COUNTRY SURVEY SERIES

Mailand

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COUNTRY SURVEY SERIES
Thomas Fitzsimmons



editor





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THAILAND

its people its society its culture

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in collaboration with

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PREFACE

The Country Series is one of several means by which the Human Relations Area Files seeks to promote and facilitate research and comparative study in the sciences concerned with the behavior of men. Other means include series of behavior science monographs, outlines, translations, reprints, and bibliographies, as well as the Area Files at member universities and in Washington, D.C.

The Country Series is designed to provide an interpretive, integrated description of selected societies in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Far East. Each survey examines in depth the sociological, political, and economic aspects of a whole society. The purpose in each case is to define basic cultural and institutional patterns, and to identify dominant values and attitudes.

Research and writing are done with the aid of a new research guide and in accordance with new procedures for interdisciplinary team research. Both guide and procedures were specifically developed to ensure that analysis undertaken within the context of any one discipline be informed by the theories and findings of the others; and that the resulting interpretations of the several disciplines be refined and integrated through a process of challenge and synthesis.

The survey of Thailand is the eighth volume in the series (see appended List of Publications); research and writing were completed in July 1957. The survey was written by one of the interdisciplinary teams at the Washington, D.C. branch of the Human Relations Area Files. Disciplines represented were: anthropology, international affairs, political science, economics, history. Kathleen Sproul was copy editor, assisted by Lon Hefner. The maps and charts were prepared by Ernest A. Will and Lewis Buck.

Acknowledgement is made to the following persons who prepared various working papers and studies used in the writing of this survey: Professor Lauriston Sharp, Frank J. Moore, and Walter F. Vella, of the Southeast Asia Program of Cornell University; and to Professor L. M. Hanks, Jr., of Bennington College, who was consulted on various points.

The transliteration of Thai place names has been based on decisions of the Board of Geographic Names, United States Department of the Interior. Names of persons have been reproduced according to the best determinable usage (including the way the persons themselves transliterate them). Other Thai words are transliterated according to a simplified system devised in 1941 by the Royal Institute of Thailand.

Final preparation of the book for publication was under the supervision of Joan Verosky.

The various programs of the Human Relations Area Files are under the immediate direction of Herbert H. Vreeland, III, Director of Research and Area Files, and Thomas Fitzsimmons, Director of Research and Publications.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

SURVEY OF WORLD CULTURES

- Jordan, George L. Harris and others. Pp. 256; illus.; tables; bibliography. 1958. \$5.50.
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- North Borneo, Brunei, Sarawak (British Borneo), George L. Harris and others.

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- RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic), Thomas Fitzsimmons and others. 2 vols. Pp. xii, 681; illus.; tables; bibliography. 1957. \$9.75.

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Thailand, Wendell Blanchard and others. Pp. 525; illus.; tables; bibliography. 1958. \$6.50.

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- Selected Bibliography of the Philippines, Fred Eggan and others. Pp. vi, 138. 1956. \$3.75.
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- League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois, Lewis H. Morgan. (Ed., H. M. Lloyd, 1901.) Vol. I, pp. xx, 338; Vol. II, pp. xii, 332; illus.; tables; bibliography. 1954. \$7.50.

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The Sanpoil and Nespelem: Salishan Peoples of Northeastern Washington, Verne F. Ray. (1st ed. 1933.) Pp. 237; illus.; tables; bibliography. 1954. \$2.50.

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Snow People (Chukchee), Taeki Odulok. Pp. xvii, 73. 1954. \$2.00.

The Mewu Fantzu: A Tibetan Tribe of Kansu, Hans Stubel. Pp. viii, 63; bibliography. 1958. \$2.75.

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIETY

The Kingdom of Thailand or, as it was known for centuries, Siam, covers an area about as large as France lying entirely within the northern tropical zone in the center of the Indochinese peninsula. It is a compact country, with one long splinter running from the central land mass down to Malaya, but it contains four distinct geographic regions and a variety of ethnic groups.

Basically an agricultural country, Thailand possesses a rich central plain which has given it a heartland relatively secure from attack by neighboring states and capable of supporting a heavy population at a level of living well above that of the rest of Southeast Asia. This fortunate circumstance is reflected both in Thailand's long history of political independence and in the present general contentment and economic well-being of its people.

Thai capitals have historically all been the sole centers of political power in the country. Bangkok is fully in this tradition, and its position is even further strengthened by the commercial interests of international trade concentrated there since the last century and the beginnings of industrialization in this one. In most aspects of Thai life, Bangkok dominates, and all the rest of Thailand serves to support it. When signs of change begin to appear in the society, they appear first in Bangkok.

PATTERNS OF THE PAST

The Thai took this land by migration and conquest. From their original home in South China, Thai peoples gradually drifted southward. During the thirteenth century the stream became a flood released by the Mongol conquest of the Thai state of Nanchao in present-day Yunnan and by the atrophy of Khmer power in the area of present-day north central Thailand.

At the century's end Thai peoples had spilled down all the principal river systems of Southeast Asia and had built chief cities near the sites of modern Chiang Rai and Chiengmai. By continuous migration, by frequent wars, and by skillful diplomacy, Thai power drove down the northern tributaries of the Chao Phraya and fanned across the great plain of the Chao Phraya itself. In 1238 two Thai chieftains defeated the Khmer commander at Sukhothai and built there the capital of a powerful and vigorous Thai kingdom. When Sukhothai declined, an even greater capital was established at Ayutthaya. When Ayutthaya in its turn fell to the Burmese, the present capital, Bangkok, arose. From this nucleus Thai power radiated to encompass an area larger than present-day Thailand, shrinking again in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the impact of British and French colonial expansion.

The Thai proudly call their country Muang Thai, or "Land of the Free." Except for rare and brief periods, the nation has been ruled by the Thai and not by foreign overlords. The state has jealously and successfully guarded its political independence. Thailand, for example, alone among the countries of Southeast Asia, never has been under western colonial domination—a fact which colors every aspect of its modern life.

Despite the name "Land of the Free," for centuries all Siamese were subjects of an absolute king and many lived in conditions of literal slavery. Those who escaped slavery still owed the state large obligations which had to be paid in taxes, in corvée labor, or in military service. Nor did the coup of 1932, which destroyed the absolute monarchy, introduce free and responsible government. Today, the Thai are ruled, as they have been for centuries past, by men who are not accountable to the people and who can impose their will more or less harshly, more or less arbitrarily, as they choose.

Thailand's history, then, is a story of migration, warfare, and independence. But it is not a history of militarism. Despite centuries of war, the Thai never prized the military virtues. Wars were affairs of the king and the nobles; to the people they meant only the onerous and dangerous duty of fighting. Moreover, the Thai were less interested in ruling others than in learning and profiting from them.

If Thai history is the history of warfare it is also a history of borrowing and assimilation. Although the Thai have guarded their political independence, they have often experienced heavy foreign cultural influence. During their long journey from Nanchao to the sea the Thai lived in the shadow of successive rich and powerful civilizations—Chinese, Cambodian, Burmese. Through trade they met others—Indian, Japanese, European. Their history shows the Thai to be better emulators than creators, better students than