

# DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS TO TAI STATES BY DAVID RICHARDSON AND W. C. McLEOD 1830–1839: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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## *Abstract*

This paper examines the ethnography of travelling embassies to Tai states in the 1830s (Chiang Mai, Chengtung, Chengrung and other Shan States) as seen primarily through the unpublished journals of two British officials based in Tenasserim: Dr David Richardson and Captain W. C. McLeod. It considers features of the lengthy overland journeys and the daily journals themselves. The main analytical focus is on pre-modern Tai diplomatic practices and their engagement with European diplomatic guests. It explores themes of diplomatic ceremony and propriety, delays and mutual suspicions, cordiality and friendship.

## Introduction

In writing this as an anthropologist, I am aware that I am treading rashly in the historian's territory, if not literally, then in the historian's time and sources. The specific *time* is the 1830s, but it starts earlier. It starts with a new European and world order after 1815; a late enlightenment intellectual climate combined with incipient industrialization. When John Crawfurd sailed from Calcutta in 1821, he remarked later with hindsight (Crawfurd 1967 [1828]), there were no steamships, but by 1824 a small steamship, named *Diana*, was in action against the Burmese army on the Irawaddy.<sup>1</sup> It starts with Thailand in confident and expansive mood, with increases in empire, in the China trade, in population, and freedom from war with Burma. It starts also with the Crawfurd mission to Bangkok in 1822, and, more intimately for my story, with the arrival in Madras of two young Anglo-Scots, William Couperus McLeod as an infantry cadet in 1821 and David Richardson as an Assistant Surgeon in 1823.

The story of British diplomatic contact with the Tai world starts earlier still of course with the travelling merchant Ralph Fitch, back in

London in 1591 after a nine-year Asian tour regaling Shakespeare's contemporaries and the London inns, with tales of fabulous Pegu, and his claim to have made a side-trip in 1587 to Chiangmai (see Ryley 1899; Edwardes 1972; Hall 1928). By 1600, year of the formation of the British East India Company (EIC), Sir Foulke Greville was advising Queen Elizabeth to send a mission to Siam, as it was free from Portuguese or Spanish influence. In Banten in early 1608 EIC Captain Keating invited to dinner the Siamese ambassadors who were on their slow way to Holland. They seem to have made it clear that the King of Siam would welcome an embassy from the English.<sup>2</sup> The first British embassy duly arrived in Ayutthaya in 1612, and in the following year a trade mission was sent to Chiangmai from Ayutthaya headed by two representatives of the EIC, Thomas Driver and Thomas Samuel (see Hall 1928; Hutchinson 1940). Or we could pick up the thread again from the years 1683–87 when Captain John Burnaby, an Englishman, and what the EIC

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called an ‘interloper’, or free trader, was Governor of Mergui, as a Siamese official (Hutchinson 1940), as W.C. McLeod was to be under British over-rule 150 years later.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these linking threads of narrative, discontinuity is more marked than continuity. In the early 1820s, as Stamford Raffles noted when he commissioned John Crawfurd to undertake the first proper European diplomatic mission to Thailand since 1687, European knowledge of, and relationship with the Tai world—indeed the whole area of ‘the countries between Bengal and China’ to use a contemporary phrase, was virtually starting again from scratch. Though true in diplomatic terms, this is a bit misleading however, since for several decades Calcutta had been a centre for commissioning, storing, and disseminating knowledge of the East Indies region. For example we may note the founding in 1788 of *Asiatick Researches*, later to become the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (JASB), the journal in which several of Richardson’s reports were to be published. There was the publication in 1810 of the first English language outline Thai grammar by Leyden. In 1824 Captain James Low, aged 33, based in Penang, who also made a number of visits into Tai territory in the Peninsula in the 1820s was awarded by the EIC a bonus of 2,000 Spanish dollars for his expertise in the Thai language of Bangkok, which he never visited, and in related Tai studies, which he had acquired over some six years with the help of Thai informants.

By about this time—if we include the occupation of Singapore in 1819 and the treaty of Yandabo in 1826 by which Britain took the Tenasserim Provinces, from Mergui in the south to Moulmein in the north—by this time, British India bordered most of the long western edges of the Tai-speaking world. From Manipur in the North to Penang in the South, there were Tai speaking residents, subjects of the Government of India.

So much, by way of introduction, for a heterodox appropriation of the historian’s dimensions of time and chronology. As for my principle sources, they are principally the reports of five missions undertaken by Dr David Richardson and one by Captain W.C. McLeod to Tai states (mostly known then as Western

Lao or Shan) and one by Richardson to Bangkok. While most of the reports have been published—in the JASB 1836–40 (Richardson 1836, 1837, 1839–40); in Parliamentary Papers in 1869 (McLeod 1869; Richardson 1869); and in the five volumes of the so-called Burney Papers in 1910–14 (Burney 1910–1914)—none have been properly edited or commercially published to date, though the journals of the Richardson and McLeod missions of 1837 are due to be published, edited by Volker Grabowsky and the present author. We have not yet examined all the manuscript versions of these sources, but it seems that virtually all relevant material has in fact been published in the limited forms mentioned. For example the Burney Papers, published safely after the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, released much correspondence originally classified as secret.

The *territory* in which these events take place is not so unfamiliar or off limits to me as it happens. I have spent quite some years living in Thailand, especially the North, and have visited, as McLeod and Richardson did between them: Chiangmai, Lamphun, Lampang, Chiangrai, Chengrung, and neighbouring places they spoke of: Chiangsaen, Chiangkhong, Nan, Luang Prabang, Puerh, Kunming, Tali and so on. I have also spent quite a few days walking through the hills and foothills, occasionally camping in the forest, as they so frequently did. Even more intimately, McLeod twice passed right through the area of a village and district in Chiangrai where I lived and researched for more than two years. This was then known until the early twentieth century as Muang Nong Khwang, now Amphur Mae Sruay. McLeod describes flora and fauna, crops, hot springs, elephant hunting, trading with Chengtung, political allegiances and dependencies and so on, which were as I found or had told to me.<sup>4</sup>

### **Ethnography of embassy**

The travelling embassies of the early modern period are extraordinary kinds of transcultural encounter.<sup>5</sup> They start with assumptions of the possibility of a cultural ‘bridgehead’ of mutual understanding. There is both strong self-interest and commitment to some common interest. Some mutually beneficial exchange is sought. It is a

negotiation. The diplomatic encounter constitutes a contested zone. Accounts thus have the merit of a kind of robust honesty, reflexivity even, about self-interested purpose and the difficulties of ‘translation’ in various senses; a transparency all too often lacking in other travellers’ and some academic accounts. And despite the fact that there are fewer Tai records, or for some missions none at all, there are opportunities to see the Tai side exercising reverse determination: facilitating, blocking, dissimulating, modifying, appropriating and so on.

Part of my method is to identify recurrent rhetorical themes or tropes, what have been called ‘formulaic commonplaces’ (cf Boon 1982, 1991) or what in the history of literary rhetoric are called *topoi*, which is to say figures of speech, which can be seen in these and other accounts. I argue that they are not so much accidental, or merely stylistic or symptomatic, but largely constitutive of the events as recorded. They include a series of critical, rhetorical complaints: of excessive ritualisation and ceremony; of excessive control, surveillance and lack of freedom; of endless, unnecessary delays and frustrations; of lack of ‘civilization’ among the host society (including excessively deferential and despotic behaviour, absence and style of clothing etc.). Then there are classifications of peoples in an ethnicising, gendering, sometimes racialising, and almost always hierarchising way.

Interestingly, some of these hyperbolic styles seem to serve to reveal—just as well, or better than the equally exaggerating method of claiming to present standard-average descriptions—or let us hear, something of the voice from the other side—their concerns and suspicions about possible threats, duplicity, espionage, and bad faith; their evaluation of the European; their lack of unanimity and so on. And there are plenty of other themes, currents or undertones, some of which may be contradictory or which leave the whole not adding up in any convenient or expected way. One of these I discuss below as the trope of friendship and delicacy; themes which I would argue are worthy of greater attention in historical and ethnographic studies.<sup>6</sup>

One influence on my approach has been from reading about Chinese diplomatic

practices, which seem to have been replicated or transformed in many East and South East Asian countries. Bangkok was sending almost annual missions to China in this period. There are quite a few interesting references to Thai and Burmese diplomatic officials met by Europeans who had had previous experience of missions to Beijing. There had been Burmese diplomats in Beijing when Lord Macartney first went there in 1793. Burney translated the account of a Burmese mission to China in 1833. One of the Tai states visited by McLeod, Chengrung, had been under Chinese suzerainty for centuries. Richardson meets, on the road, a Burmese official he had met a few years earlier, who had since been to Beijing as second ambassador. But in terms of my present focus, on what I do of course concede are relatively small scale missions, what struck me—totally freshly on a second reading—was the similarity of structure and processes of these British missions to those in Bangkok in 1822 (Crawford 1915, 1967; Finlayson 1826) 1825–26 (Burney 1910–14), 1850 (Thailand 1936), 1855 (Bowring 1857), to a Srilankan mission in 1750 (Pieris 1903), to the French missions to Ayutthaya in the 1680s (Choisy 1993), the Dutch in Vientiane in 1641 (Van Wuysthoff 1987), and so on further back and farther afield.

What we can call the intertextuality of this discursive phenomenon is a fascinating aspect. This includes the way in which authors refer to the texts of others, meet each other if contemporaries, are briefed from Calcutta by scholar officials with access to excellent libraries and archives, and so on. There is clearly a cumulative production not just of a corpus of texts, but more than that of a discourse on the Tai world, which is increasingly shared with the Tai side over time. In 1834 Cao Lamphun consults his copy of the Tai text of the Burney treaty of 1826; and in 1839 the future King Mongkut’s younger full-brother, the future Upparat, shows Richardson a copy of ‘Crawford’s map’ published in 1828, and so on.

Some of this is part of the ethnography itself. For example, Richardson records a conversation in 1838 between Henry Burney, who was then British resident, or Commissioner, at Ava, and the new King of Burma, Tharrawaddy.

Richardson had made many other visits to Ava, receiving an honorific title from the previous king. This is a year before Richardson follows in Burney's footsteps on a mission to Bangkok. He has also travelled, sometimes in the company of Burney, to Calcutta for various briefings and debriefings. Earlier still he has kept the knowledgeable Mrs Ann Judson company in Moulmein, while her husband Dr Adoniram Judson accompanied the notoriously 'un-diplomatic' Crawford as interpreter on his mission to Ava in 1826. Richardson reports the Burmese king as saying to both of them that he is willing to talk to diplomats like Burney and Richardson—both we can assume totally fluent in Burmese, after some 14 years continuous residence—'but', he goes on, and Richardson seems to quote almost verbatim 'let any "green man" who does not know the language and customs of the Burmese, and assumes a higher tone, be sent here, he will look to it as a warning to prepare his troops; if Mr Crawford (sic) were here now, it would be war directly' (Richardson 1869: 146).

The similarities—as between Bangkok and the other Tai states—are in this case more interesting than the differences. Though once we have established the comparabilities, the detailed differences once again become compelling. I might briefly mention a few broad differences. They mainly derive from the fact that the Siamese state centred on Bangkok (or the Burmese at Ava, or the Chinese at Peking) are sovereign states or rather empires, and possessed of far greater wealth and resources than their 'vassals' the *phrathetsarat*. So the difference is mainly in the *scale* of magnificence and ceremoniousness, and in the *extent* of possibilities for a less formal, more egalitarian, more participatory encounter (for example in access to various parties and classes of people, such as exiles, monks, women, other foreigners etc., less punctiliousness about sitting on chairs or removing shoes etc., more reference to use of alcohol in socialising. And also by virtue of the lesser status of these vassal states—and, which is almost the same thing, their lack of any maritime frontier—the missions are the first or the first remembered, direct encounters on home territory with Europeans at this level of formality.

## The journeys

Let me now give a starkly factual description of the missions and journals. All six missions were overland journeys (excepting a little by riverboat and raft) from Moulmein to Tai territories and back to Moulmein, the administrative capital of British Tenasserim Provinces. They were journeys on foot, both human and animal feet. They were among the first, certainly the first well documented, and the first diplomatic journeys by Europeans into the hinterland of mainland South East Asia, to anticipate a term of political geography—of German origin—dating from the high imperial 1880s and 1890s. Earlier accounts had been of journeys from port to port, and they contain descriptions of whatever was encountered on the way. So we have ethnography of the Cape of Good Hope prefacing an embassy to Beijing (Cranmer-Byng 1963; Staunton 1797); or of the behaviour of Eurasian high society in Malacca in Crawford's narrative of his mission to Bangkok. McLeod and Richardson, on the other hand, travel from the land frontier inwards towards the capitals, and so they have seen much of the conditions of the country before seeing its rulers.

The journeys were made in 1830, 1834, 1835, 1837 and 1839. They usually started in mid-December of the year before, and tried to return before the rains set in the following May. Richardson's 1834 mission arrived back on 21 May; it had rained throughout the final week, causing several deaths from exposure and most of the party to suffer from fevers. On the whole the accounts minimise the physical dangers and risks.

The number of people on these journeys varied from about 50–100 and up to 300 and more. The caravan consisted first of all of the personal party of Richardson and McLeod. This consisted of about 20–30 people, comprising five or more Indian soldiers, personal servants, tent pitchers, interpreters, guides, and so on. Then there were the elephant drivers and others in charge of bullocks and horses; and people referred to as 'coolies', who I think were porters on foot. The porters and the animals carried food and other supplies, trade goods, and very importantly diplomatic gifts, which I discuss later. There were often other traders, on their

own account, some of whom joined at later stages of the journey, taking advantage of the protection as well as the trading opportunities offered by the expedition. In addition there was sometimes an armed escort from the host state.

As far as one may tell, Richardson and McLeod were the only Europeans on these journeys.<sup>7</sup> If the expeditions are, somewhat anachronistically, thought of as research missions, then compared with the embassies to major capitals, which involved quite large multi-skilled teams, these were more like solo field trips. However, the value of a small entourage of experienced traders and interpreters, and other sources of local knowledge, must have been considerable. In any case they were not accompanied by relatives, as were the leaders of several other missions. For example, Crawford took his wife in 1822, Burney his wife and six year old son in 1826, and Bowring his adult son in 1855. The traders and others would usually include Bengalis and other Indians, Mon, Burmese, Shan, maybe Karen and Yunnanese Chinese. There were Animists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims—though the religious differences or practices of members of the caravan are hardly ever alluded to. With one exception, there is no mention of religious holidays, not even Sundays, or Ramadan for instance. By contrast local religious events, such as Northern Thai New Year, Buddhist ordinations and funerals, and some other festivals, and Buddhist monks encountered are mentioned.

The total journey times were approximately as follows: McLeod five and a half months, and Richardson respectively three and a half, two and a half, four and a half, eight and a half, and seven and a half months, a total of over two and a half person years. The distances covered averages about 10–12 miles per day in a median range 8–16, at a walking pace of about 2.5 miles per hour or less. In colder, flatter country, and for one stretch without elephants, which were usually the most important limiting factor, McLeod averaged 15 mpd (24 km) over a fortnight without halting for a day; and on another occasion 20 mpd (32 km) over a week without halt.<sup>8</sup>

Richardson had had even more demanding experiences in Burma during the war (1824–

26) as an army surgeon in sole command of caravans of wounded soldiers and field hospital staff. For example in January 1826 he had led a caravan of 263 people, including 63 wounded on carts and stretchers, for three days, covering 120 miles by land and river. Richardson wrote to his father that he would decline 2,000 rupees (about six months salary) to do the same again.

They seem to have usually made only one march in a day, arriving mid-day to early afternoon. Even if they rose well before dawn it would usually take two to three hours to cook, eat, and look after animals before leaving at 7.00 or 8.00 am or even later. The times recorded seem mainly to be of the main party which travelled faster, whereas elephants and load bearing ‘coolies’ sometimes took longer (10–12 hours), and sometimes arrived after dark. They seem never to have halted for the day unless absolutely obliged to by the needs of the pack animals, by the need to supply food, or more usually, by the political demands of their immediate hosts, which could mean a wait of several days on end. Reference to these unwelcome delays becomes a regular figure in their narratives.

They usually spent about two to three weeks—and up to a couple of months—in major centres, a week or two in lesser ones. While roughly 60 percent of the total time was spent travelling between centres, more journal entries are written at these centres, as one would indeed expect. Journal entries, however brief, are made for almost all days. Every day’s entry records distance, direction(s) and duration of march, sometimes the actual times of departure and arrival; place names where inhabited or known (villages, mountains, rivers, and small streams—and their breadth and depth); and occasionally the estimated height above sea level is calculated from the temperature at which water boils. In the Appendix to this article I give excerpts from each of Richardson’s and McLeod’s 1837 journals chosen as examples of fairly short entries on the march, just to give some flavour.

### **Pre-modern Tai diplomatic practices**

It might be thought that these missions were too low level and small scale to be called diplomatic missions, and that they were at most like consular

or trade missions. The emissaries were well regarded by their superiors and each had several years experience, military and administrative, but neither was senior in rank: Richardson had the rank of Assistant-Surgeon, and McLeod was only made up to Captain for the mission, or was possibly promoted immediately after. Both were aged about 33 on their first missions, which may not be an advanced age but nonetheless one by which many of their contemporaries had reached high office and responsibility. Although authorised by the Government of India, like Crawford and Burney, the letters they bore came from the Commissioner of Tenasserim Provinces. They are not conventionally thought of as 'diplomatic' missions, although the title of Langham-Carter's 1966 article, does refer to Richardson as 'diplomat and explorer' (Langham-Carter 1966) and Walter Vella also refers to Richardson as a 'diplomat', at least in regard to his mission to the King at Bangkok in 1839 (Vella 1957: 124).

However I think it is useful to assimilate these missions to the category of 'embassy' or diplomatic mission, for several reasons. First, these were the first official encounters between Britain (not just Tenasserim or India) and these Tai states; in the case of Chiengrung, almost certainly the first local encounter with Europeans of any sort. Secondly, for all that these were tributary states—always looking over their shoulder, so to say, towards Ava, or Bangkok, or China, actually Puerh, or Kunming at best—they had varying amounts of autonomy, a sense of their own dignity, and a desire, and some freedom, to pursue their own external relations. The British tended at first to exaggerate the sovereignty of the Burmese Shan states, but more out of ignorance perhaps than for any devious reason.

Some evidence for the relative autonomy of Chiangmai, for instance, is that the Cao Chiangmai had sent a letter to the British in Moulmein arriving as early as March 1825, from the 'ruler of 57 provinces and possessor of the richest throne in the East'. Possibly this was from King Phuttawong in the first days of his reign, or near the death of the previous ruler. This was just a few months after the occupation of Tenasserim by the British during the war but nearly a year before the treaty of

Yandabo, and seven months before Burney's embassy to Bangkok started in November 1825. Another letter, perhaps from the ambitious viceroy was sent in 1828, not long after the sack of Vientiane by the Siamese in 1827. A third letter from Lannathai arrived in Moulmein from Bunma, the Cao Lamphun and titular *cao ciwit*, or senior *cao* in the north, in early December 1829, and was either the trigger or the final authorization for Richardson's first mission which departed Moulmein on 11th December 1829. Brailey, my source for these letters, surmises plausibly that Burney had probably met Phuttawong and Bunma, called 'Western Lao Chiefs', in Bangkok on his visit in 1825–26 (Brailey 1968). Assembling vassal state rulers to attend major foreign embassies seems to have been a likely practice, so that several of the Shan *cao* probably had experience of meeting British officers at Ava (from the Symes mission of 1785 onwards) or Bangkok, prior to any formal direct contact, and they certainly would have known how various ambassadors were treated.

Thirdly, and most importantly for my approach (and which I may hope gives it some originality), my analysis shows that the structure, the semiotics, and practices of the whole mission, and within it the more focused episodes 'at court', and in the performances of royal audience and reception, allow us to assimilate these events to the category not just of diplomatic embassy, but of a generic Tai diplomatic event, at least to an extent that permits some comparison and further analysis.

Let me develop this last point and take the argument forward. I have just implied that there may be apparently factual, reliably constant features of formal events: rules or norms of language, practice, and behaviour, whether of a more ritual or more broadly social kind. For example the King or Cao receives the visitor, the *khaek muang*, in a palace (*phra raja wang* or *ho luang*); he sits in a relatively high position; the diplomats are accorded some privilege but must obey certain local rules of behaviour; there are rather strictly governed exchanges of letters, of formal questions and other rhetorical niceties, of gifts etc; hospitality and security are provided; information is requested and exchanged, or withheld within certain rules, agreements are

made and recorded, and so on. All this, though recognizably part of an even more general category of pre-modern South East Asian embassy, is conducted in a distinctive Tai idiom; it is not identical to Burmese or Vietnamese, for example. In the first place, it is interesting to study this in itself as part of a general history and ethnography of social forms, and not just in order to see what was the outcome of the negotiations, or what specific bits of information were recorded.

### **The journals**

But what can we do with this material? Most often it is mined for factual information on British colonial history, on the structure and political economy of Tai states, on the Karen and other peoples, on elephants and so on. I myself have used it as a source on Tai practices of slavery. Nigel Brailey in his unpublished 1968 SOAS PhD thesis made particularly good use of it to consider the political dynamics of the Lannathai or Chiangmai Kingdom in the nineteenth century and the origins of its incorporation by the Siamese (Brailey 1968).

My current purpose is to examine these texts as a genre of ethnography, and more particularly as ethnography of embassy, ethnography of diplomatic missions. This is part of a larger project which does the same for other European accounts in the early modern period<sup>9</sup>. We might say that these embassies produce three kinds of ethnography. First, the most obvious sort, what I call ‘narratives and classifications of other peoples’; this is ethnography by the embassy. Secondly, there is ‘ethnography of the embassies’ themselves. And thirdly, a kind of ethnography in the embassy; a less than explicitly descriptive or narrative account, an ethnography of each side’s calculations and efforts as they test ways of communicating their desire to be and to remain both distinct, distant and autonomous, and yet closer in friendship; and a desire both to accept and reject the other’s view and opinion of oneself.

On the face of it my sources mainly belong to the genres of official report writing, of diaries or journals, and of writing about journeys. They were not written for publication (a contrast with the accounts of Finlayson (Finlayson 1826),

Crawfurd (Crawfurd 1967), Bowring (Bowring 1857) and many others) and neither McLeod nor Richardson themselves published their accounts. This was mediated by superiors. Of the two Richardson may be considered the more reflective and scholarly. He also wrote detailed and thoughtful letters to his father, extracts from which were published in 1966; and he translated a basic Burmese law text which was first published a year after his death in 1846 (Richardson 1847).

The journals of McLeod and Richardson are more like the field diaries of later academic ethnographers than other accounts of the period. This is partly due to their general familiarity, gained over many years of residence, with much of the region, and many of its peoples and languages, and to their travelling for long periods in the company of a multi-ethnic caravan. All this and their ability to witness and participate in many aspects of the life of the ordinary people as well as the nobility, and the frequency of their visits, gave them some advantages over many academic researchers, who are faced with different opportunities and constraints on their time, mobility and access. Like many ethnographers of other peoples, they become somewhat, or more than somewhat seduced by the exotic, or rather, by the exotic become routine or a second home.<sup>10</sup> Richardson makes many allusions to the attractiveness of Tai—or at least Khon Muang and Shan—ways of life, for example the looks and behaviour of northern Thai women, music, hospitality, and food (the latter in contrast to the predominantly Chinese and possibly Eurasian food prepared for diplomatic visitors in Bangkok, as when at one formal dinner he says ‘[I] smuggled my own [Indian style?] curry onto the table’). In a village just outside Lampang Richardson’s party were offered a meal of ‘rice and vegetable stews’. ‘These were brought out by the women of the village, young and old; the former, as usual, uncovered to the waist, and finer busts are not to be found in the world, and many of them fair as Europeans.’ (Richardson 1836: 699)

Richardson seems to have committed himself fairly early on to a career or even a lifetime spent in the region. He said in a letter to his father, fairly soon after his arrival in Burma, that he had a premonition he would not return,

even to Madras. He was said by his grandson in 1947 to have married the daughter of a Shan *cao*, to have died in Moulmein—he died aged 49—and by that time to have turned to Buddhism (Langham-Carter 1966). It is quite possible that he was married by the time of some of his later missions.

Let me give some examples of seemingly near verbatim, and instantaneous reports of richly textured, sometimes polyvocal, multi-ethnic encounters and performances—no doubt written up before going to bed as all good anthropology fieldworkers do!<sup>11</sup>

Here is an entry for 29 January 1837. Richardson is in Karen country:

I had a long conversation this morning with an old Shan woman, from Monay, the wife of the chief man of business and interpreter; she gave her opinions freely of the Kareans, in the presence of the [Karen] chief's son . . . she said they were jungle wild animals; they had neither temples nor laws; did not know good from evil, and were perfectly uncivilised; the bystanders, or rather sitters, though she was understood by two-thirds of them, seemed perfectly unmoved by her eloquence (Richardson, 1869: 109).

It is most likely, if not absolutely certain, that she was speaking in Tai. In any case I feel I can almost translate this directly back into Shan or *kham muang* colloquial clichés.<sup>12</sup> The mutely self-deprecating (non-)response of the Karen also rings true.

Or this brief extract from his 1839 journal, written in the evening at a camp made for the night in the forest, perhaps not far from the Three Pagodas Pass. Given the scarcity of Karen villages, they have run out of rice and have eaten yams and ferns for three days:

One of our Karen companions is at this moment giving the most ludicrous and savage imitations of the dances of the Siamese, Taline [Mon], Birman and Sawas by the fire-light.' (Richardson 1839–40: 1028)

For me, this seems to resemble a comic interlude in front of the curtain in a Shakespeare history play; a few days later Richardson would be in audience with the King of Siam.

McLeod had similar opportunities and a certain talent for writing. It is May 1837. He has been talking, on the road not far from Chiangmai, to the Cao Ho Na of Chiangmai, who was the viceroy and in practice probably the most powerful member of the ruling group. The prince has an escort of about 100 elephants and 700 armed men; compared with him McLeod must have seemed like a backpacker! The prince has just come back from a diplomatic trip to Bangkok, which may also have been something of a shopping trip:

He spoke of Dr Richardson's mission [in 1834?], and said he was sure the Red Karengs, who were the bitter enemies of the Burmans, would never consent to their passing through their country. I asked him how his countrymen, being good Buddhists, could permit and encourage the slave trade with that country. He said that God had provided every nation according to its necessities; that to the Red Karengs, he had given men but no salt. The Chief of that tribe, who accompanied him down to Bangkok, went back soon, considering the capital a most disagreeable place, and Zimmé far superior to it, though nothing equal to his own mountains . . . [though they were both] loud in their praises of the English shop at Bangkok' [presumably the godown of Robert Hunter, the only European commercial establishment in the city at the time] (McLeod 1869: 95).

### Ceremony and diplomatic propriety

The earliest European account of the Ayutthaya court, in about 1515, says that the King 'is very ceremonious with strangers' and that his 'ambassadors carry out their instructions thoroughly' (Pires 1944: 103–4). In the sixteenth century, Anthony Reid says, an important 'measure of a ruler's greatness' was to have a harbour 'full of foreign ships and the court of foreign envoys' (Reid 1993: 190). Nicholas Gervaise, referring to the court of King Narai (r.1657–88) commented 'There has never been any court anywhere in the world more ritualistic than the court of the King of Siam' (Gervaise 1989: 221).

Chiangmai may not have been full of foreign envoys, but there were a number of exiled *cao*



*muang* kept close to court and Richardson observed that the shutters on the reception hall had paintings of foreigners paying homage or respects to the King, including *farang* dressed in early eighteenth century costume. And compared with Ayutthaya or Bangkok, the ceremony, both for the visiting diplomats and local nobles is perceived as less deferential. However, a straightforward structural kind of analysis of the more focused ceremonial parts of the missions, reveals common elements, and variations which permit an understanding of, on the one hand, the different degrees of wealth, strength and vassal status of the Tai states or *muang* in question; and on the other hand, of diplomatic tactics.

Richardson's first visit to Lamphun may serve as an example. It has most of the 'basic' elements which can be summarised as follows:

- a meeting outside town by a senior royal official;
- a request for an audience together with first mention of an official letter and gifts;
- arrangement for the audience (in this case the very next day) and details of protocol, including refusal of his request to wear a sword;
- the audience itself and its key elements: seating, dress code (especially shoes), gestures of respect (from both sides towards ruler), presentation of letter and gifts, formal exchange of questions and answers etc.;
- entertainment afterwards (feasting, music);
- socialising on the days following (attending religious ceremonies, for example New Year ceremonies, rocket festivals, funerals, ordinations of Buddhist monks, and also authorised visits of inspection of the town and its fortifications);
- semi-formal meetings with other senior officials to discuss business;
- other informal meetings with officials but also monks, women, exiles, traders etc.;
- throughout the visit: a succession of small gifts of provisions etc. to the visitors;
- an audience of departure;
- presentation of return gifts.

A distinctive ceremonial element in the northern scenario is the ritual of soul-calling and wrist-tying (*pouk[khwan]*) 'beyond which' he is told 'there is no possible mark of friendship'. Much used throughout the Tai world in popular practice, this is still used, and indeed has been re-emphasised in formal government receptions in Laos.

Although Richardson sits on a lower level, and on carpets and not chairs in royal audiences (though on a chair with the Phra Khlung in Bangkok), he always notes that he is permitted to keep his boots on, even in Bangkok. The Burmese commissioners do however try to get him to remove his shoes; Richardson says he would do this only in the company of princes, but the Tai do not insist. Richardson usually bows from a standing position, and remarks that the chiefs 'assume a much more manly position than in the presence of some of the lowest chiefs of Bangkok'.

Even on his visit to the Karen Chief, Pha-Bho, Richardson notes, albeit with heavy irony, a few details of ceremony. Having described the chief's house as little different from the other 70 or so houses 'in the worst Burman style', he refers to 'his Majesty's mansion' and 'the royal presence'; the room is a very dark interior with a fire burning in the middle of the floor, and 'the roof splendidly varnished with soot', but there was a carpet. Richardson gives gifts [unspecified on this occasion but usually in such cases a gun and some cloth] 'The only indications of his chieftainship were a gold and silver sword and silver betel box, both of which he carried himself, and his only attendant was the old Shan . . .', a 'factotum', as Richardson calls him, who wrote the chief's letters in Burmese. However this chief was the man who Richardson says had the power to extract 'the blackmail' (a nice historical Scottish term for the political economy of frontiers and cattle trade!) from both local Burmese and Shan, and who, when Richardson firmly refuses his request that the British ally with him in fighting the Burmese, nonetheless 'promised his protection to traders from *Maulamyne* and to people (Chinese included) from the northward'.

There are other instances of the contradictoriness of Richardson's representation of the Karen chief. Of the people in the soon

crowded room, he writes: ‘their whole demeanour was civil and respectful,—very different from what the *Zimmay* chiefs wished me to believe’. But having heard and seen some effects of slave raiding by Karen—if cultural relativism will allow me to call it that—including an interview with a pregnant woman whose husband had been ‘cut to pieces in her arms’, and who had been separated from her two daughters and all fellow villagers, and other ‘diabolical scenes’ as he calls them, Richardson does not mince his words and refers to the Karen in general in terms of ‘the terror with which these detestable savages have inspired their neighbours, though I am convinced they are equally despicable and detestable’.

Richardson nonetheless maintains a diplomatic propriety, telling the chief that ‘I had come as he had requested, and as the Commissioner of *Maulmayne* [sic] had promised last year, from whom I had brought a letter and presents, and wished to open the gold and silver road between us, and be friends with the Kayen nation, etc. etc.’ And he is convinced that Pha-Bho himself ‘discourages men-catching’, and that he has secured ‘the good-will towards us of the Red Kayens’. And although there is a fair amount of disparaging language—much of it is only of the order of ‘shabby’ and ‘vile smell of the house’, which together with the noise he says gave him a headache—his invective is reserved for the practice of ‘kidnapping and selling their neighbours’. It is only this practice that he refers to when he says:

. . . it is possible that the intercourse with these people now commenced may lead eventually towards their civilization, and that our influence with them may hereafter be successfully exerted in putting an end to their system of kidnapping and selling their neighbours. . . .

This is a quite rare instance of moralizing. And it is noticeable that those Farang writers who have spent longest in the company of Tai (I would include also James Low and Bishop Pallegoix) are the least prone to use hierarchical notions of degrees of ‘civilization’ and so on.

When Richardson arrives at the Karen village in the evening, he pitches his tent 200 yards from the village. Early in the morning he sends to the

Chief to ask when he may see him. ‘After breakfast’ is the reply. In Bangkok in 1839, in some contrast, Richardson is invited to the royal audience ten days after his arrival. King Rama III had received Burney 15 years earlier and had been present at Crawford’s mission. The King had no doubt had Richardson’s visits to the north reported to him. Richardson is carried in a ‘hammock’ by eight of his own servants. He no doubt had read of Crawford’s physical and diplomatic discomfort at being carried rolled in a soft hammock by only two porters provided by the Thai side. When the Siamese and ‘native Christians’ ‘fell on their knees and made as many prostrations as they could’ Richardson sat on the carpet at the designated spot and, in his words, made ‘two or three salaams to his Majesty’, which, though in Anglo-Indian usage could mean any greeting, I translate or interpret as a gesture with the hands and head, rather than merely a bow from the waist. During the royal conversation Richardson remarks ‘From the knowledge I have of the Laos language, and its affinities to the Siamese, I could make out that my answers to the king’s questions were modified to meet the royal ear’. He comments that,

On the whole, my reception (as I was frequently told it would be) was one of more state and ceremony, and of longer and more friendly nature as regards the time of its continuance, (lasting one hour and 20 minutes) and number of questions put, than has been granted to any mission for many years, which I presume may be attributed to . . .’ [I paraphrase] British power in Burma . . . and ‘a more just appreciation of our relative rank in the scale of nations’, and [again I paraphrase] . . . the efforts of Mr Hunter (the Scottish and sole European resident trader in Bangkok 1824–1844).

McLeod finds Lamphun in 1837 in a weakened state following the death of the *cao chiwit*, with the palace recently ‘pulled down’, and hardly prepared for a formal visit. He goes on to Chiangmai where the officials are better dressed than at Lamphun though ‘some are without jackets’ and the ‘Tsobua’ is preceded ‘by a few men shabbily dressed, armed with swords and spears’. The Tsobua himself wore a white jacket and ‘ordinary cloth of the country’,

carrying himself an ordinary sword without a scabbard, said to be a Lawa custom. In Chengtung by contrast, for all that the palace is described as a 'shabby pile of wood', it is 'richly gilt' inside, has a throne with a door at the back as at Ava, and there are men holding swords with golden scabbards. McLeod says he is 'struck with the grandeur of everything compared with what I had seen at Zimme'. The officers, all Shan, were dressed in the Burmese fashion, the rest with Shan jackets and blue trousers. On his second, less formal visit to the Tsohua (the Cao Chengtung Mahakhanan), McLeod spends nearly four hours sitting on a mat. He comments

The position in which I was seated not being the most comfortable, which his son observing [the Tsohua was blind], whispered to his father; when pillows were ordered to be brought in for me. None of the officers are permitted to use these in the Tsohua's presence.'

He was also given refreshment in a gold cup and on silver trays.

In Chengtung there is another contrast. The palace buildings and decorations are said to be Chinese, as is the costume of the court officers. Chinese is the language of the court, with one in ten of the officers able to write in Shan, we are told, and one in a hundred in Burmese. There are tables and chairs in the throne hall, and at the formal dinner with the regent, widow of the late ruler, there are three high tables with chairs and other lower tables with mats. McLeod has brought with him his own spoon and fork and wine glass, which it seems he is obliged to give as a present to the Regent at her request. The recent death of the Ruler is given, apologetically, as the reason for lack of a ceremonious reception suitable for 'a stranger of rank'.

### **Cordiality and friendship**

I want to bring into focus frequent references in the embassy literature to personal friendship, pleasure, delicacy, kindness, and appreciation. They occur alongside expressions of negative prejudice, and politically motivated protest. I am in sympathy with Theerawat Bhumichitr, a relatively new member of a long tradition of

Thai scholar-diplomats. He argues the importance of the study of emotion and interpersonal factors in international politics (Theerawat 1993).

There are limiting cases of envoys being arrested, even killed (certainly Burmese and Vietnamese). We are also alert to the ambiguities of hospitality. But the positive side tends to prevail, that sense of 'cherishing men from afar', as the Chinese annals put it. The summit of proceedings is the moment when the King briefly addresses the envoys. This is remarkably like the Chinese practice of the Emperor offering 'soothing words' (cf. Hevia 1995: 176), referred to in Thai for example as *song phraraja phaisanthan sam khrang* ['the three gracious royal questions']: how is your King; is there peace in your country; how long have you travelled? These are uncontentious words of welcome, formally friendly. Whether we are in Bangkok or the Shan States we hear these questions repeatedly.

The experience of progressively, or perhaps intermittently, more relaxed, 'cordial', conversations and expressions of care and generosity during the course of a mission can be interpreted in much the same way as the process of 'centring and channelling' which is a feature of diplomatic strategy within Chinese guest ritual. It could be reduced and turned off, as well as turned on and up<sup>13</sup>. Cushions and chairs could be provided or not; boat crews could be dismissed, elephants take longer to assemble, privileges and concessions modified. And there was the final assessment of the return gifts, when all other business had been concluded.

In addition to this highly managed aspect of personal treatment, there are many instances of something more personal. McLeod's experience can stand as an example. On the sixth day of his visit to Chiangmai in 1837, the day after his royal audience, he meets the third most senior prince who is commander-in-chief. The meeting starts formally. 'He received me with proper Siamese (sic) indifference'. McLeod thinks he is suspicious of English motives. But 'he soon made himself pleasant' and 'before we parted he threw off all reserve, put on my cap, and introduced his wives and children, of both of whom he has a vast number'; and McLeod records

that he was offered *miang* [fermented tea leaves] and coconut juice (McLeod 1869: 29).

In addition to visits of ceremony and business there are visits of a more personal kind, motivated by personal curiosity, when conversation turns to trivial matters, including for instance inspection and admiration of Richardson's equipment, his magnificent double-walled tent and 'brass-bound bullock trunks', his scientific instruments (including sextant, thermometer, watch, and compass) and, he lets slip, his greyhounds, English racing dogs, which must have travelled many hundreds of miles with him. Prominent among these visitors are monks, and on other occasions groups of women, who in Bangkok, but more especially in the north are not backward in introducing themselves. Conversations with women feature with some regularity in the journals of these two men, who give a strong impression of reporting the women's speech quite directly.

McLeod is generally sensitive to the intimate dimension. Gift giving as ever provides a good medium. He grows fond of the Cao Chengtung (Mahakhanan) to whom, when he discovers he is blind, he gives a musical box<sup>14</sup>. When in Chengrung he is given—in true imperial style—a Chinese, or should I say Tai, official's robe and an inscribed gold plate to hang round his neck. They ask him to put these on, 'which [he says] I did, much to their satisfaction'. One of the princes asks him to bring as a present, when he next comes, together with reading spectacles and a compass, 'some flower and garden seeds', 'he being fond of gardening' (McLeod 1869: 55–83).

Music plays a consistent part in these narratives<sup>15</sup>. Musical performance is always offered by the Thai side; sometimes by the Farang side. Most Farang seem to appreciate what they hear. Richardson—whose 'seduction' was rather complete, as we are seeing—heard a male and two female singers in Lamphun on his second visit and comments that 'the voices of the performers, both in sweetness and in compass were, beyond comparison, superior to anything I have heard out of Europe' (Richardson 1836: 690).<sup>16</sup>

In time-honoured diplomatic fashion McLeod loads his elephants not only with hunting guns and musical boxes, but also with cases of whisky, cherry brandy, and port wine.

He says these helped communication in a region where the *cao* were fond of spirits. He sums up his experience in Chengrung 'the aim of the [Burmese] is to treat strangers . . . with marked indifference and slight; whereas with my new friends the reverse is the case, their politeness being extreme' (McLeod 1869: 82).

Richardson was instructed to 'endeavour to render [himself] agreeable to the people and their chiefs through whose country [he would] pass'. Friendship and general goodwill were criteria by which he judged the success of his work. He writes:

In my mission so far, I have perfectly succeeded, as far as the *feelings of the chiefs* here are concerned, and my intercourse with *all classes of the people* since the first few days has been all I could wish . . . (Richardson, 1869: 130, emphasis added).

Two years earlier he wrote:

'The kind feeling our north-eastern Shan neighbours towards us, have [sic] been increased by my late visit. The mixture of firmness and conciliation I had it in my power to exhibit towards them on the points discussed, has tended to convince them that we are firm and consistent friends, not desirous of aggrandizing ourselves at their expense, but at the same time not to be imposed on or trifled with.' (Richardson 1836: 706–7).

Of course *maitri* ['friendship'], *maitricit* ['friendliness'] or *phrarachamaitri* ['royal friendship' or 'friendly relations' (as between states)] may not be quite the same thing as 'friendship'. There remains an element of European realism in Richardson's search for friendship, which he reports after his visit to Bangkok in 1839:

In conclusion I am sorry to say that I slightly *suspect* the cordiality of this people towards us: their professions are as warm as could be wished for but there is hollowness . . .' (Burney 1910–15: Vol. 4 (1) 24, original italics).

Interestingly this was part of some covering letter, which was not included in the version of

his journal edited for the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1839–40. But note, however, the tentativeness and reluctance to confirm this ‘suspicion’.

### Envoi

This paper is a report of work in progress, of how I am beginning to read this rich material. My main purpose is to begin to establish a field I am calling the ethnography of embassy or of diplomatic mission, by treating these sources critically as ethnography of various sorts: ethnography of exceptional cultural and more specifically diplomatic episodes; and by examining their own methodology and assumptions. Inevitably, in order to refer to the wider project, I have had to repeat myself at several points, quoting myself in the process—without precise references which would have held up the narrative (see Turton 1997).

I have attempted to recover as much as possible the ‘lively voice’ and the ‘ocular witness’ to use phrases of sixteenth century travel writers. And I have tried to avoid what S. S. Smith, Presbyterian Minister and Professor at Harvard in the late eighteenth century, refers to in his *An essay into the causes of the variety of complexion and figure in the human species*, namely the assumption that: ‘ordinary travellers could not be trusted with scientific information . . . Countries are described from a single spot, manners from a single action, and men from the first man that is seen on a foreign shore.’ (Smith 1788, cited in Marshall and Williams 1982: 138 note).

I have very much in mind George Stocking’s recommendations in the volume of his monumental series ‘History of Anthropology’ entitled *Colonial situations: essays on the contextualization of ethnographic knowledge* (Stocking 1991) in which he emphasises the need to anthropologize the growth of western imperial power [and indeed we have also just touched on Siamese colonialism]. Stocking also advocates a methodology to explore the *plurality* of colonial situations and locales, the interaction of different individuals and groups within them, and the ways these conditioned ethnographic knowledge and subsequent anthropology, and forming what Talal Asad in the Afterword to

this volume calls the ‘pre-existing discourses and practices met by anthropologists . . .’, in practice a virtually infinite regressions of texts and discourses.<sup>17</sup>

I attempt to question assumptions—whether those of primary authors or commentators—of a single powerful voice and perspective, of one-sided accounts, and unidirectional and non-contradictory developments. In this, I suppose I am operating in a kind of post-colonial, and you might think revisionist spirit, trying not to generalise or make anachronistic assumptions about imperial teleology, not to elide different colonialisms or different episodes even within one colonial sequence; wherever possible restoring or attributing agency, relative autonomy, to all parties; and trying to establish the particularity of a specific pre-imperial encounter. In doing so I hope to contribute to another look at Anglo-Thai and Thai-Farang relations in the early modern era; and the development of a significantly shared discourse about the Tai world, which was to have an effective influence for a century or more.

### Appendix

#### Excerpts from the journals of Richardson and McLeod

The following are examples of relatively short journal entries made while on the march. Spelling and all other details have been retained.

26th January [1837] (Thursday), Ka-tchaung-Lan, 3° 35' N.W., 12 miles.—Waited till nine o'clock at the last village to give the man another chance of crossing his elephant, when we started, finding it could not be accomplished; the first of the coolies came up at 12.35, but the elephants, owing to the sharp pointed rocks on the road, which distressed their feet, and the necessity of cutting a way for the howdahs through the branches and creepers for the first mile and a half, did not come in till 5.15. We met on the march to-day an old man and his family, taken at Mobie, being driven to the ferry for sale; their captor, an old Karean thooghee of about 50 years of age, was riding behind them, spear in hand. I asked if thoughts of his own children did not make him feel some compassion for these poor people; he coolly answered “Khan” (fortune),

and pushed on his prisoners. (Richardson 1869: 108)

4th February. [1837] From the Nam Takau to Ban Mé Phit. Direction, N. Estimated Distance, 14 miles. Time, 4h. 22m.

The route to-day may be said to have been along the valley of the Mé Láu, but the ground being too low and swampy to be traversed at present, we kept along the bases of some low hills to the eastward, though occasionally obliged to cross the low muddy plains. The road, however, was generally good, and shaded by fine trees, teak and saul.

We passed through the large village of Teng Dam, containing about 70 houses entirely inhabited by Lawas, and in every respect like the village mentioned yesterday; around it there are fields, and numbers of heads of cattle grazing. We continued to pass through a country similar to the first part of the march, and arrive at the village of Nónquan, a scattered place, and said to contain about 50 houses, situated on a large plain, with the ruins of an old fort near it.

The valley here increases in breadth to about eight miles, with high hills surrounding it. A pass is seen through them in the direction we take.

To the village of Móng Món, containing about 15 houses, we passed over an extensive plain, so much cut up by elephants and cattle that our progress over it was necessarily slow; and to the village of Mé Phit, which contains about 25 houses, we passed entirely over fields skirted by the Mé Láu to the westward. For the convenience of water, we left the high road, passed through the village, and crossed over to the left bank of the Mé Láu, where we halted.

Near the village of Teng Dam quantities of the plant called by the Burmese Bom ma thaing, or wild sage, from which they obtain camphor, was growing in the old clearings, but I cannot ascertain whether the Lawas make any use of it.

Here arose some difficulty about elephants and provisions. They wished me to halt a day; we had come slowly enough, and I would not agree to it.

This village, as well as Nónquan, is inhabited by people belonging to Zimmé, Labong, and Lagong, all eager to be in advance to participate in the profits arising from hunting elephants, the sale of the flesh of wild

animals (with which the woods abound), and the clandestine trade with Kiang Túng, with which place there is constant communication. (McLeod 1869: 46)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Captain of the *Diana* was Frederick Marryat, soon to be a patron of the Oriental Translation Committee of the Royal Asiatic Society (London) and better known to English people of my generation, brought up to celebrate Empire Day, for his numerous adventure stories for young people with an imperial flavour.

<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding a certain cautiousness of etiquette displayed by the Siamese ambassadors, who, it is reported, brought their own food and cooks to the dinner party.

<sup>3</sup> The event which preceded McLeod's eventual appointment is highlighted on the opening page of Anderson's *English intercourse with Siam in the seventeenth century* (Anderson 1890) which is a particularly imperialistic and jingoistic late nineteenth century account: 'The national aspiration of 1687 was gratified in 1824 as Mergui, on being summoned on 6th October, to surrender unconditionally, fell in an hour's time before the gallant assault of the British troops, supported by the guns of the cruisers of the Honourable East India Company.'

<sup>4</sup> There was even a story in the village of an argument about whether to cut branches off the sacred Bo tree outside the temple to facilitate the passage of the elephants of a *rachathut* (ambassador or royal emissary)—though this may have been a later one—and how this led to a curse being placed on the headman by the powerful senior monk, to which the subsequent death of the headman was attributed. The village is referred to by McLeod as Nónquan. See Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> I think of the embassy or mission as a single discursive entity, extending from the inception of the mission in London, Calcutta, or Moulmein, to post-mission commentaries and publication. The whole time spent in Tai territory is like a single ceremony, containing within it other highly focused rituals of royal audience.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the rhetorical figures appear to me to characterise the British writing about Tai societies of this time in a way that certain other figures characterise other accounts of other places at other times, for example exaggerated themes of human sacrifice, cruel

punishments, cannibalism, extreme forms of sexual practice and so on. Such themes are not entirely absent from late twentieth century eurocentric attitudes and reports on the East Asian region. There is some interesting recent secondary literature on suchlike in India and Indonesia (including Crawford's writing on the latter), but no reference from this to the Tai world, until my recent article. This is to some extent explainable in terms of the relative lateness of European 'interest' in this region and the mainly 'non-colonial' form this took.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the fact that no other Europeans are mentioned, when their watches stop—an occurrence mentioned more than once—there is no-one else who has a watch apparently. While the non-European members of the caravans might have carried a watch or clock (though most probably did not in this period), it is hard to imagine a European officer at this time without one.

<sup>8</sup> Readings inform me that a well disciplined army unit might march 30 miles per day (48 km) over a week or so. This was achieved by King Harald's houscarls (élite bodyguard) marching south to meet the Norman invaders in England in 1066. The armies of Alexander the Great apparently could cover 30 km (18 miles) in a day.

<sup>9</sup> Please see Turton (1997) which outlines this project in greater detail. I have inevitably been obliged to refer to and quote from this publication at several points in the present article.

<sup>10</sup> As Georges Condominas (1965) puts it in the title of his superb autobiographical Vietnamese ethnography *L'exotique est quotidien*.

<sup>11</sup> Of course even these apparently unproblematic descriptive parts of the accounts need to be subjected in turn to critical scrutiny for presuppositions, assumptions, prejudice, and so on.

<sup>12</sup> I invite the reader to attempt to translate this back into a vernacular Kham Muang of today. I have certainly heard myself statements of the following kind (with apologies for any inaccuracies and variation in northern pronunciation! *acan hyyi, nyaang [Karen] nia bo mii sin bo mii tham, bo mii wat mii wa, bo huu buun bo huu baap, thoeng bo huu phasaa sasana anyang sak nyang hia thoe'*).

<sup>13</sup> Some of the things that Farang found unacceptable in Bangkok—such as the *phrarachathan hai bia liang* ['the royal gift of subsistence allowance'], for what some called dismissively 'bazaar expenses' and inadequate at that—were identical to Chinese practice. As were other customs, such as providing tea, sugar,

and fresh fruit—and for the Americans even milk—which were appreciated.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is the earliest *hiep siang* in the north! This is the old Kham Muang word for gramophone or record player, literally 'sound box'.

<sup>15</sup> I am tempted to recall that Macartney took five German musicians with him on his first mission to Beijing in 1793, as part of a nearly 100 strong mission.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it was *so pheun muang*, a still popular form of folk opera in northern Thailand. Thai music has many admixtures from other places, and the envoys duly heard the music of various exile groups. Among these the Lao music heard at Bangkok, especially the *khaen* [bamboo 'reed organ', sometimes said to have inspired the European mouth organ] seems to have been the favourite. Western music naturally became a part of this hybrid musical milieu, and by 1840 Mozart could be heard on a mechanical player at royal audiences in Bangkok, just as the Thai ambassadors heard Mozart played live at Windsor Castle a few years later.

<sup>17</sup> Historians have been somewhat too ready to obscure by generalising, for example concluding that Crawford was 'hostile' and 'intolerant' etc. towards 'the Thai'. This is not entirely inaccurate, and seems to correspond with Thai perceptions. But another reading, patient to judge the overall success or achievement of the mission as a whole—or at least in a more comprehensive perspective—would take greater note of the sometimes subtle and perceptive distinctions made by Crawford and others in his team (e.g. Finlayson, 1826) between the King and his ministers, between various ministers, between Siamese and Chinese, Mon etc., between nobles and ordinary people, between monks and others and so on.

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