LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY OF THAILAND

Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand

By G. WILLIAM SKINNER

Associate Professor of Anthropology
Cornell University

Published for the Association for Asian Studies by

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ithaca, New York

Preface

THE importance of the major Chinese communities in Southeast Asia is by now generally recognized. When the Cornell Southeast Asia Program was inaugurated in 1951, a series of research projects was planned to study the ethnic Chinese who form substantial minorities in large parts of the region. This monograph on Chinese leadership in Thailand represents the first of these specific projects. The fact that Chinese leaders are men of considerable power and influence in a region now crucial to the development of world history is in itself, perhaps, sufficient justification for this study of leadership. The subject has special interest, too, because field studies of urban community leadership have never, to the writer's knowledge, been carried out in oriental societies. Bangkok, in particular, offered opportunities for the study of minority-group leadership in a setting quite different from that obtaining in the West, where provocative studies of Jewish and Negro leadership have recently been made.

The development of a modern national body politic is a process now under way in many countries of the Asian-African world. In most cases, the integration of diverse ethnic groups into a single national society is considered desirable or essential. The nature and shape of the integrative forces, however, range from national programs, consciously planned and idealistically grounded, to unforeseen concomitants of economic and political nationalism. Part of the present study explores the more or less haphazard play of cross-ethnic integrative forces at the elite levels of one national society. A type of ethnic integration is in process in Thailand that is relevant to other countries of Asia and

Africa, especially to the nations of Southeast Asia which have recently achieved independence.

The writer makes no apologies for the detail with which the present study is presented. The time is past when sweeping, nonanalytical surveys in the social and political realms can make significant contributions to our general knowledge of the area. Asian studies today must utilize the more precise methodologies of the social sciences in order not only to elucidate the finer details and subtler nuances of what is generally known, but also to yield new perspectives and to build up an integrated body of testable hypotheses.

Every attempt has been made to preserve the confidence of interviewees and informants. The identity of leaders who restricted the writer's use of their interview data has been scrupulously protected. Their case histories have not been included, and published sources mentioning their names have not been cited. Throughout the monograph, specific leaders are identified, when necessary, only by fictitious name or number. All biographical material serves an illustrative purpose only and may not be construed as factually descriptive of particular individuals.

The Transcription of Chinese and Thai

Chinese names and other terms have been transcribed according to the modified Wade-Giles system used in C. H. Fenn's *Five Thousand Dictionary*, except for the omission of tone numerals. Well-known place names are spelled in the usual form established by the *Postal Atlas of China*, e.g., Kwangtung, Fukien, Swatow, Canton, Amoy. Items for which character identification appeared useful are listed in the "Chinese Character References" preceding the Index.

Thai names and terms have been transcribed according to a phonetic system based on that recommended by the Royal Institute of Thailand in 1939 and outlined in the *Journal of the Thailand Research Society* of March 1941. Since several changes have been made in order to eliminate special letters and diacritical marks, the orthography will be briefly described here. The voiced stops, occurring only in initial position, are written *b* and *d;* the voiceless, unaspirated stops are written *p, t, j* (palatal stop), and *k;* and the voiceless aspirated stops are written *ph, th, ch,* and *kh.* The glottal stop is not transcribed. The voiceless spirants are written *f, s,* and *h,* and the voiced nasals, *m, n,* and *ng.* The nine vowels are written as follows: front unrounded, *i, e, ae;* central

unrounded, *ue, oe, a;* back rounded, u, o, ǫ [ɔ]. Homophonous vowel clusters (long vowels) are not distinguished from unlengthened or short vowels, but, of course, the three heterophonous vowel clusters which occur are indicated (*ia, uea, ua*). In initial position, the voiced semivowels are written *y* and *w*. In final position, the former is written *i* and the latter *o* when following *a* or *ae* but *w* when following *i*.

Two Thai words and one Chinese word for administrative units are used throughout in anglicized (unitalicized) form. These are *jangwat* (the primary territorial unit in Thailand, usually translated "province"), *amphoe* (the next subdivision of a jangwat, usually translated "district"), and *hsien* (the enduring intermediate territorial unit in China, usually translated "district" or "county").

Thai Currency

The unit of Thai currency is the *baht*. The conventional anglicized form of the word is used here rather than either the romanization according to the orthography otherwise adhered to in this study, *bat*, or the word *tical*, often used by Westerners. Since 1949, free-market rates have usually fluctuated between 17 and 23 baht to the United States dollar, with an average of about 20. For the period covered by this study, then, the baht may be considered to have a value of about 5 cents in United States money.

Statistical Significance

The reader who is not grounded in mathematical statistics need not quail at the parenthetical or footnote references to levels of significance. They are not vital to the argument but merely serve as assurances that the differences mentioned are real and not chance ones. To say that Teochiu leaders differ from Hakka leaders in being more leftist and that this difference is significant at the .01 level simply means that there is only one chance out of a hundred that this difference between Teochius and Hakkas is a fortuitous one not actually prevailing in the whole population of Chinese leaders. A level of .05 means that the statement is made with somewhat less assurance, the chance being one in twenty that the difference found is not actual. If a difference is significant at only the .10 level, it is usually not accepted as "real."

It should also be noted that the writer is not splitting hairs in giving some levels of significance at .02 and others at .025. For the 1952 study,

he used tables giving levels of significance at .01, .02, and .05, but for the 1955 analysis, which was done in the field, the only available tables gave levels of significance at .01, .025, and .05. The statistical techniques used in analyzing the field data are described in Appendix B1.

Acknowledgments

Sincere gratitude is extended, first of all, to the Chinese leaders interviewed and to the writer's Chinese informants in Bangkok, without whose co-operation this study could not have been made. Thanks are also due the many Thai alumni of Cornell University for their loyal support of the Cornell Research Center and for their encouragement and advice pertinent to the writer's research project. The writer is especially grateful to his research associate, Mr. James T. Peng, now of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, whose precision, diligence, and thoroughness contributed greatly to the adequacy of the field data. Others associated with the Cornell Research Center to whom grateful acknowledgment is due include Loebongs Sarabhayavanija, Lerchiew Wong, Er Siak Hong, Dalton T. Djang, and Liang Mang Soon. The writer is also most appreciative of the information so kindly supplied by several agencies of the Thai government, in particular the National Library, the Central Statistical Office, the Alien Division of the Police Department, the Private Schools Division of the Ministry of Education, and the Krungthep and Thonburi Municipal Offices. He is obliged, too, for the ready assistance of the Chinese-language officers with the American Embassy in Bangkok during the period of research.

Special thanks are due Professor Harold D. Lasswell for reading the original draft of Chapters 2 to 7 and for his most constructive criticism; the members of the Monograph Editorial Board of the Association for Asian Studies for their valuable suggestions; Hsin-min Wu (Mrs. John F. Brohm) for her expert assistance in translating Chinese materials; Mr. Donald E. Willmott for his helpful criticism of the method of structural analysis used here; Miss Jessie Cohen for her valuable help with statistical problems encountered in analyzing the field data; and Ch'eng Ch'iao (Mrs. Elizabeth Manning) for typing the final manuscript and writing the character list. Above all, the writer is beholden to his wife, Carol, for her diverse contributions to every phase of this undertaking, in particular for catching up the dangling participles and for drawing the series of charts.

Professor Lauriston Sharp and Professor Knight Biggerstaff served

as the writer's chief advisers when, as a Ph.D. candidate, he conducted the 1952 study, but he is deeply grateful to them for far more than guidance regarding the present monograph: they were instrumental in shaping the writer's scholarly interests, and it is primarily from them that he received the knowledge and the tools brought to bear on the subject matter of the present work. The writer also feels warm gratitude toward Professors Charles F. Hockett, Harold E. Shadick, Morris E. Opler, and Allan R. Holmberg for their contributions to the writer's training and for serving on his graduate committee at Cornell University.

Field research for this study was conducted under the auspices of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program. The writer gratefully acknowledges the long-term financial support provided by the Program as well as a travel grant from the Social Science Research Council.

G. William Skinner

Djakarta, Indonesia
October 1956

THE ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES, INC.

(formerly The Far Eastern Association)

Monograph No. 1: *Money Economy in Medieval Japan,* by Delmer M. Brown, 1951

Monograph No. 2: *China's Management of the American Barbarians,* by Earl Swisher, 1953

Monograph No. 3: *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand,* by G. William Skinner, 1958

Monograph No. 4: *Siam under Rama III, 1824–1851,* by Walter F. Vella, 1957

BOARD OF EDITORS

Editor: E. A. Kracke, Jr.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published 1958

Second printing 1961

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

1

HISTORY AND COMMUNITY:

The Background of Chinese Leadership in Thailand

A. A Historical Survey of Chinese Leadership

A STRONGLY mercantile orientation characterized Chinese settlements in Siam from the very beginnings of Siamese history. When the southward-moving Thai people reached the Gulf of Siam in the thirteenth century and established their power along its shores, they found Chinese already trading in the Gulf ports. With the founding of the Ayutthayan kingdom in 1350, Chinese trading centers on the Gulf expanded, and a sizable Chinese community developed in the capital to meet the demands of the Thai court for Chinese goods. In these comparatively transient communities, it was undoubtedly the more settled of the successful traders—those with deep economic roots in Siam—who were chosen for positions of leadership. Such individuals would be especially vulnerable to Thai political power. Indeed, a dependent relationship between the Chinese elite and the Thai ruling class—the royal aristocracy and the bureaucratic nobility—is one of the major themes in the history of Chinese leadership in premodern Siam.

During the centuries when Ayutthaya was the capital (to 1767), the Chinese, like other foreigners, were domiciled in a particular quarter in the environs of the royal city. Each foreign community

chose its own officials, and, on approval by the Crown, these nominees were given Thai noble titles and regarded as Siamese functionaries. Being the largest of the foreign communities, at least by the seventeenth century, the Chinese sometimes had two officials of senior rank. These quartermasters or captains, as they were variously called, had the final say in differences which arose among the local Chinese but were responsible to the Phraklang, the Thai official in charge of foreign and commercial affairs.[1]

The Chinese captains were by no means the only Chinese given noble rank and thereby drawn into the royal state apparatus. Chinese records mention that a Chinese immigrant in Siam was ennobled and given official position as early as 1480.[2] At the end of the sixteenth century, there were several Chinese officials in government service at Pattani, a southern dependency of Siam.[3] Early in the seventeenth century, a Dutch trader met two Chinese with Thai noble rank traveling in south Siam on the king's service.[4] In 1638 a Dutch writer called attention to the fact that Chinese had been "appointed to high positions and offices."[5] Later in the seventeenth century, European observers in Ayutthaya spoke of "Chinese mandarins" serving the Thai king.[6] In 1690, Phraya Yommarat, the Chief Justice and one of the seven major officials of the kingdom, was a Chinese.[7]

Just what relationship these Chinese serving as Thai government officials had with the Chinese settlements in Siam cannot be deter-

[1] Jeremias van Vliet, "Description of the Kingdom of Siam," p. 66; Simon de la Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam,* pp. 47, 112, and map; Alexandre, Chevalier de Chaumont, *Relation de l'ambassade de Monsieur le Chevalier de Chaumont à la Cour du Roy,* pp. 77, 109; Eldon R. James, "Jurisdiction over Foreigners in Siam," p. 587.

[2] Hsieh Yu-jung, *Hsien-lo kuo-chih* (Siam Gazetteer), p. 49.

[3] Hsü Yün-ch'iao, *Pei-ta-nien shih* (History of Pattani), pp. 121–122.

[4] Van Nyenrode's letter of 1612, quoted in Francis H. Giles, "A Critical Analysis of Van Vliet's Historical Account of Siam in the 17th Century," pp. 276–277.

[5] Van Vliet, *op. cit.,* p. 51.

[6] François T., abbé de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686,* p. 316.

[7] Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan, Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690–92,* p. 38. In order of descending rank, the titles of the bureaucratic nobility (as standardized in the 19th century) were Somdet Jaophraya (Somdetch Chao Phya), Jaophraya (Chao Phya), Phraya (Phya), Phra, Luang, and Khun. The title of Somdet Jaophraya was very rarely conferred—never, to the writer's knowledge, on a Chinese. In the governmental hierarchy, the titles of Jaophraya and Phraya were reserved for the highest officials and territorial administrators. Cf. Mary R. Haas, "The Declining Descent Rule for Rank in Thailand: A Correction," pp. 585–587.

mined from the available records. The privileges and status their position carried must, however, have made an impression on the locally domiciled Chinese. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, overseas Chinese were considered outcasts by their home government, and the achievement of high standing through the acquisition of official Chinese rank was for them unthinkable. The example of these Thai officials of Chinese extraction must therefore have impressed upon leading merchants the advantage of securing royally sanctioned positions in Siam. Such positions also gave security in a land where the word and whim of an absolute monarch was law. The "strange actions" in the 1620's of one Thai king led to the deportation of several Chinese merchants and the voluntary exodus of many more, leaving only "a few rich Chinese" in the country.[8] We may assume that these few were precisely those whom the king had favored with rank and offices.

The possibilities in this regard for the Thailand Chinese were greatly increased after the establishment of royal state trading around 1630. The king soon became dependent on Chinese to staff the trading apparatus at all levels. The royal factors, warehousemen, and accountants abroad, the seamen aboard the royal junks, and the maritime and customs officials were all usually Chinese. In the 1670's, a Chinese, ennobled as Phra Siwipot, served as King Narai's chief maritime official.[9] The wealthiest of the Chinese merchants were even allowed to reside within the walls of the royal city itself. The co-operation between the mercantile Thai kings and Chinese traders begun during Prasat Thọng's reign (1629–1656) established a pattern that was to hold for over two centuries.

From available evidence, then, it appears that in Ayutthayan days the Chinese elite was both exposed to the power and dependent on the bounty of the Thai king. Specifically rejected by the imperial court in China, local Chinese could not counter the power of the absolute Thai monarch, nor could they achieve any satisfaction in terms of social standing and prestige from China. The Thai court, on the other hand, was willing to offer prestige and power by conferring noble rank, to lend official sanction to Chinese community leaders by appointing them captains, and to facilitate business success by granting monopolies and dispensing positions in state trading operations. In the process,

[8] Van Vliet, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[9] John Anderson, *English Intercourse with Siam in the 17th Century*, pp. 42, 426.

the Thai government probably won the allegiance of many Chinese leaders and certainly gained the advantage of their business acumen and other skills. In accepting noble titles and official positions, however, the Chinese elite must have weakened any sense of responsibility it may have had to the Chinese community as such. Under the circumstances, it is no surprise to learn that the officials of the various foreign camps "never let any opportunity pass of drawing profits from their subjects." [10]

Before tracing the development of the Chinese elite in the post-Ayutthayan period, it would be well to summarize certain aspects of the development of Chinese society in Siam. The Chinese population in Siam, probably about 10,000 in the 1660's, increased severalfold during the last century of the Ayutthayan era. Because of the "extraordinary encouragement" which King Taksin, himself the son of a Chinese immigrant, gave the Chinese,[11] the immigration rate sharply increased during his reign (1767–1782) and was maintained at comparatively high levels by all of the early Jakkri kings.[12] By 1825 the Chinese population in the whole country had probably reached 230,000, and by 1850 it was approximately 300,000.[13] As the population grew, several developments occurred which altered the speech-group composition of Chinese society and its elite. By "speech group" is meant regionally based subdivisions of the Chinese population speaking a common language. Until recent times these groups were divided not only by language barriers but also by marked cultural distinctiveness and ethnocentrism. Five speech groups, all living in the two southernmost maritime provinces of China, are of major importance among the immigrants to Siam. Of these, the Hokkiens (from southern Fukien) were the first to come in numbers, accompanied or closely followed by considerably fewer Cantonese (from central Kwangtung). Only in the eighteenth century did the Hokkien position in Siam begin to be challenged by Teochius (from northeastern Kwangtung). Hainanese (from

[10] Van Vliet, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[11] The phrase is from John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, p. 103. Crawfurd considered the "extraordinary accession of Chinese population" set in motion by King Taksin's policies to be "almost the only great and material change which has taken place in the state of the kingdom during many centuries."

[12] The reign periods of the first five Jakkri kings are as follows: Rama I (1782–1809), Rama II (1809–1824), Rama III (1824–1851), Rama IV (1851–1868), Rama V (1868–1910).

[13] G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, pp. 68–72, and Table 5. The societal developments referred to in this section are treated in detail in this history.

Hainan Island, Kwangtung province) began trading with Siam in the eighteenth century and settled in some numbers beginning in the early nineteenth century. Hakkas (from interior parts of northern Kwangtung and southern Fukien), the fifth group, emigrated via Teochiu ports; their influx began only in the mid-nineteenth century.

King Taksin was himself a Teochiu, and members of his speech group were known during his reign as "royal Chinese" and given special privileges. This led to an influx of Teochius, particularly to the trading center established across the river from Taksin's palace in Thonburi. The new capital built in 1782 by Rama I, the first of the Jakkri kings, was established on the site of this Chinese trading center, whereupon the Chinese market was moved bodily outside the southwest gate of the royal city. This quarter is still the Chinese center of Bangkok. Thus it was that the new capital, destined to grow into the greatest metropolis in Thai history, had from the beginning a strong Chinese, especially Teochiu, element.

For various reasons the proportion of Teochius among Chinese immigrants to Siam sharply increased during the first century of the Jakkri dynasty, while that of the Hokkiens drastically declined. Other less marked changes during the same century saw an increase in the proportion of Hakkas and Hainanese and a decrease in the proportion of Cantonese. These shifts had two direct effects on the Chinese elite. First of all, during this transition period from Hokkien dominance to unchallenged Teochiu dominance, no one speech group could control Chinese society. The shifting proportions furthermore exacerbated conflicts among the groups. As one Western observer noted in 1837, Chinese speech groups were "strongly opposed to each other, as much so, indeed, as if they belonged to rival nations." [14] Chinese social structure, accordingly, was completely lacking in horizontal unity. Guilds, benevolent societies, mutual-aid and regional associations were each restricted to a single group. The same was true of the all-important secret societies. In spite of their common ostensible aim (the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty), rival societies, each restricted to a single speech group, competed bitterly for privileges and fought to "protect" members from outside encroachment. In this situation, there were speech-group leaders but no Chinese leaders. It was even less admissible to speak of a Chinese "community" in the nineteenth century than during the Ayutthayan period.

[14] George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas, or Voyages and Discoveries in the Indian Archipelago in 1832–33–34*, p. 170.

The speech-group changes during the nineteenth century were unevenly reflected in the composition of the Chinese elite. Because of occupational specialization—rigidly maintained by the guilds and secret societies—the proportional increase in the number of Hakkas and Hainanese had little effect on the composition of the top elite. Hakkas in particular were petty tradesmen, lesser artisans, manual laborers, hawkers, and barbers. Hainanese were the hand-sawyers, market gardeners, fishermen, domestic servants, waiters, tea-shop operators, and, not infrequently, "coolies," miners, and peddlers. Thus, neither group was represented in occupations of higher standing. It was the Teochius, Hokkiens, and Cantonese who fought it out at the elite levels, and throughout the century Teochius gained steadily at the expense of the others.

The struggle was not only for domination of the most lucrative trades but also for the economic favors that the Thai government was in a position to dispense. During the days of royal trade monopolies, the Teochius were in a favored position because of the connections with the Thai court established during Taksin's reign and because the Teochiu seagoing junk was the most suitable type for the Siamese trade. As early as the second reign, a Western writer noted that virtually all of the Chinese mercantile and financial officials in Bangkok were Teochius.[15] During the second and third reigns, the number, variety, and value of monopoly farms (concessions) were greatly increased, and it was for these that the Chinese business elite competed most intensely. There were royal export monopolies (e.g., pepper, sapanwood, hides), manufacturing monopolies (e.g., spirits), lottery and gambling farms, and concessions for the collection of various taxes and trade duties.

In the early years of the fourth reign (1851–1868), the system of monopolies was radically reorganized, but the net result was to raise the stakes for the Chinese elite. In 1852 a monopoly was created whereby all opium had to be sold to the Chinese opium farmers. The latter, in buying the farm, in effect paid the government the duties it could have collected directly and bought sole import rights as well as rights to process and retail the opium locally. The Bowring treaty of 1855 abolished the royal trading monopolies and established the conditions of free trade, but to make up revenue losses the government created and farmed out to Chinese a large number of tax and duty

[15] Robert Morrison, writing in Chinese in the *China Monthly Magazine*, published in Malacca between 1815 and 1821. The passage is quoted in Hsieh Yu-jung, *op. cit.*, p. 276.