

## **Siam/Civilization--Thailand/Globalization: Things to Come?**

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*It is humanity's duty today (1851)*

*to see that civilization does not destroy culture,  
nor technology the human being.*

Wilhelm Mommsen,  
quoted in Fernand Braudel,  
A History of Civilizations, 1994

For the past several years, and especially after the Bloody May Event of 1992 and before the 2 July 1997 baht currency crash, there had been a continuous hot debate in Bangkok on the meaning of the word and the implications of the process popularly known as "globalization." There were academic seminars on "globalization," debates and talk - shows in more popular administrative - executive - managerial circles on "globalization," articles and books (written by Thai or translated from the English language) on "globalization,"<sup>1</sup> argu-

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<sup>1</sup>See for examples: Thirayuth Bunmi, *Chut plian haeng yuk samai* (Turning Point of the Age), 1994, Bunrak Bonyakhetmala, *Thanandon thi si chak rabob lok thung rat Thai* (The Forth Estate from Global System to the Thai State), 1994, Yuk Sriaraya, *Lokawiwat 2000*, 1994, Sonthi Limthongkul, *Lokanawat*, 1994, Suvinai Paranalai, *Thunniyom phong sabu* (Bubble Capitalism), 1994, Rangsan Thanaponpan, *Sangkhom setthakit Thai nai totsawat 2550 yutthasat kan patthana nai krasae lokanuwat* (Thai Society and Economics in the First Decade of 2000: Development Strategy in Globalization Current), 1993, and Anuchat Sathitniraphai, *Lokanuwat* (Globalization) 1994. See also Erhard Berner/Rudiger Korff, "Globalization and Local Resistance: The Creation of Localities in Manila and Bangkok", Southeast Asia Program, Working Paper No 205, Bielefeld, 1994.

ments about the coining of a suitable Thai word to serve as an equivalent to “globalization”: should it be *lokanuwat*, *lokaphiwat*, *lokanuwok*, *lokakukkak*, or even *lokawibat*, *lokantranuwat*.<sup>2</sup> Big popular *farang* names like Alvin Toffler or John Naisbitt, had been endlessly mentioned and quoted. New catch - words like “global village,” “information super- highway,” “information society,” “re-engineering,” seemed to be everywhere in newspapers, magazines, and radio, and television. Top Thai *nakkid nakkhian* (thinkers and writers) had been involved in this long hot debate, ranging from senior and respected scholars like Saneh Chamarik, Prawes Wasi, Nidhi Aeusriwongse, Chatthip Nartsupha, and Chai-anan Samudavanija, to middle - rank and younger people such as Rangsan Thanaponpan, Thirayuth Bunmi, Anek Laothamatas, Chaiwat Sathanan, Suvinai Paranavalai, etc.

One scholar even went as far as to say that the impact of “globalization” on Thai society will be so immense that Thai people need to be prepared to creatively meet the new situation; that is why he, himself, would name his new grand-son Mr. *Lokanuwat* and his granddaughter Ms. *Globy*.<sup>3</sup> Another scholar, however, painted a not-so-optimistic future whereby in the year 2006 his university would have been divided into two separate campuses, one in the center of Bangkok and the other out in the countryside. He himself, unable to keep up with the pace of globalization, would have been pushed out to teach at the campus outside Bangkok; he would have to teach in the Thai language, to inferior, low-grade students, while his globalized colleagues, handling globalized subjects, would by then, be teaching in English, to superior, high-grade students, aided simultaneously by conference technology televised via Satellite from Harvard, with which the university would

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<sup>2</sup> After a long debate, the Royal Academy which handles the official coining of new word, came out on October 21, 1994, with their conclusion that “globalization” is *lokaphiwat*.

<sup>3</sup> See Chai - anan in Aphichat, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

have joined in academic “sandwiched” programs.<sup>4</sup>

In April, 1996, at the annual conference of the Association for Asian Studies, Honolulu, Dr. Kasian Tejapira, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, brought the issue across the Pacific and gave an extremely informative and analytical presentation. He looked into the role of those involved in the debate, whom he called “public intellectuals.” He divided them into two opposing groups: “globalizers” and “communitarians.” Not unlike in boxing tournaments, he set up “matches” between champions of the two groups: Suvinai (economist/Thammasat) versus Chatthip (economic historian/Chula) on economic reform, Anek (political sc./Thammasat) versus Saneh (political sc./retired Thammasat), on political reform, Chai-anan (political sc. retired Chula.) versus Nidhi (historian/Chiangmai), on the Thai state.<sup>5</sup>

It might seem at first sight that this debate reflects something quite new. Many people see it connected to those social and economic changes taking place in Thailand since the 1960s, out of which emerge a powerful middle class, bourgeoisie, or so-called “new rich” (with mobile phones and McDonald’s eating habits). The development of this self-confident new class was closely connected to the penetration of Japanese, American, and Taiwanese capital, as well as mass tourism and the spread of electronic media. But what strikes me as a historian is a certain *deja vu*. People may think that “the past is a foreign country, and they did things differently there?”<sup>6</sup> But is it really

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<sup>4</sup> See Rangsan, *Ibid.*, pp. 119-123.

<sup>5</sup> Kasian Tejapira, “Globalizers versus Communitarians: Post May 1992 Debates among Thai Public Intellectuals”, paper given at the AAS Conference, April, 1996. See also Chaiwat Satha-Anand, “Society in Parenthesis: Globalization and Battle of Ideas in Thai Society”, a paper submitted to Thailand Development Research Institute, January, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> The line is taken from an English novel: *The Go-Between*, also quoted by J.D. Legge in his “The Writing of Southeast Asian History”, in Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

so?

In December 1866, some one hundred and thirty years ago, Rev. Dan Beach Bradley, an American Presbyterian missionary, wrote (in the Thai language) in *Bangkok Recorder*, his own publication circulated among the small educated elite class of Siam at the time, that “if young Bangkok wants to be renowned among the countries which have **light** (*sawang*) and much strength, it must bring under consideration the construction of better roads, etc.” He went on to explain that cities with few roads were dark places and jungle town (*thi mued pen muang pa*), where no horses with carriages could be ridden. It is clear that in his mind darkness combined literal and moral meanings, and that “*sawang*” (light) did the same. In its moral sense, it meant the word was coined from the English “civilized nation” i.e. *siwilaised nason*.<sup>7</sup>

Rev. Bradley’s remarks partly echoed the ideas prevailing in the West that they lived in the Age of Enlightenment, that extraordinary *siecle de lumiere* in which white men and a few white women were entitled to rule the globe on the basis of industrialism and scientific progress. But he was also trying to impress on the Thai elite that it was in their benefit to be converted to Christianity. In October 1845 (ten years after being stationed in Siam), he wrote in *Bangkok Recorder* (in Thai) an article titled “History of the Sandwich Islands, Overthrow of Idolatry.”<sup>8</sup> He went on at length to tell readers where the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) were, how they were “discovered” by Captain Cook, and, most important, how the royalties of the Islands abandoned their religion and embraced Christianity, to the effect that their subjects followed them, and that “now” the islands along with Christianity “had brick buildings, houses, many roads for carriages and pedestrians, and have been getting happier year by year.” We cannot blame him,

<sup>7</sup> *The Bangkok Recorder*, 22 December 1866.

<sup>8</sup> *The Bangkok Recorder*, October, 1845.

writing during the reigns of King Rama III, 1824-1851, of Siam, and of King Kamehameha III, 1825-1854, of Hawaii, for not foreseeing that almost half a century later during the reign of Queen Lili uokalani, 1891-1893, on January 17, 1893, some months after the Paknam Incident and Franco - Thai dispute, the Hawaiian monarchy would be overthrown and the islands were annexed by the United States.

In November 1849, four years after the publication of Bradley's article on the Sandwich Islands, the future King Mongkut, then, still a Buddhist monk, wrote a letter (in English) to his friends Mr. and Ms. Eddy of New York. Making a reference to the Sandwich Islands, wrote as though to explain why he did not want to be converted and why he adhered to Buddhism. It seems that the future King had his own version of civilization, i.e. Buddhism, a world religion and that in his eyes what his country did not have was just modernity. The future King wrote in his very interesting English:

*"they think that they may introduce me to their religion very easier than other rather that if I were converted to it then afterward many more of noblemen & people of this country might be converted & introduced to Christianity very soon & easily as I am high priest of Buddhist & conductor of this nation to the system of the action of merits for eternal happiness. The people might follow me like in the account of Sandawed Island & c. Such vulgar desire of those my friends was for they accustomed to do to the Savage & Barbarous nation like those oceanic of Sandawed Island & c. But our country is not like those nation as here were longly some knowledge of morality & civility bearing legible wonderful accurate system & believable consequences more admirable than the same Jewish system though this was corrupted & mixed with most reproveable superstitions of Brahmins & for-*

est & cc."<sup>9</sup>

Can we not see here a Kasian-style “boxing match” between King Mongkut and the Rev. Bradley even if it took place in the age of colonialism, gunboat diplomacy, and aggressive missionary activities? Yet we know historically what came of it. The West’s vast industrial power and its ideas of “civilized” and “civilization” seemed to capture the thinking and imagination of the Thai elite from the middle part of the nineteenth and well into the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet the same elite, or part of it, managed to localize them to its own advantage. Nineteenth century “globalization” was initially felt as a threat to the elite and their traditional values. But after a period of time, and after some adjustment and concessions, especially in 1855 (the signing of the unequal Bowring Treaty) and 1893 (the concession of territorial claims in Laos), what had been a threat had become internalized, localized, and turned into an opportunity. What is known to us as the “reform,” “modernization,” and “westernization,” of Siam, especially during the reigns of King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn was the outcome of the process of “globalization” and “localization.” In this way the Thai elite created a new Siam which looked “civilized,” acceptable to the tastes and demands of the West and at the same time beneficial in the new environment.<sup>10</sup>

In effect a new Siam was created, centralized and consolidated around the monarchy and a new bureaucracy which led the process of “civilization.” But to get there required a long journey, starting from confusion and apprehension, to partial acceptance and slowly making changes within their society, values and behavior.

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<sup>9</sup> M.R. Seni Pramoj and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj (ed.), *A King of Siam Speaks*, The Siam Society, Bangkok, 1987, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> See David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1982, esp. chapter 7 on the reforms of “Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, 1851-1910”, pp. 181 - 222.

We will see that the “adopt-adapt” process covered a wide range of activities from what seemed trivial matters like dress, manners, physical looks, to what was to have a major impact on the society as a whole like education and public administration.

Coming to the throne in 1851, and deeply concerned about the intrusion of the West into Asia and into Siam in particular, King Mongkut sought some explanations from “civilized” farang he knew, especially the old Rev. Bradley who had by then been stationed in Siam for almost twenty years. The King asked for the meanings of “siwilai sed” (civilized) and “siwilai sed lae aen lai taraet na chaen” (civilized and enlightened nation).<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that by now, with his deeper knowledge of the West and his interaction with its people, the King was occasionally to “admit” that Siam was “half civilized and half barbarian”<sup>12</sup> and to say that he was ready to change those “half barbarian” aspects of things Thai to fit with “international” (i.e. globalized) standards of civilization. By now, a “civilized” Western infrastructure was already being introduced: roads (Thanon Charoen Krung or New Road was built in response to the above quoted remarks of Rev. Bradley), printing press, the telegraph, steamships, “classical” architecture (King Mongkut added a Greco - Roman look to his new palace in Phetburi, and to the restored palace of King Narai in Lopburi). Western things and ways of conduct seemed to be in vogue while some of age-old traditions were altered or destroyed.

One very curious aspect of nineteenth century globalization which has obvious parallels with today’s world fashions was a certain dress-code introduced at the court of King Mongkut. Whereas at the courts of Ayudhya and early Bangkok, it had been quite acceptable for male officials not to wear any garment on the upper part of their

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<sup>11</sup> *Chotmaihet ratchakan thi* 4, No. 357.

<sup>12</sup> *Chotmaihet ratchakan thi* 4, cho so 1215, No. 82.

body during royal audiences, with the exception of, perhaps, a few months during the cool season, now full-body attire was required. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Thai elite, especially at Court, were dressed in a manner that took a great deal from Europe and especially from Victorian England, a “new tradition” very similar to what then being created at the kratons in Central Java or in Hawaiian royal circles.

It is tempting to see, for example, globalization and localization at work when King Mongkut, in 1855, named one of his daughters Princess (phra-ong-chao) Sawangwatthana (*sawang* = light), and again, in 1868 when a daughter of King Chulalongkorn, as named Princess (phra-ong-chao) Siwilailak. In the latter case, though the word and the spelling was obviously Pali, hence fit a princess, yet *Si* (*sri*) and *wilai* (*vilaya*) seems to be a typical Thai way of playing with sound. Thus *Siwilai* (“civilized”) was a name both traditional (Thai) and modern (farang or western and civilized) at the same time. By the time of King Chulalongkorn (r.1868-1910), the word “civilized” had crept into ordinary language and become a proper Thai word with a contemporary official meaning. A school geography text-book of 1902, explained to young students that “*siwilai*” or being “civilized” meant “to be good citizens who help the Nation to progress” (pen phollamuang de... chuai chat hai charoen).<sup>13</sup> In 1907, the future King Vajiravudh, after returning from his years of education in England, took a trip to Sukhothai and discovered its “splendor.” In his book: *theo muang phra ruang*, (Traveling to the Cities of Phra Ruang) the Prince said he hoped that his writing and discoveries would make the Thais known globally: our Thai nation is not a new nation, and not a nation of barbarians, what is called in English “uncivilized” (*bang thi cha them hai khon*

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<sup>13</sup> See the controversial work by Saiphan Keongamprasert, *Kanmuang nai anusaowari Thao Suranari*, Sinlapawatthanatham, Special issue, 1995.

*Thai ru suk khun ma bang wa chat Thai rao mai chai chat mai lae mai chai chat thi pen khon pa rue thi riak tam phasa anglid "ansiwilai").*<sup>14</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to say that the impact of the Western idea of “civilized” and “civilization,” especially at its height during the turn of the century and under the absolute monarchy, was confined only to the field of custom and manners. It would be also misleading to say that the Thai elite were able to adopt and adapt with ease and only in reaction to outside influence; i.e. that the process was rather smooth and it did not lead to domestic tension and contradictions. It is also incorrect to say that the road to “civilization” was always led, interpreted, and applied solely by the Court of Bangkok. A close look tells a different story, showing that there were different views in the process of localization and that some “boxing matches” appeared even under the absolute monarchy. As David K. Wyatt has said:

*“There had been at least as early as the Third Reign a small strain of social criticism within Siamese intellectual life, expressed for the most part in traditional verse. Late in the Fifth Reign and early in the Sixth, a handful of mavericks, outsiders, trenchantly criticized the existing social, economic, and political order. Noteworthy among them were the turn-of-the-century journalists and essayists K.S.R. Kulap and Thianwan, both commoners who spent time in jail for their writings.”*<sup>15</sup>

Let us then take a look at two interesting and rather unusual “boxers” of the turn of the century: K.S.R. Kularb who was “a

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<sup>14</sup> King Rama VI (Vajirarudh), *Theo muang phra ruang*, (Traveling to the Cities of Phra Ruang), Sinlapabannakan, 1961, p.43.

<sup>15</sup> Wyatt, *op.cit.*, p. 238-39.

challenge to royal historical writing" and Thianwan "a man who fought giants."<sup>16</sup>

K.S.R. Kularb (1832 - 1921) was born in Bangkok in the reign of Rama III at a time when Western influence was starting to be felt in Siam. His father was Chinese while his mother was from the official class of Korat. He seems to have been closely connected with traditional Siam and the West at the same time. He probably grew up in a certain minor palace, became a novice and later a monk; thus, receiving an-old-style Thai education. However, he also worked as a clerk in some farang companies, i.e. the American Steam Rice-mill Company, Windsor and Co., for 15 years. It is said that he traveled widely overseas to Singapore, Penang, Sumatra, Manila, Batavia, Macao, Hong Kong, and Calcutta. Some claimed that he even went as far as England. By the 1880s Kularb was known as a learned man in the very small educated circle of Bangkok. He had become a "bibliomaniac" with a large personal collection of books, a new and "civilized" habit for the elite of new Siam. In 1882, on the occasion of the first centennial of Bangkok's founding, Kularb joined a royal exhibition by putting on show 1,000 books from his collection. In the 1890s he became an editor and publisher of his own journal: *Sayam prophet*. A prolific writer, he penned many works dealing with the changes caused by the "civilizing" process, and which thus marked the difference between old and new Siam. What is very interesting about Kularb's writing was his

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<sup>16</sup> For K.S.R. Kularb see Craig J. Reynolds, "The Case of K.S.R. Kulab: A Challenge to Royal Historical Writing in Late Nineteenth Century Thailand", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 61:2 (July 1973), pp. 63-90. For Thianwan see Walter F. Vella, "Thianwan of Siam: A Man Who Fought Giants", in Ronald D. Renard, ed., *Anuson Walter Vella*, University of Hawaii, 1986, pp. 78-91; see also Yuangrat Wedel with Paul Wedel, *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand*, Assumption Business Administration College, Bangkok, 1987, pp. 23-36. For sources in Thai see Chai-anan Samudavanija, Chiwit lae ngan khong Thianwan lae K.S.R. Kularb, Thiranon, 1979 and also Mnanya Thanaphum, K.S.R. Kularb, Association of Social Science of Thailand, 1982.

biographies and genealogies of important persons and families in Siam, something quite unusual at the time. This habit got him into trouble with the authorities when he wrote a biography of a supreme patriarch. He was accused of *lese majeste* and fabrication. He was investigated and later was sent, for one month, to a hospital to be “cured” of his madness (a new notion of punishment in new Siam).

Since then his reputation had been discredited and his name is now associated with negative meanings: making things up, lies, fabrication, invention, etc.

But Kularb was an interesting man for an interesting time, with a good knowledge of traditional society, and at the same time, with a “globalized” outlook. He was actually a strong supporter of, and a spokesman for the royal civilizing mission in Siam. He praised King Mongkut for having changed the way the Thai dressed from “*khrai khon pa*” (like jungle people) to “*khrai khon siwilai*” (like civilized people). In his 1911 publication *Ayatiwat* (means “growth” or “progress”)<sup>17</sup> he compiled 136 stories on the “changes from old to new customs,” giving a vivid picture of what was happening within the top echelons of Thai society. It is likely that with his connection to foreigners (It is said that he learned English and some Latin and French from Bishop J.B. Pallegoix who also gave the same type of instruction to King Mongkut while he was a monk), Kularb had some rare foreign (probably French) books on Siam, and that looking in from the outside gave him a different and wider perspective on his country.

In a present-day interpretation, Kularb may not be a “radical” but his role as a “public intellectual,” with prolific writings and his own journal, cannot be overlooked. It is clear that he wanted the public,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ayatiwat* was reprinted by Thai-Japanese Friendship Society with assistance from Sathaban chakkawan withaya, 1995. See informative introduction on life and work of K.S.R. Kularb by Nakharin Mektrirat.

or to be precise a small urban educated class in Bangkok, to be informed and alert to the changes or “civilization” which were taking place. At the same time he was trying to communicate his idea of “civilization” to the governing class. He noted that a good and prosperous Siam depended on a good reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. On the cover of his *Ayatiwat*, with his seal and a picture of a rose (his name Kularb, a Persian derived word, means rose), he wrote “*nang sue bamrung panya prachachon waduei plian thamniam ratchakan tangtang yang kao pen yang mai nai lem ni mi 136 ruang pen khun prayot samrab kha ratchakan lae prachachon pholamuang sap ruang athibai pidsakan*” (*Ayatiwat*: A book for people’s knowledge, on the changes of various official customs, from old to new, 136 stories, useful for officials and the public to know....)<sup>18</sup> Kularb seems to have ideas as to what type of leadership would fit Siam.

In 1897, five years after the well-known administrative reform of King Chulalongkorn, and the same year as the King’s first diplomatic trip to Europe, Kularb wrote an article: “On the Independence of a Country.” He wrote it as a question-and-answer between a son and a father, using rather complicated symbols and references from *phongsawadan* (history) and other old texts.

The son asks: In order to stay an “independent” country, which has “civilization,” what has one to do?

The father answers that in order to remain independent and prosperous, a country must have these four features:

- (1) be a land of the Buddha (*putthachak*),
- (2) be a kingdom of law and order (*phra ratcha anachak*),
- (3) have a (good) government, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

(4) have a (good) people.

Kularb also put emphasis on good leadership (*athibodi*) and suggested what qualities they should have: he went on to say that just as masters and servants need each other, so do the King and the People. But he was not very clear about what kind of government he hoped for in an independent and civilized country.

This blur brings us directly to another unusual “boxer” by the name of Thianwan who was ten years younger than Kularb and was active publishing his “public opinion” in the same era. Thianwan (1842-1915) was born in an area of mangosteen orchards on the right bank of the Chao Phraya in Bangkok. He claimed in his autobiography that he was from an old family of officials which could be traced back to the reigns of King Narai and King Borommakot of Ayudhya. He was well-educated in the traditional Thai system, spending two years, 1850-52, in palace schools and becoming a novice in 1858. As a curious young man he traveled widely- -to northern Siam and overseas to many ports along China's coast: Hong Kong, Macao, Swatow, Shanghai. He saw with his own eyes what the West was doing in East Asia. He must have mastered some English at this time, making him more international in outlook. Between 1862-67 he was a monk, and getting advanced Buddhist education at major temples of Bangkok: Wat Bowonniwet and Wat Ratchapradit. Between 1867-82 Thianwan made a career as a merchant and practicing attorney at the same time. He was known to be very well-dressed (“civilized,” meaning modern and westernized); he claimed to be the first man in Siam to wear a beard (a rather macho and “proper European” fashion at the time), and cut his hair in a western style. He was outspokenly critical of Thai society; he promoted a great number of “civilizing” programs for Siam. According to the late Walter F. Vella, Thianwan was an intellectual reformer, a pioneer in the realm of

ideas.<sup>19</sup> In good globalization style, he once predicted that “countries all over the world will change their traditions; they will get rid of the bad things and replace them with good things. I believe that those countries which refuse to change will fall under the control of others.”<sup>20</sup> In 1882 he was arrested and charged with contempt of court for writing a petition for his client and sending it to the high court without permission of the Ministry of the Palace. He was sentenced to 50 lashes and life imprisonment.

In 1898, after seventeen years in jail, Thianwan was freed at the age of fifty six. It is amazing that he still survived intellectually. Between 1900-06 he was active publishing his own journal: *Tulayawiphak photchanakit* (Fair Deal Journal) and in 1907 put out a collection of his many prolific writings as *Siriphotchanawiphak* (Fair Speech Book). Thianwan’s writings covered a wide range of subjects: politics, literature, foreign affairs, social problems, and medicine.<sup>21</sup> But they could be summed up as criticisms of Thai society and government and at the same time as proposals for what had to be done to become “civilized.” He started with the need for good leadership and government (he was critical of “bad” officials in the Ministries of the Interior and of Justice), and went on to the expansion of education and schooling, abolition of polygamy and slavery (he proposed employment for slaves after being freed), and elimination of gambling and opium smoking. He produced a long list of urgent things to be achieved: constructing roads, canals, hospitals, and a national bank, getting investment loans from the U.S., and even manufacturing canned fish. To Thianwan the civilizing process meant changes, not merely to social and administrative aspects but including the political structure of Siam. In his 1905 traditional verse writing, his version of “siwilai”

<sup>19</sup> Vella, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Yuangrat, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

explicitly includes having a parliamentary system (*paliment*) where the freed (*phri*) help their rulers (*chaonai*) in protecting the land (*banmuang*). He wrote:

*We ought to prepare the day  
 For the people to voice their wishes  
 In a parliamentary system.  
 If we wait too long  
 We shall fall behind the times.  
  
 Let us be truly civilized and not tarry.  
 Let us hurry to establish a parliament  
 And get the people to unite  
 And move on to freedom without delay.  
  
 To care for our land and help our princes.<sup>22</sup>*

Thianwan was not the first or only one to propose that Siam move toward parliamentary democracy and a representative form of government. Already in 1881 a small group of princes and nobles, with western education and an international outlook, had petitioned to King Chulalongkorn for democratic reform; but the monarch concluded that Siam was not yet ready. The outcome was in-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, see also Chai-anan, *op cit.*, p.80

ໄພໄປນ້ຳນີ້ອ່າງກຳນອງຂອນ  
 ດົມຮະນອກໄກເລີມທີ່ປະເທິນຈໍາ  
 ແກ້ນນິ້ງຂ້າສຳຫັ້ນນີ້ທໍາ  
 ຈະດັກຕໍ່ານີ້ຍໍາເຫັນເຄາສາມ  
 ຂອໃຫ້ຫຸນຂັນເວົ້າຜູ້ເນົາກັກ  
 ນໍາງຸງຮັກຍາກາດີສອາດີ  
 ທັນເຈົ້ານາຍຄ່າຍພະຄະມະນິ  
 ຈຸນເປັນດີໄລ້ຮັງອ່ານີ້ນຳນານ  
 ໃຫ້ບົນການກີ່ມັນຕົ້ນເປັນຫັກ  
 ຈະໄດ້ລັກນ້ອນໃຈພົວສົມນ  
 ເຮັດເປັນພົງປົກອ້າກັກ  
 ຮັກຍານັນເມືອງເຮົາຫ່າຍເຂົານາຍ

stead the administrative reform of 1892. But it is interesting to see that while the petition of the nobility was confined within a small circle, the writings of both Thianwan and Kularb created a certain public awareness and the outcome was again a form of “boxing match” - here Thianwan versus Vajiravudh. As Walter Vella wrote:

*“...there is one clear proof, one piece of unmistakable evidence that King Vajiravudh, as crown prince, had read Thianwan and wrestled with his concepts. Among Thianwan’s writings was an essay listing what he regarded as the needs of the country, including the need for parliament. The list was twenty-one items long. Each item started with the phrase “we need above all.” Shortly after the list appeared, Prince Vajiravudh wrote, under a pseudonym, a short story that was published in his own journal *Thawipanya*. The story is a satire, depicting the chaos that would befall Siam if it had a parliament. And among the characters in the story is one “representative of the people” named Thuan. Thuan is exceedingly windy. In the midst of a pressing debate on military finances he goes into a long disquisition on the needs of the country. Each item starts with the phrase “we need above all.” He is finally stopped by his irate audience at item twenty-two. Many items in the list of Thuan are almost identical with those in the list of Thianwan. And others are clearly ridiculed, so that Thuan appears to be a braggart and a pompous fool.”<sup>23</sup>*

The two “public intellectuals,” Kularb and Thianwan, did not seem to prosper in their day. Their publications were confined within a small group of the then educated class, mainly in Bangkok; Thianwan’s journal probably circulated among only a hundred readers, though it lasted for six years. However, their impact was not as minor

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

as one would have expected. In his old age Thianwan became blind, but he lived to learn that, in 1912, there was an unsuccessful military coup attempting to bring parliamentary democracy to Siam. In 1915 he died at the age of seventy-three. Kularb meantime survived until 1921, passing away when he was eighty-seven.

From the above we might suggest that what “globalization” is for today’s-Thai intellectuals is very much like what “civilization” was to their nineteenth century ancestors. But these ideas were always changing and still are. Always a period of alarm and uneasiness is followed by a period of localization and domestication. By the turn of the century the threat of colonialism had lessened though, the Bangkok Court had made substantial concessions to the demands of the French and the British. At home, globalized models had been adapted for a process of administrative centralization and consolidation by which an official version of being “civilized” had been established. It is noticeable that this domestication was strongly marked in Thai civilization an air of being Thai, authentic and national. Towards the end of the absolute monarchy, *siwilai* was replaced by *araya* (the Aryans, or the Buddha’s tribe in Northern India)-*tham* (way of life). By late 1930s with the rise of a new official class which seized power from the absolute monarchy in 1932, in the name of *araya-prachathippathai* (“arayan and democracy”), something that seemed authentically “local Thai” had come into being. Now it was “culture” or *watthanatham*, a new code of conduct, way of life, or style of behavior and thought that has been turned, globalization-wise into “Thailand” by the governments of Phibun, 1938- 44, and 1948-57. It seemed that the long set of boxing matches was over: King Mongkut versus Rev. Bradley, Kularb versus the Court of King Chulalongkorn, Thianwan versus Vajiravudh. By the 1960s both “civilization” and *arayatham* were mere subjects of study for first year students in many Thai universities (some of us have to teach courses on east-

ern and western arayatham, much to the dislike of many students). In effect, "civilized," once a powerful word and idea in the nineteenth century seems now confined within a small academic circle. However, even ten years ago there was a very popular song by the name of *daen siwilai* (by Thanet Worakulnukhroa) "civilized land," "a place far, far away."<sup>24</sup> Here we see that, quite surprisingly, "civilized" had taken on a utopian meaning for the Thai future. Perhaps this song was a signal that the old boxing-matches were starting up again.

There is no denying that Thai society has been going through tremendous changes since the 1960s, as a result of economic and development planning, the impact of the American wars on the mainland of Asia, and the rise of Japan. By the 1980s Thailand was said to have come near to NIC status and was ready to join the "tigers": Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. With its rising middle-class, well-educated, business-minded, hi-tech, and international oriented, the country seems to be moving rapidly ahead, despite all the serious economic and social disparities. At the same time, politically, "civilianization" if not "civilization" has been taking place and military coups, which had dominated Thai politics since the end of the absolute monarchy, seem to be a thing of the past. By the 1990's, despite the serious wounds of Bloody May 1992, Thailand is, so many believe, on

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<sup>24</sup> I am very grateful to Wikul Phongphanitanond of Siriraj Hospital Archives for providing me with much information on old and new Siam of this period.

the road to a bright future.<sup>25</sup> But so much is vanishing in this breakneck rush that there are plenty of people who are worried and alarmed. This is why current debates on globalization look so familiar to a historian. When Siam faced the danger of “civilization” (i.e. colonialism and westernization), Prince Damrong, the Grand Old Historian of Siam/Thailand, proposed three special characteristics of the Thai: (1) love of national independence, (2) tolerance, and (3) power of assimilation, would pave the way for a smooth and successful adjustment of Thai society to the “civilized” West. In facing globalization: what will become of Thailand? Probably all one can say is that the situation will be “normal” only when “globalization” has disappeared from the Thai language. Whether it will disappear might depend on whether the dominant business and political groups can manage to be freedom-loving, tolerant, and assimilating. One should assume automatically that they will.

**Note:** This paper was given at the 1996 International Association of Historians of Asia Conference. Frankly at the beginning I was not interested in the topic but I must say I am now happy with what I had done just before the 1997 economic and currency crashes in Southeast Asia. Just a few months prior to the 1996 IAHA Conference held at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Prof. Piyanart Bunnag, the Chairperson, had been rather insisting that I should present my view on “globalization.” I knew that the topic was exciting to many people, especially at the time of the “boom” and “Asian

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<sup>25</sup> For good descriptions and analyses of modern Thailand with its rapid changes and social complexity, see Benedict Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9:3 (1977), pp. 13-30, and his “Murder and Progress in Modern Siam”, *New Left Review*, 181 (1990), pp. 33-48. See also two pieces of work by Kevin Hewison, “Of regimes, state and pluralities: Thai politics enters the 1990s,” in *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, Allen and Unwin, Australia, 1993, and also his piece “Emerging social forces in Thailand: new political and economic roles”, in Richard Robinson and David S.G. Goodman, ed., *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile phones, McDonalds and Middle-class Revolution*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.

miracle" but at the same time rather boring to others. So I declined, informing her that I knew nothing about the subject. I suggested to Madam Chairperson that she should find a more suitable person especially in the "hot" fields of business and public administration, mass-media, political science or economics. These fields are full of futurists, while I deal professionally with the past. But Prof. Piyanart being a capable *Chula ajaan*, a Mon-Thai historian, and a capable organizer did not accept my answer. After a good long discussion she convinced me that being a good historian should enable one to use the knowledge of the past for studying the present, and "even" coming up with some ideas about the future! Wishing to be a good historian, I, therefore, gave in and had spent a few months thinking about what I would have to say to that distinguished gathering of historians of Asia. In addition, I am very grateful to Bryce Beemer, then, a graduate student at the University of Hawaii, for helping this paper to have some Hawaiian-Siamese connection. I also want to express my appreciation to my colleagues in Honolulu, especially Profs. Leonard and Barbara Andaya, and students in History and Asian Studies, at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, who helped and made my four months away from Siam a happy and memorable one. Parts of this paper were carried out there in the rainbow state.