

The Hokkien Rayas of Songkhla

Pimpraphai Bisalputra and Jeffery Sng

Independent scholars, Bangkok

ABSTRACT—Of the numerous Chinese families in Thailand, perhaps fewer than ten can trace their ancestry back to the 18th century; one of these is the Wu clan of Songkhla. Wu Rang (吳陽), the patriarch, known locally as Hao Yiang,¹ was part of a nascent Hokkien merchant community that thrived in Songkhla during the reign of King Borommakot (1733-1758) of Ayutthaya. Three prominent Thai-Chinese families trace their roots back to Hao Yiang, namely Na Songkhla, Suwankiri and Rochanahusdin. During the early Bangkok period the fortune of Songkhla rulers fluctuated depending on local conditions, Siamese demands, as well as center-periphery relations between the Siamese court and tributary principalities of the South. This article traces the story of the rulers of Songkhla from the late 18th century until the establishment of a centralized modern bureaucracy by King Rama V at the end of the 19th century.

The Sultanate of Singora

Situated on the eastern shore of the southern Siamese peninsular between Pattani and Nakhon Si Thammarat (Ligor), Songkhla in the 18th century was a sleepy backwater port of no importance. When Hao Yiang arrived before the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767, the headman of Songkhla was a petty chief reporting to the ruler of Ligor. In the mid-18th century, the strategic southern Siamese towns were Chumphon (controlling the upper part of the peninsular), Thalang (Phuket, controlling the western shore) and Ligor (which controlled the tributary Malay states, as well as tin exports through the gulf of Siam). Only the ruins of the old fort at Khao Daeng and the graveyard of a legendary Muslim ruler bore testimony to the glorious past of Singora, the precursor of today's Songkhla.²

Singora was founded by Dato Mogol, a Shia Muslim of Persian descent who migrated from Java in the early 1600s. His arrival in Siam came in the wake of Dutch inroads into the Indonesian spice trade at the expense of Muslim mercantile interests. Settling on Siamese land, the new port of Singora paid tribute to Ayutthaya and accepted Siamese suzerainty. Under Dato Mogol Singora became a tax-free port city frequented

¹ In those days, Chinese people in Songkhla were known by their Hokkien name. This article uses names in Hokkien dialect (rather than in Mandarin pinyin) so that they can be easily identified with the Thai sources.

² Damrong, *Anuson*, 353–4.

by Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese and Muslim traders. Mogol was succeeded by his son Sulaiman in 1620.³

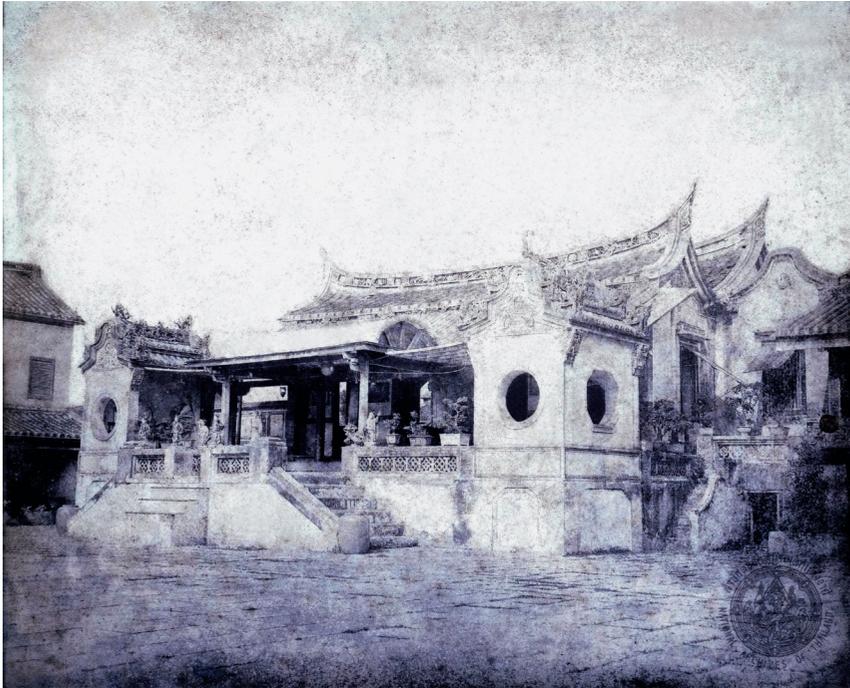


Figure 1. The Na Songkhla Residence (1894) by the sea was destroyed in 1942 during the Pacific War. Courtesy: National Archives of Thailand.

Relations between Ayutthaya and Singora deteriorated following the ascension of King Prasat Thong (r. 1629-1656) to the Siamese throne. When Pattani rebelled against Ayutthaya, Singora became embroiled in the conflict; during the fighting between Pattani and Ayutthaya, the town of Singora was damaged and its pepper crop destroyed. However, under Sulaiman's able leadership, Singora quickly recovered to become a busy port embodied in well-constructed city walls and moats with fortifications rising up to the summit of Khao Daeng.⁴ In 1642 Sulaiman, who became disenchanted with King Prasat Thong, declared his independence and proclaimed himself Sultan Suleiman Shah. Ayutthaya made repeated attempts to reclaim Singora during Sulaiman's reign but each attack failed. Finally, more than ten years after Sulaiman passed away, King Narai (r. 1656-1688) mounted another offensive to subdue Singora in 1679. During 1680 after a siege lasting more than six months, Singora was defeated and the city destroyed. Suleiman's sons and his clansmen were moved to Ayutthaya and finally allowed to settle in Chaiya and Phatthalung.⁵

After the King of Ayutthaya had subjugated the port, it was largely abandoned and

³ Suphatr, "Prawatisat sultan sulaiman", 78

⁴ Anat, *Sultan lumthalesap songkhla*, 80-98

⁵ Anat, *Sultan lumthalesap songkhla*, 117-25



Figure 2a, 2b, 2c. Singora Cannon cast by Sultan Sulaiman Shar. It was taken to Ayutthaya in the 17th century, then on to Burma in the 18th century and London in the 19th century. It is now at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London. Photos: Pongthanit Bisalputra.

declined to become a sleepy backwater ruled by a Thai governor reporting to Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁶

At the age of thirty-four, Hao Yiang left his small village called Xi Xing, in Hai Cheng county, north of Xiamen, and arrived in Songkhla in 1750 during the reign of King Borommakot. At that time Songkhla was a quiet village town. There was a small Chinese community located where the inland sea flows out to the gulf. According to the Songkhla Chronicle, after settling down at Khao Daeng with wives from the inland Phatthalung district, Hao Yiang had five sons namely Boon Hui (吳文輝) Boon Hiew, Boon Xing, Tien Seng and Yok Seng.

Sixteen years later in 1767, the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya was sacked and destroyed by the Burmese, splitting the kingdom into several self-governing cliques. In the south, Nu, the local boss of Nakhon Si Thammarat who used to serve in the royal page corps of Ayutthaya, declared himself king of the south with the support of Chan⁷ as his viceroy. Nu sent Vitien, a *krommakan* (town official) of Nakhon Si Thammarat to govern Songkhla. Meanwhile, all the Malay sultanates of the Peninsula South nullified their tributary ties with Ayutthaya. After King Taksin (r. 1767-1782) founded the Kingdom of Thonburi upon the ruins of Ayutthaya, the resurgent Siamese state launched a military campaign led by Chaophraya Chakri (Mood)⁸ with 5,000 troops to reassert Thonburi's suzerainty over Nakhon Si Thammarat on behalf of Ayutthaya. But the campaign was not successful. After the first attack on Nakhon Si Thammarat failed, King Taksin himself led an army of 10,000 to subjugate Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁹ This time the Raja of Ligor, Nu, was defeated and together with Vitien, the governor of Songkhla, escaped to Pattani.

King Taksin and his southern policy

While King Taksin was in Songkhla, Hao Yiang obtained an audience to ask for a bird nest concession at Ko Si and Ko Ha, two islands in the Songkhla inland sea, for fifty *chang* per annum. Hao Yiang's request for consideration did not fall on deaf ears. Hao Yiang, eighteen years older than Taksin, was regarded as an important leader in the overseas Chinese community in Songkhla.¹⁰ Like many Chinese overseas mining communities, the Chinese in Songkhla were organized as a self-defense society. Overseas Chinese had to learn to protect themselves, as the the emigrants to the Nanyang¹¹ lived without the benefit of protection by their government. During the Early Ming Dynasty private trade and emigration to the Nanyang were discouraged and sometimes proscribed

⁶ According to the Phatthalung Chronicle, Songkhla was in the late Ayutthaya period part of the four fourth-tier towns reporting to Phatthalung: Palien, Chana, Thepa and Songkhla (Siworawat, *Phongsawadan mueang phatthalung*, 30).

⁷ Chan was the son of Chaophraya Chamnan Borirak, a senior minister during the reign of King Borommakot who fled from Ayutthaya to Nakhon Si Thammarat when Ayutthaya was sacked by the Burmese.

⁸ A descendent of Sulaiman of Singora who used to serve as a tax collector for the King of Ayutthaya.

⁹ *Phrarachaphongsawadan chabap phrarachahatthalekha*, vol. II, 172-3.

¹⁰ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 358.

¹¹ Literally "the Southern Ocean" usually meaning Southeast Asia.

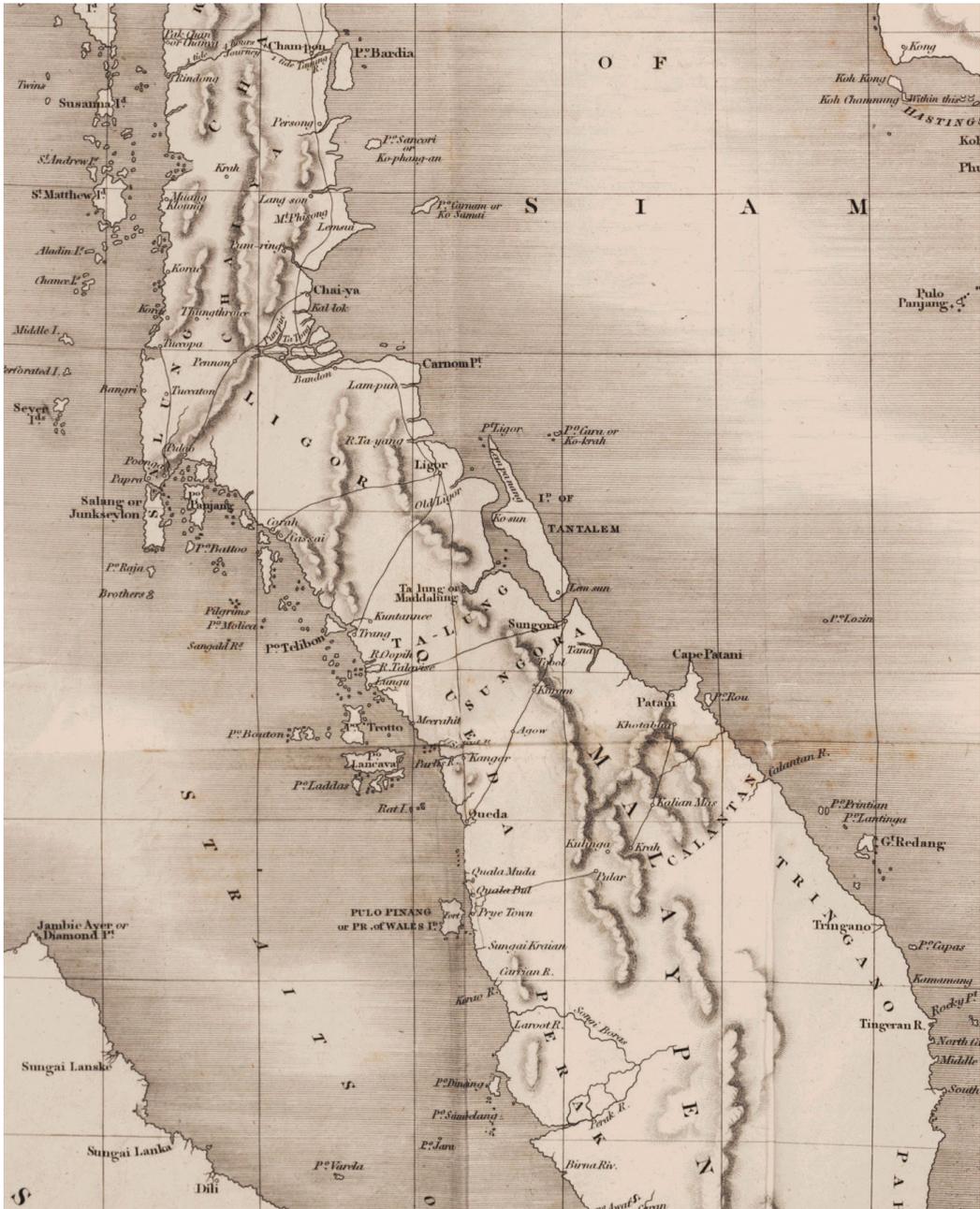


Figure 3. The middle peninsula on Crawford’s “Map of the Kingdoms of Siam and Cochin China,” compiled by John Walker, published by John Crawford (1828). Courtesy of Chris Joll.

under pain of death. Consequently, those breaking the Imperial ban on travel and trade ran the risk of arrest, exile or beheading if they were caught.

Hence, the Chinese overseas found themselves vulnerable in foreign lands. This was reflected in their overriding concern with the protection of life and property especially during times of disorder. They often turned to the traditional self-help and self-defense organizations that had served to protect their villages from predators and bandits in

ancient China. These were their *huiguan*, temple shrines and secret societies. Often, they were inextricably related.

The organization for self-defense was often placed in the hands of Chinese secret societies. In the southern peninsular there were many Chinese Triad groups including the Poon Tao Kong, Ngee Hin, Ngee Hok, Toa Kongsu and the Siew Li Kue, whose *raison d'être* was to protect the livelihoods of the miners. In the 19th century, the leader of these self-defense group was called the Chinese Kapitan by the British. These groups were usually organized in the form of a hierarchical brotherhood whose martial leaders went by the title of First Brother, Second Brother, Third Brother etc., in order of importance. The fact that Hao Yiang was variously referred to as Toa Peh, Krua Peh and Chom of Laem Son¹² reflected his highly venerated position in the Hokkien community of Songkhla. The title 'Toa Peh,' First Elder or Great Elder, indicated that he was even more senior than 'Toa Hia,' First Brother.

Meanwhile, King Taksin himself was keen to gain supporters from powerful local groups. Hao Yiang's lofty standing in the Chinese community testified to his powerful clout in the pecking order of Songkhla. Consequently, upon receiving a gift of fifty boxes of tobacco as a token of his submission, King Taksin immediately granted his request. Hao Yiang was then given the Thai title Luang Inthakhirisombat and his son Boon Xing was enlisted as the king's page accompanying him back to Bangkok. Before leaving Songkhla, Taksin bestowed the governorship position of Phra Songkhla to Yoam, a local Thai.¹³

Hao Yiang was diligent in his employment and always sent his concession dues promptly to Thonburi, the new capital of Siam. After he had also proved to be an effective tax farmer, King Taksin had a change of heart and appointed Hao Yiang as the governor of Songkhla, with the new title of Luang Suwankhirisombat, replacing Phra Songkhla (Yoam), who was called to live in the capital. Two years later, when Hao Yiang complained that Nakhon Si Thammarat sent officials to forcefully take away Songkhla girls from a weaver village to Nakhon Si Thammarat, creating a conflict between the two towns, King Taksin granted Songkhla the privilege of reporting directly to Thonburi instead of reporting via Nakhon Si Thammarat.¹⁴

Taksin's policy of establishing close ties with local leaders of various communities created a fiscal base for the new regime as well as cementing military alliances to enforce peace while his main army was engaged in continuous wars with the Burmese.

The Hokkien ruler of a frontier town

Members of the Wu family (i.e. Hao Yiang and his successors), which began to rule Songkhla in the reign of King Taksin, continued to retain the position of governor until 1901. The sustained unchallenged dominance of the Wu clan in this southern town was remarkable.

In the early Bangkok period, before the era of railways and steamships, contact

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 359.

between Songkhla and Bangkok took several weeks by sea¹⁵ and almost three months by land. The Chakri dynasty relied on trust and close relationships with distant rulers to control outlying frontier regions. Administration of large empires requires delicate finesse in managing center-periphery relations.¹⁶ The rocky relationship between the Sultan of Singora and the King of Ayutthaya, more than 100 years ago, set a dangerous precedent.

At the same time, the Wu clan had to negotiate the delicate relations with the king in Bangkok so that they would not fail like the Sultan of Singora over 100 years earlier. Those who fail to learn from the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them. While Sulaiman had tried to exploit Ayutthaya's logistical difficulties in controlling outlying fiefdoms, Hao Yiang sought to develop a mutually beneficial alliance with the Siamese capital embodied in a relationship of confidence and trust between center and periphery.

Custom, political imperative, expedience, interdependence and specific historical factors combined to create a body of mutually acceptable practices governing center-periphery relations between Bangkok and Songkhla. There already existed a customary precedent since the Ayutthaya period for important members of the nobility (*khunnang*) to send their sons to serve in the corps of pages (*mahatlek*) in the capital. This practice created hostages, which gave the imperial court leverage over the tributary fiefdoms, while also providing an avenue for grooming local bloodlines to assume power as tributary rulers within the Ayutthaya empire. Moreover, having sons in high places at court also provided the tributary rulers and provincial governors of distant towns with eyes and ears in the capital. For example, when Hao Yiang's son Boon Xing accompanied Taksin back to Thonburi, he was able to obtain news on the political situation and activities at court. From the written record of Boon Xing's son named Boon Sang (吳志仁), who was also a page of King Rama II (r. 1809-1824), we have a glimpse of everyday life in Bangkok:

At 16 I became a royal page in Bangkok. Life was hard work. In the morning around nine o'clock we had to be present in the audience hall attending the royal meeting which lasted till around eleven before being dismissed. I came home¹⁷ for lunch and left again at two in the afternoon to check on the building of royal junks at Ban Khok Krabue. Then I would return home for a short rest and supper before going again to the palace to submit a progress report on shipbuilding. The evening audience usually lasted until ten before the king retired and I could take leave. That was my routine for four years [1812-1816].¹⁸

¹⁵ Depending on the sailing vessels, the wind and the seasons, traveling between Songkhla and Bangkok took from 13 up to 45 days (Udomsombat, *Jotmai luang udomsombat*).

¹⁶ In the Siamese feudal system, the capital assigned local income from the land and part of the fees and taxes to the rulers in return for the responsibility of upkeep of administration within their territory. No salary was sent from the capital.

¹⁷ The Wu Clan lived in the heart of Bangkok on the east side of the river. Thien Jong, the third Phraya of Songkhla, had a house by the river near Sununthalai (Rajini School) while his brother Thien Seng, the fourth Phraya of Songkhla, lived on the waterfront behind Wat Sam Pluem, near Rajawongse pier. (Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 380-2)

¹⁸ Sawatkhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla phak 2*, 383.

Many years later in 1847, Boon Sang, already a familiar face at court, became the fifth member from the Wu clan appointed to the position of Chaophraya Wichiankhiri, ruler of Songkhla between 1847 and 1865. But even though the Wu were cautious, their fortunes fluctuated during the 126 years that they ruled Songkhla, reflecting political swings in Bangkok.

After King Rama I ascended the throne in 1782, the government was restructured. Hao Yiang, who was seen as a close associate of the King of Thonburi, was sacked in 1784. However, the reasons for his removal were couched in non-political terms. Foremost among the reasons cited was Hao Yiang's failure to construct three transport ships on time, as requested by the capital. Songkhla had become a center of Siam's shipbuilding industry in southern Thailand, second only to Nakhon Si Thammarat. During the first four reigns of the Chakri dynasty, Songkhla was charged with delivering sixty-two seaworthy vessels to the capital.¹⁹

Hao Yiang was also taken to task for failing to meet the payment deadline of the royal bird-nest concession. More serious was the charge that when there was unrest among the Malay states of Terengganu, Pattani and Nongchik, Hao Yiang failed in his duty to send troops to enforce a favorable settlement. To add insult to injury, Hao Yiang not only failed in his duty he simply withdrew his troops without authorization and did not report to Bangkok. Last but not least, Hao Yiang also failed to secure the safety of the junk trading routes around Songkhla from pirate attacks.²⁰

Yet the new dynasty also recognized the strategic value of the Wu clan. After executing Taksin and the most dangerous among his loyalist generals and reshuffling the government, King Rama I (r. 1782-1809) set out to win the allegiance of useful, able generals, ministers and subjects for the new Chakri dynasty. It was the classic carrot-and-stick approach. Acting on the counsel of his brother, Maha Surasinghanat, Rama I decided to combine his harsh sacking of Hao Yiang with offers of clemency to his family. The new king demonstrated his magnanimity by elevating Boon Hui, the eldest son of the sacked Hao Yiang, to the position of Luang Suwankhiri, the caretaker governor of Songkhla. However he balanced his positive gesture with a simultaneous decree downgrading the administration status of Songkhla by placing it once again under the authority of Nakhon Si Thammarat as it had been during the Ayutthaya era.²¹ The message was clear to the House of Songkhla: what is given can be taken away.

In a parallel decree, King Rama I also replaced Chaophraya Nakhon Si Thammarat (Nu),²² father-in-law of King Taksin, by appointing Phat, Nu's other son-in-law, as ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat, the most important Siamese city on the peninsula.²³

¹⁹ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 62.

²⁰ Nidhi, *Kanmueang thai samai phrajao krung thonburi*, 338-339; Sasimon, *Prawatsat mueang songkhla*, 338-9.

²¹ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 359.

²² Nu was officially appointed the Tributary Raja of Nakhon Si Thammarat by King Taksin, with the right to appoint his own peers. Hence, Nu's daughters were recorded as "Princess" in many documents.

²³ Thiphakhawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 1*, 27.

The southern warlords

In 1785 King Bodawpaya of Burma, a younger brother of Hsinbyushin who conquered Ayutthaya, embarked on a campaign to annex the old pre-1767 Ayutthayan domains. According to Prince Damrong, the Burmese launched a six-pronged attack from the Irrawaddy Basin on the Siamese heartland.²⁴ This renewal of the Burmese War in 1785-1786 is called the “Nine Armies War” in the Thai chronicles. Since the Burmese deployed a strategy of military encirclement of the Chao Phraya Basin, the Siamese found themselves having to defend a very broad front. The Burmese strategy enabled the invading forces to control the initial momentum of the war as the Siamese defenders found that they had insufficient troops to counter the enemy’s multi-pronged attacks with 130,000 men.²⁵

Making the most of a bad situation the main Siamese army, led by Siam’s most able general Maha Surasinghanat, the Prince of the Front Palace, prepared to engage Bodawpaya’s main force on the western front in Kanchanaburi. Meanwhile, King Rama I’s nephew, Prince of the Rear Palace, Anurak Devesh, brought his army to reinforce Lanna via Nakhon Sawan.

As the main Siamese forces were concentrated in the west and lower north, Bangkok could not send reinforcements to repulse the Burmese attack in the south. Surprised and outnumbered, the southern towns fell one after another under the Burmese onslaught, from Ranong across the isthmus to Chumphon and Chaiya, then all the way down to Nakhon Si Thammarat, the main southern citadel of Siam. Only Phuket (Thalang) successfully resisted the Burmese blitzkrieg thanks to the heroism of two sisters: Chan, a widow of the governor of Phuket, and her sister Mook successfully rallied the residents to fight and defend the town. After a month-long siege, the Burmese retreated.²⁶

The Burmese invasion unwittingly cast a new light on the quality of Bangkok’s political assets on her southern frontier. The brief war proved to be an invaluable lesson for Bangkok to determine the strengths and weaknesses among her military assets in the south. Chumphon, Chaiya and Nakhon Si Thammarat, the cornerstone of Bangkok’s defense system, failed to live up to expectations. The Burmese attack cast an ignominious shadow on Phat, the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat, who panicked after he heard a false rumor that Bangkok had fallen to the Burmese and fled before the advancing Burmese army without putting up a fight to defend his own city.²⁷ The symbolic and strategic importance of the fall of Nakhon Si Thammarat to Burmese arms was amply demonstrated. After the Bangkok forces commanded by Maha Surasinghanat defeated King Bodawpaya’s forces in Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi, the Bangkok force of 20,000 men promptly marched south to reclaim Nakhon Si Thammarat.

In the meantime in the south, as the news of the Burmese victories spread,

²⁴ Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 1*, 1-34; Damrong, “Athibai rueang phongsawadan.”

²⁵ Damrong, “Rueang jatkan pokhrong huamueang pak tai”, 163.

²⁶ Damrong, “Athibai rueang phongsawadan.”

²⁷ Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 1*, 38.

insurrections flared up. Khun Rongrajmontri (Chim), the son of the former governor of Songkhla (Yoam), who was managing the tin mine at Chana, attacked Songkhla. Boon Hui was betrayed by a gatekeeper, lost Songkhla, and escaped to Bangkok to ask for reinforcements. King Rama I ordered him to accompany Yoam, who was in Bangkok, to hasten to Maha Surasinghanat's camp in Nakhon Si Thammarat for help. Meanwhile Khun Rongrajmontri (Chim) occupied Songkhla for almost four months before Boon Hui, Yoam and Maha Surasinghanat's army arrived.²⁸



Figure 4a. Singora gun tower at Khao Hua Daeng, Laem Son.

As Maha Surasinghanat marched his army 190 kilometers south to Songkhla on the pretext of resolving a dispute between the chieftains at Chana and the ruler of Songkhla, Boon Hui, he had time to ponder over what should be the new dynasty's policy toward the south and the Malay Sultanates. When the prince arrived in Songkhla, he did not punish Chim for the attack on Songkhla but ignored the issue completely. Apparently Maha Surasinghanat was not in a hurry to choose between the two groups of local warlords until he could ascertain who would make a better ally for Bangkok. Meanwhile, he saw an opportunity to project Bangkok's influence into the former domains of Ayutthaya in the Malay world. Emissaries from Songkhla were sent to Kedah, Terengganu and Pattani. Relying on the threat of Siamese arms garrisoned in nearby Songkhla, Bangkok proclaimed suzerainty over these Malay states. The envoys' message was clear: it was

²⁸ Thipakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 1*, 35.

an offer which could not be refused. All submitted to become vassals of Bangkok except Pattani.²⁹

Pattani's refusal was tantamount to a declaration of war. Siamese troops immediately laid siege to Pattani's legendary impregnable fortress city³⁰. Boon Hui had already implanted his Trojan Horse, Songkhla loyalists within Pattani's walled city, and was able to obtain details of guard deployments and defense arrangements for the prince to plan his attack. Exploiting the weak points of Pattani's walled fortress Siamese forces



Figure 4b. City moat below the gun tower at Khao Hua Daeng.

quickly overran the city's defenses, and the city fell with ease. Victorious Siamese forces entered the city. The cannon of Pattani, famed in the Malay world, were moved to Bangkok, along with prisoners of war and their families.

Meanwhile Khun Rongrajmontri (Chim), Boon Hui's opponent, failed to commandeer a Pattani merchant ship that Maha Surasinghanat ordered him to confiscate. Moreover, Boon Hui accused Phra Chana³¹ of conspiring with the Burmese: the conspiracy was proven true and Phra Chana was convicted by his own brother Phraya Phatthalung (Khun).³² Both chieftains of Chana were put to death.

For his effort, Boon Hui was promoted from the rank of Luang to Phraya Pichaikiri Si Samut Songkhram, but Maha Surasinghanat stopped short of disturbing the prevailing political arrangements. For

the time being Songkhla remained subordinate to Nakhon Si Thammarat and Boon Hui was still required to report to Nakhon Si Thammarat. This expedient decision would return to haunt Maha Surasinghanat.

Five years later in 1791, Pattani rose in revolt. Phraya Pattani, abetted by a mystic Muslim cleric named Toh Sayat, marched on Songkhla and encamped at Khao Luk Chang,

²⁹ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 360-3.

³⁰ According to a report by Captain Francis Light on 12 September 1786: [Pujut, which was Patani's main fort] was deemed impregnable. It was surrounded by Seven thick rows of Bamboes, within the Bamboes an exceeding wide and deep Canal, and within the Canal a Strong Rampart of Earth, on which was mounted a Number of large Cannon. The Area within the Walls Contained all the Inhabitants Cattle and Grain. Their Strength Amounted to near 4,000 Fighting Men. See Bradley, "Siam's Conquest of Patani." 151.

³¹ The rulers of Chana and Phatthalung were brothers descended from Sultan Suleiman.

³² Siworawat, *Phongsawadan mueang phatthalung*; Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 360-3.

a hill south of the town. An embattled Boon Hui desperately requested reinforcements from Bangkok and Nakhon Si Thammarat. The reinforcement from Nakhon arrived on time to raise the siege, then the combined forces of Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat sacked the Pattani camp at Khao Luk Chang. The magical powers of Toh Sayat proved to be no match for Siamese arms. The cleric was shot down as he was chanting and sprinkling holy water on his warriors to make them invulnerable to Siamese arrows and bullets.³³ With the death of Toh Sayat, Pattani's fighting spirit collapsed as rebel soldiers fled helter-skelter into the forest. Riding on the momentum of victory Boon Hui marched on Pattani and occupied the city.

If there were important lessons to be learned from the experience of the Burmese invasion and the Pattani revolt, it was the weakness of Nakhon Si Thammarat in the southern defense system. Geographically, Nakhon Si Thammarat was too far away from the endemic trouble spots further south to respond swiftly and put out political fires before they spread.

The recurring revolts in the South finally impressed upon officials in Bangkok the inadequacy of ruling through Nakhon Si Thammarat. King Rama I revived the old Thonburi practice of shifting the locus of power away from Nakhon Si Thammarat to Songkhla and placing Songkhla under the direct control of Bangkok. He also promoted Boon Hui to the rank of Chaophraya Inthakhiri, responsible for the Muslim sultanates on the Gulf of Siam, namely, Terengganu and Pattani.³⁴ Later, to consolidate its hold on Pattani, Bangkok resorted to the imperial strategy of divide and rule and split the Sultanate of Pattani into seven principalities including, Yala, Yaring, Raman, Ra Ngae, Sai Buri, Nong Chik and Pattani, to prevent the latter from becoming too big and powerful for Songkhla to handle with its limited manpower. Songkhla's advantage as a strategic geopolitical asset resulted from its greater proximity to the Malay Sultanates, compared to Nakhon Si Thammarat. Moreover, Chaophraya Inthakhiri (Boon Hui), the ruler of Songkhla, was an able and trustworthy general, while his counterpart in Nakhon Si Thammarat had a record of abandoning his station during the Burmese attack in 1785. In addition, the commercial shrewdness of the Wu clan in trade made Songkhla a lucrative port earning taxable revenues for the Chakri court in Bangkok.

Bangkok's decision to take Songkhla and the eastern Malay States away from the jurisdiction of Nakhon Si Thammarat caused untold resentment there and deepened the rift between the Na Songkhla and Na Nakhon ruling houses. Prince Damrong remarked: "It is a well-known fact that Chaophraya Nakhon and Chaophraya and Phraya of Songkhla have been in conflict since their forefathers' generation. It is this hostility that came back to haunt Bangkok's administration of the Malay States."³⁵ For the time being, Bangkok took steps to control the situation by separating the responsibilities of Songkhla from Nakhon Si Thammarat: since they could not cooperate it was better to keep them out of each other's way as much as possible.

The effectiveness of dealing directly with the Malay States through Songkhla

³³ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 364-5.

³⁴ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 366.

³⁵ Damrong, "Athibai rueang phongsawadan."

was demonstrated when rebellion threatened again in 1808. Upon receiving timely intelligence of a brewing rebellion among the Malay chiefs, Boon Hui promptly tipped off Bangkok that the Sultan of Yaring was conspiring with the Sultan of Terengganu to attack Siamese domains. Bangkok decided to act on Boon Hui's suspicion without waiting for material proof of rebellion—mindful that logistical requirements for a long march south required a lead time of several months. Bangkok ordered Chaophraya Phonlathep (Bunnak), commander of the Siamese troops then stationed in Thalang, accompanied by Boon Hui's nephew Thien Jong (吳志從), who was serving as a page in Bangkok, to march on Yaring. Siamese troops occupied Yaring and arrested Dato Paklan, the Yaring governor. Thus, a potential Malay rebellion was nipped in the bud.³⁶

The second test came in 1809 when King Rama I passed away. Taking advantage of distress in the Siamese court, Burmese fleets attacked Thalang. Songkhla responded swiftly. Thien Jong, the veteran of the Yaring campaign led 1,000 troops from Songkhla across the isthmus to rendezvous with Chaophraya Yommarat who commanded the main army from Bangkok. Meanwhile Boon Hui took 400 men to Kedah to request troops from Ahmad Tajuddin II, the Sultan of Kedah. Siam's expeditious military response successfully repelled the Burmese invasion.³⁷ For his help in defeating the Burmese, the ruler of Kedah was bestowed the title of Chaophraya in August 1811.

However, the high tide in Songkhla's fortune was overshadowed by bereavement. Boon Hui, Songkhla's able ruler died in 1812, a year after the victory. The succession passed to Thien Jong, who was appointed Phraya Wisetphakdi, the acting governor of Songkhla. However, the conflict between Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat, which had cast a shadow over the affairs of the south, did not end with the passing of Boon Hui and returned to haunt the next generation of the Rajas of Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat during the Second and Third Reigns.

Bangkok's southern policy in the Second Reign (1809-1824)

In 1811 Chaophraya Nakhon Si Thammarat arrived in Bangkok to attend the cremation rite of King Rama I. During his audience with the new king, Rama II, Phat asked to resign due to his old age. The King then appointed Phra Borirakphubet (Noi), an adopted son of Phat to replace him as the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat with the title of Phraya Si Thammasokkarat. Noi is known in James Low's *Mission to Southern Siam* report (1824) as the Raja of Ligor.

The ascension of Noi to the seat of power energized and invigorated the court of Nakhon Si Thammarat. Noi was a man of extraordinary character, a clever vigorous and determined ruler³⁸ with a prestigious descent to match his position. He is believed to be King Taksin's son.³⁹ Noi's mother was one of the six daughters of the old Raja of Ligor

³⁶ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 366-7.

³⁷ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 367.

³⁸ Munro-Hay. "A Plan of Nakhon Si Thammarat, 61-70.

³⁹ Damrong, "Rueang jatkan pokhron huamueang pak tai", 9-10.

(Nu) who had no sons. Nu's daughters, the Ligor princesses, were quite influential in the Thonburi and early Bangkok eras.

Through his mother, one of the Ligor princesses, Noi was closely related to Krom Muen Sakdiphonlasep, a half-brother of King Rama II who controlled Kalahom, the ministry responsible for the administrative affairs of southern Siam. According to the Ligor lineage, Krom Mun Sakdiphonlasep's mother, Nui Yai, who had been a consort of King Rama I, was Noi's first cousin. Another royal luminary with close ties to Ligor was Prince Isaranurak, whose wife was a daughter of the Ligor princess Chim and the late King of Thonburi. Sang, the director of royal pages from the house of Isaranurak sent Nakhon Si Thammarat a reassuring message: "... with regard to Nakhon Si Thammarat, please inform *chao khun* that Krom Muen Sakdiphonlasep is (on our side) helping to support your concerns. (Your position is) ten times better than Songkhla... no need to worry or be anxious."⁴⁰

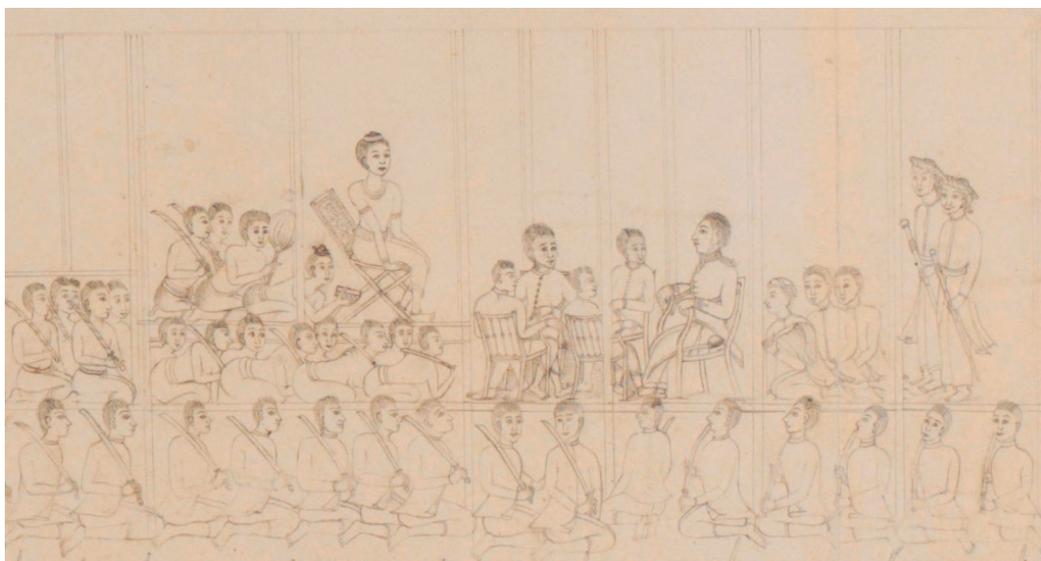


Figure 5. Raja of Ligor (Noi)'s son, Phra Saneha Montru (Noi Yai) at a meeting with James Low on 24 June 1824. Image from British Library, Add. 27370, f.18, in public domain.

In contrast, Thien Jong, the governor of Songkhla, fared badly in the new eyes of Bangkok. In 1812, the capital sent conscription officers to register the number of *lek* or *phrai luang* (able-bodied men who could be conscripted for military duty in time of war) in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla and Phatthalung. The number of *lek* (conscripts) recruited and tattooed in Nakhon Si Thammarat was much greater than Songkhla. Thien Jong accused Nakhon Si Thammarat of stealing Songkhla manpower to boost the numbers of *lek* in Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁴¹ Noi on the other hand claimed that 800-900 men from Nakhon Si Thammarat ran away to Songkhla and the officials at Songkhla could capture and send back only six of these deserters. Hence, Noi had to send his

⁴⁰ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 132.

⁴¹ Sisamon, *Prawatisat mueang songkhla*, 155-6.

men to round up people who he claimed were rightly his. Thien Jong was reprimanded. Not long after this humiliation, Thien Jong passed away in 1816. The succession in Songkhla passed to his younger brother, Thien Seng (吳志生), who was appointed Phra Samutranurak, the acting governor of Songkhla.

In 1820 relations between Kedah and Nakhon Si Thammarat turned sour, due to British intrigues. The previous Sultan of Kedah had leased out Penang island to the British as a naval coaling station in 1786. The close relations with the British, a rising power in the Straits of Malacca, encouraged the Sultan in his defiance of Bangkok. Meanwhile, King Rama II was investigating a report by a Chinese junk merchant named Lim Hoi, who had captured a ship carrying a letter from the King of Burma addressed to the Sultan of Kedah asking for cooperation in the event of Burma's possible invasion of Siam. Warned of the impending investigation, Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah II of Kedah not only refused to travel to Bangkok but abstained from dispatching the annual *bungamas* tribute to King Rama II as well.⁴²

Chaophraya Nakhon Si Thammarat (Noi) saw the opportunity to expand his territorial influence. With the concurrence of King Rama II, he led Siamese troops to attack and annex Kedah, which was just fifteen days march from Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁴³ The embattled Sultan fled to Penang in 1821 to escape capture. Noi assured the British of Siam's good offices while he occupied Kedah and installed his nineteen-year-old son as the ruler of Kedah.

Noi's decision to annex Kedah was greeted with derision in Songkhla. Thien Seng saw Nakhon's intervention in Kedah as a folly and a recipe for disaster. He argued that direct Siamese rule over Kedah, whose population spoke a different language and espoused a different religion, would present insuperable difficulties and require Siamese arms to hold the hostile polity.⁴⁴ Indeed holding on to Kedah proved problematic for Siam for the next twenty years.

Thien Seng: A Chinese patriarch

Thien Seng remained Phra Samutranurak and acting governor of Songkhla for seven years before he was promoted to the rank of Phraya Wichiankhiri. His rule of thirty-one years is the longest in Songkhla history. Thien Seng, a rough-and-tough aggressive leader, who collected guns and loved hunting tigers, was nicknamed *chao khun suea* or "Tiger Lord" by his people. In addition, he was commercially shrewd and owned three trading junks. He enjoyed *lakhon*, the Thai dance drama, and was fond of poetry. His poetic talent in improvising rhyme and rhythm earned him the reputation of a delightful performer and exponent of the *sakkawa* genre. According to the Songkhla Chronicle:

Phraya Wichiankhiri adhered strictly to Chinese customs. He was prolific in Chinese (reading and writing fluently) and used abacus in his computations. His

⁴² Damrong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 2*, 428-30.

⁴³ Low, *Jotmai het jems lo*.

⁴⁴ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 168, 172.

fierce and forceful character, together with his readiness to use force, made him an apt governor for Songkhla during the time when there were frequent unrest and uprisings in the seven petite sultanates in the old Pattani area. Also, people in the Songkhla vicinity were quite barbaric in those days. Piracy and robbery were common. Thien Seng was feared to the extent that he could order the villagers to round up a tiger as if it was a cat or a mouse deer. The people of Songkhla were more afraid of him than they were afraid of the man-eating tigers He never neglected the Chinese code of ethics. Intermarriage within members of the Hao (Wu) clan were not allowed.⁴⁵



Figure 6. Saksitphitak City Gate (source: Sawaphol Suvanich).



Figure 7. Suramrit City Gate (source: National Archives of Thailand), built by Thien Seng.

However, Thien Seng's savage bravado could also verge into recklessness in his dealings with his overlords in Bangkok. The Chakri court felt ill at ease in dealing with this new larger-than-life noble savage of Songkhla. The rocky center-periphery relationship also masked Thien Seng's unspoken resentment of Bangkok's favoritism towards Nakhon Si Thammarat embodied in the 1812 conscription incident. Memories of this past returned to spook the new lord Thien Seng in 1820.

Bangkok envoys, Phraya Surasena and Phraya Pichai, appeared in Songkhla to register the number of *lek*. This renewed request reopened the wounds from 1812 which had not yet healed. The revival of painful memories simply enraged the ferocious Thien Seng who defiantly refused to lift a finger to help Phraya Surasena and Phraya

⁴⁵ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 380-2.

Phichai to register *lek* under the jurisdiction of Songkhla.⁴⁶ Neither did the Governor and his *krommakan* send any troops to accompany the Bangkok mission to register *lek* in Satun. Consequently, the conscription effort was wholly unsuccessful.⁴⁷ Songkhla's defiance and lack of cooperation was underscored in the most damaging way possible by a humiliated Phraya Surasena and Phraya Pichai. King Rama II was apoplectic at Thien Seng's reckless temerity in disobeying the royal decree. Thien Seng was severely reprimanded. He was sent to Bangkok in chains and denounced at the Chakri court.⁴⁸

However in 1827 Thien Seng was offered an opportunity to redeem himself when war broke out between Siam and Laos. Chao Anou, King of Lan Xang⁴⁹ attacked

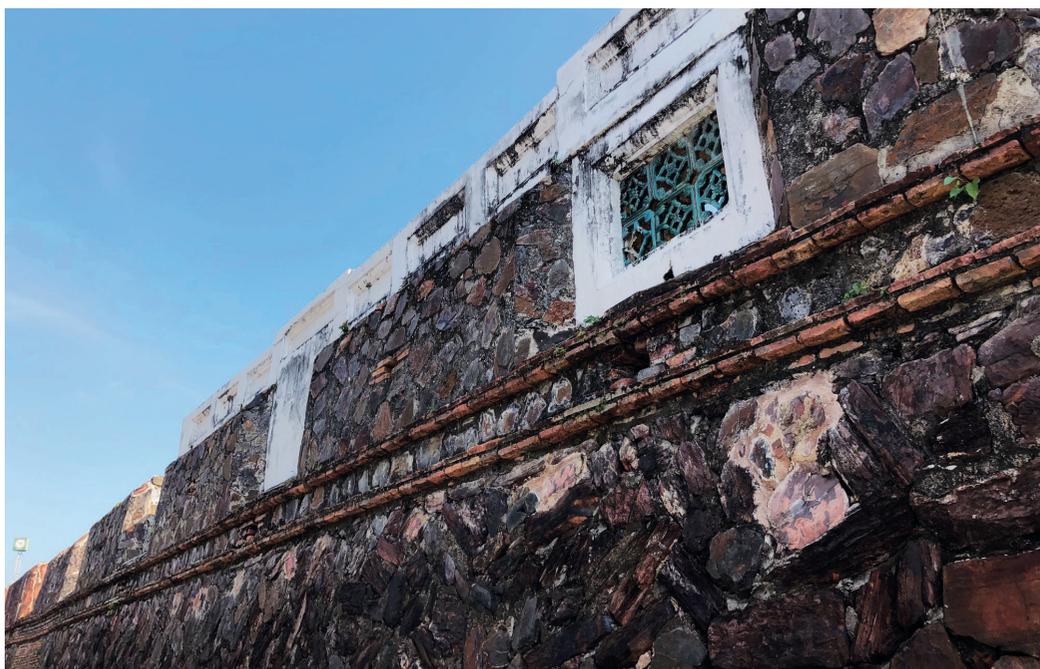


Figure 8. City wall of Songkhla built by Thien Seng. .

Nakhon Ratchasima. Responding to Bangkok's request, Songkhla sent 1,000 men to help Bangkok repel the Laos invaders. A grateful King Rama III asked Thien Seng's

⁴⁶ Perhaps due to the local lords' need of manpower. Once a man had been tattooed as *phrai luang*, he was no longer subordinate to the local lords but had to report to an official from the capital stationed in the town. It was therefore customary for the provincial governors to declare their men as *phrai som* belonging to the local lords.

⁴⁷ *Rueang phrabat somdet phraphutthaloetlainaphalai mai pho phrathai*.

⁴⁸ According to a report by James Low on 5 July 1824: "the Rajah [of Ligor] is very oppressive. It seems that many of his people, disgusted at the hardships they suffered, left Ligor and sought protection at Sangora. ... This was quite sufficient to incite the Ligorian against the governor of Sangora. He had diminished his popularity by holding out superior advantages in his country to what Ligor offered. This seems to have been his crime, and for this he had been put in irons and sent to Siam [Bangkok]." See Farrington, *Low's Mission to Southern Siam 1824*, 62; Sisamon, *Prawatisat mueang songkhla*, 155-6.

⁴⁹ A Laotian kingdom that flourished from the 14th century until it was split into two separate kingdoms in the 18th century.

men to build fortifications in Samut Prakan, a task which Thien Seng's men completed before returning home.⁵⁰

In commendation of Thien Seng's role, the Songkhla Chronicle, written by the last Raya of Songkhla, noted that Thien Seng was a just patriarch whose authority was unchallenged within the House of Wu. Under his wise leadership social harmony prevailed between parents, siblings and extended family members. The House of Songkhla affirmed they could count on him to protect family and clan interests, settle disputes in a just manner and refrain from favoritism in allocating position, rank, authority and resources within the clan. Not only did he honor and take exemplary care of the family embodied in the immediate descendants of Hao Yiang, he was always careful to be fair in dispensing favors and showing support to all the members of the Wu clan in the best Confucian tradition.



Figure 9. The city wall of the new town in Bo Yang built by Thien Seng was completed in 1842. Courtesy: จรัส จัทรพรหมรัตน์

Unrest in Kedah

In 1830 a force of 3,000 Malays, led by Tuanku Dain, a nephew of Ahmad Tajuddin II, the ex-sultan living in exile in Malacca, attacked Kedah in an attempt to regain the throne. In response, Noi, the Rajah of Ligor, sent Phra Surin who was Krom Mun Sakdiphonlasep's officer to conscript able-bodied men from Songkhla and the seven southern states to fight the pretender's invading army.⁵¹ Thien Seng was reluctant to render his good offices to Nakhon Si Thammarat's military conscription drive. In his view, Noi's unwise decision to invade and remove the ruler of Kedah with Siamese arms had provoked the popular insurrection in Kedah in the first place. Noi's attempt to correct his mistake by conscripting a Malay force to put down the insurrection was tantamount

⁵⁰ Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 3*, 52; Sisamon, *Prawatisat mueang songkhla*, 155-6.

⁵¹ Namely, Yala, Yaring, Raman, Ra-ngae, Sai Buri, Nong Chik and Pattani.

to adding insult to injury. In Songkhla's view it was downright "silly to recruit Moslem Malays to fight Moslem Malays!" Consequently, he categorically refused to cooperate and told Noi's officers to go and recruit soldiers themselves.⁵²

The seven southern towns, with the exception of Yaring, were up in arms against the conscription team. Phra Surin's officials were accused of extortion. Subsequently in 1832, Bangkok forces headed by Chaophraya Phrakhlung (Dit) were sent to pacify the rebellious Malay sultanates on both sides of the isthmus. Meanwhile Noi managed to retake Kedah two months before the Phrakhlung arrived in Songkhla. Tuanku Dain and the rebels committed suicide in the town of Kedah. The southern sultans who supported the rebels, including Kelantan, Saiburi, Raman and Ra-ngae, submitted to the Phrakhlung and were fined. Those who refused were captured and taken hostage to Bangkok.⁵³



Figure 10. A view inside Songkhla new town at Bo Yang across the lake from Khao Hua Daeng. Courtesy: Thailand National Archives.

Six years later King Rama III's mother, Her Highness Si Sulalai,⁵⁴ passed away. Both Noi and Thien Seng traveled north to attend the funeral rites in Bangkok in August 1838. While they were in Bangkok another uprising broke out in the south. Tuanku Mohammad Said, a nephew of Ahmad Tajuddin and Tuanku Abdullah, together with Wan Mali and several groups of Malay pirates, attacked Kedah. Noi's son could not hold the town and withdrew to Phatthalung. The rebels took over Trang, a nearby Siamese town, and regrouped for an attack on Songkhla. They also tried to convince the rulers of the seven southern states to join forces with them.

Noi and Thien Seng rushed back to defend their towns. King Rama III immediately dispatched small reinforcements to Songkhla and later appointed Phraya Si Phiphat

⁵² Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 3*, 63; Damrong, "Athibai rueang phongsawadan," 28.

⁵³ Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 3*, 72

⁵⁴ Her Highness Si Sulalai was a descendant of Sultan Sulaiman Shah of Singora.

(Tat), a younger brother of the Phrakhleng, as the military commander of the main force. However, Phraya Si Phiphat (Tat), Chaophraya Yommarat and Phraya Phetchaburi were held up by conscription delays. The parties eventually set off when Dr. Richardson, a British surgeon of the East India Company's Madras Army, was visiting Bangkok. Richardson reported that the Phrakhleng deployed ships to transport Siamese troops to reinforce the Rajahs of Ligor and Songkhla. On 1 March 1839, a dispatch from Songkhla arrived with the news that the Malays were within two miles with 3000 men, and begging immediate assistance.⁵⁵

Boon Sang, a cousin of Thien Seng who was acting town chief, managed to hold his position and deployed Chinese fighters of the Wu clan to storm the rebel camp in a bloody hand-to-hand battle. When Thien Seng arrived back in town, he declared that he would pay fifty dollars for each rebel head his soldiers brought back. Thien Seng's offer boosted Siamese morale.⁵⁶ A pile of decapitated rebel heads was collected at the town center.

When the vanguard units from Bangkok arrived at Ko Nu, Boon Sang attacked the enemy positions with heavy cannon fire. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Malays fled. Siamese forces won a total victory. By the time the main Siamese army arrived, the battle was over.

Phraya Si Phiphat later sent Phraya Phetchaburi accompanied by Boon Sang down to Saiburi (สายบุรี) to calm a conflict brewing in the nearby Sultanate of Kelantan.⁵⁷ After visiting the town of Kedah, Phraya Si Phiphat stayed on in Songkhla for over a year to familiarize himself with the political situation of the south on the pretext of helping Thien Seng complete a new fortified town at Boh Yang. Perhaps the real reason for his long stay was that Chaophraya Nakhon Si Thammarat (Noi), Bangkok's strong man in the south had suddenly passed away.

During the reigns of King Rama II and King Rama III, the two Bunnag brothers, Dit and Tat, were perhaps the most influential figures at the Chakri court. Apart from their brilliant minds, they enjoyed further prestige as Rama II's maternal cousins. Both had been appointed commander-in-chief of Siamese troops in the South, Dit in 1832 and Tat in 1839. But it was Tat's southern experience through his prolonged stay in Songkhla that eventually influenced Bangkok to rectify Siamese policy towards Kedah in early 1840s.⁵⁸

In Songkhla, Thien Seng completed his new city at Boh Yang on the lowland plain across from Khao Daeng, the site of the old city. The new town was the Wu clan's pride—a true fortified town just like those in China, with city walls, fortified battlements, and eight Chinese-style gates built over ten feet high. The auspicious occasion of establishing a new city shrine was celebrated in a grand ceremony presided over by Thien Seng in 1842.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Farrington, *Dr Richardson's missions to Siam*, 200.

⁵⁶ Wichiankhiri, *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla*, 374.

⁵⁷ Thiphakhorawong, *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 3*, 132-4.

⁵⁸ In 1841 Bangkok had divided Kedah into four small states, similar to the division of Pattani into seven small states. The southern, largest and most prosperous portion was given back to the old Sultan of Kedah, Ahmed Tajuddin Halim Shah II, when he sent his sons to Bangkok to negotiate his restoration in 1842.

⁵⁹ Sisamon, *Prawatisat mueang songkhla*, 167-74.

The Southerner

The strong bond between leaders and their men was legendary in the South where piracy and robbery were widespread. Disobedience to Bangkok officials was also common. When Phraya Si Phiphat's fleet stopped for fresh water supply in Chaiya on his way south, he had to wait for almost four days before his request was met. Tat was so put off by the Chaiya authorities under Chaophraya Nakhon (Noi)'s jurisdiction that he refused to stop at Nakhon Si Thammarat but sailed directly to Songkhla.⁶⁰ Upon hearing the story, King Rama III was bemused and remarked: "Typical! The Nakhon Si Thammarat men are extremely difficult and uncooperative. They are only loyal to their boss and will not obey unless the boss has given them permission to do so. No useful information can be obtained from them. They only listen to their boss."⁶¹

Meanwhile Songkhla continued to receive demographic and cultural influences from China during the 19th century. Following historical precedent Songkhla became a favorite destination for migrants from Zhangzhou, the ancestral town of the ruling Wu clan. Hence new arrivals tended to belong to the same speech group as the ruling Wu family in Songkhla and were well received there.

When Tan Bui (陳酉配) decided to seek his fortune overseas, naturally he thought of Songkhla. Tan Bui's grandfather was a brave Ming loyalist from Zhangzhou who went out to sea and never returned to his ancestral village. Not wanting his own son to follow his grandfather's footsteps, Tan Bui's father raised his son to be a farmer. However, the boy had a restless spirit. Determined to seek his fortune overseas, he asked his father for a herd of pigs as seed capital, and set sail for the Nanyang with a group of twenty-five like-minded adventurous young men.⁶² During the voyage seventeen of them disembarked at ports of call along the South China Sea. Tan Bui and his seven friends, however, had their sights on Songkhla, which had a reputation for welcoming natives of Zhangzhou, and whose ruler belonged to the same Hokkien speech group.

When the Chinese junk entered Siamese waters in 1838/9, Songkhla was under siege by a Malay army. The prospect of combat excited the adventurous spirits of the hot-headed young men from Zhangzhou, who immediately offered to enlist in the Wu clan's army. In the course of battle, the Chinese defenders under the command of Boon Sang repelled the Malay invaders, then, with timely reinforcements from Bangkok led by the Phraya of Phetchaburi, took the battle to the retreating enemy and decisively defeated the Malay rebels in Saiburi.

During the march back after the battle of Saiburi, Tan Bui passed through Pattani. He became very taken with the strategic location of Pattani harbor. A port city with such an excellent natural location offered great potential for trade. Tan Bui reasoned that with a Chinese peacekeeping force stationed at Pattani, Songkhla would be able to control the maritime trade of the South. Moreover, the distrust between the Malays and the Siamese offered an opportunity for the Chinese to play the role of middleman. China had enjoyed

⁶⁰ Udomsombat, *Jotmai luang udomsombat*, 198-9.

⁶¹ Udomsombat, *Jotmai luang udomsombat*, 198-9.

⁶² Wichit, "Chiwaprawat jangwangto luang samretkittakonjangwang."



Figure 11. A portrait of Tan Bui known in Thai as Luang Samretkitkon Changwang, the Chinese Kapitan of Pattani. Courtesy: Dr. Panthep Kunanurak

a long history of contact with Pattani since the time of Lim Tok Khiam during the Ming dynasty. The local Chinese were well integrated in Pattani's plural society. The Malays had developed a more comfortable relationship with the Chinese community than with the imperialist Siamese.

Tan Bui proposed to Thien Seng that the Chinese could be counted on as a third force capable of mediating between the Siamese and the Malays. Heeding Tan Bui's advice Thien Seng interceded with Bangkok to appoint Tan Bui as Luang Samretkitkon, the Chinese Kapitan and commander of the Chinese peacekeeping force quartered at Hua Talat, on the banks of the Pattani River overlooking Pattani harbor.⁶³

⁶³ Tan Bui is the forefather of the Kananurak and Tantanawat families.



Figure 12. (above) The spirit table at Tan Bui's residence in Pattani, inscribed with the name Tan Tiang Sin. Figure 13. (below) The ceremony at the Lim Ko Niao Shrine, Pattani, where Tan Bui's offspring still gather annually. Courtesy: Dr. Panthep Kunanurak

Even on its own Songkhla was economically prosperous earning income from birds' nests, gambling, alcohol, brick and tile production, pottery, silverware and nielloware, dried fish, shrimps, fishing and opium. The Wu clan took a passionate interest in the economic activities under its jurisdiction. The example set by Nai Tong Suk was celebrated by the province's proud residents.



Figure 14. Old artifacts from the Wu family are on show at the Songkhla National Museum just outside the city wall. The property was the old home of Phraya Samutranurak (Net Na Songkhla) built in 1878. The original door carvings of the dragon with four claws is well preserved.

Nai Tong Suk was the youngest son of Thien Seng and a distant relative of Phraya Wichiankhiri (Choom), the last Wu governor of Songkhla. His job was to manage the collection of birds' nests at the inland lake concession of Ko Si and Ko Ha for the provincial government. Not only did he do this very well, he also encouraged the villagers along the lake to raise chickens so that his workers collecting nests could enjoy a healthy meat diet. The descendants of this beloved young lord are members of today's Suwankiri family, whose illustrious members include Dr. Trairong Suwankiri, a former deputy prime minister.⁶⁴

The profits from tax farms were substantial. The Wu clan operated the bird's nest concession at Ko Si and Ko Ha from 1769 in the reign of King Taksin until well into the Fifth Reign. The allocation of these concessions was conducted by a periodic bidding process under the control of local rulers.

In Songkhla, many Chinese workers, coolies and soldiers were addicted to opium, and the Wu clan discreetly tolerated their opium habit. King Rama II and King Rama III,

⁶⁴ Nattapon, *Kiatiprawat trakun na songkhla*, 74.

however, regarded opium as a scourge to society, and officially banned opium smoking in Siam. Thien Seng repeatedly received royal reprimands from Bangkok for not doing enough to suppress the opium trade in Songkhla. Thien Seng also resisted Bangkok's attempts to conscript labor from Songkhla. He seemed to possess a certain reckless character trait which ran within the ruling Wu family.

When Thien Seng passed away in 1847, King Rama III appointed the former's able cousin and second-in-command, Boon Sang, as the new Phraya of Songkhla. Although descended of a different maternal line from Thien Jong and Thien Seng, Boon Sang was Thien Seng's first cousin.

Boon Sang was no stranger to the Chakri Court in Bangkok. He had served many years as a royal page under King Rama II. Trained in the subtle arts of the courtier, Boon Sang had cultivated excellent connections in the capital. Moreover, he had demonstrated martial prowess and proven himself as a reliable strongman who could enforce Bangkok's desires in the South and project the Chakri court's imperial power into the Malay world. His valiant defense of Songkhla when it came under Malay attack in 1838/9, while Thien Seng was away in Bangkok, had earned him the Chakri Court's unshakable respect. Hence his succession in Songkhla was uncontested in the Chakri court, as well as within the Wu clan.

However, at this pinnacle of triumph, the recklessness of the Wu clan again intervened, in the person of Thad, the second son of Boon Sang. Thad held the position and title of Phra Anurakphuben, responsible for collecting tax and sending dues to Bangkok. Like Thien Seng, Thad proved to have a mind of his own and a stubbornness to match. He believed that the taxes collected in Songkhla should belong to the province and be used for the benefit of its residents. One day, Thad facetiously filled the tax jars with tamarind seeds rather than silver and dispatched them to the capital. Knowing that he had committed a capital crime, Thad fled to live in exile in Kedah to the discomfort and distress of his relatives.⁶⁵

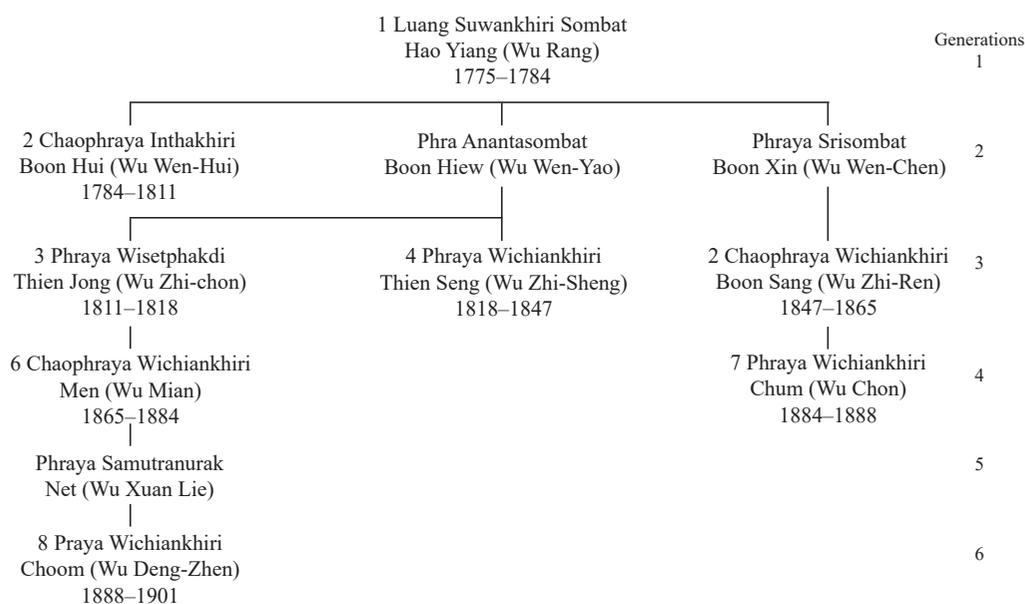
A brave new world

Unknown to the Wu clan, the old world was about to be turned upside down by the forces of change emanating from distant Europe. By the mid-19th century, the traditional Asian world was being challenged by the arrival of Western imperialism based on capitalist industrial productivity, technological prowess, military superiority and an ideological mission to bring civilization and religion to the benighted pagan natives. A brave new world was in the making.

Among the reforms through which King Chulalongkorn responded to this brave new world was a centralization of finances and bureaucratization of the administration. Local governors and tributary rajahs tended to lose out completely under the new system. In the case of Songkhla, when the Wu clan's bird's nest concession came up for renewal, it was not automatically extended as had been the case previously. Bangkok called for open bidding for the first time. In 1883 the Phraya of Songkhla lost the concession to

⁶⁵ Nattapon, *Kiatiprawat trakun na songkhla*, 68.

another bidder, and Bangkok's income from the concession income rose from 6,000 baht to 32,000 baht.⁶⁶ Revenue was no longer shared with local governors and tributary rulers, but now belonged to the central state. In 1895 all tax farming concessions were abolished after the Revenue Department was established. Henceforth, all taxes were collected by Revenue Department officials. The respective role of the tax farmers and local governors passed into history.



The fall of tax farmers extended administrative centralization into the interior and peripheral regions, changing age-old relations between Bangkok and traditional elites such as the Hokkien and Malay Rayas of the South. In 1896 all provincial governors received a fixed salary in lieu of their old benefits. Phra Wichiankhiri (Choom), the last governor of Songkhla under the old system, received an annual salary of 8,000 baht, instead of the yearly income of 50,000 baht which he had received on first becoming Raya of Songkhla.⁶⁷ A new law in 1892 ended the use of unpaid corvée labor in the South.⁶⁸ This ruling had a dramatic dislocating effect on local rulers and chiefs who exploited *phrai* labor to operate their businesses and estates.

Songkhla was no longer a tributary principality, but a province of an enlarged Siamese kingdom. There was no longer room for local rayas in the South regardless of precedent or past legacies. During King Chulalongkorn's reign, the Hokkien and Malay Rayahs were gradually replaced by senior officials posted as governors. By 1910 the old noble elite, as well as the local governors in the peripheral regions of the empire had

⁶⁶ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 177.

⁶⁷ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 177.

⁶⁸ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 177.

been pensioned off. From Bangkok to the district level, Siam was henceforth governed by salaried civil servants.

Finale

The fall of the Hokkien Rayas of Songkhla was a gradual process which began long before King Chulalongkorn ascended the throne in 1868. The writing had been on the wall for a long time. Perhaps it began with the erosion of Chinese tradition within the House of Wu, precipitating disunity within the clan. Chinese tradition dictates that patriarchal succession proceeds from the father down to the eldest son. However, Bangkok's intervention to appoint rulers based on political and administrative criteria undermined the succession within the Wu clan. After Thien Seng died, he was succeeded by Boon Sang, his cousin rather than his son. After Boon Sang died, Bangkok bypassed his eldest son, Chum, preferring Men (吳錦), who was the youngest son of Thien Jong, the third Phraya of Songkhla. So, the pendulum of succession again swung back to the family of the first wife.

Bangkok may have wished to weaken the Wu clan. Certainly Bangkok's interference in the succession opened up the opportunity for competition between rival maternal lines supporting different candidates. Where a patriarch has several wives, there is always the risk of disunity, resentment and discontent. Lobbying for political support often meant airing the dirty linen of potential rivals and exposing their moral and personal weaknesses and misdemeanors to willing ears in the capital.

The breakdown of unity within the Wu clan was reflected in a degradation of the system of governance. Local administration in Songkhla became plagued by corruption, favoritism, and inefficiency which in turn contributed to a breakdown of social order reflected in robberies and piracy.⁶⁹ Consequently, in 1894 Bangkok sent Phra Wichitworasan (Pan Sukhum), a protégé of Prince Damrong, to govern and modernize Songkhla as part of Monthon Nakhon Si Thammarat under King Chulalongkorn's new system of provincial administration. By the turn of the 20th century, the descendants of the Wu clan moved to Bangkok.

A new pattern emerged. Children of regional elites came to Bangkok or went abroad in search of modern education. Choom, the last Phraya Songkhla, sent his three sons to gain a multilingual education in Singapore. The eldest, Prong, attended an English school; his younger brother, Thid, went to a Chinese school; while the youngest attended a Malay school. All of them later joined the government and became high-ranking officials in the capital with the rank of Phraya. In his retirement Phraya Wichiankhiri (Choom) wrote the "Chronicle of Songkhla" to which this article is indebted.

Thid, Phraya Wichiankhiri's second son, who served as a page of King Rama V, was assigned the responsibility of maintaining all palace grounds and gardens throughout the kingdom. The tree-lined avenue leading to the newly constructed Anantasamakom Throne Hall was one of his landmark works. Officially known as Phraya Apirak Raj-

⁶⁹ Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*, 221-4.

Uthayan, head of the Palace Landscape Department, Thid also served as privy councilor during the reigns of King Rama VI and Rama VII.

On 29 June 1913, King Rama VI bestowed the surname of Na Songkhla on Phraya Apirak Raj-Utayan (Thid) and his family in recognition of the time-honored services and merits of the House of Wu in Songkhla since 1769.

Conclusion

The Wu clan of Songkhla, one of the most illustrious Chinese families in Siam, trace their history back to Wu Rang (Hao Yiang) who arrived in Siam in 1750. Appointed as the rulers of Songkhla, the House of Wu developed this small fishing village into an important port in the south rivaling Nakhon Si Thammarat. As a tributary vassal of Bangkok, the new capital of Siam, the Wu played an important role in the administration of the South during the first half of the 19th century. As the Chinese were well integrated into the plural society of the South, the Malays tended to develop a more comfortable relationship with the Chinese than with the Siamese. In those days the early Bangkok kings were tolerant of warlords in both Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla. In fact, Songkhla had twice turned down the charge of a Malay principality, namely Kelantan and Satun. These towns were then subsumed under Nakhon Si Thammarat.⁷⁰ King Rama II gave an insightful summation of the key southern men whom he knew well: “Phraya Nakhon (Noi) is good and worldly, on the other hand Songkhla behaves like a trader (*luk kha*).”⁷¹ In those days *luk kha* meant Chinese as well as westerners who came to trade.

In the second half of the 19th century, as the political economy of the international trading environment began to change due to the emergence of a new economic system embodied in the rise of capitalism and the aggrandizement of the Western powers annexing colonies in Asia, the old Asian world order embodied in the tributary system began to unravel. The great transformation of the world economic system was reflected in the reinvention of the regional tributary system linking Bangkok and its peripheral towns. The decline of the fortunes of the Hokkien Raya of Songkhla embodied in the House of Wu was set against the backdrop of the emerging new Asian world order and its impact upon the Chinese in Siam in general and on concessional tax farming in particular. The decay of the old world meant the loss of power, influence, prestige and eventual displacement of the Wu family as the ruling house of Songkhla by Western-style bureaucrats installed and controlled from Bangkok.

⁷⁰ In 1813, Kelantan want to break away from Terengganu so the Raya of Kelantan requested to pay tribute to Siam via Songkhla. Thien Jong turned down the request. Then in 1844 Thien Seng requested to return Satul to Bangkok as the Raya of Satul was disobedient. He was also upset because he had to make an extra Bu-Nga-Mas for Bangkok on behalf of Satul.

⁷¹ Wachirayn Library records of the Second Reign no. 9, C.S. 1174 (1812 CE), as quoted in Sangop, *Kan phatthana huamueang songkhla*.

References

- Anat Anantaphak, *Sultan lumthalesap songkhla* [Sultan of the Songkhla Lake basin]. 2nd printing, Bangkok: Gypsy, 2012. อาณัติ อนันตภาค. สุลต่านลุ่มทะเลสาบสงขลา. พิมพ์ครั้งที่ 2, กรุงเทพฯ: ยิปซี, 2557.
- Bradley, Francis R. “Siam’s Conquest of Patani and the End of Mandala Relations, 1786-1838.” In Patrick Jory, ed., *Ghosts of the Past in Southern Thailand: Essays on the History and Historiography of Patani*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2013.
- Damrong Rachanubhab, Prince. “Athibai rueang phongsawadan an pen mulhet haeng jotmai luang udomsombat” [Explaining the history behind the letter of Luang Udomsombat]. In Udomsombat, Jotmai luang udomsombat. ดำรงราชานุภาพ, สมเด็จพระเจ้า กรมพระยา. “อธิบายเรื่องพงศาวดารอันเป็นมูลเหตุแห่งจดหมายหลวงอุดมสมบัติ.” ใน จดหมายหลวงอุดมสมบัติ.
- _____. “Rueang jatkan pokkhong hua mueang phak tai” [Organizing the administration of the cities in the southern region] in *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 2* [Royal chronicles of the Bangkok era, Second Reign]. ดำรงราชานุภาพ, สมเด็จพระเจ้า กรมพระยา. “เรื่องจัดการปกครองหัวเมืองปักษ์ใต้”, พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ รัชกาลที่ 2. อนุสรณ์งานฌาปนกิจศพ หม่อมแก้ว ทินกร และนายฤทธิสำแดง กรุงเทพฯ, 2498
- _____. *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 2* [Royal chronicles of the Bangkok era, Second Reign]. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1968. ดำรงราชานุภาพ, สมเด็จพระเจ้า กรมพระยา. พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ รัชกาลที่ 2. กรุงเทพฯ : กรมศิลปากร, 2511.
- _____. *Anuson ngan prarachathan ploeng sop chaophraya sithammathibet (jit na songkhla)* [Cremation memorial book of Chaophraya Sithammathibet (Jit na Songkhla)]. Bangkok, Chuan Phim, 1976. สมเด็จพระเจ้ากรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ เจ้าพระยาศรีธรรมาธิเบศ (จิตร ณ สงขลา). กรุงเทพฯ : โรงพิมพ์ชวนพิมพ์, 2519.
- Farrington, Anthony. *Dr Richardson’s missions to Siam 1829-1839*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004.
- _____. *Low’s Mission to Southern Siam 1824*. Bangkok: White Lotus, 2007.
- Low, James. *Jotmai het james low “Journal of a public mission to Raja of Ligor.”* Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1999. James Low, ‘Extracts from the journal of a political mission to the Raja of Ligor in Siam’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society in Bengal*, 7 (1838): 583-608. โลว์, เจมส์. จดหมายเหตุเจมส์โลว์ “Journal of public mission to Raja of Ligor”. กรุงเทพฯ : กรมศิลปากร 2542
- Munro-Hay, S.C. “A Plan of Nakhon Si Thammarat (Southern Thailand) of c.1825 in the Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd Series, 10, 1 (2000): 61–70.
- Nattapon na Songkhla, ed. *Kiattiprawat trakun na songkhla* [History of the na Songkhla family]. Bangkok: P Press, 2011. ณัฐพล ณ สงขลา บรรณาธิการ. เกียรติประวัติ ตระกูล ณ สงขลา. ชมรมสายสกุล ณ สงขลา กรุงเทพฯ : พีเพรส, 2554.
- Nidhi Eoseewong. *Kanmueang thai samai phrajao krung thonburi* [Thai history in the reign of the King of Thonburi]. Bangkok: Sinlapa Watthanatham, 2016. นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์. การเมืองไทยสมัยพระเจ้ากรุงธนบุรี. กรุงเทพฯ : ศิลปวัฒนธรรม, 2559.
- Phrarachaphongsawadan chabap phrarachathalekha* [Royal chronicles, royal autograph edition]. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1999. พระราชพงศาวดารฉบับพระราชหัตถเลขา. กรุงเทพฯ : กรมศิลปากร, 2542
- Rueang phrabat somdet phraphutthaloetlainaphalai mai pho phrathai* [Concerning the displeasure of King Rama II]. Jotmai het hong samut wachirayan lek thi 8 jo so 1182

- [Records of Wachirayan Library No. 8, CS 1182]. เรื่องพระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธเลิศหล้านภาลัยไม่พอพระราชหฤทัย จดหมายเหตุ (ห้องสมุดวชิรญาณ,จ.ศ.1182: เลขที่ 8)
- Sangop Songmueang, *Kan phatthana hueamueang songkhla nai samai krung thonburi lae rattanakosin ton ton (pho so 2310-2444)* [Development of Songkhla in the Thonburi and early Bangkok eras, 1767-1801]. Songkhla: Sinakharinwirot University, 1979. สงบ ส่งเมือง. การพัฒนาหัวเมืองสงขลาในสมัยกรุงธนบุรีและรัตนโกสินทร์ตอนต้น (พ.ศ. 2310-2444). สงขลา : มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ, 2522
- Sawatkhiri Sisamanthasnayok, Phraya (Yen Suwannapathom). *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla phak 2* [Chronicle of Songkhla, vol. 2], cremation volume of Chaophraya Sithammathibet, 1976. พระยาสวัสดิ์ศิริศรีสมันตราษฎ์นายก (เย็น สุวรรณปัทม). พงศาวดารเมืองสงขลา ภาค 2, อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ มหาอำมาตย์เอก เจ้าพระยาตรีธรรมาธิเบศ พ.ศ. 2519.
- Sisamon Sibenjaphalangkun. *Prawatisat mueang songkhla* [History of Songkhla]. Songkhla, Songkhla Rajabhat University, 1996. ศรีสมร ศรีเบญจพลางกูร. ประวัติศาสตร์เมืองสงขลา. สงขลา : สถาบันราชภัฏสงขลา, 2539.
- Siworawat, Luang (Phin Jantharajawong). *Phongsawadan mueang phatthalung* [Chronicle of Phatthalung]. In *Prachum phongsawadan phak thi 15* [Collected chronicles part 15]. Bangkok: Sophon Phiphatanakon, 1920. หลวงศรีวรวัตร (พิน จันทโรจวงศ์), พงศาวดารเมืองพัทลุง ใน ประชุมพงศาวดารภาคที่ 15. กรุงเทพฯ : โรงพิมพ์โสภณพิพรรฒธนากร, 2463.
- Suphatr Sukhonthaphirom na Phatthalung. “Prawatisat sultan sulaiman” [History of Sultan Sulaiman]. In *Prawatisat trakun sultan sulaiman* [History of the lineage of Sultan Sulaiman]. Bangkok: Amarin, 1976. ร.ท. สุภัทร สุคนธาภิรมย์ ณ พัทลุง. “ประวัติศาสตร์สุลต่านสุลัยมาน”, ใน ประวัติศาสตร์ตระกูลสุลต่านสุลัยมาน. กรุงเทพฯ : อมรินทร์พริ้นติ้ง, 2530.
- Thiphakhorawong, Chaophraya (Kham Bunnag). *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 1* [Royal Chronicles of the Bangkok Era, First Reign]. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1988. เจ้าพระยา ทิพากรวงศ์ (ข้า บุนนาค). พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ รัชกาลที่ 1. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร 2531.
- Thiphakhorawong, Chaophraya (Kham Bunnag). *Phrarachaphongsawadan krung rattanakosin rachakan thi 3* [Royal Chronicles of the Bangkok Era, Third Reign]. Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1981. เจ้าพระยาทิพากรวงศ์ (ข้า บุนนาค). พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ รัชกาลที่ 3. กรุงเทพฯ : โรงพิมพ์คุรุสภา, 2538. พิมพ์แจกเป็นที่ระลึก ในงานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ ท่านผู้หญิงวงษาประพัทธ์ (ดาต สนิทวงศ์ ณอยุธยา) วันที่ ๑๗ มีนาคม พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๑, ณ เมรุวัดเทพศิรินทราวาส; พิมพ์ที่โรงพิมพ์โสภณพิพรรฒธนากร
- Udomsombat, Luang. *Jotmai luang udomsombat* [Letters of Luang Udomsombat]. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1987. หลวงอุดมสมบัติ. จดหมายหลวงอุดมสมบัติ. กรุงเทพฯ : กรมศิลปากร 2530.
- Wichiankhiri, Phraya (Chom na Songkhla). *Phongsawadan mueang songkhla* [Chronicle of Songkhla]. twelfth reprint in cremation memorial book of Chaophraya Sithammathibet (Jit na Songkhla). Bangkok, Chuan Phim, 1976. วิเชียรศิริ, พระยา (ชม ณ สงขลา). อนุสรณ์งานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ เจ้าพระยาตรีธรรมาธิเบศ (จิตร ณ สงขลา). กรุงเทพฯ : โรงพิมพ์ชวนพิมพ์, 2519.
- Wichit Khananurak (Chuanyin Tantanawat). “Chiwaprawat jangwangto luang samretkitkongwang” [Biography of Luang Samretkitkongwang] in Panthep Kananurak, Prayundet Kananurak and Phanrit Watthanayakon, *Prawat thayat luang samretkittakon* [History of the kin of Luang Samretkitkon]. วิชิต คณานุรักษ์ (ชวนยืน ตันธนวัฒน์). “ชีวประวัติจางวางโทหลวงสำเร็จกิจกรจางวาง”, น.พ. ปานเทพ คณานุรักษ์ นายประยูรเดช คณานุรักษ์ และนายพันธ์ฤทธิ์ วัฒนายากร, ประวัติทายาทหลวงสำเร็จกิจกร. www.kananurak.com