

# ASPECTS OF SIAMESE-FRENCH RELATIONS DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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First of, all I would like to express my delight at being invited to address the members of the Siam Society, even if English is only my third language. Preparing my *Louis XIV et le Siam*, I came across many articles and publications bearing the mark of your distinguished Society. They were most helpful in my research on specific aspects of Siamese-European relations during the 17th Century. The cultural and scientific interests of Thailand have been well served abroad by your Society's publishing efforts.

Before discussing some aspects of the relations between the kingdoms of Siam and France during the reigns of Somdet Phra Narai and Louis XIV, who share the epithet "the Great," I would like to summarize a few general ideas that support my book.

To my mind, it is impossible to write the story of Siamese-French relations during the 17th Century as an independent episode in diplomatic history. One cannot understand why the two kings sought each other's alliance, if one does not know the fate of the European nations that discovered and visited Siam before the French: the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. The first four chapters of my book recount the history of the pre-French presence in Siam of the aforesaid European nations, from the arrival at the Court of Phra Intharatcha II, in 1511, of an emissary of the Portuguese viceroy, until the blockade of the Chao Phraya by the Dutch in 1663.

I would like in this respect to draw your attention to the unknown autobiography of the Flemish adventurer Jacques de Coutre. Not unlike Fernão Mendes Pinto, de Coutre crisscrossed Asia for thirty years, amassed and lost as many fortunes, and was captured, sold and freed as many times as his famous Portuguese counterpart. He spent eight months in Siam in 1595 during the reign of Phra Naresuan. The recollections of this keen-eyed witness are impressive and

unique, since the Dutch descriptions of the kingdom of Siam only started in the 1620s. The precision of his observations is striking. The ceremonies at the Royal Palace, the temples and the huge Buddha images that they house, the exotic market places, the crocodiles in the klongs, the unbearable cruelty of the executions, the *kathin nam* and *kathin phak* processions, the elephant hunting parties, the tiger battles, the incredible luxury surrounding the royal elephants (who slept on silk cushions and defecated in solid gold vessels), the stately funeral and cremation of the elephant on which Phra Naresuan had won the battle of Nong Sarai, everything is reported, pictured and measured with an eye for characteristic detail.

The Flemish adventurer spent his old age in Spain, where he dictated his Spanish Memoirs. Printed in Madrid in 1640, de Coutre's *Vida* seems to have been forgotten almost at once, overshadowed by Mendes Pinto's bestselling *Peregrinação*. The only known copy of the *Vida* was discovered in a Madrid library and published in Antwerp in a Flemish translation in 1988. The Siamese episode of de Coutre's *Vida* is attracting the attention of Thai historians. My colleague and friend Prof. Dhiravat na Pombejra,\* who reads Flemish, told me that de Coutre's description of an elephantine funeral is a striking and unique document.

My decision to pave the way to the French arrival in Siam in the 1660s by an account of the pre-French involvement in that kingdom of other European nations will seem obvious enough to the readers of the *Journal of the Siam Society*, who are familiar with many sources written in Portuguese, Dutch and English by travellers, traders and missionaries in the late 16th and early 17th Century. It does not seem that obvious to many French readers, who see the history of their country as a glorious and almost independent epic, unaware of the fact that France lagged behind the other seagoing nations in its quest for new colonial markets.

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Lecture given at The Siam Society, with the President, Dr. Piriya Krairiksh, in the Chair.

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The fact that the last book on Siamese-French relations during the 17th Century, written by a French historian, was published in 1883, seems almost unbelievable, especially when one bears in mind the words of Sir John Bowring: "There are few episodes in French history more remarkable than the events connected with the intercourse between the Court of Versailles and that of Siam in the reign of Louis XIV."

How to explain that phenomenon of collective amnesia? I suppose that the unhappy outcome of the story, at least from a French viewpoint, is the main reason why French historians have looked the other way. Ernest Lavisse wrote ninety years ago in his impressive biography of Louis XIV: "In France, we do not like matters that do not succeed at once." François Bluche, who five years ago published a brilliant and widely acclaimed 1,000-page biography of Louis XIV, does not even mention the word "Siam." Louis XIV's failure to force a French protectorate upon the kingdom of Siam was considered incompatible with the Sun King's grandeur.

It must be stressed, however, that the tide of French opinion has been turning the last few years. There has been, for starters, the exhibition "Phra Narai, roi de Siam, et Louis XIV," organized in Paris by the Musée Guimet in 1986, to celebrate the third centenary of the stay in France of an important Siamese diplomatic mission. A catalogue written by Thai and French scholars opened many new perspectives. A profusely introduced and annotated edition of Simon de La Loubère's *Du royaume de Siam* was published in Paris in 1987 by Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h. The Siamese episode of Forbin's Memoirs was reprinted last year as a small volume under the title *Le voyage du comte de Forbin à Siam*. And Maurice Collis's *Siamese White* finally got translated into French, fifty-five years after the first English edition. It was published in Paris last September as *Au service du roi de Siam*.

Reviews in the French press greeted the simultaneous publication of my own book and the Collis translation as "a happy coincidence." One critic reads my narrative and analysis of Siamese-French relations during the 17th Century as "an incredible comedy of manners," and another sees it as "a love story between France and Siam." Clearly, some efforts still need to be made before the reality of Siamese-French relations will be understood and seen as a very complex intercultural experience.

Whether one likes it or not, the story of the commercial, religious and diplomatic contacts between Louis XIV and Phra Narai is the story of a failure. Claude-Michel Cluny, who signed a very sympathetic review of my book in *L'Express*, writes nicely: "Resembling two golden scarabs touching each other with their feelers, the kings of France and Siam blindly extend their scepters to one another." The image implies good will and curiosity as well as a lack of mutual understanding.

It is of course impossible to summarize a book of nearly 600 pages in less than an hour, but let's try to get a general idea of it. After the first section on the pre-French period in the contacts between Europe and Siam, three chapters analyse other non-French components of the story. A long chapter is devoted to Somdet Phra Narai, his father Prasat Thong,

his seizure of power, the golden age of Thai poetry during his reign, his wars, Crown trade as a main source of revenue, and finally the king's fondness for Lopburi and his building efforts in that ancient city.

Another chapter seeks to give a truthful portrait of Phra Narai's Greek favourite, Constantine Phaulkon, in spite of the conflicting evidence given by the French Jesuits (who extolled him to the skies) and the British East India Company officials (who loathed him). The Jesuit archives in Rome and the archives of the "Missions étrangères de Paris" provide revealing documents on Phaulkon which shed light upon this highly intelligent, ambitious and reckless character.

A last non-French chapter introduces an important text hitherto unknown in France: *The Ship of Sulaimān*, being the account of a Persian embassy sent in 1685 to the Court of King Narai by Shāh Sulaimān, who hoped "to guide him into the fold of Islam." Knowledge of this exotic and poetic travel story, written by Muhammad Ibrahim and translated into English by John O'Kane, is essential for a better understanding of the French endeavour to lure Phra Narai into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. The French ambassadors, who were made to believe that King Narai was considering a change of religion, were aware of the Persian mission and very worried about its outcome, as appears in the travel diaries of Father Bouvet and the Abbé de Choisy.

The thirteen chapters devoted to the French involvement in Siam open with a first section of five chapters under the general heading "The Time of Missionaries and Traders." They encompass the period 1660-1680, starting with the foundation of the Royal East-India Company (Compagnie royale des Indes Orientales) by Louis XIV and Colbert in 1664. The ill-fated decision to colonize on the way the huge island of Madagascar absorbed precious human and financial resources needed to set up a network of French trading posts in India and Southeast Asia.

The documents relating to the Royal Company reveal an overbearing behaviour, a lack of serious preparation, and an unwillingness to understand the reality of Asia and the touchiness of its rulers. When one knows furthermore that the Dutch, on whom Louis XIV had declared war in the meantime, went to great lengths to put a spoke in the French wheel, it is easy to understand why the Royal East-India Company never was a success story. But a French trading post was set up in Ayudhya, specializing in the spice trade.

The next chapters tell the story of the arrival in Mergui and Ayudhya of the first French bishops and priests who had left France in 1660. It would take too much time to explain the reasons why the Pope approved a new missionary order, designed to christianize Southeast Asia and China, the "Société des Mission étrangères de Paris." The general idea was to bypass the old privileges of the Portuguese and Spanish missions that depended entirely on the kings of Portugal and Spain, and to launch a new missionary instrument at the Pope's beck and call.

As a consequence, two rival Catholic missionary circuits shared the Asian scene from the 1660s on. They engaged in a fierce struggle where all kinds of dirty tricks were

allowed. It will surprise nobody that the Siamese were sick and tired of the neverending quarrels, and that very few among them felt the urge to join a Church that preached peace and brotherly love, but whose representatives were at each other's throats.

For the same reason, the first bishops and clerics of the Missions étrangères who left for Southeast Asia in November 1660 carefully avoided the shipping lanes controlled by the Dutch and the Portuguese, and chose the problematic land route across Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. They sailed on a British trader from Bandar Abbas in Persia to Surat on the northwest coast of Mogul India. They crossed the sub-continent walking behind an ox-cart, and arrived at Masulipatam on the Coromandel Coast where a shaky Moorish vessel en route to Mergui was boarded. The march through the isthmus to Phetchaburi, and from there to Ayudhya, was particularly exhausting and dangerous, but they arrived somehow in one piece in the capital in August 1662 after a testing journey of twenty-two months.

We are well informed about the first voyage to Siam of the clerics of the Missions étrangères thanks to the travel report written by one of them, Jacques de Bourges, the *Account of a Journey through Turkey, Persia and India, as far as the Kingdom of Siam*. This very important French book, published in Paris in 1666, deserves much more attention than it has attracted hitherto, and this for several reasons. It is, to start with, the first account of a French journey to Siam, made attractive by many picturesque details and practical advice to would-be travellers. It contains furthermore a 50-page description of the kingdom of Siam. One wonders if Jacques de Bourges was aware of the fact that he had started a new literary genre, to be made famous by the descriptions of Siam by people like Nicolas Gervaise and Simon de La Loubère.

But there is a third and to my mind still more important reason why de Bourges's book should be closely studied. The man was a pious priest ready to risk his life to convert the Siamese "heathens" and very aware of this mission. His book allows us to penetrate his mind and that of his companions, Bishop Pierre Lambert and fellow priest François Deydier. What can have possessed these three French clerics to undertake a hazardous and endless journey without maps or travel routes, studded with hair-raising dangers of all kinds? What did they know about the kingdom of Siam where they were heading. Since they were about to persuade the Siamese to drop their immemorial religious culture, how much did they know about Buddhism? And, still more important, how did they intend to convince the Siamese? Behind these problems of missionary motives and strategy lurks the fundamental question of religious tolerance. Where they prepared to go a part of the road stretching between them and their prospective converts?

I believe this to be an essential problem, since it makes us understand the failure of their undertaking. De Bourges's reader notices from the start the man's reluctance to recognize in other religions even the slightest portion of truth. Crossing Islamic and Hinduistic countries before reaching Siam, he mentions with obvious distaste the "devilish faith,"

the "preposterous superstitions" and the "absurd convictions" of the populations seen along the road. A visit to a Hindu temple in Surat inspires the following lament: "It is a horrible thing when one walks into their temples, to see the monstrous images of their idols and to observe these people worshipping so hideous a figure." It appears from the context that he refers to the popular Elephant-God Ganesa.

The moment Bishop Lambert and his priests set foot ashore in Tenasserim, they pay a visit to a "talapoin" or Buddhist monk. "The whole region of Tenasserim professes paganism and idolatry, and lives in a total ignorance of God and eternal salvation. We went to see one of their priests—they call them talapoins—with whom we had a discussion about the articles of his faith, by means of an interpreter. We found the poor man full of darkness, contradictions and absurdities. [...] However, he made it clear to us that he valued Christian people and thought well of their religion, without rejecting his own, and that the higher esteem the sanctity of Christian religion is held in, is the only reason why they tolerate those who profess it. And in fact, religious freedom could not be greater." For the first time, an unbridgeable contrast between Catholic dogmatism and Buddhist tolerance reveals itself.

Forty pages further on, de Bourges tells us more about what he calls "the conference of Tenasserim." "Bishop Lambert called on one of their leading priests, with the assistance of a Portuguese interpreter. After greetings in the fashion of the country, not wanting to shock the old man, he questioned him as if he wished to study [Buddhist] Law. The man opened his exposition by saying that one had to start from the principle that there were seven gods, that their abode was in Heaven, that it was a delicious place full of pleasure which we must try to get to after death. Bishop Lambert, for his part, expounded the articles of his faith without trying to refute his extravagances. He seemed to listen with satisfaction, and admitted in the end that he thought very well of the Christian religion, and that the God of Christians and his own were brothers, but that his was elder and more powerful. [...] Behold the nonsense put forward by that scholar, which demonstrates how remote these people are from the knowledge of the true God."

There was not the least attempt on the part of the French clerics to gain more in-depth knowledge of the religious culture they came to overthrow. Since it was "devilish," "extravagant" and "preposterous," why should they waste time on it? Not a single one of the many French texts devoted to Siam in the 17th Century has even tried to understand Theravāda Buddhism. That Philistine attitude shocked the Siamese, to whom each religion is a valuable way of exploring the relation between God and men. De Bourges himself quotes this magnificent comparison: "So they say that Heaven resembles a huge palace which many roads lead to. Some are shorter, some are more tread on, some are more difficult, but all end up at the Palace of Happiness which all men try to reach." Is there a more beautiful way to suggest that each religion contains a portion of the eternal truth of God?

More fundamentally, the impossibility of reaching a

common language in religious matters is due to a different conception of truth. To the French, trained in Greek and Cartesian logic, truth is unique. Two persons cannot have different opinions on a given subject and both be right. To the Siamese, truth has many faces and no honest opinion should be rejected. To the Western mind, different approaches are conflicting. To the Eastern mind, they are complementary. The deadlock is complete.

Jacques de Bourges's book on his overland journey to the distant kingdom of Siam deserves our full attention. To the historian of mentalities tackling a clash of cultures, its value is enormous.

It appears that intolerance was the main reason for the French failure to gain a firm foothold in Siam, but they were by no means the only ones to snob the Siamese. The already mentioned Persian envoys to the Court of Phra Narai despised their guests openly. The author of *The Ship of Sulaimān* writes for instance after a royal banquet: "The food of the Siamese in no way resembles normal, proper foods, and the natives are not familiar with intelligent methods of preparing meals. In fact no one in Siam really knows how to cook and eat, or even how to sit correctly at table. The Siamese have only recently arrived from the world of bestiality to the realm of humanity."

It will take an even-handed and moderate man such as La Loubère to sing another tune. He had not, of course, read the Philistine outpourings of his Persian colleague, but he states nonetheless in his chapter "Concerning the Table of the Siameses" (I quote from the 1693 translation): "I cannot forbear making a remark very necessary, truly to understand the Relations of Foreign Countries. It is that the words *good, excellent, magnificent, great, bad, ugly, simple* and *small*, equivocal in themselves, must always be understood with reference to the fantasy of the Author of the Relation [...]. It would not be just to condemn everything that resembles not what we do now see in the Court of France..." Perhaps, if there had been more La Loubères among the French, the outcome of their adventure in Siam might have been different.

But let us go back to the first team of French clerics who set foot in Ayudhya in 1662. My chapters 9 and 10 relate the arrival of more French priests, their quarrels with the Portuguese Jesuits and Dominicans established in Ayudhya, their vain attempts to heal the paralysis of Chaofa Aphaitot, the king's half-brother, the consecration of Louis Laneau as first Bishop of Ayudhya, etc. They maintained excellent contacts with the Royal Court. The king was presented with sumptuously bound volumes containing not only copper engravings of biblical scenes, but also of Louis XIV, the French royal family, the royal palaces, vistas of Paris, French regiments, artillery and proud vessels. They saturated the royal ear with praises of the Sun King, his power, the many battles he had won, his wisdom, his generosity, and so on.

Phra Narai was very curious about the world outside Siam and he listened eagerly to these eulogies. The idea seeped (or was seeped) in to his mind that diplomatic contacts with so powerful a prince would enhance his status among the rulers of Southeast Asia and rein in the Dutch.

Their arrogance and power in the region worried him, and he never truly forgave nor forgot the 1663 blockade of the Chao Phraya river mouth. The French bishops Lambert and Laneau urged him to send an embassy to Versailles, and the agents of the Royal Company offered him passage for his envoys on the *Soleil d'Orient*. The signature in 1678 of the peace treaty of Nijmegen had put an end to the French-Dutch war in Europe, and reopened the sea lanes to the French vessels. It was the dawning of a new age in Siamese-French relations.

That second period, starting in 1680, is the subject of a three-chapter section under the heading "The Time of the First Embassies." A first chapter tells of the ill-fated voyage of the *Soleil d'Orient*, a thousand-ton vessel which was the pride of the French merchant navy. It had three Siamese ambassadors on board, two French clerics who were to serve as interpreters, a large party of *khunnang* (mandarins), secretaries and servants, their cumbersome baggage, fifty large crates of presents, and last but not least two young elephants—male and female—provided with a huge supply of banana-leaves and sugar cane. The ambassadors carried two royal messages engraved on gold foil and addressed to Louis XIV and Pope Innocent XI. The letter to the French king said among other things: "We beg you, Very Great and Powerful King, to send us ambassadors. May our embassies go and come without interruption, and may our friendship be strong and everlasting."

Court astrologers had predicted all kinds of disasters for Siamese reckless enough to board Farang vessels, and events proved them to be right. The *Soleil d'Orient* left Bantam in August 1681, but never reached her destination. When one pieces together all available scraps of evidence, one comes to the conclusion that the hapless vessel perished somewhere between Madagascar and the Cape. Siamese and French officials suspected for a long time that the Dutch were somehow responsible for this tragedy.

It took several years for the awful truth to become known in Ayudhya. Phaulkon's brilliant career as favourite of Phra Narai and almighty manager of Crown Trade, Foreign Affairs and Court Politics had started in the meantime. He urged the king to pursue his overtures towards the French. A modest mission of two *khunnang* set off for France in January 1684 on a small British vessel and reached Paris safely before the end of the year.

They were escorted by the French priest Bénigne Vachet, who acted officially as interpreter. Actually, Phra Narai had entrusted him with the direction of the mission and asked him to keep an eye on the envoys. Father Vachet wrote very extensive memoirs which inform us on every detail of the first Siamese embassy to reach France. The three bulky volumes of the manuscript of Vachet's Memoirs are kept in the archives of the Missions étrangères de Paris. They yield a rich harvest of unknown facts on Siam and the author's semiofficial mission to the French Court. An English edition of the Vachet Memoirs would keep busy a small team of young Thai historians. It would keep them happy as well, for the tale of Vachet's troubles is very entertaining. He spent his time prodding and cursing his two unruly *khunnang* who did

not make the slightest effort to adapt to French customs or even to behave politely. He brought them crawling on their knees and elbows before Louis XIV in the Gallery of Mirrors in Versailles. The king said to him in his usual royal manner: "Please assure these gentlemen that I am delighted to have seen them, and that I shall comply with the utmost pleasure with the wishes of my brother the king of Siam."

The talkative Vachet was lucky enough to convince the king's ministers that it was in the interest of France to send an impressive embassy to Siam. Carried away by his enthusiasm, he insinuated that Phra Narai could become a Roman Catholic. This very imprudent suggestion set up a misunderstanding that weighed heavily upon future relations between the two Crowns. Having spent several years in Siam, Vachet should have known that the king, worshipped as a *Devaraja* or God-King, a future *Bodhisattva* and a *chakravartin*, or wheel-turning monarch, could not drop Buddhism, the backbone of Siamese culture.

Louis XIV appointed Alexandre de Chaumont as his ambassador, and assigned the Abbé de Choisy as counsel and possible replacement. Six Jesuits, well-grounded in astronomy and mathematics, were to sail with the ambassador on the *Oiseau* and *Maligne*, two vessels of the Crown. The Imperial Court of China was their ultimate goal. We must mention among them Joachim Bouvet and Guy Tachard, who kept well-known travel accounts. Father Tachard, who was about to play a pernicious part in Siamese-French relations, is the leading "bad character" in our story. The ambassador selected a retinue of young noblemen and aides. One of them, Claude de Forbin, deserves special mention. He would outstay the others in Siam and paint a realistic image of that country in his famous memoirs.

The next section of my book is called "The Time of the Great Embassies." It tells in the first place, in two colourful chapters, of the journey of the French vessels to Siam, with stopovers in Cape Town and Batavia, and the three months the embassy spent in Siam, from September till December 1685. The whole affair is well documented by the accounts referred to previously, and the diaries written by Chaumont and Choisy. This is of course the most famous episode of the whole story. I will not impose upon your patience by recalling things each of you has well etched in your memory.

The most important things, as is always the case when diplomatic missions are concerned, happened behind the scenes. While the exotic pomp and circumstance unfolded in front of the visitors, Phaulkon and Father Tachard conducted their shady business in the back room. The Greek needed the French since he felt threatened by the mandarins and the Buddhist Sangha, whereas Tachard, who wanted to establish his Jesuit order in Siam to the prejudice of the Mission étrangère, went to great lengths to please him.

Constantine Phaulkon (the French called him "Monsieur Constance") craved for the presence in Siam of a French army corps on which he could rely in case of emergency. Ambassador Chaumont did not even want to talk of it, and Choisy thought likewise. But Tachard whispered in the Greek's ear that Chaumont carried little weight in Versailles

(which was true), and that Father de La Chaize, the King's Jesuit confessor, would get him his army corps in no time. It was thereupon decided that Father Tachard would return to France to advocate in Versailles the cause of a French military involvement in Siam. He was to offer the fortresses of Bangkok and Mergui, the two "keys of the kingdom," to the French. When he heard the news, Chaumont called himself "un ambassadeur de façade," and Choisy writes with the same bitterness: "Chaumont and myself were but theatrical performers; the good Father was the real ambassador, in charge of the secret negotiation." The fact that Phra Narai, of course, had not even thought of becoming a Roman Catholic, made the embassy, the nice speeches and rich presents notwithstanding, a failure.

The two vessels returned to France with an important Siamese embassy, a letter on gold foil and magnificent presents for the King and the Royal Family. The three ambassadors were selected with great care. The *Ratchathut* or first ambassador was no one less than Okphra Visut Sunthorn, better known as Kosa Pan, who had shared a wet nurse with Phra Narai and was raised with him. The Uppathut and Trithut (second and third ambassadors) were outstanding mandarins with diplomatic experience.

In June 1686 the two vessels dropped anchor in the seaport of Brest in Brittany after a smooth return voyage of hardly six months. All along the journey the three Siamese ambassadors had prepared themselves eagerly for their mission in France, asking lots of questions and taking notes. Father Vachet, who escorted them, was very helpful in this respect.

At this point in the writing of my book I was delighted to have a very rare Siamese document at my disposal. The Palace Revolution of 1688, the destruction of Ayudhya, the damp climate and the voracious insects explain the extreme scarcity of authentic Siamese documents going back to the 17th Century. The existence of an old Siamese manuscript in the archives of the Missions étrangères has been known for some time. It was published by Mr. Manich Jumsai in 1984 and the *Silpakorn Journal* in 1985, but the text was never translated to the best of my knowledge. Professor Dhiravata Pombejra was kind enough to introduce me to the Translation Centre of Chulalongkorn University. Professor Visudh Busyakul agreed to translate into English and to annotate for me the Siamese text I had so often browsed through in the Rue du Bac in Paris. I take this opportunity to thank him for his fine scholarly work which has enabled me to hear and make heard the voice of a single Siamese witness in the middle of an impressive choir of European, mostly French voices.

The Kosa Pan Diary covers a period of fifteen days, from the 20th of June till the 4th of July 1686. Kosa Pan had arrived two days earlier in Brest with his fellow ambassadors and retinue, and left that city the 9th of July, which allows us to call the fragment "Kosa Pan's Brest Diary." It informs us about the first fortnight of the *Ratchathut's* stay in France, and voices his amazement and admiration for all things French. The Diary boasts furthermore of *Kosa Pan's* adaptability to French manners. He writes for instance on the fifth day of

the waxing moon in the eighth month of the year of the Tiger, being the eighth year of the Chulasakkarat Decade (which means Monday, the 24th of June, 1686): "In the evening the Governor and his wife came and had dinner with me. I took hold of the hand of the Governor's wife and we washed our hands together, and led her to her seat beside me. I set on her right side. The Second Ambassador and the Third Ambassador sat next to her left. I followed the French etiquette as instructed to me by Father Vachet."

There is not enough time for me to quote from the *Brest Diary* in Professor Busyakul's translation, but it might be worth while to consider its publication in the *Journal of the Siam Society*. The reader will notice, among other interesting details, the author's struggle with the French names of dishes, vegetables and fruits unknown in Siam, and for which there were no Siamese words available.

We are very well informed about the eight months the Siamese delegation spent in France. Father Vachet's Memoirs, and the Diaries kept by several French courtiers such as Souches and Dangeau, provide us with a wealth of details. But the most impressive source is the monthly *Mercure galant* which devoted no less than 2,000 small pages to the Siamese embassy. Five special "Siamese" issues were printed between July 1686 and January 1687. They are hard to find, even in the main French libraries, but Mr. Manich Jumsai has had the excellent idea to make some of them available to the general public, as well as other French 17th Century texts on Siam.

The most interesting things happened of course far from the public eye. While the French went crazy about the Siamese and the *Mercure* reported their visits and quoted their sayings, Father Tachard spun his web in the back rooms of Versailles. The stately audiences were left to Kosa Pan and his colleagues, but it is the Jesuit who prepared the dramatic future of Siamese-French relations.

The king and his navy secretary Seignelay decided to send an army corps of six hundred men to Siam. General Desfarges was to be their commanding officer. Two envoys without ambassadorial status, Simon de La Loubère and Claude Céberet, were appointed, but they were told to decide nothing without Father Tachard's approval.

The instructions to the envoys were very clear. Phaulkon, so they said, had pledged "to hand over all the strongholds demanded by the [French] King, to install French officials to run all places belonging to the King of Siam, and to grant total freedom of trade to all His Majesty's subjects." The instructions stipulated further that, if those promises were not kept, "His Majesty has decided to attack Bangkok and to resort to violence." One rubs one's eyes with astonishment: where are they gone, the nice speeches and flowery compliments exchanged between the two Crowns?

The commercial and religious goals of the expedition were stressed at the same time: "Although the establishment of trade is the goal of the enterprise, it must be emphasized that the main reason why His Majesty is about to provide a solid establishment to the French in that country, is his intention to promote the interests of Religion."

When told about Phaulkon's promise to hand over

Bangkok and Mergui, Kosa Pan was very upset. He repeated that his instructions directed him only to offer Songkhla in the south as a trading post to the French.

A squadron of five vessels left Brest in March 1687, carrying a total of 1,361 men. Among them, twelve Jesuits. From the start, almost everything went wrong: the relations between the envoys and Tachard were icy, violent storms badly damaged the vessels, and scurvy, dysentery and other diseases killed about 200 soldiers and sailors. One of the Jesuits died as well.

Father Tachard managed to disembark well ahead of the others and to meet Phaulkon before Kosa Pan and his colleagues could advise against the cession of Bangkok and Mergui. The Greek convinced Phra Narai and his Council to put the two strongholds under French "protection." Phra Phetracha, chief of the elephantry, was the only member of the Council to speak against the proposal, which was in the end approved by the king. Phetracha became in no time the heart of a nationalist anti-French movement, which was joined soon after by Kromluang Yothathep, Phra Narai's strong-headed daughter.

We are pretty well informed on those matters by the accounts written by the Jesuits de Bèze and Le Blanc, and by Céberet, the second envoy. Father de Bèze's book on Phaulkon, published in Tokyo in 1947, has been translated into English and is well known. Father Le Blanc's testimony, which is still more important, was never reprinted since its 1692 publication in two volumes. The only copy I know of is located in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. I chose however to quote Le Blanc from a more confidential manuscript version in the Jesuit archives in Rome, the *Secret Memoirs on what happened in Siam*. Céberet's travel diary was never published. Two nearly identical manuscript copies can be consulted in Paris. I can only hope that Le Blanc and Céberet will be published some day in English, for they could serve Thai history well.

Having obtained the king's permission to hand over the fortresses of Bangkok and Mergui to the French, Phaulkon only let them disembark after an oath of obedience to himself. La Loubère and Céberet fumed, but there was not much they could do about it, all the more because the stupid General Desfarges and the Machiavellian Tachard approved the submission of their king's soldiers to a Greek adventurer.

There is no need to tell you that the La Loubère and Céberet mission was not a success. The religious and commercial treaties they signed with Phaulkon had little value and were never applied anyway. The exotic glitter of the royal audience could not dispel the bitter feeling of ineffectiveness that haunted them. There was no love lost between the envoys and Phaulkon. They were happy to weigh anchor after a stay of three months, during which they had been told the details of the Macassar revolt that had rocked the kingdom in 1686 after the departure of the previous embassy.

The envoys and Father Tachard, no longer on speaking terms, reached France in July 1688, eager to submit their conflicting reports and proposals to the king and his ministers. The French Court was about to send a new military force to Siam, but the Glorious Revolution and the Prince of

Orange's accession to the British throne kept them in Europe. Nobody could know then in France that in the meantime another revolution had shaken the foundations of the kingdom of Siam and put an end to the relations between the two countries.

Many sources are available on the "Revolution of Siam:" French, Dutch, English and Portuguese. On the French side, there is Jean Vollant des Verquains's *Histoire de la révolution de Siam* printed in 1691, Father de Bèze's book on Phaulkon, and of course Father Le Blanc's unsurpassed *Mémoires secrets*. The Dutch were delighted with the events, and the V.O.C. archives in the Hague are a treasure-trove of gloating reports. Some of them are French documents seized by the Dutch, for instance the extensive report written by Desfarges, who died on his way back to France. An interesting English account was printed in London in 1690, called *A Full and True Relation of the Great and Wonderful Revolution that happened lately in the Kingdom of Siam*. The Portuguese *Relação das revoltas de Sião* by the Belgian Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Maldonado, who witnessed the events, reveals unknown aspects and sequels of the Revolution. Father Maldonado concludes: "So horrible a Revolution deserves a thick volume providing the full details, and there will be no lack of dedicated historians to do so, especially in France."

My twentieth and last chapter unfolds the chronicle of the Palace Revolution that overturned Siamese-French relations during the summer of 1688. Phaulkon was tortured and put to death in the most awful way. Phra Narai's two half-brothers, Chaofa Aphaitot and Chaofa Noi, were put in scarlet sacks and beaten to death with sandalwood clubs, and the king, a captive in his own palace at Lopburi, died of despair and sickness. Phra Phetracha and his son Okluang Sorasak, who were to be the next kings, played of course an essential part. It is hard to explain General Desfarges' refusal to rush from Bangkok to Phaulkon's and the king's rescue when there was still plenty of time. The behaviour of other French, such as Bishop Louis Laneau, his aide Artus de Lionne, and Véret, the agent of the French Royal Company, gives rise to many questions as well. Father Le Blanc stresses the importance of the Buddhist Sangha and the *Sankarāt* (main abbot) of Lopburi in the progress of the dramatic events.

But the outcome was clear enough, The French military were dislodged from their strongholds in Bangkok and Mergui, and many were killed. Those who could fled to Pondichéry on the Coromandel Coast. The relations between the two Crowns came to an abrupt standstill, in spite of the efforts of the tireless Guy Tachard to establish relations with King Phetracha and his Phra Khlang, Kosa Pan. It is interesting to know that Father Tachard, in addition to his First and Second Voyage to Siam, which were printed, left also an overlooked manuscript account of his third and fourth Asian journeys. He went to Ayudhya a last time in 1698. He met King Phetracha, Kosa Pan and Phaulkon's Japanese widow, who worked as a slave in the kitchens of the Royal Palace, but could only establish that Siamese-French relations had collapsed.

My epilogue takes its title from the famous Tom Wolfe novel, "The Bonfire of the Vanities." When Phra Narai's remains were cremated in February 1690, the towering sandalwood pyre was decorated with crucifixes, Christian pictures, portraits of Louis XIV and his ministers, and other relics of the French adventure in Siam. The day the king's body was committed to the fire and his soul set free, a dream went up in flames. The late king's wish, "May our friendship be strong and everlasting," proved to be impossible. The French king's answer, "I have decided to attack Bangkok and to resort to violence," was not what Phra Narai had in mind when he extended his invitation.

I have suggested throughout this lecture the main reasons for the Siamese-French failure. The short-lived flirtation revealed the near impossibility of a common language between two completely different cultures. The French were mainly invited to curb the Dutch arrogance, but the medicine proved to be more dangerous than the illness it was to heal. Quicker to judge than to understand, the French were mentally ill-equipped. Unfamiliar with European ruthlessness, the Siamese should have pondered the saying, "Who supps with the devil needs a very long spoon," before opening up their country to the enterprising Farangs.

It appears as if our planet was still too big in the 17th Century and the geographic and mental distances also stretched too far. The world, fortunately, has changed a lot in the last three centuries.

