

**INTERPRETATIVE STUDIES
ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURE**

Withaya Sucharithanarugse
Editor

**Institute of Thai Studies
Chulalongkorn University**

INTERPRETATIVE STUDIES ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN CULTURE

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Foreword

It is the great pleasure of the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University to be able to present this special collection of research works on Thai and ASEAN studies, Interpretative Studies on Southeast Asian Culture. This collection is the outcome of the Empowering Network for International Thai and ASEAN Studies: ENITAS Scholarships 2014 offered by Chulalongkorn University. One of objectives of the ENITAS project is to encourage a young generation of scholars and to expand the mutual understanding between various researchers working in ASEAN studies.

It is hoped that this volume will benefit the general public and scholars alike and will be an inspiration for further research that will flourish with the flourishing of the ASEAN Community in the future.

Suchitra Chongstitvatana
*Director, Institute of Thai Studies
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Introduction

Withaya Sucharithanarugse¹

The works published in this volume entitled Interpretative Studies on Southeast Asian Culture are a collection of academic undertakings in various fields that share the main theme of providing a better understanding of Southeast Asian culture through a careful analysis of various phenomena of notable interests, all using different approaches pertinent to their particular case.

“Traditional Practices and Law: Recognising Legal Pluralism to Bridge the Gap of ASEAN Heritage Protection” represents an effort to align traditional perception and practice with the norms of legal sanction prescribed by the law of the West on the subject of heritage protection in ASEAN via the case of a shipwreck in Bali. This is no doubt a case of making use of local wisdom or adat law to help preserve national heritage with an option for regional application. That the shipwreck site is in Bali which is promoted as a tourist spot certainly helps raise the awareness of the local population on the subject of heritage and how to preserve it, which spares them the burden of legal scrutiny. This may typify the cohabitation of two practices that defy merger because the orientation is of a different kind. Management of national heritage involves both promotion and protection and this can conflict; yet good management can evolve from practice.

“Reading Colonial Visuality: A History Depicted in Esteban Villanueva’s Basi Revolt Paintings (1821)” is a praiseworthy work that unlocks a trove of information behind the portrayal of a set of paintings through the methodological rigidity of research. This paper is a good example of how an ordinary source can be used to shed light on an event so what happened could be better understood. It also cautions us to be

mindful of choosing evidence to support a study that must be more inclusive. This method is applicable to most fields of research.

“The Content and Meaning of Northeast Thai Memorial Books in Contemporary Life” touches on a genre of publication where the author does not exist but deals with a person who does not live; the members of the family of whom see to the birth of the book about him or her. This kind of after-life book normatively denotes the intention to remember the worthy existence of the deceased by the family and the community. “Don’t talk bad about the deceased” seems to be a well accepted characteristic when a book like this is organized. Sociologically and economically, it represents social values among the well-to-do and/or the middle class. Not that they only want their family to be remembered, rather that they want recognition among the community or the society. Books of this kind, although perishable like any, emphasize the status of the deceased and the family as long as it is handled.

“The Plain of Jars in the Context of South and Southeast Asian Archaeology” describes and compares stone jars found in northern Laos with those in Burma, Assam and Jambi (Sumatra) and contrasts these with the terracotta burial urns of Sa Huynh of Vietnam. The standing stones of Hua Phan as well as of Luang Nam Tha provinces are described. The megaliths include stone discs at the Plain of Jars and at Hua Phan. Recapitulation of the findings in table form makes it easy to embrace and understand. Photographs renders effectiveness to the subject of description, as well as present true images of the subject, yet are unable to deprive the value of the measurement of the subject which is usual archaeological practice.

“Buddhist Meditation and Emerging Pluralism in the Philippines: Toward Sketching a Preliminary Trajectory” is an interesting piece of research into the search for peace of mind through means found outside one’s own immediate milieu exemplified by the case of Christian, urban middle-class Filipinos practice of Buddhist meditation. Though the reason

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why is not truly explored, the argument is made for emerging pluralism and diversification in the heavily Catholic country like the Philippines. Essentially, the "dual belonging" attributed to the meditators does not cause any disruption socially, although spiritually there are a few cases of shifting religion. This paper also points to religious toleration among the middle class where ethnicity is not pronounced.

"Thai Influence on the Lao Pop Music Industry: History, Repercussions and the Future" describes the development of Lao pop music, particularly at the juncture of the country turning into a socialist state while also embracing an open economy and globalization. Despite the fact that state control on pop music presentation is there, it is also the state that encourages propagation of the pop music. With better technology, capital and promotion strategy, Thai entrepreneurs cash in on Lao pop music, while also backing up Lao artists to fame in Thailand. The cross-border nature of pop music with a large audience serves as a good mechanism to reinforce mutual ties between Thailand and Laos PDR.

"Luang Prabang and Bangkok: A 19th Century Friendship" most thoroughly analyses the relationship between Bangkok and Luang Prabang during the 19th century using traditional reference sources, plus newly retrieved evidence of Lao origin. The writer meticulously consults and sorts out documents to verify his point of view and nails a fresh interpretation. He gives equal treatment to the Laotian, French, Thai and Vietnamese sources in weighing evidence. Needless to say, judgement has to be pronounced after consideration. Most intriguing is the manner in which Luang Prabang makes use of refined diplomacy to "deemphasize their subordinate position", while not rejecting Luang Prabang vassalage to Bangkok, and as such maintaining amicable "friendship" or alliance. Luang Prabang in this manner remained a kingdom to be recognized.

"Early Peninsular Thailand and Eastern India (including Bangladesh): Understanding the Buddhist Milieu through an Archaeological Lens", supplies archaeological

argument and evidence of southeastern Bangladesh as an additional (that is the fourth) Mahayana Buddhist center of great international importance. The author cites the flourishing trade since the tenth century between India and the Kra Isthmus region, propagation of Buddhism and creation of venerated objects, such as clay votive tablets. This also includes the clay tablets of Avalokitesvara and that of Tara. The author also makes a point of the existence and the work of Indian artisan among Southeast Asian craftsmen.

"The Situation of Thai Language Teaching in Vietnamese Universities" gives a brief but effective account of teaching Thai language at seven Vietnamese universities in north, central and south Vietnam. Information was derived by questionnaires and actual interviews of a number of Thai language teachers. The impetus to teach the language is homegrown, facilitated by the Thai government and Thai commercial houses. The Vietnamese students at some institutes worry about job opportunity in learning Thai and Vietnamese teachers need more support from their institutes and government.

"The Boats of Angkor", traces the existence and function of boats in the Angkor period based on evidence of bas reliefs of temples of Bayon and Banteay Chmar, plus records left by Zhou Daguan, together with the remains of a boat excavated recently at Kra Raleung village in Siem Reap, pointing to a long tradition of boat craft. The author describes how a traditional Cambodian way to make a boat is done from the first phase of identifying the proper tree in the forests, rituals involving the preparation for the dugout of the boat form, shaping the boat form, up to the launching of the boat – the whole process of which relates intimately with the spirits that guard the boat. Spiritual value is raised on a high plane when the boat is attributed to fertility rites observed by plenty of races. Comparison with the Thai royal barge is made to highlight the function and belief developed around the boat.

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Luang Prabang and Bangkok: A 19th Century "Friendship"

Ryan Wolfson-Ford¹

Abstract

This article offers an examination of the nature of Lao-Thai relations in the early 19th century. Luang Prabang's vassalage to Siam was not simply Thai domination as many scholars have subsequently claimed. Rather, Luang Prabang reached new heights as a Thai vassal. It had a greater degree of autonomy than has been previously acknowledged, exercising control over a sizable area of the Siamese empire. Further, in the course of the Siam-Vietnam War which came in the wake of the Chao Anou War, Luang Prabang was able to reconstitute itself similar to Lan Na's revival under Kaowila. A rare cache of Lao palm leaf manuscripts written in the reign of Chao Sukkasoem reveals how Luang Prabang expanded its control over surrounding areas in the wake of the fall of Vientiane. We further analyze correspondence Chao Sukkasoem had with Rama III to elaborate on Lao-Thai relations. We conclude with a discussion of the historiography of Lao-Thai relations.

¹ Independent Scholar. I wish to acknowledge the many persons who have offered me invaluable aid in my research. My advisor Thongchai Winichakul has been a constant source of inspiration and support who has challenged me to improve many weak issues. I have profited considerably from the assistance of Kennon Breazeale. My teachers at the National Library of Laos in Vientiane were extremely generous and patient in teaching me to first read Lao manuscripts, especially Mr. Thongsuey Outhomphone. I would not have been able to complete my research without a very long period of study with Maha Khamphoui Sisavaidy, who is a very accomplished and learned scholar of Laos, including his many historical works. Finally, I never would have even thought to study Lao history were it not for the brilliance of Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox who inspired me in so many ways. This article is part of a larger dissertation research into the Ho wars and its aftermath on Lao society. All translations are those of the author.

What was the nature of Luang Prabang-Bangkok relations in this period? I hypothesize that after the fall of Chao Anou, the last remaining semi-independent Lao power at Luang Prabang formed an alliance ("friendship") with Bangkok which propelled Luang Prabang to be a preeminent power in the north of the peninsula. This is distinct from existing scholarship which on the one hand takes as simple fact that Luang Prabang was always a subordinate, obedient and loyal vassal agent vis-à-vis the Thai and at its extreme even claims that Laos was naturally Thai. On the other hand, there is a body of scholarship which claims that Luang Prabang was oppressed under a heavy Thai yoke. I will examine these two positions in the conclusion. Yet the idea that Luang Prabang was totally dominated by the Thai in this period is based entirely on Thai documentation. What is missing from these accounts is any Lao source. I will present some Lao primary documents that will show the flawed nature of a simple top-down model of relations between Luang Prabang and Bangkok.⁵

Relations Prior To, and During the Chao Anou War

The funeral of Rama II is a good illustration of the stark contrasts of the two Lao vassals' relations to Bangkok. For Chao Anou, Rama III's rejection of his request for the return of Lao captives from 1778 was the immediate cause for war.⁶ In the case of the Luang Prabang monarch, Chao Mangthathurat (r. 1817-1836), it was his opportunity to cement good ties with the

⁵ Breazeale p. 1 notes that his study relied on Thai documents that produced an account solely from the Thai view. Others who have worked on this topic have been similarly limited by their sources. My work does not break free of this dilemma, but rather introduces Lao sources to provide a preliminary account from a Lao (Luang Prabang) view; however, this does not encompass Phuan, Champassak, Khmu, Hmong, Mien or other view points and is itself only a representation by a foreign scholar.

⁶ For the Thai chronicle account of Anou at the funeral, see Thiphakorawong, vol. 1, p. 26, which notes that Anou left "with sadness because (he) was unable to fulfil his wishes/มีความโศกเศร้าไม่เต็มใจเพราะทรงพระประชวร." Rama III also made insulting and offensive requests of Anou's entourage: that they act as laborers while in Siam; Mayoury and Phuephan analyze this in detail, p. 145-148.

Introduction

Chao Anou's war (1827-1829) made sweeping changes to the political landscape of mainland Southeast Asia, in effect consolidating the power and control of the two remaining dominant states of Siam and Vietnam. For Siam especially, this was the culminating moment when the central Thai finally brought the Lao to heel and erased any pretenses to independence, autonomy or sovereignty. In Champassak and Vientiane this is most evident, as the former was punished for its support of Anou by a loss of dependents and a reduction in size and autonomy, while the latter was wiped off the map.² The subsequent Thai raids to depopulate the left-bank of southern and central Laos left wanton destruction, but it also allowed the Thai to rewrite the power hierarchies by creating new elites with new titles, towns and people to rule.³ The creation and incorporation of the "Isan" region was a significant outcome of the war granting the Thai unprecedented power and authority in the Khorat plateau. Given these wide-ranging developments, many scholars have echoed this assessment for Laos in general, however, not as many have recognized the exceptional case of Luang Prabang.⁴ While recent controversy has disputed the role of Luang Prabang during the war, there is a preponderance of evidence to show it did aid the Thai in numerous ways and was even rewarded for it. Yet it was only in the succeeding decades that the Luang Prabang-Bangkok "friendship" fully took form. This article will examine the relationship between Bangkok and Luang Prabang in the wake of the Chao Anou war.

² Vella p. 86 notes that Champassak was a "new style province" and fn. 47 notes that territories east of Champassak were subject directly to Bangkok, which as Wilson describes it, eliminated any "concentration of power" and was a primary way in which Bangkok increased its power over out-lying areas, p. 514; on the other hand Luang Prabang was never subjected to these conditions as will be seen below, but for one example, one notes the blank areas surrounding Luang Prabang on Thai administrative maps which were areas directly subject to Luang Prabang, not Bangkok, see Wilson p. 1072.

³ Breazeale, 1975, 1988; see also Vella p. 87 which notes that Chao Phraya Bodindecha remained in Isan to personally appoint new provincial chiefs loyal to Bangkok.

⁴ Wyatt, 1984 p. 153; Vella, p. 90-91; One could also consult the works of Mayoury and Phuephan Ngaosrivathana, Leiberman, or Grabowsky.

new Thai monarch by a well-staged show of piety.⁷ In a sign of mourning, Mangthathurat ordained as a monk and spent the Buddhist lent period at Wat Mahathat Yuwarat-rangsarit at Phra Nangklao's leave, one of the ten highest class temples in the Thai capital. Out of respect for this magnanimous act, Rama III arranged for Mangthathurat's ordination ceremony to be held at Wat Phra Kaeo by a high ecclesiastical dignitary (ราชาคณะ). What were Mangthathurat's intentions with this dramatic move? In the Minister's Pavilion Edition of the Luang Prabang chronicles he is reported to have told Rama III while prostrating himself:

thinking of the great virtue of his majesty Rama I and Rama II, who fostered me as I matured, I request to ordain as a monk, to offer merit to them both

คิดถึงพระบารมีพระเดชพระคุณพระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกย์ พระบาทสมเด็จพระนั่งเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวได้ทรงชุบเลี้ยงต่อจาก จะขอบวชเป็นพระภิกษุสงฆ์ ถวายพระวาทะกุศลแด่พระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกย์ พระบาทสมเด็จพระนั่งเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว

Yet in such a public setting so pregnant with political overtones it is difficult to accept this statement as the true intentions of the Lao king, and it begs further interpretation. In fact, we must be critical of the pavilion chronicle as a source. It is the most commonly referenced Thai-language source on Luang Prabang history; however, the context in which it was written should be examined. The chronicle, dated 1867, was as much a staged performance by the Luang Prabang elite presenting themselves as "loyal servants" to the Thai as Mangthathurat's ordination. Yet, regardless of that, his act in 1824 stands out as significant: shared mourning in an emotionally potent moment formed a bond between the two kings. Perhaps he was drawn to do this because he felt the need to counter threats from the growing

⁷ Vella p. 79 and fn. 1: notes the Lao vassal's "anxiety" to go to Bangkok frequently and in person.

⁸ See the pavilion chronicle (hereafter MPE), p. 260-262 for the full account of Mangthathurat's time in Bangkok and p. 261, especially for the quote above. I have not made any effort to modernize the Thai spelling in the original.

power of Anou by re-engaging with the new Chakri monarch.⁹ At any rate he remained a monk for the duration of the Buddhist lent. Afterwards, he stayed in Bangkok where he conducted his affairs from the house of a member of the Thai elite. For two years he left the affairs of state to the local Luang Prabang elite.¹⁰ He only left Bangkok at the urging of Rama III to attend to his people amid the immediate crisis of an epidemic that killed many in Luang Prabang. In Phra Nangklao's parting speech he spoke highly of the Lao King as "a loyal person...honest and steadfast."¹¹ The Thai king even gave Mangthathurat a new set of the five regalia of kings. As another sign of the positive outcome of the visit, Mangthathurat was provided on his return trip with funeral paraphernalia for his recently deceased mother.¹² Yet he left his third son, the future Chao Unkham in Bangkok to enroll as a royal page.¹³ Le Boulanger has described Chao Unkham as a "hostage".¹⁴ However, there were immense opportunities for Unkham to learn at the capital and to be exposed to Thai court culture to the benefit of future dealings with Bangkok. Moreover, it provided

⁹ Breazeale p. 7 notes Chao Anou had made significant efforts to manipulate and weaken internally its vassal of Xieng Khouang by arranging for the succession of a commoner – while a short annal of Vientiane history suggests Vientiane's military activities to expand to the north east – perhaps to make up for its loss of vassals in the Khorat plateau – and it was only three decades before that Vientiane sought to conquer Luang Prabang in the same campaign. Further, even Mayoury and Phuephan hint at some of the aggressiveness of Anou when they wonder aloud if Phuthai migrating to Vang Vien had done so "voluntarily" p 45, fn 72. This is not a condemnation of Anou's character, but rather a recognition of the political realities of the time.

¹⁰ MPE, p. 261 notes he "left the country (affairs) to the *thaophraya* to take care" – this probably meant the *uparat*, *rasavong*, *rasaburi* and the King's Council.

¹¹ Ibid p. 262 "คนดีมีบุญ...เป็นคนดีซื่อสัตย์" in the original from the MPE. Rama III again refers to Mangthathurat as "honest" when the latter informed Bangkok about Chao Anou's intentions, p. 263.

¹² Kennon Breazeale described this from a Thai memo from the second reign (email of October 15, 2012).

¹³ Vella p. 79, fn. 1 erroneously says it is Mangthathurat's "eldest" son. See MPE, p. 262 in the original. On p. 263 it adds that Rama III later ordered Chao Unkham to ordain as a monk.

¹⁴ "Il y était retenu en otage.../He was held hostage..." Le Boulanger, p. 209. This appears to be the author's own interpretation, based on a certain understanding of Siam-Lao relations rather than based on any explicit statement from a text.

an immediate line of communication between the two kings during the coming war. Thus we can say Luang Prabang grew closer to Bangkok at the very moment Vientiane began to break away.

Around this time Manthaturat refused a diplomatic mission from Anou's envoy Nakphumin to form an army and unite to make war on the Thai.¹⁵ An accomplished Lao historian, Chao Khamman Vongkottrattana, noted that Luang Prabang refused to take sides, even going so far as to tell Anou's envoys it would wait to join whichever side was more powerful.¹⁶ From this ambiguous response, it is possible that at this point Mangthathurat and his council did not know what course of action to take and struggled to formulate a response. Vientiane had long been an enemy, sacking the city several times, the last being within living memory. In 1792, Vientiane had temporarily gained suzerainty over Luang Prabang, until Chao Nanthasen was denounced to Bangkok three years later, where he died in jail.¹⁷

¹⁵ There is some confusion about the date of Anou's overture: the pavilion chronicle notes it was 1827, whereas both Chao Khamman, p. 94-95 and Le Boulanger's accounts, p. 201, note there were two missions in 1819 and 1820 (the latter being led by Nakphumin). The later date would make Luang Prabang appear more innocent, not having time to warn the Thai. Nakphumin was said to have brought an elephant and shield as gifts, both symbols of war. The pavilion edition, p. 262-263 tells the reader that after receiving Anou's overture, Mangthathurat and his ministers began a program of deception that worked so perfectly they still had fooled Anou even once the war had commenced. Yet this "official" version does not account for all the ambiguities and is questionable for this pivotal moment when Bangkok would be limited to knowing only what Luang Prabang later said had happened. It is more a comment on Luang Prabang-Bangkok relations during the 1860s when it was written than anything else.

¹⁶ Chao Khamman Vongkottrattana's little known 1959 history of Laos is a detailed study of Luang Prabang history. It appears that he referred to original documents, but he does not clearly indicate them. See p. 95 for this statement, which he dates to 1825 (in response to a third mission from Anou to win Luang Prabang to his cause), to which Mangthathurat replied "ຫາງໃດແດງຈະຊອບຫາງນັ້ນ."

¹⁷ The invasion of 1792 led to two weeks of bitter siege warfare, in which Luang Prabang fought the invaders to a standstill. It was only by the arts of deception that Chao Nanthasen was able to convince a noble woman to open the south-east gate for the promise of power as the queen. When Vientiane troops stormed the city, many inside were killed, the King, *uparat*, *rasavong*, their families were all captured and many families from Luang Prabang were forcibly resettled to Vientiane. A Vientiane official was placed in charge of the defeated city for the next four years. The ruling elite and

Bangkok was the graveyard of many Lao rulers in this period. Yet Mangthathurat could also recall an uneasy period in relations with Bangkok during his father Anurutha's reign. In the same episode, both Anurutha and Mangthathurat were arrested and sent to the Bangkok jail. They were only released by the efforts of three envoys of the Qing who pleaded with the Thai to liberate them.¹⁸ Mangthathurat was the *rasavong* during his father's rule so he witnessed these events firsthand. Since the 1774 alliance between Luang Prabang and Siam against Vientiane, Luang Prabang had served as an early defensive line in the north against Burmese invasions. However, with the latter's defeat in 1802 at Chiang Saen, the Luang Prabang-Bangkok relationship needed to be reformulated.¹⁹ Eventually Mangthathurat sent his eldest son, Chao Sukkasoen, with a tributary letter to Bangkok to alert it to the fateful plans of Chao Anou, but only after the war had already broken-out.²⁰

It is fascinating to consider the possibility of a pan-Lao movement against the Thai as suggested by Mayoury and Pheuiphan Ngaosyvath.²¹ Given the scant documentation that exists, of which

their families were sent to Bangkok to jail. See MPE, p. 256-257. Le Boulanger, p. 200, adds that one of Anou's envoys implored Mangthathurat to "forget the past quarrels/d'oublier les querelles passées."

¹⁸ This episode is originally taken from MPE, p. 257-258, which describes a Chinese official and a Sipsong Panna official traveling together overland down to Bangkok with a letter and gifts to request the Luang Prabang elite be freed. The families moved to Vientiane were also returned to their original residences in Luang Prabang.

¹⁹ Wyatt, "Siam and Laos"; Le Boulanger uses the word "alliance" as well and notes the pact was originally made to counter Burma, p. 196-197. See also Chao Khamman, p. 88 which describes it as a "friendship/ສາມພັນສາວະນະ."

²⁰ MPE, p. 263 notes that Chao Sukkasoen only got down to Bangkok with the letter (ສຸດທ້າຍ) after the Thai armies had captured Vientiane and the 1827 phase of the war was over (including the only major military challenge the Vientiane Lao could muster). The chronicle partly accounts for this slow response by saying the Lao prince had to "sneak past the enemy/ເລີກອອກສຳຫຼັດ." Meanwhile Luang Prabang officials (namely Chao Muang Phaen) were still in the city of Vientiane until its fall negotiating with Anou (a "deception" according to the chronicle).

²¹ Paths, p. 69-75 makes the case that Luang Prabang did accept Chao Anou's offer of alliance despite the only surviving textual evidence indicating otherwise and the lack of any Luang Prabang military aid to ever materialize during Anou's war. They claim that Luang Prabang indicated its support for Anou by symbolically raising the height

much is yet unexamined, we must remain alive to such a possibility and be ready to revise old dogmas. This controversy, once raised, in fact, will not be resolved anytime soon. Still, by 1827 Luang Prabang could call forth plenty of memories of Vientiane Lao aggression and several sackings of its city by their hand. It would not be hard to mobilize for war on this basis. Extant manuscripts from Luang Prabang, written much later after the fact, are quite blunt and do not equivocate on the issue: there is a clear bias in surviving texts from Luang Prabang against Vientiane and Chao Anou. For example, in the pavilion chronicle, the 1792 invasion of Luang Prabang by Chao Nanthasen was characterized as Vientiane's "revenge"²² for the former's role in assisting the Thai attack of 1778/1779. Yet Luang Prabang only helped the Thai invasion then in order to quench its own thirst for vengeance for an earlier Vientiane/Burmese invasion.²³ According to this text, it would seem that "vengeance", rather than a pan-Lao nationalism, characterized relations. Another Luang Prabang manuscript, dated to around 1900, explicitly adheres to the Bangkok view of Chao Anou's war by describing it as a "revolt":

Chao Anou succeeded [Chao Inthava] and ruled the country for twenty-four years until the *muengkhai* year. He rebelled against your most gracious majesty and fled to the protection of Vietnam. Vietnam left him and sent him back to Vientiane. It is only vengeance [to] Chao Anou, [that] his energy [came] under [Siam]. Beware, he was finished in the *katbow* year...

of a temple, and keeping Anou's letter in a temple. They also claim from an interview with one prominent Lao scholar that Anou offered to retire if Luang Prabang would help him beat Siam.

²² "การพมหาราช" in the original. It is significant that this is how the events of 1792 were described more than half a century afterwards in 1867, see MPE, p. 256.

²³ See Sila, 1957, p. 223. He notes that the Luang Prabang ruler, Chao Suriyavong was "happy/ดีใจ" to learn of the Thai invasion.

ເຈົ້າອານຸສະວິອຣເມີອາເທນາສາດ ມາເຖີ ງູບີເມີງໃຫ້ກະບັດຈາກຊົນເກົາລົມກະໝອມຫົນໄປເຜິ້ງແກວ ງ ພັດເອົາມາສົ່ງວຽງຈັນ ບ່າຍແຕ່ວນກມະຈາອານຸພະລະກຳລັງພາຍໃຕ້ ລະວງໃຈສັງເສັງໃນບັກດບັງ²⁴

The text also censures Chao Nanthasen for being "immoral," after which he went to Bangkok, "the great city."²⁵ While these comments are rather opaque and unfortunately do not offer a fuller account of the events they comment on, they stand in contrast to the normally a-political language of Lao manuscripts and so should not be ignored.²⁶ This would be ignoring real tensions in Lao history. As we will see below, this pro-Bangkok language is repeated elsewhere in the official correspondence of Luang Prabang, and not just in fawning letters to the Chakri ruler either.

For all the emphasis on the delay of sending its troops to Vientiane, Luang Prabang seems to have applied itself vigorously after overcoming its initial hesitation. It organized an army of 5,000

²⁴ The original undated palm leaf manuscript, titled simply "phongsavadan muang" is archived as PLMP: 06010914053 10 in the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts. The quotation is taken from folio 97 lines 1-2. This was later published as "Phongsavadan Muang Luang Prabang" in 1969. The published version diverges from the original "revolt/ກະບັດ" by substituting the more politically neutral "liberate/ກັບດ." While the original, written in old Lao script, does have a "j" this is merely an idiosyncrasy of the scribe's writing. There is no "u" vowel on the "ງ". On the other hand "ເວນ" is clearly written as "ເວວງ" in the manuscript, however, I have taken this as a transcription error. My reading is more consonant with the rest of the manuscript, such as the clear condemnation of Nanthasen and the honoring language for Rama III.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 96, line 4: ຈົກນັບບໍ່ຊອບຫົນໄປຢູ່ງຽງເທບພະຫນາະອນພູນັດເວ. ²⁶ Mayoury and Pheuphan, p. 66 admit that this same chronicle does "dwell on this episode [1792 invasion] of political rape." Again, p. 72 they note that "some copies" of the Luang Prabang chronicles "bluster with verbal intemperance" which they also assign to the fact that these chronicles were written "at the orders of Bangkok." See also p. 19. I have indicated, especially with regard to the pavilion chronicle, this issue; however, for a chronicle approximately dated to 1900 (it must be later than 1893 as it refers to the French) it would not have been written at Bangkok's order or for Bangkok's consumption. As the French did not have the requisite language abilities, the Lao at Luang Prabang may have felt much more freedom to write what they pleased. At any rate, the anti-Anou view still being reproduced this long after shows a certain longevity to it.

soldiers led by the *uparat* Chao Suttha, the *rasavong* Chao Aphaï, Chao Unkaeo (younger brother of the *uparat*) Chao Kaenkhram and other nobles who on the order of Mangthathurat, "hurried to assist the Thai army" in what the pavilion chronicle describes as a grand "pincer movement."²⁷ Afterwards, Luang Prabang provided badly needed supplies and provisions to the Thai army.²⁸ The Luang Prabang contingent assisted Chao Phraya Bodindecha with the systematic destruction of Vientiane. Moreover, according to Thai sources, Luang Prabang helped Siam destroy the remnant enemy forces, remove weapons and assisted in the resettlement of Vientiane Lao.²⁹ The latter activity was a crucial role that Luang Prabang would play for Bangkok in its designs to secure the region by control of people. The earlier Thai campaigns of tattooing people was expanded and dwarfed by the scale of population resettlement undertaken in the decades after the Anou war.³⁰ As late as November 1830, Luang Prabang still was managing 5,000 Vientiane Lao captives at Paklai that were in transit to Bangkok.³¹ There was however one individual who resisted this course of events: the *uparat* of Luang Prabang, Chao Suttha.³² In 1828 he was arrested by the Phraya of Phichai on the order of Rama III and incarcerated in Bangkok, charged with "hiding the families of Vientiane."³³ Early French sources interpret his actions as a latent Luang Prabang resistance and indictment of the whole Thai effort; however, one cannot rule out the possibility that it was simply a case

²⁷ "กรมราชวงศ์กรุงเทพฯ ตีกระหนาบเมืองเวียงจันทน์" MP, p. 263. I follow the Lao spelling of Chao Aphaï, rather than the Thai "Rachaphai."

²⁸ Vella, p. 84 notes that the Thai army could not occupy the area of Vientiane due to a lack of supplies.

²⁹ Ibid p. 83. See also MPE, p 263.

³⁰ For an excellent account of this in the Vientiane region, see Mayoury and Pheuphan, p. 45, 54-55, 138.

³¹ Breazeale, p. 12.

³² It is interesting to note that Chao Suttha's disobedience is parallel in form to Chao Tissa's betrayal of Chao Anou in that both held the position of *uparat* and both ended up turning against their respective ruling king during the course of the war.

³³ MPE, p. 264 states: "เจ้าอุปราชปิดบังครอบครัวเมืองเวียงจันทน์" See also Chao Khamman, p. 95.

of fighting over the spoils of war.³⁴ There are fleeting references to a Luang Prabang assault on Xieng Khuang in mid-1828, most likely as a reprisal for "aid and comfort" the Phuan provided Anou.³⁵ When it came time to hunt Anou down a second time in late 1828, Luang Prabang served as a guide and added weight to the military ultimatum the Thai gave to Chao Noi.³⁶ By mid-January 1829, when Bangkok executed Chao Anou in a horrible manner and Chao Noi was beheaded in Hue, the course of events had gone far beyond a simple dispute between vassal and overlord.

The Siam-Vietnam War in Northern Laos, 1829-1837³⁷

The destruction of Vientiane and its king led directly to the outbreak of war between Siam and Vietnam – Anou had kept a balance between the two powers, on which had rested an uneasy peace.³⁸ As this crumbled, there emerged a large-scale conflict that took shape

³⁴ Le Boulanger, p. 202. He wrongly identifies this person as Chao Unkaeo, who continued to be important in Luang Prabang history well after this period; it was actually Chao Suttha. Le Boulanger's interpretation depends on a sense of nationalism that is anachronistic to some degree; whereas there are other cases in this period, as we will see below, of Luang Prabang elite keeping war-captives from other Lao (in this case Phuan) neighbors.

³⁵ Whitmore, p. 57 notes the aid Xieng Khuang gave to Anou in 1828. He further notes "Luang Prabang ceased its harassment of Xieng Khuang" after the latter requested Vietnamese aid, which triggered the establishment of a garrison force, p. 58. Woodside also refers to a "conflict" between Xieng Khuang and "the Siamese supported ruler of Luang Prabang", although the date is wrongly given as 1827, p. 249. Breazeale, p. 9 on the other hand gives an account of Anou's first flight to Vietnam in mid-1828 in which he went on a southern route, not via Xieng Khuang.

³⁶ Whitmore writes vaguely that the Thai "allied with the Lao to hunt [Anou] down" p. 59. Breazeale, p. 10 notes the Thai ultimatum.

³⁷ In the evolving conflict there was a lot of activity in south and central Laos, in addition to the campaigns in the north, which I will not address here. For a fabulous account of those events, such as the last stand of Vientiane Lao resistance at Maha Chai, see Breazeale, p. 11-22.

³⁸ Vella, p. 85 notes Bangkok's fear that Vietnam would step into the political vacuum, whereas on p. 87 Vietnam sent a letter to the Thai stating Vientiane should not be left as "a vacant kingdom." Whitmore, p. 57 recounts the Vietnamese court debate on how to respond to the war. Breazeale, p. 14 adds the Vietnamese assigned their own officials to areas formerly under Vientiane.

across the peninsula, extending from the north near China down to the high seas off the coast of Cambodia. The war in Laos has not been fully appreciated in accounts of this conflict, and most scholars have focused on the Cambodian battlefield, which was larger in scale.³⁹ Yet it was in Laos that Bangkok was able to realize the most decisive and convincing victories, which were achieved with the critical support of Luang Prabang. Throughout the 1830s, Luang Prabang conducted joint military campaigns with the Thai and was a key ally for them in the region, without which similar Thai efforts would have been impossible. Military cooperation greatly enhanced the power of Luang Prabang against its enemies as they were forced to bring tribute to the northern Lao center in the name of fealty to Bangkok. In this way, Luang Prabang gained power over much of the surrounding territories in the area. While it is certain that these new vassals were made to pledge an oath to Siam, and behind this lay the very real threat of Siamese military force, it nevertheless was also true that Luang Prabang wielded real power in the arrangement. Luang Prabang not only provided the organizational capacity, logistics, intelligence and served as a base for campaigning, but it was also the local agent of Thai authority in the region. Luang Prabang was able to use this very profitably to serve its own interests.

The Thai-Vietnamese war as it developed in Laos was a pivotal moment in Luang Prabang's expansionary, state-building during the 19th century. In the heat of the Anou war, Minh Mang sent a threatening letter warning Luang Prabang "against further expansion."⁴⁰ John K. Whitmore's essay, written from Vietnamese sources, repeatedly frames Luang Prabang as a rising power taking advantage of its link with Bangkok to expand its power over smaller principalities in the east.⁴¹ By the early 1830s, the Nguyen saw Luang Prabang as a powerful

³⁹ Breazeale makes this observation, p. 18. Whitmore's path-breaking essay on this topic in 1970 remains a major contribution after half a century. Even Le Boulanger's seminal history of Laos focuses more on the conflict in Cambodia, p. 206-209.

⁴⁰ Whitmore, p. 58; to which Luang Prabang was said to have replied by having "trembled and asked for a pardon" in the Vietnamese annals.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58-60 and adds that "Only Luang Prabang had maintained its autonomy" in Laos.

state, "high on the list of tributary states...even above Cambodia."⁴² Woodside adds to this Vietnamese perception from a popular song: "the petty prince of Luang Prabang was conniving with Siam.../the isolated barbarian chieftain [Xieng Khuang] was disturbed/and offered as tribute to the court of the Southern Country [Vietnam] his seven districts.../"⁴³ In some ways it was only following a model already established in Lao vassalage to Bangkok set by the kings of Vientiane. Chao Nanthasen had launched a similar expansionary campaign in the early 1790s that compelled Luang Prabang, Huaphan and Xieng Khuang to submit. He also waged war against the Tay Son on behalf of Bangkok.⁴⁴ But, there is no greater example of Thai-Lao military cooperation than Chao Anou himself.⁴⁵ His military prowess against the Burmese and others sufficiently awed the Chakri king that he easily secured the throne of Vientiane and the throne of Champassak for his son. His betrayal cut deeper because he was so close to Bangkok, but another Lao kingdom lay in the offing. Incorporation of the right-bank could only go so far to securing the Lao areas. To project power up to the Annamite Cordillera, the Xieng Khuang plateau and to the borders of China – to accomplish all these objectives – Bangkok needed Luang Prabang.

Vietnam had occupied Xieng Khuang and surrounding areas and asserted itself in Huaphan.⁴⁶ In 1828, Minh Mang had decided to "take advantage of the situation and tie the plateau into the empire" in order to rebuff the Thai advances.⁴⁷ At this time, Xieng Khuang was renamed Tran-ninh and made a part of Nghe-an province, at least on paper. To the Thai, these areas were all potential invasion routes. Furthermore,

⁴² Whitmore, p. 60. See also Woodside, p. 237 for details of a similar list from 1813 made by Gia Long.

⁴³ Woodside, p. 249.

⁴⁴ Mayour and Pheuphan, p. 65-66.

⁴⁵ Vella p. 80 notes Anou "frequently [gave] military aid to Siamese armies."

⁴⁶ Breazeale, p. 9 describes the Vietnamese garrison from mid-1828, which as I have noted above was likely in response to an attack, or its serious potential from Luang Prabang. Thiphakorawong, p. 167-169 includes an account from the Huaphan elite who say they were given to Vietnam by Anou. See also Vella, p. 85 and on p. 88-89 he notes that Thai sources indicate the Vietnamese had 3,000 troops across Xieng Khuang.

⁴⁷ Whitmore, p. 58.

they were all former vassals of Vientiane that Luang Prabang desired to control again now that its rival was defeated. Before the conflict, there was a lull period from 1829-1833. Bangkok was preoccupied with reorganizing the right bank territories.⁴⁸ The Thai forces on the Khorat plateau could mainly just wait and report, although they did have some success in persuading many Lao to resettle on the right bank.⁴⁹ Luang Prabang on the other hand was more provocative. As early as mid-1828, Vietnam was alarmed that Luang Prabang had "an accumulation of stocks for an attack on Tran-ninh" to which they responded by shoring up their own defenses.⁵⁰ Breazeale notes further that Luang Prabang sent out spies to gather information about Xieng Khuang.⁵¹ In 1833, Luang Prabang was able to use its savvy to manipulate the tributary system in order to get the permission of the Vietnamese authorities in Xieng Khuang to resettle people, who had earlier fled, returning them to the Lao kingdom.⁵² The major offensive took shape in the dry season of 1833/1834, preempted by ominous rumors of war.⁵³ The timing of the attack occurred for a number of reasons, including a major Vietnamese rebellion led by a dissident who reached out to the Thai in southern Vietnam and requests for aid from Cambodia and the Phuan.⁵⁴ In the northern theater, the Thai-Lao thrust to Xieng

⁴⁸ Breazeale, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Vella p. 88 notes that captured Lao nobles who had by this point been co-opted by Siam with offers of new wealth, power and authority, were able to persuade many Lao on the left bank to come over to the promise of new opportunity amid the rebuilding on the right bank.

⁵⁰ Whitmore, p. 59.

⁵¹ Breazeale, p. 11. Whitmore notes further that armed Lao traders showed up in Xieng Khuang around this time.

⁵² Whitmore, p. 61. Woodside notes Luang Prabang went through an intermediary, the Muong people, to accomplish this mission, p. 244. Perhaps they wanted to avoid Siamese attention to this activity? Le Boulanger, p. 203, suggests this mission, along with an earlier one from 1831, sought a "counter-point" to the Siamese "yoke." He seems unaware of the fruits Luang Prabang realized from this mission. Moreover, he makes no comment about the coming Thai-Lao offensives against Vietnamese in the area.

⁵³ Whitmore, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 249 notes that the Thai-Lao offensive was supposed to give aid to the Vietnamese rebel Le Van Khoi.

Khuang came in a pincer movement. Luang Prabang attacked from the northwest striking at Sui and Xieng Kham in western Xieng Khuang.⁵⁵ Xieng Kham was a major fortress that Thai-Lao armies would return to repeatedly later in the century. The Thai force at Nongkhai moved to attack Xieng Khuang from the southwest. However, a well-timed revolt by the Phuan against the local Vietnamese garrison was able to secure victory for the Thai and Lao. The Phuan reacted against a "heavy yoke" of Vietnamese administration, which made heavy demands to be fed and housed, "oppressed" the nobles, and forced people to adopt "proper" Vietnamese surnames.⁵⁶ The Thai-Lao campaign used these Phuan grievances as the pretext to invade.⁵⁷

The Luang Prabang war effort is described in greater detail in the pavilion chronicle.⁵⁸ The Thai general Chaophraya Thamma went up to Luang Prabang in 1833. The Luang Prabang *uparat* Chao Apha, whose post usually acted as the field commander for Luang Prabang military campaigns, amassed an army with the aid of local elite to march on the Phuan. Vietnamese sources note the composition of this army was 500 Thai soldiers and 4,500 Lao soldiers.⁵⁹ A report by the Thai general specifies that Luang Prabang assembled 2,000 soldiers who combined with the other forces.⁶⁰ The army was reinforced by soldiers from Phichai, Swanakhalok, Phichit Phitsanulok, Sukhothai and Phrae.⁶¹ In early February, 1834 they easily defeated the Vietnamese posts ringing the Xieng Khuang plateau, however, their advance stalled when they encountered Vietnamese defensive positions in the mountains to the plateau. It was only after the Phuan staged a timely revolt that the Vietnamese forces collapsed and the Thai-Lao armies seized victory. This can be attributed to the tactics of the Lao. Phraya Muang Phaen,

⁵⁵ The Thai chronicle account can be found in Thipakarawong, p. 149-156. I have adopted the term "Thai-Lao" which appears in the chronicle: "Thai-Lao Generals and Commanders/ไทยลาวทัพนายกองเจ้าหน้าการ," p. 150. See also, Breazeale, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Whitmore, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 61.

⁵⁸ See-MPE, p. 264-265.

⁵⁹ Whitmore, p. 61. See also Thiphakorawong, p. 136 which notes 4,000 troops were assembled.

⁶⁰ Thiphakorawong, p. 150.

⁶¹ Vella, p. 89.

a dependent of Luang Prabang, was sent ahead of the army to Xieng Khuang to call on the Phuan to surrender in the face of overwhelming force: "submit to be a servant of Rama III goodly, please! Then Phuan country and Luang Prabang country can be brotherly neighbors from then on."⁶² It is significant that the Phuan were not only told to submit to Bangkok, but also to ensure good relations with Luang Prabang. The inseparable nature of the two powers is repeated in other key moments of the period. After this covert negotiation, to which the Phuan agreed, the Phuan were working with the invading army giving them advice and collaboratively working to defeat the enemy, striking a small force at Sui and more at Nguem River.⁶³ The army finally seized the capital by entering at 3 a.m., massacring 300 soldiers of the Vietnamese garrison, including the commander, with the help of the Phuan.⁶⁴

The pavilion chronicle also reports that there was a second Luang Prabang army led by Chao Unkaeo, Chao Kaenkham and others that went to attack Muang Thaen in the same season.⁶⁵ After success in conquering Muang Thaen, the army continued up to Muang Lai where the ruler of the Deo family there surrendered and was allowed with his family to continue ruling.⁶⁶ The Thai wanted to divert Vietnamese attention to the Lao attack on Muang Thaen and away from Cambodia, but no Vietnamese support was sent.⁶⁷ Both campaigns won many captive Phuan and Black Tai.⁶⁸ Luang Prabang profited richly

⁶² Thiphakorawong, p. 151. "ให้ตั้งเมืองสวามิภักดิ์เป็นเจ้าสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวโดยดีเถิด แล้วเจ้าเมืองพวนกับเมืองหลวงพระบางจะ"ได้เป็นบ้านพี่เมืองน้องกันสืบไป" in the original. The ruler and *uparat* of Phuan replied "We couldn't possibly be happier/ข้าพเจ้าบังเกิดความยินดีหาที่สุดมิได้"

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 152. The Vietnamese stationed at Sui fled, but at Nguem River, 47 Vietnamese died and 53 others fled.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153. Of the massacre, it says "Lao" and "Phuan" were the ones who captured and slaughtered the Vietnamese. The Thai forces are conveniently absent in the account of the violence, according to the chronicle.

⁶⁵ MPE, p. 264-265. Vella, p. 90.

⁶⁶ Chao Khamman, p. 96. He notes the ruler of Muang Lai was named "ວ່າຍັງ." He erroneously dates this campaign and the one against the Vietnamese garrison in Xieng Khuang as being in the year 1835.

⁶⁷ Whitmore, p. 63. It is clear that the lack of Vietnamese support in northern Laos led to significant gains for the Thai-Lao forces in the region.

⁶⁸ "Lao songdam/ลาวทรงดำ" in the original, MPE, p. 265. As noted earlier, a Vientiane

from these campaigns, not only in the new vassal-domains it had acquired, but also in terms of the new war-slaves it resettled in the Kingdom.⁶⁹ The next target in the Thai-Lao campaign was to subdue Huaphan. Riding the wave of their earlier successes, Luang Prabang and Bangkok gained ascendancy in Huaphan with the mere threat of invasion. Huaphan sent a delegation to Luang Prabang to submit and thereby avert the coming invasion. It is significant that Huaphan achieved this first by submitting at Luang Prabang.⁷⁰ When the Thai general, Chaophraya Thamma, returned to report, Phra Nangklao was suspicious of the Huaphan envoys and seriously doubted their loyalties, yet he was effectively presented with a *fait accompli* by Mangthathurat.⁷¹ Only afterward did Huaphan belatedly send a delegation down to Bangkok. He therefore grudgingly accepted the Huaphan submission with only a tenuous grasp on the real situation.⁷² Due to the distances involved, and the difficulty of communicating, it was impossible for Bangkok to contemplate exercising direct power over all the newly conquered territory. For this reason, all the new "Thai" territories would in fact conduct their tributary relations with Luang Prabang, including conducting diplomatic missions and

chronicle notes that Vientiane conducted military campaigns in the same region as far back as the 1790s showing that it had long been a target of Lao on the Mekong.

⁶⁹ From the Thai general's report it appears that the attack on Huaphan was delayed by Mangthathurat, who diverted the army to gather Phuan people to be resettled in Luang Prabang: see Thiphakorawong, p. 153.

⁷⁰ All the inhabitants of Huaphan fled when the Luang Prabang army approached at first. The negotiations for Huaphan to submit then had to be conducted through the *lam* intermediary – after which the Huaphan elite went to Luang Prabang, *ibid.*, p. 155-156. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155-156 notes Rama III was concerned they "might have been deceived by the Huaphan people... if it is likely so, (we) will lose honor" and so he ordered the Thai general to return.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 167-71 contains the full account of the audience including more details on Huaphan's status relative to the other powers. It was allegedly given to Vietnam by Anou when he sheltered there after his first defeat in 1827. The Thai-Lao side made more threats through the *lam*. This was followed by the Huaphan mission to Bangkok where they testified before Rama III and pledged their allegiance saying they would be "willingly submissive." This Thai account gives the sense that Huaphan simply surrendered whenever a large force invaded, but otherwise held no true loyalties, reflecting the insecurities of the court.

consultations, paying tribute, and the annual water oath ceremony. Some vassals would even send their children to study in Luang Prabang, rather than Bangkok.⁷³ In the name of Bangkok, Luang Prabang established its own vassal network. This was a resounding success for Luang Prabang.⁷⁴

The 1833/34 campaign was only the first in a series of three campaigns.⁷⁵ The Vietnamese did not abandon Xieng Khuang, but returned to find it burned to ground and eighty percent of the population taken. As the Vietnamese sought to re-establish themselves, Luang Prabang launched a number of raids to harass Vietnamese positions. The focus of many of the following Thai-Lao operations was to take people, often entire villages at a time.⁷⁶ A pattern emerged where after harvest each year people on the left bank had to flee to the mountain passes guarded by Vietnamese for safety; after the dry season they could return to the lowlands to rebuild their now destroyed villages.⁷⁷ The next year in 1835, the Thai-Lao launched their second campaign to seize control of Xieng Khuang and even reached “the outer limits of Hung-hoa.” In part, the Thai-Lao persuaded many to leave Vietnamese-controlled land, likely by promoting stories of Vietnamese abuse while using relatives to convince them of the benefits on the right bank. Whitmore describes the main thrust by the Thai-Lao as an “extensive” attack “along the entire northern front” to which Vietnam lately responded with its own forces that were able to push the Thai-Lao armies back. Out of desperation, Minh Mang ordered a more hard-line approach to forcibly resettle the remaining

⁷³ In his memoirs, Deo Van Tri recalled fondly of studying in Luang Prabang as a boy.
⁷⁴ Vella, p. 90-91 interprets the outcome of this campaign as increasing Thai power over Luang Prabang, but I have tried to argue against this interpretation above. It is far too simplistic an assessment.

⁷⁵ Whitmore, p. 62-64 is the only source for the other two campaigns, because Thai and Lao sources remain silent about it. This section is based on his account, except where noted otherwise.

⁷⁶ Breazeale, p. 18.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Breazeale is specifically referring to central Laos in this description, but it may be a fair representation of the areas between Luang Prabang and Xieng Khuang as well. He also notes that in this period the majority of the soldiers for either side were both Lao.

Phuan in order to keep them from moving to the Thai-Lao areas. Yet in the final campaign of 1837, there was no significant Vietnamese response as Minh Mang “merely expressed his disapproval.”⁷⁸ Finally, serious hostilities ceased when the next Phuan ruler presented tribute to both the Vietnamese and Luang Prabang. This was a compromise that returned the situation to the *status-quo-ante*; yet the Phuan lands were now devastated and large portions of the population had been relocated to areas surrounding Bangkok, or along the banks of the Mekong near the ruins of Vientiane.⁷⁹ Throughout the period, Luang Prabang frequently displayed a callous disregard and ruthlessness to its neighbors like Xieng Khuang; there is no evidence of a pan-Lao “patriotism” felt by Luang Prabang in these events. In the end, so discouraged was Minh Mang about the Vietnamese position in northern Laos that when he received a request for intervention in the Luang Prabang succession dispute in 1837, he rejected it out of hand citing Confucian views against it.⁸⁰

There exists a rare surviving Lao document which attests to Luang Prabang’s power and influence in the region at this time. A cache of Chao Sukkasom’s diplomatic correspondence, which is dated to the year 1840, reveals how Luang Prabang interacted with its new vassals in the eastern region.⁸¹ This is a very different kind of source for Lao history than those already known by scholars because, instead of showing Luang Prabang to be subservient, it shows the real power it exercised over Xieng Khuang, Hua Phan, Xieng Hung and Muang Thaeen at the time, all of which it had recently conquered with the aid of Bangkok. The letter itself is actually addressed to Bangkok

⁷⁸ Whitmore, p. 63-64.

⁷⁹ Breazeale, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Whitmore, p. 64. See also Woodside, p. 243, which provides an odd epilogue of sorts when he reports that in 1840 Minh Mang complained that Luang Prabang was ranked higher by the Qing than Vietnam.

⁸¹ Untitled manuscript, PLMP code: 06011414001_06. The letters address a wide range of topics and deserve fuller treatment elsewhere. Some in the collection carry the date CSI/202/1840, which I assume applies to the rest. Unlike most Lao palm leaf manuscripts, these letters are written on five lines, perhaps acquiescing to the need for space and the realities of doing paper work. “Letter” is written as: “ອະທະນະສະ ຄຳຖາວອນ” in the original.

yet a few Thai-isms have filtered into the Lao document such as “Na Muang Phuan” or “the dust of the feet of Rama III.” It is significant that in this report, the suzerainty of Bangkok over this distant land is immediately followed by mention of its real dependence on Luang Prabang.⁸³ Next, the letter continues with a short report it received from Huaphan, which notes succinctly that a representative came down when requested, but that other “dependents” did not come at that time.⁸⁴ The most significant detail in the report is the way “Huaphan” is written: *huaphantangsi* – which only represents four of the six muang in the country.⁸⁵ Later on, there is a report also from Xieng Hung, which reports only that “all is quiet.”⁸⁶ Yet one can see the broad reach Luang Prabang has developed by this time, as its authority stretches up to China.

The most interesting report in the letter is undoubtedly that written about Muang Thaen, which Thai sources represented as being a place “at the edge of the border.”⁸⁷ Yet for the Lao it was Muang Na Noi Oi Nu, the ancestral home where god-kings came to earth and humanity was created, including especially the Lao royal line (a mixture of the former two).⁸⁸ The Luang Prabang report is as follows:

[We] requested a report from Thaen country. We then prepared Phanya Sakkharakhone and Saen Chan of Nao river-bank to regularly go up to defend the forward-area of the check-point on the frontier of Thaen country from now on. They must not fail. If they [il.] come out to establish villages and make houses, [it will be] risky over there. We will march our army up to strike at them. Do not allow them to establish villages or make houses anywhere.

⁸³ This is repeated in the Bangkok court chronicle as noted above regarding the Phuan ruler’s submission in 1834. See Thiphakorawong, p. 151.

⁸⁴ Untitled MS, folio 11, line 5. “ຫົວເມືອງ” in the original.

⁸⁵ Ibid. “ຫົວເມືອງທັງໄຂ່” in the original – this is distinct from the way it is normally referred to as “*huaphantatangkok*.” Later during the Haw Wars there will again be a similar division of Huaphan with only four muang submitting willingly to Luang Prabang.

⁸⁶ Ibid, folio 12, line 2. “ຍັງສະງົບຢູ່” in the original.

⁸⁷ Thiphakorawong, p. 167, 169. This is also what Phra Nangklao called it. In the Lao texts of this period the place is still called “Thaen” rather than the later, Thai “Thaeng.”

⁸⁸ See further, Mayoury and Pheupphan, p. 45, fn. 71. The god-king is Khun Burom.

(written as “ເຈລະນັບທະເທພູຣີ”) by the King’s Council of Luang Prabang and its two highest officials, the *muang saen* and *muang chan*, who both had wide-ranging powers in the government. Luang Prabang reported on Xieng Khuang first:

[We] requested a report from Phuan country. Thao-phia Vien Khuan Na Muang Phuan then was able to arrange and prepare Khun Phon-amat-munti and Khun Maha Vongsa with commoners to purchase and bring riches and tributary gifts and a latanier paper register of the Na Muang Phuan people, coming down to offer to us. [They] requested to be servants [illegible] and celebrate his majesty beneath the dust of the feet of Rama III, dependents of Luang Prabang. We were then able to collect reports from them [and] they then were able to receive reports from us. Then, Rama III... [il.], we were able to make arrangements to support and look after them, and ordered them to go back to their country.

ຊົງຂໍຮາຊະການຜ່າຍເມືອງພວນນັບທ່າວໄພ່ຂອງນຂວາ
 ນນາເມືອງພວນກໍໄດ້ຈັດແຈ້ງແຕ່ງໃຫ້ຊຸນພົນອາມາດມູນຕິເລ
 ະຊຸນມະຫາວົງສາກັບໄພ່ສີລືນາເອົາສິນຂອງເຄື່ອງຮາຊາບຸນນາກາ
 ນແລະວານບານຊີຄົນນາເມືອງພວນລົງມາຄືນກັບຂົນທັງຫຼາຍຂີ
 ເບັນຂົນ [il.] ຮາຊະການສະຫຼອງພຣະເດັດພຣະຊາມັດໄຕຜ່າຮະ
 ອອງທົ່ວພະບາດສົມເດັດພຣະພຸດທະເຈົ້າຢູ່ຫົວຂຶ້ນກັບເມືອງຫຼວ
 ງພຣະບາງຂົນທັງຫຼາຍກໍໄດ້ກັນຮາຊະການກັບເຂົາ ເຂົາກໍໄດ້ຮ
 ບູຮາຊະການກັບຂົນທັງຫຼາຍແລ້ວຈົນຮາຊະໝອມສົມເດັດພຣະ
 ຜູ້ນາເຈົ້າ [il.] ຂົນທັງຫຼາຍກໍໄດ້ຕັ້ງແຕ່ງຊຸບອັບລົງເກືອເຂົາໃຫ້
 ຂຶ້ນໄປຫາບ້ານຫາເມືອງແລ້ວ⁸²

Here we can clearly see how Luang Prabang managed this corner of the Siamese empire. Its collection of reports for Bangkok granted it control over the flow of information; one may only speculate as to how Luang Prabang might have used this to its advantage. Further, we note that Luang Prabang was collecting not just tribute, but also census information on the Phuan; how it is used is not clear, but one may venture a guess that it would have been useful in future resettlement raids on the plateau. The letter is written in *tham* script,

⁸² Ibid, folio 11, lines 3-5. Some of the text is illegible in places as indicated.

ຊົງຂໍຮາຊະການຜ່າລືມືອງແຖນນັ້ນ ຊ້າທັງຫຼາຍກໍໄດ້ແຕ່ງໃຫ້ຜະຊາສັກກະຄອນແສນຈັນສົບນາວຂຶ້ນໄປປະຈຳຮັກສາ ຫນ້າດານດູ່ແດນລືມືອງແຖນເນີນງຸ່ມໄດ້ຂາດ ຖ້າເຂົາ [il.] ອອກມາຕັ້ງບ້ານແບງເຮືອນລຸ່ມຊຸ່ນນູ່ ຊ້າທັງຫຼາຍຈະໄດ້ຊື່ ກກອງທັບຂຶ້ນໄປຜ່າດີເສ້ຍມີໃຫ້ເຂົາຕັ້ງບ້ານແບງເຮືອນຢູ່ໄດ້⁸⁹

This last report is extraordinary because it defies the received wisdom about Luang Prabang. In most scholarly accounts, and in the Thai documents they draw from, Luang Prabang is a weak plaything or puppet of stronger neighbors. In the above passage, however, Luang Prabang is clearly not the victim. It is rather flexing its new military muscles to dominate its neighbors. There is no explicit mention of Thai, or even northern Siam reinforcements in these actions. This new Lao power had a major impact on the region, such as forcing rivals like the Deo family who ruled Sip Song Chu Tai from Muang Thaen into exile, thereafter relocated to Muang Lai farther away. Eventually in 1887, Muang Lai would return to destroy Luang Prabang in revenge for its imperialist activities, most recently led by the Lao heir Chao Khamsuk and Waiworon at in the third Thai-Lao “Ho suppression” campaign. The White Tai were not confused when they targeted Luang Prabang as the source of their difficulties. This new region may have been carved out “in the name of Bangkok,” but real power to rule lay in the hands of Luang Prabang.

The Language of “Friendship”

By the time Chao Sukkasoen (r. 1838-1848) ascended the throne, he could reflect on the renewed, revived power and promise of his kingdom.⁹⁰ It had been almost half a century since Luang Prabang

ruled over all these vassals and was the undisputed master of the northern regions. Many of its long-time foes had now been vanquished or greatly reduced in power. With the assistance of the Thai, there was no serious military threat of which to speak. The reconstitution of Luang Prabang has largely gone unnoticed, yet comparisons might be drawn to the revival of the Lan Na state under Kaowila, which expanded equally by force while instituting a massive depopulation campaign of its own, with the aid of Siam.⁹¹ These two rising powers would be joined later in the Chiang Tung wars. For Sukkasoen at this historic moment, there exists rare documentation that appears in tributary letters he sent to Bangkok and the Yunnan authorities of Qing China. With an examination of these documents we can form a better understanding of the relations between Luang Prabang and Bangkok, among others. In the same cache of letters there is one letter written by Chao Sukkasoen addressed to Rama III, wherein he describes a ceremony in Luang Prabang in 1839, but first Sukkasoen begins by exchanging pleasantries and small talk about health and the weather:

Your nephew, contemplating [your letter], [I] of the great lineage in the land of one million elephants, the jeweled city beneath the umbrella of Lord Brahma the universal monarch, the great capital Lan Xang Hom Khao, [I] declare my close affection, night and day, recalling the esteemed friendship with my uncle, the sovereign Ramathibodi in contemplation, of the great lineage in Bangkok. [I] reply from the far borders... still doing well in body and mind? [Uncle] shouldn't go into any kind of dangerous activity; still residing in the practice of religion, prosperous and secure into the future? If it is so, I, your nephew, am then delighted, overjoyed and happy without compare, truly. It is just the same as CS1201/1839, [which] in the Thai language is called the *kameakkasok* year, entering into the hot season, the fourth month stepping to the fifth night of the rising moon...

ຜົນວ່າຮາຊະກຸມັດຕາວ່າວ່າສິດຕະພະພິນິໄສໄມມະຫາ ກອຸດຕະມະຣະວົງຊົງສິວັດຕະມາສະນະຫຼອດອຸດຕະມະຣັດຕ

⁹¹ Grabowsky, “Forced Resettlement.”

⁸⁹ Untitled “*pheim muang lan xang*,” folio 11 line 5 and 12 lines 1-2. There is one illegible word as indicated. One may note also the continued usage of Thai words: instead of the usual Lao “ບໍ່” negation, the scribe writes the “ມີ” negation, more commonly used in Thai.

⁹⁰ This perspective is diametrically opposed to the interpretation offered by Le Boulanger on Sukkasoen’s succession, p. 210, which suggests he reflected on Siamese expansion and “meditated on the precarious fate of his own country/méditer sur les destinées précaires de son propre pays.”

ມະນາເຖິງສອງຄອງກັນລະອາງສົມເພັນທະນິດສນິດສະເນຫາຣາລຸ
 ມຕິເຫງ່າ ຄ ມະຫາມະຄອນເຈົ້າຕົນເປັນນ້ຳເລວະຂ້າອົງເປັນຫຼວງ
 ນເພື່ອວ່າຈະໃຫ້ອົງວ່າລະເມດທະສາສາມາໃນ໒ ມະຫາມະຄອນນີ້ ກາ
 ນກຸງຮຸ່ງເຮືອງຕໍ່ໄປເພື່ອຫວັງຕາບຕັດທິສິນ ໕ ພັນພະວັດສາ
 ວ່າມີປະການສັນນິດໄລວ້⁹³

From this short reading of the diplomatic correspondence between Luang Prabang and Bangkok, one can observe that the relationship between the two was often expressed in terms of “friendship.” Identical language can be found in a number of other examples, not limited to here. For instance, when Luang Prabang severed its ties with Vietnam in 1833, it was again expressed in terms of “friendship”: “จากทางไมตรี.”⁹⁴ Indeed, there are many examples of this in the diplomacy of Bangkok with as diverse countries as Vietnam, Burma and USA.⁹⁵ In Constance Wilson’s analysis of diplomatic correspondence between Siam and the Qing, she observes that the Thai referred to this relation, stressing it as a “friendship.”⁹⁶ She argues it was used by the Thai in an obviously unequal relation with China to deemphasize their subordinate position. It is evident that Luang Prabang used this language in its correspondence with Bangkok and one can suggest it was used for the same purposes. Yet at the same time that Chao Sukasoem spoke of his equal ties of friendship with Bangkok, he also invoked the shared religion between the two centers, which defined a shared “tradition”, as well as a common cause. This served as a potent and affective symbol of unity between Luang Prabang and Siam.

Perhaps the most surprising comment on the Luang Prabang-Bangkok relationship comes to us not in the Lao-Siam correspondence,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ MPE, p. 264. See also examples of this in Sila, 1957, p. 220.

⁹⁵ See Thiphakorawong, p. 97 in a letter recorded from Vietnam and later on p. 127 in reports about the first American envoy to Siam.

⁹⁶ Wilson, p.151-152.

ະນາບູຣິດໄມ່ຟຣົມມະຈັກກະພັດຕິສິມະຫານະຄອນຣາຊທາ
 ນິວ້ານຊ້າງຣົມຂາວປັກກາສິດຕະອະສະນິດສະເນຫາຣະຕິນ
 ທະວານູສາຣມານະຊາໄສພັນທະໄມຕິເຖິງພະວໍຣະບິຕຸ
 ເຈົ້າຕົນເປັນນ້ຳອິດສະຣະຣາມາທິບໍດີພິນໄສໃນອຸດຕະມະຣະ
 ວັງຂົງເຊຍະນັນທະເທພູຣິຣາຊທານີເຈົ້າເຕັທູຣະພານ...
 ອົງຄອຍພະວັດຕິເປັນໄປໃນກາຍະສັນດານ ພະວໍຣະບິຕຸຈາຫ
 າກິດຈະບັດທະວະອັນຕະຣາຣິຊາເລື້ອງໄດ້ບໍ່ໄດ້ ອົງຄອຍຕັ້ງຢູ່ປະ
 ຕິບັດໃນສາດສະໜາໄຊຕິຍະພິຊຕິປັນອະນາຄົດ ດັງນັບຂ້າອົງ
 ເປັນຫວານຸກຸນິດິໄສມະນັດສະປະໄມທະອະຫາທິສັງຫິຊ້າບໍດີ
 ແທ້ແວດັງນັບສັກກາຫຣາຊ ໑໒໐໑ ຕົວ ໄທຍະພາສາວ່າປູກູຣະ
 ອກກະສັກອົກເຂົ້າໃນຄົມຫັນຕະຣຸດຕິອນ ໔ ໄຕ່ຂົນ ໕ ຄຳ⁹²

One is struck by the informal, even intimate language of this correspondence. Chao Sukasoem, inquiring about Phra Nangklao’s health and activities, almost seems to have a chastising tone at times. Perhaps most significant is the usage of kinship terms of nephew and uncle. It may be significant that this is not the same kinship terms of father and (unruly) son the Vietnamese attributed to Anou and the Chakri monarchs. The relation is still one of seniority, yet with less obvious ownership. The letter continues, describing the arrival of an envoy and royal letter from Siam:

Phanya Na Tai [and] Phanya Kham-awn Mahalek guided the royal letter step-by-step on the path, bringing prosperity to the royal residence of your nephew. It did clarify in that letter that the Great Heavenly King, my uncle came to think on the two traditions and the happy, friendly relations and close affections of the two great cities. Uncle and I, your nephew, are in the cause to sustain the excellent Buddha’s teaching in the two great cities to develop and prosper into the future until the end of 5,000 years. It’s of a kind just like this.

ພະຍານາໄຕທ້າວຄຳອນມະຫາດັວ້ການຳເອົາອັກຂະຣະ
 ຣາຊຄຳຖາວ່າດັບມັກກະວັງການຂົນໄປວຸດຖິຈຳເຣັນເຖິງໃນຣາ
 ຊູສູ່ນັກຂ້າອົງເປັນຫວານກິດິເຈົ້າມາໃນອັກຂະຣະຣາຊຄຳຖາ
 ນນວ່າເຈົ້າພ້າຫວອງເປັນນ້ຳບັງເກີດບໍຣົມມະຣາຊິນດາຜາຣົມ

⁹² Untitled MS. folio 19, lines 1-4. I would like to thank my teacher, Maha Khamphoui Sisavady for his assistance, especially with the Pali “decorative words” in this passage.

but in Lao contacts with other states in the region. In the same cache of letters, which consists of a total of eight letters, five are actually addressed to the Qing authorities at Yunnan. In the first of these letters, in which Chao Sukkasoen informs the Qing of his coronation, he amazingly dates Luang Prabang's tributary status to the Qing to the 1778/1779 Thai war against Vientiane and Champassak, in which Luang Prabang fought with Siam:

[China], looks with sympathy [upon Luang Prabang] since the period of Phra Vorarat, the father. [We] then are happy because of the meritorious support continuing like [that] until the period of his son...

ເບິ່ງພຣະກະຣຸນາເດີເຊັ່ນພຣະວໍຣະຣາຊປິຕຕາກໍໄດ້ສຸກ
 ອໍ້ຂ້າບຸນອະສົມພານຄັ້ງສົງມາເທົາເຖິງເຊັ່ນພຣະຣາຊບຸຕຕາ

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The passage is illegible after that, but presents a tantalizing image of Luang Prabang. Chao Sukkasoen makes clear that Luang Prabang was an ally of Siam by identifying with the cause of Phra Vorarat. This statement is all the more valuable because it does not come in the constrained correspondence with Bangkok. In fact, it even suggests that one outcome of Luang Prabang's alliance with Siam was that it opened tributary relations with the Qing. At any rate, Luang Prabang's history of support for Siam and Phra Vorarat had become an important point of reference in regional politics by the reign of Chao Sukkasoen.

Conclusion: Towards an Alternate History?

I have tried to present here evidence of an alternate history of Luang Prabang in the mid-19th century, but it may not be the history some were hoping to find. The widely observed close relations between Luang Prabang and Bangkok are not just evident in Thai sources. There exists clear evidence of close collaboration in sources

from Luang Prabang too. As a result, the charge that Luang Prabang's alliance to Bangkok in this period was merely a fabrication of the Thai cannot be maintained. Yet I have further attempted to study Luang Prabang-Bangkok relations to form a more robust understanding of it. In the decade immediately after Chao Anou, the Luang Prabang-Siam bond was clearly not Thai "domination" of Lao as scholars, both Lao and French, would write later. Specifically, in the case of Luang Prabang, which was uniquely different from that of Vientiane or Champassak, there were great benefits to be shared by its close relations with Siam. I have presented evidence that Luang Prabang's power spread far as a chief vassal of Bangkok. By virtue of the sheer difficulties involved, Luang Prabang had wide latitude in the conduct of its affairs on the vast north-eastern frontier. Often the pace of events outran the abilities of the court at Bangkok to keep up in terms of planning, communications or even basic knowledge. Compromises had to be made – most of the day-to-day business of ruling was left in the hands of Luang Prabang. This provided ample opportunity for Luang Prabang to subtly shape the region to serve its interests, which inevitably tended toward its increasing power. Ironically, the more powerful Luang Prabang grew, the more that Bangkok was left to rely on Luang Prabang for its tenuous hold on the area.⁹⁸ While many scholars have observed the drawing together of the two capitals in this period, few have recognized this did not necessarily mean that a simple top-down model of relations prevailed.

But why should this interpretation pose a problem? There exists a serious difficulty in the interpretation of sources from this period that this study has not resolved. At this point in the state of our knowledge one must try to navigate successfully between the hazards of total acceptance of Thai sources without questioning their biases versus an over-zealous skepticism bordering on denial of the available evidence and a blindly patriotic, anachronistic reading of Lao history. Either extreme will miss the real history which was neither

⁹⁸ For example, see Wilson's account of the Chiang Tung war, where she observed, p. 529 that Bangkok was unable to call for more aid from Luang Prabang when the campaign soured, due to the latter's role as a bulwark in the region against trouble-makers such as Vietnam.

⁹⁷ Untitled MS, folio 1, lines 4-5. The first two folios have extensive wear in the middle, suggesting this manuscript did not have a cover to protect it.

wholly draped in nationalism, nor was it blindly loyal to Thai; it is absolutely unacceptable to maintain any interpretation that ignores Lao self-interest either. Failure to navigate these difficulties leads to an impoverished history. Were one to attempt to recreate Lao history in this period without recourse to Thai sources, there would be enormous gaps. For some, this is Lao history that has been forgotten or ignored because of Thai influence, which shows what some of the influences on Lao historiography have been until the present.

The historical interpretation of this period as one of Thai “domination” deserves special attention because of its wide influence. The interpretation was given fresh impetus in the context of French colonization of Laos; one may take the first comprehensive, Western-style history of Laos as a more final version. Le Boulanger’s seminal work is inflected with a distinct anti-Thai view that seems to be shaped in the text by the Siamese invasions of 1778 and the war against Anou, the effects of which he hastily generalized to the rest of Laos including Luang Prabang – yet his knowledge of northern Laos after Anou is imperfect. Just the same, he asserts that Luang Prabang after 1778 was “forced” to recognize Siamese suzerainty; however, this is more based on a Eurocentric understanding of the region’s diplomacy than a fair appraisal of the situation.⁹⁹ Furthermore, as we have seen above, Luang Prabang identified itself as allied to the cause of Phra Vorarat, and aided the Thai in the 1778/1779 campaign against Phra Vo’s enemies. Luang Prabang had no quarrel with Phra Vo, but rather accused Vientiane of colluding with the Burmese. Therefore, the existing evidence does not suggest that Luang Prabang would have been punished along with Vientiane or Champassak – if anything it would have been rewarded.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the Thai were demonized in

⁹⁹ Le Boulanger, p. 197. Wilson, p. 163-165 has argued this was simply the manner in which diplomacy was conducted and we cannot assume European-style relations between nominally “independent” states.

¹⁰⁰ In fact, Chao Khamman makes no mention of Luang Prabang being forced to submit to the Thai in 1779. Instead he offers a far more likely scenario as he notes that it was only in 1793 when Chao Anurutha and Chao Mangthathurat were imprisoned in Bangkok by Chao Nanthasen that “Luang Prabang fell to be a colony of Bangkok throughout the land/ເມືອງວ່ານຳກຸ້ມຂອງພວກໄທທັງໝົດປະເທດສາອຸດຕກາງທຸດພຣັດຜ່ານຕີນນິໂປ,” p. 89. However, even this is not straightforward because

Le Boulanger account in service of French colonial efforts as noted above; the Thai were the primary obstacle to French ascendancy in Laos and French writers were unkind to them as a result, discrediting them as corrupt and abusive rulers. Le Boulanger’s ideas resonate today because they have out-stripped his own work, being adapted by others. Lao scholars such as Maha Sila Viravong have repeated it dogmatically, but the original basis has not been revisited in all this time. Yet there are too many unknowns in Lao history to yet write anything conclusively. So little has been done in Lao history that brief works are over-used and few return to do more work, preferring instead to reproduce endless summaries.

Lao scholars adopted Le Boulanger’s views because it was taught to the elite in Vientiane, Saigon and Paris, but more importantly, because it was seen by some intellectuals as politically useful at the time of Lao independence. Maha Sila Viravong, the “father of Lao history,” was himself influenced by the French view when he wrote his landmark modernist history of Laos, published for the Buddhist year 2500 in 1957. He repeats Le Boulanger when he says that after 1778 Luang Prabang also fell under the domination of Siam.¹⁰¹ In fact, he has characterized the entire period from 1778-1893 as the period of “lost independence/ສິບເປັນສິບເກຣດ.”¹⁰² Of course, it goes unsaid that it was lost to the Thai. His periodization has been widely accepted among Lao and foreigners alike. Yet one should also consider his personal motives. He wrote in his autobiography that he experienced and was deeply impressed by racism in Bangkok in the 1920s. After

he continues by noting on p. 90 that Chao Anurutha was also the first tributary king to ever receive the five royal regalia (ເຄື່ອງຮາກາທຸທຸພັນ) from a Chakri ruler. Chao Khamman was an expert on Luang Prabang history, therefore his views carry significant weight.

¹⁰¹ Sila, p. 225 says simply that the Thai commander, after ravaging Vientiane with the Luang Prabang assistance, “forced Chao Suriyavong, ruler of Luang Prabang to submit to be a colony of the Thai country just like that/ແມ່ນໄທກໍໄດ້ມັງຄຸນໃຫ້ເຈົ້າຮຸ້ນອະວົງຈີນາະອອນຫລວງພຣະບາງອອມບັນເນືອງຂຶ້ນຂອງປະເທດໄທດັງດວກັນ.”

¹⁰² The final chapter in his 1957 work covers the period from 1778-1893 and is entitled “The Lao country after losing independence/ປະເທດລາວພາຫຼັງເສັງອອກອາດຮາດຮາວ.” See also *ibid*, p. 225-226, 235, 283 for several poignant statements of this. More recently see, Mayoury and Phueiphan, p. 58.

one experience, he left to go for the first time to Vientiane where he became a leading Lao nationalist.¹⁰³ He witnessed the 1940-1941 Thai-Lao war. Finally, by 1973 in the concluding chapter to his revised history that would serve as a secondary school text book, he notes that the Lao Issara political movement effectively ended this long history of foreign domination by securing independence for the country from foreign rule that began with the Thai and continued under the French:

In summary, we observe that the Kingdom of Laos that is great, vast and immense since ancient times lost its unity and independence to the Thai in 1779 AD. From then until 1893 AD France came to divide and take Lao territory on the left bank of the Mekong from the Thai until 1949 AD. [Then] France truly did consent to give the areas of Laos under its control independence, rights and freedoms in united self-rule. From the time the Lao nation fell to be a colony of other nations since 1779 until the year 1949 [when] it did truly win its independence, it was a very long period of 170 years.

ສຽບຄວາມລົງໄຂ້ວັດຕົ້ນວ່າຮາຊານາຈັກລາວທີ່ກວ້າງໃຫຍ່ໄພຮາງມາແຕ່ບູຮານໄດ້ເສັງອິສຣະພາບຮຸ່ນເຮື້ອກຳລັງໃຫ້ແກ່ປະເທດໄທໃນປີ ຄສ 1779 ຕໍ່ຈາກນັ້ນມາເຖິງປີ ຄສ 1893 ຝຣັ່ງເສດໄດ້ມາແບ່ງປັນເອົາດິນລາວທີ່ຢູ່ທາງຝັ່ງຊ້າຍແມ່ນ້ຳຂອງໄປຈາກໄທຕົກມາເຖິງປີ 1949 ຝຣັ່ງເສດຈຶ່ງໄດ້ຍົນອອກໃຫ້ລາວໃນສ່ວນທີ່ຢູ່ນ້ຳຝຣັ່ງເສດນັ້ນໄດ້ຮັບຄວາມເປັນເອກະາຊະນິດທີ່ເສີມພາບໃນການປົກຄອງຕົນໂຮມເຂົ້າຕົງແຕ່ຊາດລາວຕົກເປັນຫົວເມືອງຂຶ້ນຂອງຊາດອິນມາແຕ່ປີ 1779 ເຖິງປີ 1949 ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ເອກຮາດເປັນເວລາເຫຼັ້ງນານເຖິງ 170 ປີ¹⁰⁴

He wrote in broad terms to magnify the significance of his own political party in the scheme of Lao history. The “lost independence” trope he wrote of was in this way to serve merely as a foil for the great liberation led by him, Chao Phetsarath and the “strong” and “courageous” members of the Lao Issara.¹⁰⁵

Finally, I must note here that I do not intend to suggest that there

¹⁰³ Sila, 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Sila, 1973, p 178-179.

¹⁰⁵ Sila, 1973, p 178: “ມີລາວພວກຮັກຊາດຢ່າງແຮງກ້າພວກນັ້ນ.”

were never any difficulties in the Bangkok-Luang Prabang relationship. There are in fact several examples surviving in the sources that give evidence of exactly this situation, which seems to have occurred repeatedly over the course of the “alliance” which I have tried to sketch here. For example, in the 1840 cache of documents the Luang Prabang authorities report to Bangkok about a case of “sexual misconduct”¹⁰⁶ by a visiting Thai envoy in the city who had an illicit affair with a wife of a Lao noble mentioned in the report. The Lao resolved this case by punishing the Thai envoy according to local law. Later, in the Chiang Tung wars, Luang Prabang hosted a Thai army gathering supplies and conscripts for the ill-fated war effort. The Thai National Library contains numerous reports from this period in which Lao officials accuse the local Thai commander of oppressing the people of Luang Prabang in the conduct of his mission. There are striking similarities between the 1840 case and another in the Thai National Archives from the mid-1880s which recounted a case of a Thai soldier from Uttaradit who was posted in Luang Prabang during the second and third “Ho suppression” campaigns. The Uttaradit soldier was guilty of going to a nearby town and taking a wife by force. He was forced to flee to another town by the inhabitants. There he repeated the same act and was subsequently killed by Lao villagers. In light of these cases, the broader picture of a Luang Prabang-Bangkok alliance should not be overturned, but it must be recognized that it was in reality not a straightforward relationship in its own right and requires further study.

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