PY: 4). His work is important and interesting not as a convenient substitute for northern chronicles, but as a case of synthetic enterprise in the fledging "modern" Siamese historiography. What is required is an elucidation of the true characteristic of Chaem's project by sourcing and specifying particular chronicles for examination one by one. Unfortunately, as the whereabouts of the exact materials he actually used are not known, we cannot but leave such requirements for future study. However, I continue to believe that it is important to trace the starting point or the formative stage of "modern" Siamese historiography, which has often been collectively known as Damrong Rachanuphap's school, considering the historical contexts in order to discuss its merits as well as limitations.

In this article, by following up a lead on a particularly relevant document in the possession of the National Library of Thailand, I attempt to approach one of the historical sites where one phase of the abovementioned formation took place.

## Source materials

### *"Phongsawadan Mueang Ubon Ratchathani" (PMU) in the National Library of Thailand*

The document, a text of 130 odd pages and the primary source material for the following discussion, constitutes most of a typescript paper manuscript, which is presently kept at the Ancient Manuscript Section located on the fourth floor of the National Library of Thailand.

The document has three title pages before the body text begins. First, the details of these three pages need to be checked. The typed title in the center of the front page

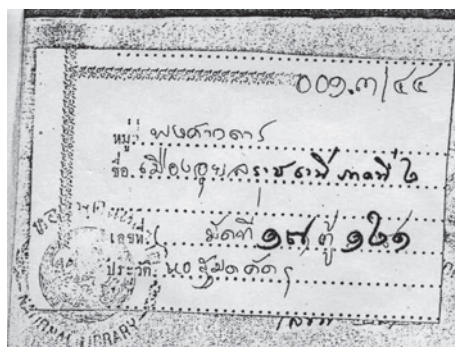


Figure 1. PMU, front page.

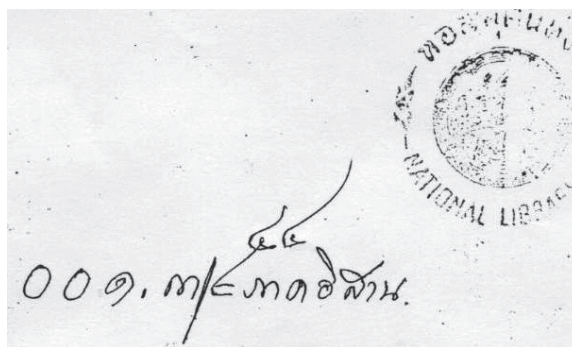


Figure 2. PMU, second page.

is *Phongsawadan mueang Ubon*, to which *phak thi 1* (the first part) has been added by hand. The label attached (Figure 1) reads as follows.

[NL] 001.3/44

Mu (Group). *Phongsawadan*

Chue (Title). *Mueang Ubon Ratchathani phak thi 2*

Lek-thi (Number). [blank] The 17 th *mat* (bundle) The *tu* (shelf) number 121

Prawat (Provenance). The Library (*Ho samut*) copied (*khat*).

On the next page (Figure 2) is the number 001.3/44, which is the same as the label on the front page, the current call number of the manuscript in the National Library, followed by the two words, *phak Isan* (Northeastern Province).

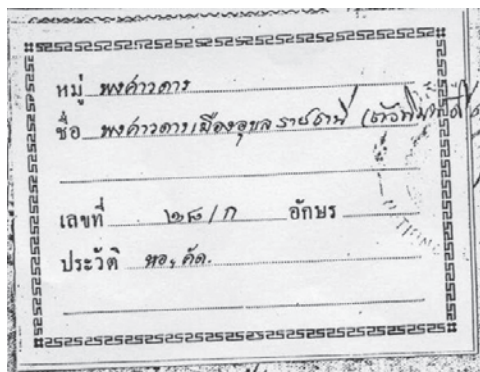
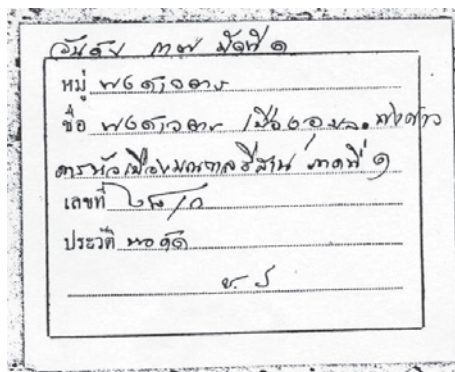


Figure 3. PMU, third page.



On the third page (Figure 3), there are two labels. The typewritten formats of the two labels and that on the front page are identical except for the missing item *akson* (script) of the upper label on the third page. The document is manually grouped as *phongsawadan* on all three labels, and the descriptions of provenance, saying that the library copied, are almost uniform. As for the title, however, there appears to be a different one on the label below the third page, in addition to the shared parts of “(Phongsawadan) mueang Ubon (or Ubon Ratchathani).” The title “Phongsawadan huamueang monthon Isan phak thi 1”



was added.<sup>5</sup> This title (without *phak thi 1*) is handwritten in a line with larger letters in the middle of the third page, between the two labels, and the subsequent line has the author's ([*phu*] *taeng*) name, Mom Amorawongwichit (Pathom Khanecon).

Although these details may seem cumbersome, any information that may help understand the provenance of the document should be carefully considered. Since the descriptive contents of the three labels vary slightly, they were presumably placed on three separate occasions. Nevertheless, the entries of provenance indicate invariably that the library copied it, so it seems certain that all the labels were affixed after the document had come into the custody of the library. Although there remains much room for studying the contexts of the presumed three occasions, the label on the front page is supposed to be the most recently updated one, for this label is currently valid. Accordingly, the document is listed as the “*Phongsawadan mueang Ubon Ratchathani*” in the catalogue provided in the Ancient Manuscript Section of the National Library of Thailand.

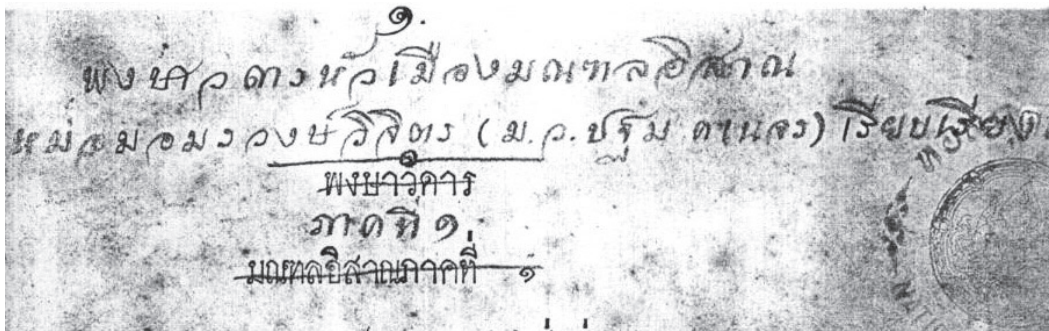


Figure 4. PMU, main body.

However, upon turning to the first page of the main body (Figure 4), one finds the different title of the “Phongsawadan monthon Isan phak thi 1” in typescript, which is crossed out by hand, and on the upper side on the top of the page, another title and the author-compiler’s name have been handwritten as “Phongsawadan huamueang monthon Isan, Mom Amorawongwichit (Mo Wo Pathom Khanecon) edited (*riap-riang*).’ Although this handwritten title and the handwritten title on the third title page are similar, the handwriting differs. It may be plausible that the title on the body page was written later. This assessment is based on the fact that this title is the same as the title of the “Phongsawadan huamueang<sup>6</sup> monthon Isan” (abbreviated as *PHMI*) that was

<sup>5</sup> Outside the frame of the label below on the third page, “Number 37 The first bundle,” is also written.

<sup>6</sup> The contemporary meaning of the word *huamueang* is *the provinces* (outside the capital). The Royal Institute’s dictionary gives an older meaning of “a large domain (*mueang*) that has small dependent domains” (*Photchananukrom chabap ratchabandittayasathan P.S. 2554*, 2nd printing, 2013: 1326). Although Keyes maintains in his book focusing on northeastern Thailand that the term *huamueang*, in which the word *hua* means head, was applied specifically to small principalities comprising a single important center and subordinate villages or other centers (Keyes 1967: 67), usages apparently vary. For example, when the *huamueang Lao Kao* was established in 1890, it comprised twenty-three large *huamueang* and fifty-five dependent *huamueang*, and all these seventy-eight *huamueang* were placed under the jurisdiction of the Royal Commissioner (Toem 1999: 321).

included in the fourth volume of the *Prachum Phongsawadan* (Collected Histories, abbreviated as *PP*) and publicized.

The author immediately recognized the resemblance between the “Phongsawadan mueang Ubon Ratchathani” (to be abbreviated as *PMU*) in the National Library and the *PHMI* in the fourth volume of *PP*, which had already been frequently consulted. Therefore, the author checked further and discovered that 132 pages (from page 1 to page 132)<sup>7</sup> out of the 152-page typescript of *PMU* are unmistakably the draft of the printed publication, *PHMI*. As already stated, the *PMU* is fundamentally a typewritten manuscript. However, it is replete with the handwritten marks of various alterations. Evidently, the text was printed and published as part of the fourth volume of *PP* only after such alterations were implemented.

#### *The PHMI in the fourth volume of PP*

In 1908, the first volume of *PP* was printed on the occasion of the cremation ceremony of a member of royalty. It comprised six documents that had been selected by the council of the Library for the Capital (*ho phrasamut samrap phranakhon*),<sup>8</sup> the predecessor of today’s National Library of Thailand, from its possessions. Since then, volumes of *PP* were augmented sequentially until it became firmly established as a huge collection of more than eighty volumes.

The fourth volume of *PP* was originally compiled and printed in 1915, upon the request of a certain high-ranking official of the Finance Ministry, to be distributed at the funeral service of his mother. Prince Damrong wrote a “fairly long” (Damrong 1963 [1915a]) preface to this volume. The preface began with an explanatory account of the *PP* series, which appears to have not yet been widely known, before introducing the contents of the fourth volume itself.

According to Prince Damrong, the *PP* consisted of various fragmentary historical books, both old and new, that the council (of the Library) had determined to be good books or interesting stories. They were to be edited and printed in order to ensure that rare books would not be scattered and lost, while benefiting history students for their convenience of reading and researching. When a certain number of materials had been gathered, the Library would compile them into a volume and print it, instead of waiting indefinitely for a complete collection (Damrong 1963 [1915a]). Consequently, each volume of *PP* tended to be a mixture of miscellaneous short and long documents. The fourth volume, for example, in addition to the *PHMI*, includes “Phraratchaphongsawadan krung kao chabap cunlasakkarat 1136” (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya Lesser Era Year 1136 version), “Phongsawadan mueang Lawaek chabap somdet phranarai ramathibodi” (Chronicle of Lawaek (Cambodia) King Eng version) and “Het songkhram rawang farangset.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A typescript draft of another text covers from mid-page 132 to 152, entitled “Het songkhram rawang farangset” [Fighting Incident with the French]. This text is also included in the fourth volume of *PP* following the *PHMI*.

<sup>8</sup> As to the formation of the Library of the Capital, see (Jory 2000: 352, 357, 359). As for its principal predecessor, the Wachirayan Library, see (Chirabodee and Luyt: 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 7.

The *PP* today is generally regarded as a “printed collection of primary sources and important sources” (Nithi 1996: “Kham chi caeng”) and, to quote Jory (2000: 369), “one of the principal (and *authoritative* [underlined by the present author]) collections of published source material for the writing of Thai history.” Nithi further writes that it is valuable not only for historical studies but for wide-ranging Thai studies (*Thai-khadi-sueksa*) (Nithi *ibid*). Those materials in the *PP*, once selected and ranked for the pantheon of *PP*,<sup>10</sup> appear to have attained the status of canonical texts.

The authoritative springhead of the *PP* must have derived from the fact that Prince Damrong was the originator of this compiling and printing project (Nithi *ibid*.). Prince Damrong would always contribute introductory and explanatory remarks to the early volumes of *PP*, which revealed how he had been largely responsible for the selection of documents. Owing to its authoritative appearance, the *PP*, through a mixture of miscellaneous documents of often dubious provenance, appears liable to be treated as a primary source and cited without proper textual criticism, while Prince Damrong’s interpretations continue to prevail.

Such problems relating to the *PP* have been recognized to some extent by Thai scholars who have noted the need to fulfill the criteria of academic research, such as comparison with the original text and conflation of several versions of the text (Nithi *ibid*.). Nevertheless, because of the massiveness of the collection or its authoritative nature, a full-scale endeavor has yet to come, and the historical contexts of *PP* are far from amply discussed. In any case, such an endeavor should be based on the examination of each available source material. Unfortunately, certain regulations of the National Library of Thailand<sup>11</sup> have hampered efforts for further critical investigation. According to the regulations, a requested item should be checked by the library staff beforehand and, when it is proven to have been published in some form, the request should be denied, and one should be provided with only published texts to consult. Under such conditions, access to manuscripts for the *PP* is closed, and there is no opportunity to check the published texts against the unpublished manuscripts.

This article deals with only one document, which appears significant enough to warrant careful attention, because it represents a rare draft manuscript of one of the *PP* documents hitherto unknown,<sup>12</sup> have been barred by the regulations, and will make

<sup>10</sup> Wyatt, in referring to the *PY*’s entry into the *PP*, writes that it gained admission to the prestigious *Prachum Phongsawadan* in volume 5, published in 1917, long after its author’s death in 1907 (Wyatt 2002: 83, 85).

<sup>11</sup> “Rabiap ho samut haeng chat wa-duai an chai borikan ekasan boran pho, so, 2539” (Regulations concerning the Use of Service for the Ancient Documents B.E. 2539 (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Artha has referred to the “Phongsawadan mueang Ubon Ratchathani” with the same call number of 001.3/44 (group: Phongsawadan), which he notes having browsed in the Ancient Manuscript Section of the Wachirayan Library (Ho Wachirayan). Although Artha mentions alterations in the text, his source material was a “manuscript written with black ink,” instead of a typescript, and the corrections in the text were made “in pencil.” In addition to this discrepancy with our typescript, as he lists another “Phongsawadan mueang Ubon Ratchathani (phak thi 1)” with the call number 001.3/43 in his bibliography (Artha 1986: 261), Artha’s document is unidentifiable. There might be another handwritten copy. Artha introduces his document as an example of Bangkok officials’ inappropriate attempts to write local histories. According to him, it is because those officials, sent

analytical investigation, which should provide a basis for critical study on the *PP* texts, possible. In this article, by first drawing a comparison between the *PMU* and the *PHMI* of the fourth volume of *PP*, the author will attempt to discuss problems concerning the *PP*, and subsequently of modern Siamese historiography that appears to have relied on the *PP* to no small extent.

In the preface to the fourth volume of *PP*, following the aforementioned account of the *PP* in general, Prince Damrong provides a commentary for each of four texts (Damrong 1915). As for the *PHMI*, the first half of Prince Damrong's commentary is dedicated to the introduction of the author-compiler Mom Amorawongwichit (M.R.W. Pathom Kanechon<sup>13</sup>) (-1908). According to Prince Damrong, Pathom began his career as a student of the Suan Kulap School, which although originally founded in 1881 for bringing up government officials, particularly among boys of royal descent (Wyatt 1994: 234-236), eventually would become regarded as the precursor of modern school education in Siam. Having graduated from the early Suan Kulap School, Pathom became investitured and was soon transferred to the Ministry of Interior. He then voluntarily took a post to work in Monthon Isan under the Royal High Commissioner (*Khaluang yai tang phraong*), Prince Sanphasitthiprasong (1857-1922).<sup>14</sup> He finally attained the position of Deputy Commissioner there, but died at a young age due to illness contracted while heading to the border on an important mission to negotiate with the French in 1908.<sup>15</sup> Prince Damrong, seemingly regretting Pathom's untimely death in the line of duty, refers at great length to the royal patronage and pension bestowed by two successive Kings upon Pathom's family, including his father (Mom Chao Mekhin), wife, and son.

In the latter part of the preface, Prince Damrong narrates the story behind the *PHMI*.

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from the capital Bangkok, could not understand the "local" spirits (*khwa pen "thong thin"*) of the original regional note takers that "disregards" (*laloei*) and "distortions" (*bit buean*) occurred in the works of Bangkok officials. In referring to two lines from his "Phongsawadan mueang Ubon Ratchathani," where the word *Lao* was erased by hand, he infers incompatibility with the Bangkok government's policy that induced such alterations (Artha 1986: 247-248). Artha consistently assumes that the alterations were made by dispatched personnel, and he never discusses the relationship between his document and the *PHMI* in the *PP*. He could get access to the material probably because the library staff, as well as Artha himself, did not recognize that it contained a draft of the *PP* publications. It seems also likely that my own access to the document was approved by error, since the document's title was different from the one in the *PP*, causing the library staff to overlook it. In short, the *PMU* has never been published as a draft of one of the *PP* documents.

<sup>13</sup> Pathom was a grandchild of Phraongchao Khanechon (1815-1878), the twelfth child of King Phranangkla, the third king of the Bangkok dynasty (*SWIPI*, vol.15: 5166).

<sup>14</sup> At the time when Prince Sanphasitthiprasong, another talented half-brother of King Chulalongkorn, arrived in Ubon Ratchathani, the place of his assignment in December 1893, the *monthon* was called Lao Kao and not *monthon* Isan. Prince Sanphasitthiprasong was accompanied by fourteen officials he had selected, including Pathom Khanechon, and about two hundred soldiers (Phaithun 1972: 57; Toem 1999: 362-363). He stayed at his post in Ubon Ratchathani for a long period until 1910, when he was summoned back to Bangkok to assume the office of Minister of Palace (Damrong 1923: (16)). For the achievements of Prince Sanphasitthiprasong as the Royal High Commissioner in the northeast, see (Phaithun 1972).

<sup>15</sup> For the details of Pathom's activities in the "Isan" region, see *SWIPI*, vol.15: 5167-5168. As to the circumstances of Pathom's demise, see Toem 1999: 372-373.



First, Prince Damrong emphasizes that nobody ever ordered Pathom to write the *PHMI*, but that he had engaged himself in writing it while off duty, as he loved knowledge and learning. With the intention of assisting the state government, Pathom had attempted to acquire various data and information on his inspection trips, from the provincial office and sometimes by purchasing history books. Pathom's case seems analogous to that of Chaem Bunnag, who compiled the *PY*, in that both Pathom and Chaem were Bangkok government officials who, on being dispatched to remote provinces, took an interest in the local histories of their posts and voluntarily worked on compilations.

Pathom, when serving under the Interior Minister Prince Damrong, submitted as much of the draft as he had written for Prince Damrong to check (*truat*) whenever he had a chance to travel to the capital. Prince Damrong writes that he used to return the draft to Pathom after review. If this was indeed the case, it is of utmost importance in light of textual criticism to know how Prince Damrong handled Pathom's drafts and to clarify the nature of the conducted verification. Prince Damrong continues that Pathom's draft, once completed, was sent to Damrong's office at the Ministry of Interior sometime before his death in 1908, but was later considered lost, for Prince Damrong could not find it on searching for it at the news of Pathom's demise. It was rediscovered at the Ministry shortly before Damrong's retirement from the office and transferred to the Library for the Capital, where the draft was located at the time of its publication as part of the fourth volume of *PP* in 1915. This is Prince Damrong's account of how the *PHMI* came into being.

At the initial stage of "modern" Siamese historiography, "regional" histories were opened up by Bangkok government officials sent to work in the then remote outer provinces. Historical documents or source materials that they had searched for locally in the field were collected at the capital, Bangkok. More precisely, such materials somehow reached the institutional custody of Prince Damrong's surveillance. Part of the materials, mostly selected by Damrong, subsequently became published in the serial form of *PP*. The above account of Prince Damrong appears to precisely indicate the process of molding the standard of Siamese nationals' historical knowledge in the name of *PP* or of the canon of "modern" Siamese historiography. However, as will become apparent later, a rather different testimony concerning the formative process of *PHMI* exists as well.

### From the typescript *PMU* to *PHMI* in *Prachum Phongsawadan*

Now I conduct comparative investigation into the body texts of our sources. As stated earlier, the *PMU* is a typescript with handwritten alterations. The relationship between the *PMU* and the *PHMI*, as a rule, is such that the handwritten alterations on the pages of *PMU* are faithfully reproduced in the printed text of *PHMI*.

Let us look at the top of the first body page of *PMU*, for example (Figure 4). There the text is titled anew by hand as the "Phongsawadan huamueang monthon Isan," and this new title appears in the printed text of *PHMI* in the fourth volume of *PP* (Figure 5). Thus, the printed text gives no hint of the title "Phongsawadan mueang Ubon (Ratchathani)."

Since there are many handwritten alterations, including minute corrections of

spelling, on every page of *PMU*, it is impossible to deal with all of them in a limited space. In what follows, only the alterations that appear to be specifically interesting in light of historiographical construction will be indicated and discussed. In the following, “A” stands for the typescript text of *PMU*, “B” stands for the modified text of *PHMI*, and “C” is the common part of both texts. Explanatory remarks by the author are provided in brackets.

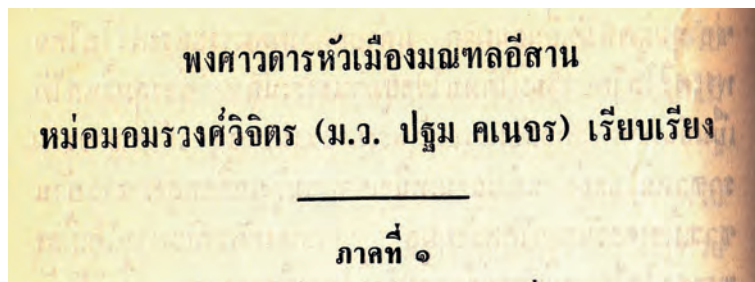


Figure 5. *PHMI*, title page.

### *Population composition*

A: [*PMU*: 1] The indigenous people of the region (*khon phuen mueang*) are Lao, Khmer (*Khamen*), and Suai, race (*chat*), and [in addition] there are people of other countries (*prathet uen*), such as Thai, Farang [Westerners], Vietnamese, Burmese, Tongsu, and Chinese, who have settled to engage with trade in large numbers.

คนพื้นเมืองเป็นชาติ, ลาว, เขมร, ส่วย, และมีชนชาวประเทศอื่นคือไทย, ฝรั่งเศส, ญวน, พม่า, ดองซู, จีน, เข้าไปตั้งประกอบการค้าขายเป็นอันมาก

B: [*PHMI*: 185] The indigenous people are basically Thai. In addition to the Thai, there are Khmer, Suai, and Lawa,<sup>16</sup> and people of other countries such as Farang, Vietnamese, Burmese, Tongsu, and Chinese have settled, but they are not many.

คนพื้นเมืองเป็นไทยเป็นพื้น นอกจากไทยมีเขมรส่วย และลว้า และมีชนชาวประเทศอื่นคือ ฝรั่งเศส, ญวน, พม่า, ดองซู, จีน, เข้าไปอยู่บ้าง แต่ไม่มากนัก

C: [*PMU*: 1] [*PHMI*: 185] The whole population in this year of 122 [Ratanakosin Era, which corresponds to April 1903~March 1904] was approximately 924,000 odd people.

The word *Lao* in A is crossed out and, accordingly, there is no *Lao* in B. Thai, one of the foreign peoples in A, are stated to be the native, major population in B. In A, many “people of the other countries” are said to reside, but in B, they are said to be few. With these alterations, the demographic composition in B has changed considerably from A. Nevertheless, the total population of 924,000<sup>17</sup> remains unchanged.

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 33.

<sup>17</sup> The ground for this approximate figure is unknown. In the year 123 of Ratanaosin Era (April 1904~March 1905), the first partial census (*kan samruat sammanokhrua*) was conducted in twelve inner *monthon* (circles), but not in Monthon Isan. However, in the Census Report (*Kham athibai*

*Race* in A is not crossed out, but is omitted in B.

*Thai race (chon chat thai)*<sup>18</sup>

C: [PMU: 1] [PHMI: 185] Formerly, before the year 1000 of the Lesser Era (*cunlasakkarat*), the land of this Monthon Lao Kao<sup>19</sup> used be a heavily forested area, where the jungle people descended from Khom<sup>20</sup> and later called Kha, Suai, and Kuai lived. Those people are still living on the eastern bank of the Mekong River today.

เดิมพื้นในมณฑลลาวกาวนี้ เมื่อก่อนจุลศักราชได้ ๑๐๐๐ ปี ก็เป็นทำเน[sic]ป่าดง ซึ่งเป็นที่อาศัยของพวกคนป่าอันสืบเชื้อสายมาแต่ขอม ต่อมาเรียกกันว่าพวกข่า, ส่วย, กวย, ซึ่งยังมีอยู่ในฝั่งโขงตัวนอกจนบัดนี้นั้น

A: [PMU: 1-2] When the people of the Lao race (*chon chat lao*) who had been in the country (*prathet*) to the north, which had Mueang Sisattanakhanahut (Wiangchan) for example, dispersed and came down to get settled independently....

ครั้งเมื่อชนชาติลาวซึ่งอยู่ประเทศข้างเหนือ มีเมืองศรีสัตนาคนหุต (เวียงจันทน์) เป็นต้น ได้แตกसानล้านเขนลงมาตั้งเคหสถานโดยความอิสรภาพแห่งตน

B: [PHMI: 185] When the people of the Thai race (*chon chat thai*) who had been in the country to the north, which had Mueang Sisattanakhanahut (Wiangchan), for example, dispersed and came down to get settled independently.....

ครั้งเมื่อชนชาติไทยซึ่งอยู่ประเทศข้างเหนือ มีเมืองศรีสัตนาคนหุต (เวียงจันทน์) เป็นต้น ได้แตกฉานล้านเขนลงมาตั้งเคหสถาน โดยความอิสรภาพแห่งตน

The word *Lao* in A is crossed out. In B, the word *Thai* is used instead of *Lao*, and the Thai race emerged as the outcome.

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*banchi sammanokhrua*) (Grabowsky 1993: 75-84), the approximate population figures of eight *monthon* exempted from “the detailed census” (i.e. the census of R.E.123), including Monthon Isan, are provided. The report says the figures are calculated on the assumption that based on comparison with other survey figures the population increased by 25% since the old surveys. The estimated figure for the Monthon Isan population is 915,750 (Grabowsky 1993: 84), which is fairly close to the approximate figure for the year 122 in both our sources.

<sup>18</sup> *Chon chat thai* is the title given to the Thai language translation in 1939 of *The Tai Race* by Dodd (1923). Cf. Streckfuss 1993: 147, n.4.

<sup>19</sup> The “Lao Kao” is one of few idioms with the word *Lao* that has been exceptionally exempt from erasure in the *PHMI* (There are a few more instances where the word *Lao* appears independently). It may be that because the name of *Monthon Lao Kao* had been adopted by the Bangkok government as an official appellation along with other *Lao monthon* (*Mongthon lao Chiang* for the present day northern Thailand, etc.), though temporarily, they could not help but retain the name for the relevant period (PMU: 117-118). However, such speculation might be denied by the case where *monthon Lao Kao* was changed to *monthon Isan* without hesitation in the entry for the year 1221 of the Lesser Era (1859 A.D.) (PMU: 50)

<sup>20</sup> This underlined part of “from Khom” is inserted by hand in A. Although there is more than one view about the word *khom*, it seems interchangeable with *khamen* in this text.

### *Erasure of Lao*

A: [PMU: 4] In 1075 of the Lesser Era [1713 A.D.], year of the snake, Phra Khru Phonsamet, along with the Lao aristocrats and officials (*saen thao phraya lao*), performed a coronation ceremony to enthrone Chao No Kasat as king, dedicated the royal name of Chao Soi Sisamut Phutthangkun and made him the sovereign ruler by following the kingly customs of the Lao country (*lao prathet*).

ครั้นจุลศักราช ๑๐๗๕ ปีเมเสงเบญจศก พระครูโพนเสม็ดพร้อมด้วยแสนท้าวพระยาลาว จึงได้ตั้งพิชัยเจ้าหน่อกระษัตริย์ขึ้นเป็นกระษัตริย์ถวายพระนามว่า เจ้าสร้อยศรีสมุทรพุทธางกูร ครองสมบัติเป็นเอกราชตามประเพณีกระษัตริย์มลาว[sic]ประเทศ

B: [PHMI: 190] In 1075 of the Lesser Era, year of the snake, Phra Khru Phonsamet, along with the aristocrats and officials performed a coronation ceremony to enthrone Chao No Kasat as king, dedicated the royal name of Chao Soi Sisamut Phutthangkun and made him the sovereign ruler by following kingly customs.

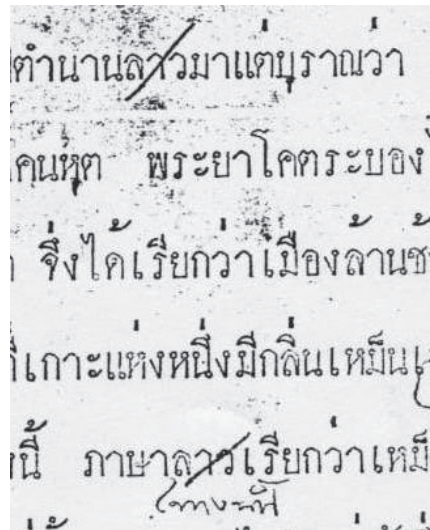
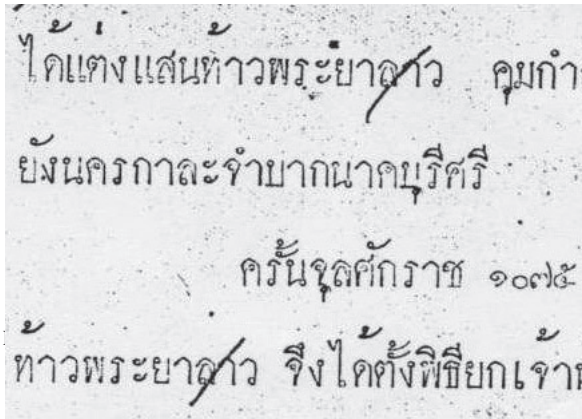
ครั้นจุลศักราช ๑๐๗๕ ปีเมเสงเบญจศก พระครูโพนเสม็ดพร้อมด้วยแสนท้าวพระยา จึงได้ตั้งพิชัยเจ้าหน่อกระษัตริย์ขึ้นเป็นกระษัตริย์ ถวายพระนามว่าเจ้าสร้อยศรีสมุทรพุทธางกูร ครองสมบัติเป็นเอกราชตามประเพณีกระษัตริย์

This is the passage describing the beginning of Lao rule of Champasak in today's southern Laos. In the wake of upheavals in Wiangchan (Vientiane), a charismatic monk named Phra Khru Phonsamet led thousands of his faction's followers across the Mekong and southward until they reached the place that later became known as Champasak. There, Phra Khru Phonsamet crowned Chao No Kasat, who was of royal descent through the second son of King Surinyawongsa's<sup>21</sup> daughter, as King Soi Sisamut Phutthangkun (Archaimbault 1961: 534-539; Stuart-Fox 1998: 102). All instances of the word *Lao* in A are indicated, and the text in B does not contain the word *Lao* at all.

The erasure marks of *Lao* as seen here (Figure 6) are only minor examples of many such changes. Wherever the word *Lao* comes up in the typescript text, every instance is carefully crossed out. Sometimes, when they (I am not for the moment raising the question of who "they" are) appear to have thought the outcome after deletion to be awkward, they paraphrase. For example, the word *Lao* on the first line of the plate below (Figure 7), which appears to have been combined with the word *chronicle* (*tamnan*) as *Lao chronicle* (*tamnan lao*), is simply crossed out. However, on the fifth line where a composite term *Lao language* (*phasa lao*) appears, they have used the paraphrased expression *language over there* (*phasa thang nan*) in order to make the sentence explain local etymology meaningfully. In other cases where *Lao language* (*kham lao*) appears, the expression *local language* (*kham phuen mueang*) is applied to avoid the word *Lao*. In short, it can be safely concluded that they or the "revisionist(s)," do not appear to have liked the word *Lao* and seem to have attempted to eliminate all instances of *Lao* from the document.

<sup>21</sup> Surinyawongsa was the most powerful Lao king of Lan Sang, who ruled in the 17th century from his capital at Wiangchan. After his death in 1695, a succession struggle ensued, and Lan Sang dissolved into three or four separate small kingdoms. The newly established Champasak was one of them.





Figures 6, 7. Erasure of Lao in *PMU*.

### *Bangkok-centric viewpoint*

A: [*PMU*: 55] ...ask the petty official of Mueang Ubon who had gone down to [stay in] Bangkok...

... แต่ให้ถามกรรมการเมืองอุบลซึ่งลงไปอยู่ที่กรุงเทพฯ

B: [*PHMI*: 274] ...ask the petty official of Mueang Ubon who had come down to [stay in] Bangkok...

... และให้ถามกรรมการเมืองอุบล ซึ่งลงมาอยู่ที่กรุงเทพฯ

A: [*PMU*: 84] In the year of the goat, 1244 of the Lesser Era, the king mercifully had Phraya Sisinghathep (Run) along with many officials as the Royal Commissioner come up to maintain the royal order of the eastern Lao-Khmer provinces, which were set up at Nakhon Champasak.

(จุลศักราช ๑๒๔๔ ปีมะแมจัตวาศก ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้พระยาศรีสิงหเทพ (หฺร่น) พร้อมด้วยข้าราชการหลายนายเป็นข้าหลวงขึ้นมารักษาราชการหัวเมืองลาวเขมรวันออก ตั้งอยู่ ณ นครจำปาศักดิ์

B: [*PHMI*: 319-320] In the year of goat, 1244 of the Lesser Era, the king mercifully had Phraya Maha Ammat (Run), who was Phraya Sisinghathep at that time, along with many officials as the Royal Commissioner, go up to maintain the royal order of the eastern provinces, which were set up at Nakhon Champasak.

จุลศักราช ๑๒๔๔ ปีมะแมจัตวาศก ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้พระยามหาอำมาตย์ (หฺร่น) แต่ยังเป็นพระยา ศรีสิงหเทพ พร้อมด้วยข้าราชการหลายนายเป็นข้าหลวงขึ้นไปรักษาราชการหัวเมืองตะวันออก ตั้งอยู่ ณ นครจำปาศักดิ์

In A, to describe the activities involving going to Bangkok, such as a provincial governor's courtesy visits or a delivery of *suai* duties, the word *pai* (to go) is used to indicate orientation. Such uses of *pai* are all replaced by *ma* (to come) in B. On

เพื่อแย่งกันขอเป็นเจ้าเมือง ตั้งแต่ปีมอโรง จุลศักราช ๑๐๘๒ แต่ครั้งนั้นยังไม่ถึงกรุงเทพ ฯ  
 ฝ่ายท้าวคำปานช่วย ก็ถึงแก่กรรมเสีย ครั้นมาปีนี้จึงทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้า ฯ ให้  
 ให้พระพรหมภักดี (โท) บุตรหลวงวิเศษ ยกกรมการเมืองศรีสะเกษ เป็นพระยาวินัย  
 ภักดีเจ้าเมือง ให้ท้าวเจ้าบุตรพระยาวินัย (บุญจันทร์) เป็นพระภักดีโยธาปลัด ไทราช  
 วังษ์ (บุญญา) บุตรหลวงไชย์ (สุก) เป็นพระพรหมภักดียกกรมตัว แลโปรดให้ท้าวเศษ  
 บุตรพระยาวินัย (โท) รับการตำแหน่งผู้ช่วยเมืองศรีสะเกษ แลเมืองศรีสะเกษ  
 มีบอกขอตั้งบ้านโนนดินกอง ซึ่งเมืองสุวรรณภูมิว่าเปนแขวงเมืองสุวรรณภูมินั้นเป็นเมือง  
 ของพระพล (จันทร์) บุตรหลวงยกกรมการเมืองศรีสะเกษเป็นเจ้าเมือง  
 โปรดเกล้า ฯ ให้ยกบ้านโนนดินกอง เป็นเมืองรายีไศล ให้พระพล (จันทร์)  
 เป็นพระยาชัยบุรีเจ้าเมือง ขึ้นกับเมืองศรีสะเกษแต่บัดนั้นมา แลเมื่อคราวราช  
 สัตีโปรดเกล้า ฯ ให้หลวงแสง (จันทร์) น้องชายพระยาชัยบุรี เป็นหลวงหาญศึกนาศปลัด  
 ให้ท้าวคำเม็ก บุตรพระยาชัยบุรี เป็นหลวงวิเศษไพร่ ยกกรมการเมืองรายีไศล ขึ้นกับเมือง  
 ศรีสะเกษแต่บัดนั้นมา  
 จุลศักราช ๑๑๔๔ ปีมะแมจัตวาศก ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้า ฯ ให้พระ  
 ยาศรีสิงห์เทพ (หุวัน) พร้อมด้วยข้าราชการหลายนายเป็นข้าหลวงขึ้นมาตรวจราชการ  
 หัวเมืองลาวพวนนอก ตั้งอยู่ตามนครจำปาศักดิ์  
 ระหว่างนั้นข้าปะตงภูคองไคทางหลายเผือกท้าวหนึ่งซึ่งไปงวันออก  
 พระยาศรีสิงห์เทพ พร้อมด้วยเจ้าผู้ครองนครจำปาศักดิ์ ได้เอาเงินสำหรับ  
 บ้านเมือง ๓๐ ชั่งซื้อช้างพลายเผือกตัวนี้ไว้  
 เจ้าพรหมเทวานุเคราะห์ช่วยเจ้าเมืองอุบล, มีบอกขอตั้งท้าวพระไชย์  
 (จันทร์) กรมการเมืองเขมรราชซึ่งอพยพลงมาตั้งบ้านที่แขวงเมืองอุบล, เป็นเจ้า  
 เมือง ขอยกบ้านที่เป็นเมือง ครั้นวัน ๑๖๓ ค่ำ โปรดเกล้า ฯ ให้ตั้งท้าวพระไชย์  
 เป็นพระวิไชยราชบุตรเจ้าเมือง ยกบ้านที่เป็นเมืองเขมรเดิมขึ้นเมืองอุบล, พระ

Figure 8. PMU, p. 84.

the contrary, for all movements heading towards the countryside, such as the Royal Commissioner's arrival, the word *ma* is used in A. Almost all such uses of *ma* in A are crossed out and changed to *pai* (Figure 8).

It is supposed that the text was originally written somewhere outside Bangkok, presumably around the Ubon Ratchathani area, and that when it was transformed into the *PHMI* in Bangkok, it was modified to accommodate readers in the capital. Therefore, Prince Damrong's explanation in the preface as to the formation of the texts may be evinced in a way. By way of alterations befallen in Bangkok, B changed into a text to be read smoothly in Bangkok.

### *Kings of Siam*

In the text of *PMU*, kings of Siam make an appearance several times, some of which are altered in the *PHMI*.

#### King Taksin of the Thonburi Dynasty

A: [*PMU*: 13] In the year of the dragon, 1138 of the Lesser Era, the king of fourth Somdet Phraborommaracha (Chao Taksin) ascended to the throne at Thonburi.

ลุลูกศักราช ๑๑๓๘ ปีมะโรงจัตวาศก แผ่นดินสมเด็จพระบรมราชาที่ ๔ (เจ้าตากสิน) ขึ้นครองราชสมบัติณกรุงธนบุรี...

B: [*PHMI*: 204] In the year of the dragon, 1138 of the Lesser Era, Chao Taksin ascended to the throne at Thonburi.

ลุลูกศักราช ๑๑๓๘ ปีมะโรงจัตวาศก เมื่อเจ้าตากสินเสวยราชย์อยู่ ณ กรุงธนบุรี...

#### The First King of the Bangkok Dynasty

C: [*PMU*: 17; *PHMI*: 210] [Somdet Chaophraya Kasatsuek] ... hurriedly came back to the capital, suppressed corrupt people and quelled the riot completely. Then [he] ascended to the throne and was crowned at the capital city of angels ... in the year of the tiger, 1144 of the Lesser Era.

A: [*PMU*: 17] The royal signature at that time was presented as Somdet Phraramathibodi thi 4, i.e. the first king of the Chakri dynasty, that very Phrabat Somdet Phraphuttha Yotfa Chulalok. When [the king] knew.... [This sentence without an explicit subject begins with a word indicating royal activities.]

ปรากฏพระบรมนามาภิไธยในสมัยนั้นว่า สมเด็จพระรามาธิบดีที่ ๔ คือสมเด็จพระปฐมบรมจักรีวงศ์ พระบาท สมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกย์นั้น ครั้นทรงทราบว่า ...

B: [*PHMI*: 210] [The wordy explanation of the king's signature is cut out.] When [the king] knew....

ครั้นทรงทราบว่า ...

#### The Third King of the Bangkok Dynasty

A: [*PMU*: 46] ....Phrabat Somdet Phranangklao Chao Yu Hua, who had been the Siamese king in the third period of the dynasty, gracefully went to his rest in heaven.

... พระบาทสมเด็จพระนั่งเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวซึ่งเปนพระเจ้าแผ่นดินสยามในลำดับรัชกาลที่ ๓ เสด็จสู่สวรรคต[sic]

B: [*PHMI*: 258]... Phrabat Somdet Phranangklao Chao Yu Hua gracefully went to his rest in heaven. The third period of the dynasty ended.

... พระบาทสมเด็จพระนั่งเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวเสด็จสวรรคตสิ้นรัชกาลที่ ๓

## The Fourth and Fifth Kings of the Bangkok Dynasty

C: ...in the year of the dragon, 1230 of the Lesser Era [1868 A.D.], Phrabat Somdet Phrachomklao Chao Yu Hua gracefully went to his rest in heaven.

A: [PMU: 60] [The king] lived for sixty-five years in total. He reigned for seventeen years and six months. The regent along with the members of the royal family and higher officials invited Somdet Chaofa Chulalongkorn Krommakhun Phinitprachanat Phraboromratchaorot (Crown Prince Chulalongkorn) to ascend the throne of the kingdom of Siam ... with the royal name of Phrabat Somdet Phraparamin Maha Chulalongkorn in the present reign.

รวมพระชนม์ได้ ๖๕ พรรษา อยู่ในราชสมบัติได้ ๑๗ ปีกับ ๖ เดือน ผู้สำเร็จราชการแผ่นดินจึงพร้อมด้วยพระบรมวงศานุวงศ์ ข้าราชการผู้ใหญ่ผู้น้อย อันเชิญเสด็จสมเด็จพระเจ้าฟ้าจุฬาลงกรณ์ กรมขุนพิริยดิศประชาวรภพระบรมราชโอรสขึ้นเสวยราชสมบัติบรมราชาภิเศก เป็นพระเจ้าแผ่นดินสยาม... โดยปรากฏพระบรมนามาภิไธยว่า พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาจุฬาลงกรณ์ พระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ณรัชกาลปัตยุบันนี้

B: [PHMI: 280] [The wordy name of the Crown Prince and the process of his accession to the throne are removed.] Phrabat Somdet Phraparamin Maha Chulalongkorn was enthroned in the present reign.

พระบาทสมเด็จพระปรมินทรมหาจุฬาลงกรณ์ พระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวได้เสวยราชสมบัติในรัชกาลปัจจุบันนี้

All the lengthy explanatory remarks and detailed accounts associated with the Siamese kings in A are omitted in B. It is probably because there was no need for explanations about the Siamese kings for the intended readers in Bangkok.

Additionally, probably because Siam was an all-encompassing “world” in itself for the Bangkok readers, there is no mention of Siam at all in B. The kings of Siam in B were required therefore to be the only kings and could not be relativized against other petty rulers, such as Lao chiefs.

### Anu War

A conspicuous reworking in the story of the Siamese–Lao war, which was triggered by the “rebellious” Lao king of Wiangchan, Chao Anu, is as follows.

A: [PMU: 31] At that time, on the part of those Lao and Khmer families, who, by order of Chao Pasak (Yo), had been rounded up and remained in the city of Champasak, on getting the news that the Bangkok army went on an offensive ... in the year of the pig, 1189 of the Lesser Era [1827 A.D.], those Lao and Khmer families all joined in setting fire to torch the city of Champasak.

ขณะนั้นฝ่ายพวกครัวลาวเขมรที่เจ้าปาศักดิ์ (โย) ให้กวาดส่งไปไว้ยังเมืองจำปาศักดิ์นั้น ครั้นรู้ข่าวว่ากองทัพกรุงยกขึ้นไป ครั้น... ปีgunนพศก จุลศักราช ๑๑๘๙ พวกครัวลาวเขมรนั้น ก็พากันเอาไฟเผาเมืองจำปาศักดิ์ลุกลามขึ้น ...



B: [PHMI: 234] At that time, on the part of those Thai and Khmer families, who, by order of Chao Champasak (Yo), had been rounded up and remained in the city of Champasak, on getting the news that the Bangkok army went on an offensive ... in the year of the pig, 1189 of the Lesser Era [1827 A.D.], those families all joined in setting fire to torch the city of Champasak.

ขณะนั้นฝ่ายพวกครัวไทยเขมรที่เจ้าจำปาศักดิ์ (โย) ให้กวาดส่งไปไว้ยังเมืองจำปาศักดิ์นั้น ครั้นรู้ข่าวว่ากองทัพกรุงยกขึ้นไป ครั้น ... ปีกุนนพศก จุลศักราช ๑๑๘๙ พวกครัวก็พากันเอาไฟเผาเมืองจำปาศักดิ์ลุกลามขึ้น ...

The word *Lao* in A is crossed out, and *Thai* has been inserted instead in B. As a result, the story in B is confusing. In order to avoid a contradictory implication that the Thai families fought against the Bangkok army, the repletion of the names of the families who fought is avoided in B.

### *Territorialization*

Referring to the tumultuous situation in Vietnam following the Hue Treaty of 1883, through which the French protectorate was recognized and France was granted the privilege of stationing a resident-general at Hue, the following passage recounts the measures taken by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) of Siam in 1885 in order to avoid involvement with the French-Vietnamese conflict.

C: [PMU: 95] [PHMI: 337] When the King became aware of the above situation [in Vietnam], he solemnly thought that the Vietnamese might be shattered to flee from the French and come into the King's realm.

ครั้นความทั้งนี้ได้ทรงทราบฝ่าละอองธุลีพระบาทแล้ว ทรงพระราชดำริห์ว่า ลางที่พวกญวนจะแตกหนีฝรั่งเศสเข้ามาในพระราชอาณาเขต

A: [PMU: 95] Then it might develop a rift in the amicable relationship between the Kingdom and France. The King therefore graciously made Phraya Maha Ammat, who was a royal commissioner at Nakhon Champasak, levy provincial conscripts and send troops up to station at Khemarat, where he was ordered to investigate the Vietnamese people who had come to stay for a while at the border town of Ding about whether they should be located inside or outside the King's realm. If they are located inside, have them lay aside their weapons. Don't let them go back to cause trouble to harm France.

จะทำให้เปนบาดหมางต่อพระราชไมตรีกับฝรั่งเศส จึงได้ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้พระยามหาอำมาตย์ข้าหลวงนครจำปาศักดิ์เกณฑ์กำลังหัวเมืองขึ้นไปตั้งขัดตาทัพอยู่ณเมืองเขมราฐ แล้วให้สืบสวนดูพวกญวนที่มาตั้ง อยู่ณด่านดิงเหลาแต่ก่อนนั้นจะตั้งอยู่ในถานอกพระราชอาณาเขต ถ้าตั้งอยู่ในก็ให้ละวางอาวุธ อย่าให้คิดกลับไปก่อเหตุทำร้ายแก่ฝรั่งเศส ...

B: [PHMI: 337] Then the incident developed between Vietnam and France that might be brought to involve Thai [Siam]. The King therefore graciously made Phraya Maha Ammat who was a royal commissioner at Mueang Nakhon Champasak levy provincial conscripts and send troops up to station at Khemarat,

where he was ordered to investigate the Vietnamese people who had come to stay at the border town of Ding about whether they should be outside the King's realm [or] trespass by coming in. If they should trespass by coming in, have them to lay aside their weapons and don't let them come to reside in the land of Siam and cause trouble to harm France.

จะเหตุการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้นในระหว่างญวนกับฝรั่งเศสเข้ามาเกี่ยวข้องกับไทย จึงได้ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้พระยามหาอำมาตย์ข้าหลวงนครจำปาศักดิ์เกณฑ์กำลังหัวเมืองขึ้นไปตั้งขัดตาทัพอยู่ ณ เมืองเขมราฐแล้วให้สืบสวนดูพวกญวนที่มาตั้งอยู่ ณ ด่านดิงเหลาแต่ก่อนนั้น จะตั้งอยู่นอกพระราชอาณาเขตล่วงล้ำเข้ามา ถ้าล่วงเข้ามาก็ให้บังคับให้ละวางอาวุธเสีย อย่ามาอาศัยแผ่นดินสยามก่อเหตุทำร้ายแก่ฝรั่งเศส ...

Considerable discrepancies are found between the two. In B, the boundary of the King's realm is dealt with more consciously than in A. In A, the Vietnamese residing within the King's realm are accepted as an accomplished fact. The "fact" is however denied in B and understood as a renewed encroachment.

### Formation of Isan

The word *Isan*, a derivative from Pali meaning the northeast, first came into existence as a name for a *monthon* in 1900. The administrative area established in 1894 by the name of Monthon Lao Kao<sup>22</sup> was renamed Monthon Tawan-ok Chiang Nuea (Northeast Circle) in 1899, and once again was renamed Monthon Isan in January 1900. The royal reflection on the second renaming was proclaimed in the form of a simple "Regulation,"<sup>23</sup> with the signature of the Interior Minister Prince Damrong. The names of the four *monthon* were changed at the same time. The regulation provided the following reason for the renaming: The King thought that some of the existing names of *monthon*, such as Monthon Tawan-ok Chiang Nuea, Monthon Tawan-tok Chiang Nuea (Northwest Circle), and two others were "long words [which are] difficult to address," and that they were all words that showed bearings of each *monthon*'s location. The King, then, thinking of ancient words (*khong boran*)<sup>24</sup> for directions that were shorter and easier to address, graciously decreed name changes for the four *monthon*.

<sup>22</sup> The area roughly corresponded to the southeastern quarter of today's northeastern Thailand. The seven major *mueangs* in the area were Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Champasak, Sisaket, Surin, Roiet, Mahasarakha, and Kalasin (Toem 1999: 344). As for the appellation Lao Kao, it is explained by Tueanchai that the Lao Kao referred to the Lao who lived close to Vietnam, since the Siamese called Vietnam Kao or Kao (Tueanchai 1993: 38). Toem offers a different etymological theory in conjunction with the Chinese (Toem 1999: 321).

<sup>23</sup> "Kot kho bangkhap rueang plian chue monthon 4 monthon" (PKPS. Vol. 17: 537-8).

<sup>24</sup> Dararat regards the word *Isan* or *Iisan* as a "new word created by the royal court at Bangkok" (Dararat 2003: 77). However, the word *Isan* meaning *northeast* is already listed in Pallegoix's dictionary in 1854 (Pallegoix 1854: 175). There is one example of the word *Isan* indicating direction (*thit*) in the *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang* (Law of Three Seals) (KTSD vol.1: 242). Incidentally, the first syllables of the word *Isan* were originally short vowels, although it is written with a long vowel today, as authorized by the Royal Institute. The consonant letters for the sounds [s] and [n] have also undergone changes.

It was certainly the first renaming from Monthon Lao Kao to Monthon Tawan-ok Chiang Neua, preceding the introduction of the name Isan, that was a radically drastic change. The royal “Ordinance” concerning the name changes for the *monthon*, declared on 5 June 1899, outlined the reason for the change as follows:<sup>25</sup>

As for the inner provinces (*huamueang chan nai*), which were integrated into *monthon* under the Thesaphiban administrative system, have already been given names based on locality (*tam phuen thi*) adequately. However, the outer (*chan nok*) *monthon*, such as Lao Chiang, Lao Phuan, Lao Kao and Khamen, have not been given names based on location following the same rules. The King therefore graciously declared to let everyone know that from now on Monthon Lao Chiang should be called Monthon Tawan-tok Chiang Nuea, Monthon Lao Phuan as Monthon Fai Nuea (North), Monthon Lao Kao as Monthon Tawan-ok Chiang Nuea (Northeast), and Monthon Khamen as Monthon Tawan-ok (East)

The “Ordinance” stated that the new principle of appellation was “to be based on locality.” Compared with the old principle that appears to have been based on the attributes of the majority of inhabitants, “To be based on locality” was an expression of space consciousness based on a principle of territoriality instead of personal jurisdiction. Nevertheless, in contrast to the inner *monthon*, where a particular toponym such as Phitsanulok or Ayutthaya was adopted, the outer *monthon* were to be called by names indicating their compass direction from Bangkok. This method of naming firmly based on the centrality of Bangkok was the manifestation of the central government’s determination to intensify control over the hitherto peripheral outer regions. At the same time, by eliminating the words *Lao* and *Khamen*, the traditional conception of racial differences was suppressed. As I will discuss shortly, this was not only to conceptually negate the existence of “other races” within the territorial boundary of Siam, but to subsume the others and incorporate them into the new mold of “Thai.”

In 1912, the Monthon Isan was divided into Monthon Ubon Ratchathani and Monthon Roiet,<sup>26</sup> causing the *monthon* name of Isan to disappear. It may be safely presumed that the draft titled “Phongsawadan monthon Isan” was prepared after 1900, the year of the birth of Monthon Isan. If the draft was completed before Pathom Khanechon’s death and the typescript had also been made by Pathom himself (or people around him), the time of completion should be before 1908. We can at least be highly certain that it was completed before 1912. The intention of adopting *huamueang* Monthon Isan in the title for the fourth volume of *PP* cannot be clearly explained. What is clear is that there was no Monthon Isan at the time of its publication in 1915. This could be part of the reason for the word *huamueang*,<sup>27</sup> in that its content was not limited to the territorial boundary of the former Monthon Isan.

<sup>25</sup> “Prakat plian nam monthon” (*PKPS*. Vol. 17: 47-48).

<sup>26</sup> *PKPS*, Vol.25: 5-6. The stated reason for division was that the existing Monthon Isan had been too large and heavily populated with as many as 1.5 million people. This made it difficult to administer effectively its every corner.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 6.

*Isan*, as the name of an administrative unit that had once disappeared, experienced a resurgence during the Sixth Reign. This time, *Isan* became the name of a region (*phak*), Phak Isan, which was established in August 1922. King Wachiraut's "Ordinance" stated:

Now that communication has developed, the appropriate time has come to support and improve the *monthon* on the northeastern side, namely Monthon Udon, Monthon Roiet, and Monthon Ubon, more than before. Therefore, the King graciously promotes the status of the three *monthon* to a *region* (*phak*), with Uparat as the administrative superintendent ... The king bestows its name as Phak Isan.<sup>28</sup>

Later, the use of the name *Phak Isan* (Isan Region), being a more geographical name roughly corresponding to the whole Khorat Plateau rather in the limited sense of a certain administrative unit, appears to have become widespread (Grabowsky 1995: 107). In 1929, two separate books, in the form of cremation volumes, appeared coincidentally under the identical titles of *Phongsawadan Phak Isan*. If the content of these books is taken into account, one might be duly entitled a "Yasothon Chronicle" (*PPI.A*) and the other a "Roiet Chronicle" (*PPI.B*), respectively. The fact that both used this title well attests how the name of *Phak Isan* had become prevalent in the late 1920s, even though the indicated area of Isan was rather ambiguous.

### Theory and practice of expulsion of *Lao*

While the word *Isan* became popular, *Lao* fell off the map. The "Ordinance" of 1899 that claimed the spatial territoriality principle as its basis did not identify what was negated by the territoriality principle. As noted above, it might be called, at the moment, "racial otherness."

Until the mid-1890s, when *monthon* with names comprising the word *Lao* were established, the central Thai or Siamese usage of nominal designation for a certain people of outer regions had been consistently *Lao*, which was not only used for the inhabitants of present-day northeastern Thailand but also for their northern counterparts.<sup>29</sup> A Siamese dictionary published in 1873 in Bangkok defines *Lao* as the "name of people of a certain language (*phasa*), living in the northern region, where there is Chiang Mai and

<sup>28</sup> "Prakat tang uparat lae samuha thesaphiban" (*PKPS*. Vol. 35: 70-71). The division of *phak* was a novel idea implemented by King Wachiraut soon after Prince Damrong's resignation from the Ministry of Interior in 1915 (Tej 1977: 246-247). For details of the introduction of the *phak* system, see (Chakrit 2002: 500-504).

<sup>29</sup> According to Tueanchai in a detailed study on the usage of the word *Lao*, it has been demonstrated that examples of *Lao* usage trace back to the Sukhothai inscriptions, and the word was widely used as meaning either groups of people, of places, or for cultures (Tueanchai 1993: 31-44).



the rest" and gave particulars of the *Lao phung dam* (black bellied Lao),<sup>30</sup> *Lao phuan*,<sup>31</sup> and *Lao Wiangchan* (Bradley 1873: 658). The Siamese King of the mid-19th century differentiated the Lao from the Thai and perceived the Lao as "another race," similar to Khmer, Mon, Burmese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malays, or Indians (*khaek*). In letters from the King addressed to foreign sovereigns, *Lao Chiang* and *Lao Kao*, both of which would be adopted as names of *monthon* in the 1890s, were regarded as dependencies (*mueang khuen*) located outside the king's realm, along with Cambodia (*Kamphucha*) and Malay (*Malayu*) states. The King stated with clarity that the people there differed from the Siamese in terms of language and culture (Iijima 2008: 35-37; Streckfuss 2012: 420).

Such perceptions of "racial otherness," which had been maintained throughout the 19th century, came under scrutiny at the time of the first census partially conducted in 1904, when the question of race (*chat*) was raised. In that census, besides *Thai*, fourteen choices, i.e. thirteen races such as Malay, Chinese, and Khmer, were provided. Although the "Explanations"<sup>32</sup> attached to the census results indicate enormous difficulty in identifying races because the inhabitants were "of mingled lineage and racially mixed," some practical criteria were used to differentiate the Chinese, Khmer, and Mon from the Thai, such as dress and native language.

At the same time, the reason why the Lao and Thai could not be distinguished and why the Lao should be subsumed by the Thai was delivered in a careful manner. According to reasoning, notwithstanding most people's apprehension, the distinction between the Lao and Thai was groundless. The Lao and Thai languages are the same, with differences only in intonations (*samniang*) and certain vocabulary. It could then have been said, "If the people who pronounce differently from the Bangkok people (*chao bangkok*) should be the Lao, then the people of Nakhon Sithammarat (*chao nakhon*) should not be Thai either." Then, it was stated conclusively, "following the truth ascertained by all the learned men," the people called Lao at that time are in fact "not Lao, they are Thai (*pen thai mi chai lao*)" (Grabowsky 1993: 76-77; Streckfuss 2012: 422).<sup>33</sup>

The above statement indicates that in those days the Lao had been generally recognized as the "other race." Nevertheless, there was an obvious intention to deny such a general recognition by asserting that it was false and should be included in the Thai rubric. This intention logically overlaps with the act of erasing the word *Lao* and sometimes rewriting it as *Thai*, as in the case of "Phongsawadan huamueang monthon Isan."

<sup>30</sup> "A Lao group who make their bellies black with tattoo. Those look as if they wear black pants" (Bradley 1873: 658). This comment refers mostly to today's northern Thai people, who used to have a custom among male members of tattooing themselves black from belly to calf. The Siamese people saw them based on their appearance as "black bellied" (Tueanchai 1993: 34-36).

<sup>31</sup> The Lao Phuan originated in the Lao polity that had developed in the Xiang Khwang area in present-day Laos. A special study of the Phuan is Snit and Breazeale (1988).

<sup>32</sup> "Kham athibai banchi sammanokhrua" (Grabowsky 1993: 75-84)

<sup>33</sup> After this conclusion, another theory that the aboriginal people called *Lawa* living in northern Siam are true Lao was added. This section of explanation is closed with the statement that since those aboriginal minorities were scattered all over the Kingdom and could not be distinguished from the Thai, they have been all registered as Thai (Grabowsky 1993: 76-77). As to the recurrent *Lawa* connected theory, see (Evans 1999: 2).

Prince Damrong demonstrated the logic of sweeping away “racial otherness” by restating Lao as Thai in the well-publicized work *Nithan borannakhadi* (Historical Anecdotes), which was penned in his later life. The following key quote has been cited frequently.<sup>34</sup>

King Chulalongkorn graciously changed the governmental system of the kingdom since 1892 with the following royal discretion: the existing governmental system has tended to be like an “Empire,” within which states of different races and different languages were dependent. Therefore, three peripheral *monthon* in the king’s realm were regarded as *mueang lao* [Lao domain] and the people there, who are in fact Thai, were called Lao. However, such a system of government has become obsolete, and would harm the country (*ban mueang*) if it were maintained. The King thus initiated the reform of the system and changed it to that of a unified Thai “Kingdom” (*prathet thai*), abolished the tradition whereby the tributary states (*mueang prathetsarat*) had presented the king with the token of gold and silver trees, changed the names ... [of three Lao *monthon*], and abolished the nomenclature of Lao for the Thai people of those three *monthon*. Since then, they have been together called northern Thai. (Damrong 1974 [1944]: 305)

In the same *Nithan borannakhadi*, Prince Damrong, by reflecting on the inspection trip to the northeastern provinces from December 1906 for fifty-six days, dedicated two chapters to his recollections of the trip. There, Prince Damrong summed up his findings about a variety of people he had encountered on the trip:

...as for various groups of people who are inhabitants of Monthon Udon and Monthon Isan, the Thai are more numerous than all the other groups. The Kha and the Khmer count next. When we have become aware this way, the questions arise: where the Lao are, and why have we called the Monthon Phayap and Monthon Udon and Monthon Isan *mueang lao* (Lao domain) ever since olden days. (Damrong 1974 [1944]: 347)<sup>35</sup>

Corresponding to this later recollection, the following account is retained in Prince Damrong’s journal during the trip:

<sup>34</sup> Both Phaithun (1974: 111-112) and Dararat (2003: 76-77) cite the same part, where the English words *Empire* and *Kingdom* are employed in such a way as if it were King Chulalongkorn’s own wording of the day, which is doubtful. Tej (1977: 146) omits the *Empire* passage in his citation. Chatchai’s citation (Chatchai 1991: 296) is more abridged. Incidentally, it is interesting to note an almost full-length citation of this part of Prince Damrong’s writing in the work of a northern Thai folklorist, Sanguan, in the 1960s (Sanguan 1969: 160-162).

<sup>35</sup> In the following part of this paragraph, Prince Damrong displays his speculative knowledge that the Lawa might have been the Lao of indigenous inhabitants in the Chaophraya river basin, and that Kha might have been the Lao of indigenous inhabitants in the Mekong River basin (Damrong 1974 [1944]: 347). It is noteworthy that his speculation as to the Lawa is quite similar as the idea presented in the Census Explanations of 1904. This proposition that the Lawa might be the descendants of the indigenous Lao would be more definitively developed by Prince Damrong in his principal historical works of later years (Damrong 1914: 19; Damrong 1924: 1-2).

[14 January 1907] ...Concerning different races (*chat*) of people in these provinces (*monthon*), I tried to inquire about the languages of every group of people I came to meet. That is, I let them count in their languages from one up to ten and noted them to examine. It was found that only two kinds of languages, the Thai language and the Khmer language, were counted. ...

The reason for naming many groups with this and that differently seems to have been only caused by people's dispersion in different localities for a long time. So, they began to feel alienated. But in fact, they are still one Thai race or one Khmer race, that's all. (Damrong 1995: 115-116)

Thus, while Damrong acknowledges the Khmer people's presence on the one hand, he assertively argues that the principal population (*ratsadon phonlamueang*) in the northeastern provinces is Thai. In contrast, there is no mention of the Lao at all throughout this journal,<sup>36</sup> which has the opposite effect as that intended, of imparting an impression of strong Lao-consciousness.

If compared with Chaem Bunnag's discussion published in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Siam Society* in 1904, which was likewise based on field research in the northeastern provinces, the arbitrary absence of the Lao in Damrong's journal is noticeable. According to Chaem, the inhabitants of the study region in those days were a mixed population of “Thai Lao” race (*chat*) and Suai race, called *forest Khmer* (*khamen pa dong*), or Lao and Khmer in short. Chaem also uses the word *Thai group* (*phuak thai*) in contrast with Suai, but he explicitly states on the basis of *Lao chronicles* (*phongsawadan lao*) that those Thai were Lao who had migrated down from the north within less than the past 200 years. He also accurately states that the “Thai Lao” people had spread downward to settle in this southern part of the country only as a result of Bangkok's armed forces's conquest of Wiangchan towards the end of 18th century (Prachakit Korachak 1904: 177, 180, 183-184). In contrast with Damrong's journal and its arbitrary intentions, Chaem's work appears to be more congruent with the scholarly object of the new journal.

It is not difficult to understand why Interior Minister Prince Damrong's thesis was significant. Phraya Ratchasena (Siri Thephatsadin na Ayutthaya), having served the Ministry of Interior for years, following Prince Damrong's writing of “Rueang Thesaphiban,” subsequently wrote:

The author has personally heard His Royal Highness [Prince Damrong] say [they] are Thai not Lao (*pen thai mai chai lao*) in relating the history of Thai race in Regions of Isan and Phayap, and that, however ... their sounds of speech had changed out of tune such that outside people who didn't know the history of their race misunderstood them as Lao and called them Lao (*Thesaphiban* 1966: 60; *Thesaphiban* 2002: 186-187).

<sup>36</sup> In the journal of inspection trip as the Interior Minister to Chonburi in January 1901, Prince Damrong writes about the Lao people he met in the Phanatnikhom District in detail as the majority of the inhabitants. According to him, they were the Lao who had migrated from the “right side [of the Mekong],” i.e. the Northeast, during the Third Reign and their spoken language was still “authentically Lao” (*lao thae*) (*CH* 117, 119: 74).

This assertion was enforced by the government in the way that “[His Royal Highness] strictly forbade the government officials to call the people of Isan and Phayap Lao; for example, in the census and other such instances [he] made them to be called Thai” (*Thesaphiban* 2002: 186-187). The phrase that was found in the Census Explanations, “not Lao, they are Thai (*pen thai mi chai lao*)” echoes Damrong’s own words. It was not mere knowledge corresponding to reality, but a definitive political implication, to create the norm that people of the kingdom (*ratsadon*) should be called Thai.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of the 20th century, the idea to eradicate the Lao from the kingdom, particularly from the Isan region, which comprised a large population of Lao, appears to have been developed with the imperative to solve the problems imposed by France.<sup>38</sup> The French colonialists, who had firmly seized the other side of the Mekong in 1893, pursued a policy of harboring as many protégés as possible, which would result in encroachment on the kingdom’s population (Iijima 1976; Streckfuss 1993: 135-138).<sup>39</sup> As the people called *Lao* were the most readily eligible for French protégé status, it was necessary to ensure that no Lao would remain among the kingdom’s population in order to prevent erosion.<sup>40</sup> Prince Damrong himself was in the position most suited to the said imperative and to coping with the predicament.

If we think carefully about who could possess a resolute-enough attitude and authority to erase *Lao* from the draft of *PHMI*, Prince Damrong appears to lead the candidates.<sup>41</sup> Circumstantial evidence appears to suggest so as well.

<sup>37</sup> Streckfuss, in writing that the elimination of the Lao as a racial category was “only the first part of a much larger and more profound historical change—the creation of “the Thai,” regards the Thai version of the 1902 treaty with France where *Siam* was replaced by *Thai* as indicative of the Siamese royalty’s “‘creatively adapting’ the concept of race and extending Thai racial boundaries to the existent territorial limits”(Streckfuss 1993: 140-143).

<sup>38</sup> The manipulation of historical sources could also have been a response to the part of the Siamese royalist elite in the wake of defeat in the Franco-Siamese conflict, culminating in the crisis of 1893. See (Thongchai 2011).

<sup>39</sup> How a space for a “Lao Laos” was carved out under French colonial tutelage is discussed by Ivarsson (2003; 2008).

<sup>40</sup> For the complex vicissitudes surrounding the northern provinces formerly known as “Lao,” see (Easum 2015).

<sup>41</sup> A typescript titled “Explanation of Thesaphiban history” (*Athibai tamnan thesaphiban*) and a part of manuscript with no title are reproduced in *Thesaphiban* (2002:8-23). They are a National Archives collection and presumably composed by Prince Damrong. To the typescript are added handwritten revisions (deletions and insertions of words and sentences, correction of words), the style and the handwriting of which appears in some measure resemblance to the traces of recasting found in the typescript of *PHMI*. Thinking that rigorous graphological analyses should be necessary for further investigation, the author would like to refrain from any definitive position. However, it seems highly possible that Prince Damrong was the determinate supervising editor of the *PHMI*. Importantly, it has been pointed out that Prince Damrong, meddling in “ethnic cleansing of history,” “expunged all ethnic references to the Lao” in his revisions of royal chronicles originally penned by Thipakorawong (Kham Bunnag) (Streckfuss 2012: 427).



## Concluding remarks

Beginning with the pioneering work of Tej Bunnag (Tej 1977), interest in the reform of provincial administration during the Fifth Reign has produced several theses written by Thai scholars of younger generations, dealing with each province in detail throughout reform mostly based on archival sources. Both works of Thirachai (1984) and Wirot (1986), being two of them, unsurprisingly pay attention to the “Ordinance” of 1899 announcing the change of *monthon* names, which eliminated the connotation of racial otherness. According to Wirot, “it was because the royal court (*ratchasamnak*) in the center had the policy of integrating provinces into a nation state (*rat-chat*) ... that the word *Lao* was eliminated in order not to make people feel alienated racially for being Lao, and not Thai” (Wirot 1986: 158).<sup>42</sup> Thirachai, on the other hand, writes, “it indicated that the concern of the royal court in Bangkok was to integrate the various lands within the sphere of political and governmental influence into a single nation state (*rat-prachachat*) in order not to be separated, as Siam and Lao and Cambodia as had been” (Thirachai 1984: 196). It is noteworthy that what was called a “kingdom” in Damrong’s treatise has uniformly transformed into a “nation state.”

However, it seems anachronistic to argue about a “nation state” on the part of people’s consciousness at the close of the 19th century. Apart from a handful of elites’ perceptions (cf. Streckfuss 2012: 427-428), the orthodoxy that was attained at this juncture was royalism at most, and it would take considerable time to instill a national consciousness into the masses (Tamada 1996). Now that more than a century has passed, the “nation state” discourse without doubt has pervaded enough discourse to be regarded the most appropriate explicable rhetoric. It is firmly an axiomatic premise that all the constituent members of the nation should be Thai. The identity of Thainess is then inclusive, however hierarchical it might be (Streckfuss 2012: 431).

In the year after the first census (1905), the military conscription system for all intended male members was introduced, whereby the Siamese state started to create “Thai” subjects under the rule of the one and only king and who assumed prescribed duties equally. Around the same time, a sort of falsification was made to the *PU* text and, ultimately, the *Phongsawadan huamueang monthon Isan* came into being. Thus, the supposed readers in Bangkok became endowed with a “local history” (*prawattisat thongthin*) in conformity with their national perspective, which would serve the Bangkok-centric discourses of Thai national identity when they “determined the representation of the country’s regional and ethnic diversity” (Jory 2003). For the ethnic “others,” it was like a “forced inclusion” to the “Thainess” model of nationalism (Streckfuss 2012: 430), and nothing but a “conjuring trick” (Streckfuss 2012: 420).

However, the question is not only about the creation of a local history. The fact that a historical text was manipulated, being controlled by outside values and logic, itself testifies to the ideologically charged nature of modern Siamese historiography. The modern Siamese and successive Thai historiography has been constructed while producing a huge amount of source materials esteemed as “canon,” a process that did

<sup>42</sup> Wirot provides the English translation of *rat-chat* as “Nation State” (Wirot 1986: 148).

not refrain from manipulating even historical texts. Particularly, the act of rewriting *Lao* as *Thai* provides suggestive evidence for the abiding nature of the arbitrary and forceful metanarrative of the “nation (*chat*)”, which would eventually embrace the whole state of modern Thailand.

Finally, the previously referenced alternative account as to how the *PHMI* came to light should be addressed. According to Prince Damrong, Pathom Khanechon’s pursuit, which eventually bore fruit as the *PHMI*, started voluntarily. However, Toem, the author of *Isan History (Prawattisat Isan)*, has provided a different narrative in the introduction of his book, based on the Records of Administration in Huanmueang Monthon Isan (*Banthuek kan pokkhong huamueang monthon Isan*), which his father Phra Wiphakphotchanakit (Lek Singhatsathit) had written during his tenure as assistant commissioner of the Ministry of Interior (*kha luang mahatthai phu chuai*) at Ubon Ratchathani in 1906. The outline of Toem’s story is as follows:

In the year 2443 of the Buddhist Era [1900], Prince Sanphasitthiprasong [the Royal Commissioner in charge of Monthon Huamueang Lao Kao, later Isan 1893-1910] ordered collection of *khoei* paper notebooks (*samut khoei*), to begin with, and important old documents including warrants of appointment of ranking lords, old and new, that could be found in all the dominions (*huamueang*) of varying size in Monthon Isan or somewhere else. When the documents were gathered, the Prince appointed Mom Amorawongwichit, Deputy Superintendent Commissioner (*palat monthon*) stationed at Ubon Ratchathani, as captain (*mae kong*), entrusting him with the business of compiling documentary records of the northeastern provinces, and my father as the assistant ... When Mom Amorawongwichit finished compiling, the title *Phongsawadan huamueang Isan* was given to the book, which has more than twenty-five *yok*.<sup>43</sup> (Toem 1999: (12)-(13))

There should be no reason to doubt the credibility of the records of Toem’s father, who took part in the scene. We know from his records that the *Phongsawadan huamueang Isan* was compiled on the basis of a large number of documents collected in the field wherever possible at that time. It is more than obvious that such a task could never be completed in one man’s spare time single-handedly.

On the other hand, it seems probable that Prince Damrong’s commitment to the *PHMI* was also disguised and that he may have played a greater role than mere checker or proofreader. Prince Damrong, later in 1934, confided in personal correspondence with Prince Narit that while he was on the inspection trip to the northeastern provinces, wherever he went, he made inquiries about history (*tamnan*) and asked them to bring in old documents, such as mandates with official stamps, thus becoming acquainted with and listening to [histories] (SS6: 239).<sup>44</sup> Part of the documents that Prince Damrong

<sup>43</sup> In the space after the ending on the last page of the typescript *PMU*, there is a handwritten insertion that reads “twenty-five yok ends only here (*yok 25 chop phiang ni*).” “Yok” is a printer’s term for page size or counting pages.

<sup>44</sup> A document titled “Rueang tang mueang nai monthon udon lae isan (Account of establishing dominions in Monthon Udon and Isan)” is attached to this letter to Prince Narit, dated December

viewed as important were transcribed on the spot, and the transcripts were brought back to Bangkok to be preserved in the fledgling National Library under Prince Damrong's supervision. Prince Damrong thought that these source materials, with which collection he had got involved, should be utilized when writing histories (Damrong 1987 [1915b]).

The reason why Prince Damrong's “official” account concerning the birth of *PHMI* told in the preface of the fourth volume of *PP* considerably differs from that related in the records of Toem's father remains an open question. However, it is certain that the systematic endeavor to collect local documents, which had been carried out officially by the Superintendent Commissioner's endorsement, was lost and that, instead, an exemplary model of a devoted Ministry of Interior bureaucrat was brought into existence.

This article has dealt with only a single source material so far but, hopefully, individual cases of study will be accumulated subsequently. The whole apparatus of modern Siamese state historiography might gradually and eventually be elucidated to completion. Commencing with the dubious process of acquiring and collecting source materials, then, the problematic nature of the *Prachum Phongsawadan* and the peculiar heredities of the National Library of Thailand, to name but a few topics, must be discussed with vivacity.

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