

SIMON DE LA LOUBÈRE: FRENCH VIEWS OF SIAM IN THE 1680s¹

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In the "epistle dedicatory" of his new, two-volume book, *Du Royaume de Siam*, Simon de La Loubère wrote to the marquis de Seignelay:

It was by the orders, which I had the honour to receive from the king upon leaving [Versailles] for my voyage to Siam, that I observed in that country, as exactly as possible, all that appeared to be the most singular; and at my return I awaited fresh orders from you before deciding upon what form I would give to the observations that I made. I hope, Monseigneur, that [the results] please you.²

Whether or not the overworked minister of the Marine ever saw La Loubère's finished tomes, if only in manuscript, is impossible to say, for he died suddenly in 1690, a year before their publication. Nevertheless, the book was received enthusiastically by other contemporaries who heaped praise upon its author. "Your observations are so exact, so accurate," lauded the abbé de Dangeau at La Loubère's reception into the *Académie française* in August 1693, an honor the former envoy had coveted for some time,

that whoever reads your work with close attention, will learn many things long ignored, and will understand perfectly the religion, the government, [and] the mores of ... nations that are separated from us by so many seas ... We will profit from it, Monsieur ...³

Another French scholar, Daniel Larroque, also extolled the book as singular and "more curious than any we have seen up to now, because it is a kind of natural history of that country," and not just another travel narrative.⁴ Gottfried Leibnitz, the noted German *savant*, with whom La Loubère had corresponded regularly since 1680, and to whom he had sent a copy of his account as soon as it had appeared in print,⁵ was equally effusive in his praise.⁶ Esteeming his French colleague as "one of the most knowledgeable and able men of these times,"⁷ Leibnitz

criticized the relations of other travellers for reporting only superficialities dressed-up with "exterior prettytness." By contrast, "you have given us solid truths and research of great consequence."⁸

What these seventeenth century readers found so significant about La Loubère's new book—a significance made more apparent by historical hindsight—was his effort to move beyond a simple description of prices, products or cultural exotica common to so many travelogues of the day, and to attempt an understanding of the anthropological underpinnings of Siamese society. This appealed not only to a contemporary European audience, whose perceptions of the non-western, non-Christian world already had begun to change as a result of extensive contact with foreign civilizations, but also to the *philosophes* of the next century, who used such travel literature to blast apart old preconceptions about European society itself. Thus, in a vital way Simon de La Loubère contributed to a vibrant literary tradition, inspired and perpetuated to a large part by an elite cadre of diplomats—including William of Rubruck, Ghiselin de Busbecq, Sir George Sansom and W. A. R. Wood⁹—whose accounts of the countries in which they served were at once intelligent, sensitive and influential.

Nor did the impact of La Loubère's book diminish over time, though it enjoyed only five printings.¹⁰ For even after his death in 1729 at the age of eighty-seven, praise was still being lavished on his account as the "most appropriate model for works of this genre ..."¹¹ ... [There] are very few relations," eulogized Jean-Baptiste Mirabaud, chancellor of the *Académie française*,

that can stand next to that which he gave us of the kingdom of Siam. Geography, natural philosophy, religion, government, daily employments, all are treated in a manner that satisfies the most curious and demanding reader.¹²

Claude Gros de Boze, historian of the *Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, agreed with this assessment, admiring in particular what the late La Loubère had accomplished despite

the brevity of his stay in Siam—a "trimester worth more than any fame," Leibnitz had declared in 1692.¹³ "In an interval lasting only three months," wrote Gros de Boze,

he collected information on the history and physical nature of this country, on the origin, language, employments, mores, industry and religion of its inhabitants, which is so exact, that the relation he published on his return [to France], even though preceded by three or four others, was regarded as unique.¹⁴

Curiously, despite the relative renown that La Loubère gained from the publication of his book, his biography is sketchy.¹⁵ Born into a distinguished *parlementaire* (i.e., judicial) family of Toulouse in 1642, he showed an early interest in literature and science that was encouraged by his father, Arnould—a magistrate and man of letters—and by his paternal uncle, Antoine, a Jesuit priest noted for his own work in mathematics and geometry. As a young adult he moved to Paris, where he participated actively in the literary circles of the day, making a number of influential contacts. His public career began soon after with his appointment in 1672 as secretary to the baron de Saint-Romain, the French ambassador to Switzerland, followed by other postings to Strasbourg and Hanover in 1678 and 1679 respectively. Apparently, La Loubère's success in these three commissions, combined with patronage at court, won him the appointment as Louis XIV's envoy extraordinary to Siam in 1687.

The goal of this new mission was to negotiate a political alliance with that Asian kingdom in fulfillment of a long-established foreign policy. Ever since 1664, when Jean-Baptiste Colbert had chartered the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* with royal backing, the Bourbon Crown had been seeking ways to establish France as a great commercial, political and military power in the Far East, in direct challenge to Dutch hegemony. First efforts to realize this goal by colonizing Madagascar had failed in the 1660s, however, followed by the humiliating defeat in 1674 of the sieur de La Haye's "Persian squadron" by Dutch forces.¹⁶ Subsequently, French attention had shifted to the strategic kingdom of Siam, whose monarch, Phra Narai, already had made some tentative steps toward opening diplomatic relations with the Sun King as a counterpoise to the threat of Dutch encroachment.¹⁷ Meantime, French policy had received a further incentive in the form of assurances from the Apostolic fathers of the *Missions Étrangères* (active in Siam since 1662) that the Asian monarch was ready to convert to Christianity, having misinterpreted—or perhaps misrepresented—his generosity toward them as a sign of his desire to embrace their faith.

Encouraged by these prospects for success, Louis XIV dispatched two embassies to Southeast Asia from France. The first, led by the chevalier de Chaumont in 1685,¹⁸ failed to achieve the conversion of Phra Narai as anticipated, though two treaties were signed giving extensive trade privileges to the French *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*, and protection to Siamese converts to Catholicism. The second legation, headed by La Loubère in 1687,¹⁹ was sent ostensibly to strengthen these ties by con-

cluding a firm alliance. But the real goal probably was to gain ascendancy over Siam, using the 636 soldiers sent out with the ambassador as an initial holding force. This embassy, too, failed to achieve its objectives. A new commercial treaty was negotiated, though under very trying conditions. Meanwhile, the steady growth of strong anti-French sentiment at the Siamese court over the foreign military occupation of Bangkok and the port of Mergui on the Bay of Bengal did not bode well for the future. In fact, within six months of La Loubère's departure for France in January 1688, Siam exploded in a bloody revolution that toppled Phra Narai's dynasty from the throne, overthrew the French garrison and closed the kingdom to Europeans, except for a single Dutch trading post.²⁰ By the time news of the disaster had reached Europe, Louis XIV was engaged heavily in a new war with his continental enemies and was in no position to respond. French contact with Siam thus ended abruptly for the next 150 years.

Despite the ultimate failure of his embassy, Simon de La Loubère produced a remarkable book on his return to Europe, a masterpiece of travel literature as highly valued today as it was admired in 1691. One of the many elements that make modern Thailand unique among other Asian nations is that most of what is known of its history in the late sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is preserved only in contemporary European sources, the Siamese archives having been destroyed with the former royal capital of Ayudhya in 1767 by invading Burmese armies. Of these sources, La Loubère's *Du Royaume de Siam* is considered to be the best. David K. Wyatt, an American specialist of Thai history, describes the book as "a lucid, comprehensive, and extremely accurate account of the life and civilization of Ayutthaya in the seventeenth century."

The information with which [La Loubère] provides us, whether of physical geography, manners and customs, political and social structure, or religion and administration, remains extremely useful to our understanding of Thai culture and society. Nearly three centuries have passed since he wrote, yet much of what he saw ... is still to be seen in Thai villages, monasteries, and homes.²¹

A recent French editor of the work adds further that one must "render homage to the efforts of La Loubère to maintain his impartiality, objectivity and prudence in making final judgments while writing the book."²²

Indeed, this quality of fairness is a salient feature of the two volumes, the author having endeavoured conscientiously to maintain a balanced view of his subject. No doubt his efforts here were aided by the significant fact that he approached Siam from the broad perspective of a writer and diplomat, rather than the much narrower focus of a merchant, soldier or cleric. Moreover, his account is free of the bitterness one might have expected, given the disappointments of his embassy to which few references are made, except to illustrate particular points from personal experience. As well, the book is largely unaffected by cultural or racial prejudice often found in other travelogues of the period. Only in matters of religion, warfare, science and

technology does La Loubère betray a Christian European sense of superiority; yet, even in these matters he did not dismiss the Siamese as inferior or simply primitive. Rather, he explained their apparent "backwardness" according to contemporary notions of anthropology, geography and even rudimentary sociology, which gives still greater dimension to his analysis. As a result, his portrayal of Siam is not only sensitive and sympathetic, but it also reveals almost as much about seventeenth century European mentality and habits as it does about the Siamese people and their kingdom.

In his introduction, La Loubère outlined his method in scholarly consideration of his audience. He developed his text by stages, he wrote, in order that

the farther the Reader shall advance in the perusal of the work, the more he will find it worthy of Curiosity; by reason that the Nature and Genius of the *Siameses*, which I have every where endeavoured to penetrate into, will be discovered more and more.²³

He also consulted the relations of previous visitors to the east with whom his readers already were familiar. Fernão Mendes Pinto,²⁴ Jeremias van Vliet²⁵ and Nicolas Gervaise²⁶—all of whom had spent time in Siam—are cited frequently in the text, as are João de Barros,²⁷ François Pyrard,²⁸ Sir Thomas Herbert,²⁹ Father Navarete³⁰ and François Bernier.³¹ Thirty-seven contemporary and near-contemporary writers are quoted in total.³² La Loubère even drew upon classical authors, such as Aelian, Ptolemy and Strabo, to strengthen his work with still-accepted authorities.³³ Such preliminary research was essential, he observed, having "supplied the defect of a longer residence, and has made me to remark and understand in the three months I was at *Siam*, what I could not perhaps have understood or remark'd in three Years ..."³⁴ For similar reasons, he devoted the entire second volume of his book to various moral, mathematical, astronomical and historical texts obtained from India, China and Siam, because "it seems to me that the Comparison of the things of Neighbouring Countries with each other, does greatly illustrate them."³⁵

Yet, at the same time La Loubère applied to these sources a very critical eye, being particularly careful to warn his readers against the hidden snares in contemporary travel literature. For example, he remarked that the use of adjectives, such as good, ugly, magnificent and so on, already "equivocal in themselves, must always be understood with reference to the Phantasie [i.e., the culture and individual perspective] of the Author of the Relation," for the natural tendency is to evaluate unfamiliar things by comparison to what is known at home.³⁶ And even then, what was habitual to a Portuguese was not necessarily so to a Frenchman. Consequently, such words should be seen as culturally charged, relative terms only and never as absolutes. "Another defect in Relations," he noted, was the inaccurate rendering of foreign labels or expressions by translators who disregarded cultural significance when selecting European equivalents—or as La Loubère put it, "when the same Words and the same *Ideas* are transferred from one to the other."³⁷ This

practice distorted meanings as grossly as the contemporary travel writer's other bad habit of judging unfamiliar societies on the basis of a few traits only, according to what seemed "either extravagant or admirable." The false impressions created by such careless approaches to translation and observation would disappear, he argued, if translators were more sensitive to the cultural nuances of native appellations, and if foreign civilizations were viewed comprehensively, not piecemeal, because that would reveal "that there is not in any place anything marvelous or extravagant."³⁸

La Loubère divided the first volume of his text into three parts—copiously illustrated with maps, drawings and diagrams of people, places and things—reserving the second volume for supporting documentation.³⁹ Part I deals with "the Country of *Siam*, its Extent, Fertility, and the qualities of its Soil and Climate,"⁴⁰ broadly describing the kingdom's physical geography, territorial boundaries, water courses, agriculture, seasonal changes, natural resources and centers of population. Part II attempts to "explain the manners of the *Siameses* in general, and then their particular Customs according to their various Qualities."⁴¹ Here are found details on the physiognomy of the people; their dress, attitudes and character; their houses, furnishings and means of travel; their diversions and daily activities; their notions of education, marriage and community; and finally their skill in medicine, science, music and the plastic arts. Part III, concerning "The Manners of the *Siameses* according to their several conditions," scrutinizes the structure of Siamese society, its hierarchy, government, laws, social relations and administration. In the third part the religious establishment also is examined, with extensive discussion of Buddhist history, theology and morality.

Like so many other Asian kingdoms, observed La Loubère, Siam was familiar to western travellers only from its coasts, chief waterways, major cities and ports, "which some report to be the best in all *India* ..."⁴² Otherwise, detailed information was scanty, the Siamese having made no effort even to map their country, perhaps fearing that such valuable intelligence might fall into the hands of would-be invaders.⁴³ The history of the kingdom and its people was equally obscure, "the Books thereof [being] very scarce, by reason the *Siameses* have not the use of Printing," despite having borrowed so much else from neighboring China. As for those few "chronological Abridgements" that did exist, the former envoy dismissed them as "dry and insipid" and more "full of Fables" than reliable facts.⁴⁴

His purpose, therefore, was to correct the prevailing dearth of knowledge by writing a comprehensive treatment of Siam that would satisfy the interest of a receptive European audience, which already was acutely aware of the world around it and was imbued as never before with an anthropological curiosity about foreign, non-Christian societies—a curiosity fuelled by the enormous body of contemporary travel literature that "continued to swell till it overflowed all reasonable limits,"⁴⁵ and complemented by both a growing sophistication of analysis and a declining sense of ethnocentrism. Thus, La Loubère's work does far more than simply reflect the mood and mentality of his readership; it also mirrors the late seventeenth century intellec-

tual revolution—identified by Paul Hazard in his book, *The European Mind*—which was sparked to a large degree by Europeans looking eastward and discovering there "a vast agglomeration of non-Christian values, [and] a huge block of humanity which had constructed its moral system, its concept of truth, on lines peculiarly its own."⁴⁶ Compelled to reconsider the fundamental concepts of the western world "as a result of the conditions in which [these same ideals] were seen to operate in far-off countries," articulate Europeans recognized that they no longer could take their old perceptions for granted.⁴⁷ Instead, noted Hazard:

Practices deemed [formerly] to be based on reason were found to be mere matters of custom, and, inversely, certain habits which, at a distance, had appeared preposterous and absurd, took on an apparently logical aspect once they were examined in the light of their origin and local circumstances.⁴⁸

Or, as La Loubère observed more simply, "so true it is that the Phantasies [i.e., social tastes and perspectives], even they which seem to be most natural, do greatly consist in Custom."⁴⁹ Hence, "difference," not "superiority" was becoming the emphasis of the day, which represented "a striking psychological readjustment" in the European mind.⁵⁰

This change of perspective is what lends so much significance to La Loubère's book; it helps also to explain the remarkable fairness of his judgments, as well as his depth of analysis, sensitivity to Asian conditions and willingness to accept most indigenous practices on native terms, however peculiar or strange they first may have appeared. For example, La Loubère used what he knew of Asian linguistics and demography to trace the ethnic origins of the Siamese.⁵¹ Like so many other cultures in Asia, he noted, the people of Siam spoke two languages—the "Vulgar" and a second "dead" tongue, called "Ballie" (or Pāli, the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures used primarily by monks in the writing of law and religion),⁵² which European missionaries had traced to India and ultimately to Ceylon, the birthplace also of Buddhism. These factors alone indicated that the Siamese people "are near of the same Genius with their Neighbours."⁵³ But the former envoy hypothesized still further, suggesting that to escape political turbulence elsewhere ("the Crowns of *Asia* [being] always unstable"), various peoples had migrated to Siam where they had intermarried. Consequently, Siamese blood was "very much mixed with foreign,"⁵⁴ a phenomenon evinced in his own day, he believed, by the physiognomy of the people in comparison with other Asians, and the existence of twenty-one separate foreign communities, long-established in the suburbs around Ayudhya.⁵⁵

Whatever questions one might raise about the ultimate accuracy of La Loubère's analysis, what really matters here is the way he blended empirical evidence gathered from observation with thoughtful reflection, using an almost scientific method to reach his conclusions. This approach is similarly evident in his treatment of other themes, such as the nature and extent of

Phra Narai's royal authority, a topic of obvious interest to the subjects of Louis XIV. Portrayed outwardly as an autocrat who ruled through fear and mistrust (since "despotick Authority is almost destitute of [other] defence"),⁵⁶ the king of Siam held the power of life and death over his subjects, whom he tortured or executed "without any formality of Justice, and by the hand of whom he pleases ..."⁵⁷ But he was nevertheless a responsible monarch who knew his duty well, having once observed to La Loubère's deep admiration that good kingship was not "inspired" (i.e., natural) in a prince, and that from his "great Experience and Reading he perceived that he was not yet perfect in understanding it."⁵⁸ Nor was his justice as arbitrary as at first appeared. Punishments, though cruel, usually fitted the crime and carried no lingering stigma of disgrace as in Europe,⁵⁹ being looked upon as proof of the king's "paternal care" for his subjects.⁶⁰ Equally striking was that a criminal's immediate superior shared his sentence "by reason that ... having the power to correct him, he ought [also] to answer for his conduct."⁶¹ Thus the yoke of autocratic authority fell most heavily across the shoulders of court nobles and other men of rank, whose "Ambition in this Country leads to Slavery." Meanwhile, "Liberty, and other Enjoyments of Life are for the vulgar conditions,"⁶² a point not lost on the *philosophes* of the next century, who would use such examples to fashion their own version of Enlightened European Despotism.

Still more revealing of cultural differences are the direct contrasts La Loubère drew between native and western customs, often to the discredit of Europe. Remarking on native hygiene and dress, for example, the former envoy wrote that the Siamese bathed regularly, cleaned their teeth and washed their hair, which they anointed with scented oil "as the Spaniards do," before combing it carefully, "which most of the Spaniards do not."⁶³ And although they wore almost no clothing, "so great a Nudity renders them not immodest." On the contrary, the Siamese were so scrupulous about revealing parts of the body "which Custom obliges them to conceal," that whenever the French soldiers went bathing, "'twas necessary to give [them] some *pagnes* [i.e. panungs, or swaddling loincloths] to wash in, to remove the Complaints which these People make, of seeing them all go naked into the River."⁶⁴ "[This] proves, in my opinion," reflected La Loubère, "that the simplicity of Manners, as well as the heat, is the cause of the Nakedness of the *Siameses*," who were surprised in their turn by the numerous layers of clothing worn by Europeans. Particularly baffling to them was the overly abundant garb of French ladies—an excess "absolutely contemn'd ... as too intricate and troublesome for the Husband that would pull it off from his Wife":

... I have since consider'd [mused La Loubère], that [the Siamese] imagin'd perhaps that our Wives lay in their Cloathes, like theirs, which would doubtless be very troublesome.⁶⁵

Equally inscrutable was the European use of cosmetics. It was customary in Siam to chew betel nut (just as some westerners chewed tobacco), which blackened the teeth and stained the lips

a blotchy red, though both were considered a sign of beauty. Consequently, when the natives saw "in the Pictures of our Ladies" the rich vermilion coloring of the lips, they were impressed, concluding erroneously "that we must needs have in France, better *Betel* than theirs!"⁶⁶

Such cultural differences, though amusing, were largely superficial. Far more evocative were La Loubère's thoughtful comments on the character and intellect of the Siamese, and the searing criticisms these implied of the hypocrisy and inhumanity of contemporary European society. This critique was especially evident in his description of the Siamese as an honest, courteous and imperturbable people, both "plain in their Habits" and "Rich in a general Poverty, because they know how to content themselves with a little,"⁶⁷ unlike the materialistic westerner. And if they were sometimes guilty of minor faults, such as timidity and occasional lying, real "Vices are detestable amongst them, and they excuse them not as witty conceits, nor as sublimity of mind"⁶⁸—La Loubère's implication being that Europeans did. And despite their paganism, the social blemishes of divorce and beggary—so common in the west, where the Christian virtues of marital fidelity and charity were supposed to operate—were seen rarely in Siam,⁶⁹ where family life was close and loving,⁷⁰ and relatives "charitably maintain those that cannot maintain themselves out of their Estate or Labour."⁷¹ Even their Children were physically better proportioned than French offspring, which the former envoy attributed "to their not swadling in their Infancy;" whereas

The care that we take to form the Shape of our Children, is not always so successful, as the liberty that they leave to Nature to proceed in forming theirs.⁷²

In each of these comments, one almost can hear the rumblings of Voltaire, Montesquieu and a host of later *philosophes*.

La Loubère was well aware, of course, that there were many negative aspects of Siamese society—a society in which slavery was practised widely and "servitude was the reward of Ingenuity."⁷³ Yet, he was willing to forgive and justify much. He deplored, for instance, the intellectual backwardness, cowardliness and sheer superstitiousness of the Siamese people, whom he declared to be "utterly ignorant" of the sciences at which Europeans excelled and inclined "to imagine Wonders," despite their being intelligent, rational and quick to learn. Their astronomy, he charged, was both rudimentary and inexact, while their knowledge of medicine and biology was primitive even by contemporary western standards. As well, he noted, their facility in such technical fields as metallurgy, mechanics and fortification was so inferior that Phra Narai already had begun to rely upon European expertise to supply the deficiencies.⁷⁴ "But it must be confessed for their excuse," the Frenchman added swiftly, disarming his own criticisms, "that all application of Mind is so laborious in a Climate so hot as theirs, ... that the very *Europeans* could hardly study there, what desire soever they might have thereto."⁷⁵

La Loubère was similarly evenhanded when describing what he perceived as a singular lack of martial spirit among his

late Asian hosts, and their apparent faintheartedness when confronted with force—the presence of a strong warrior mentality, backed by skill at arms and a powerful military establishment, being one of the principal yardsticks used by contemporary westerners to gauge the sophistication of non-European societies against their own. "The Sight of a naked Sword is sufficient to put an hundred *Siameses* to flight," he scoffed, adding with an air of cultural, even racial superiority that

... there needs only the assured Tone of an *European*, that wears a Sword at his side, or a Cane in his hand, to make them forget the most express Orders of their Superiors.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the former envoy could not help but admire "the Constancy [i.e., bravery] with which it is reported that the *Siameses* do undergo" the savage punishments that they frequently were subjected to under native law and custom. That kind of fortitude, he confessed, was almost "incredible in persons who express so little Courage in War."⁷⁷ As for Siamese superstitiousness, manifested by such things as their faith in lucky and unlucky days, La Loubère had only to remind his readers that this "Folly [also] ... is perhaps too much tolerated amongst Christians; witness the Almanac of *Milan*, to which so many persons do now give such blind belief."⁷⁸ And he turned the same criticism against those Catholic priests working among the Siamese, who had refused to interpret the latter's Buddhist religion and rituals to him, sneering that they "look'd upon these things with Horror, as Witchcraft and Compacts with the *Demon*, altho' it be very possible that they are only Fooleries full of Credulity and Ignorance."⁷⁹

Just like any other European of his day, the former envoy had been imbued deeply since infancy with an unshakable belief that Christianity, and specifically Catholic Christianity, was the only true faith. But rather than dismiss Buddhism summarily out of hand as the quotation above seems to suggest, he attempted to understand and explain in detail its characteristics and underlying precepts within the Asian context, though in the final analysis his comprehension was imperfect. Hampered by a lack of time during his embassy, the inadequacies of his printed sources (most of which described the faith as it was observed in India or China, rather than Siam),⁸⁰ and the dense filter of his own Christian bias, he was prevented from penetrating beneath the surface of Buddhism to reach a more subtle appreciation of its essential concepts and moral philosophy. Certainly he seems to have had no knowledge of either the Four Noble Truths upon which the religion was founded, or the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment, which consists of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindedness and right concentration.

Instead, La Loubère focused on the exterior features of Siamese Buddhism that appeared to have Christian parallels, in addition to those doctrines—such as the nature of heaven and hell, the concept of sin and the eternity of the world—that were of greatest interest and accessibility to his European audience. He described at length, for example, the hierarchical organiza-

tion, dress, housing and training of the "talapoins" or monks of whose rigorous life-style he seems to have approved—with the intention, perhaps, of drawing an implicit contrast with the licentious behavior of some Catholic clergy, whose bad conduct periodically scandalized European society. Yet, because of his western outlook, the former envoy did not understand the full significance of certain aspects of the monks' daily routine which consisted, he thought, of preserving themselves from sin while leading "a penitent Life for the Sins of those that bestow Alms upon them, and to live on Alms."⁸¹ This was an essentially Christian concept of monastic duty. La Loubère had simply failed to grasp the larger Asian view that by practising the ethical precepts of the faith, meditating regularly and aspiring to purity of character, the monks were a living example to their people, who looked upon them as moral leaders. Furthermore, by accepting charity from the laity, the "talapoins" afforded them an opportunity to practise the householder's virtue of giving, the performance of good deeds being the basic condition for moral improvement in accordance with the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment.

More successful, however, was the former envoy's representation of the Buddhist concept of the human soul (which he defined as a material substance inhabiting the human form, but without being "physically united with the Body, to make one with it") and its transmigrations through successive existences. This continuous pattern of rebirth, he explained, was a form of penance "to extirpate ... Sins by ... Sufferings, because that indeed there is no kind of Life which has not its Troubles."⁸² Hence the soul's "perpetual necessity of animating Bodies, and of passing from one to another" until, having reached the state of "*Nireupan*" (i.e., Nirvana, the extinction of individuality and absorption into the supreme spirit), it "disappears, they say, like a Spark, which is lost in the Air."⁸³ In addition, though he did not know the name for it, La Loubère clearly understood that these transmigrations were governed by the Buddhist concept of *karma*—the universal causality and law of deeds—which determined a person's fate in his next life by the sum of his actions in one of his successive states of existence. Or, as the Frenchman put it more simply, the Siamese

... attribute this distributive Justice to a blind Fatality. So that according to them, 'tis the Fatality which makes the Soul to pass from one state to a better or a worse, and which retains them more or less proportionably to their good or bad works.⁸⁴

Ultimately, however, La Loubère rejected Siamese Buddhism as little more than "a Texture of Fables."⁸⁵ And although he seems to have approved of its underlying moral teachings to kill nothing, steal nothing, commit no "impurity", tell no lies and "drink no intoxicating Liquor"⁸⁶—probably because these corresponded to basic Christian virtues—he could not accept a doctrine that contained "no Idea of a Divinity ... being far from acknowledging a God Creator." For this was fundamental to his own system of belief. By the same token, he doubted that the historical Buddha ever existed, there being "no reasonable [i.e.,

written] memory of him" comparable to the life of Jesus Christ as preserved in the Christian Bible, apart from a few texts replete with what he dismissed as inconsistencies, contradictions and "gross Ignorance."⁸⁷ Thus, he wrote, "we ought rather to call [the Siamese] Atheists than Idolaters."⁸⁸ The former envoy even criticized the kingdom's toleration of other religions, not because he disagreed with the idea in principle, but because he considered the principle naive. For "by approving that other People have each their worship, [the Siamese] comprehend not that some would exterminate theirs"⁸⁹—a thinly veiled reference to the Jesuit priests and Apostolic fathers of the *Missions Étrangères* who were trying even then to convert the realm to the Roman faith.

Harsh as his final judgment of Buddhism was, however, La Loubère was fully aware of the religion's profound cultural significance to the Siamese, and he even accorded its ancient "legislators" (i.e., Buddha and his later disciples) "the merit of having known before the *Greeks* some Intelligent Beings superior to [mortal] man, and the Immortality of the Soul." For that reason alone, he asked:

Why should we not praise the Legislators of the east, as well as the *Greek* Legislators [so admired by Christian Europeans], for that they have applied themselves to inspire into the People, what to them has appeared most virtuous, and most proper to keep them in Peace and Innocence?⁹⁰

Besides, he observed, Buddhist doctrine "comforts men in the Misfortunes of Life, and fortifies them against the Horrors of Death," even if it was erroneous by Christian standards.⁹¹ Such an enlightened evaluation, if not acceptance, of a pagan faith would be difficult to find elsewhere in Europe, even among the most forward-looking thinkers of his day.

Consequently, La Loubère could not blame his former Siamese hosts for believing blindly in what he viewed as a collection of "Fables, which a long succession of Ages full of Ignorance has invented upon their Account"⁹² But if they were to be converted to Christianity it was essential, he warned, "that the Missionaries, which preach the Gospel in the East, do perfectly understand the Manners and Belief of these People" first.⁹³ They also must speak respectfully of Asian religious figures and their learning at all times, the more effectively "to insinuate, that being men, they are deceived in several things important to the eternal Salvation of Mankind, and principally in that they have not known the Creator."⁹⁴ Only then should the missionary fathers—"who have not the gift of Miracles" to aid them—begin to reveal Christian truth cautiously to the Siamese "for their better understanding," starting with "the Existence of God the Creator."⁹⁵ This first lesson was essential, for "as they acknowledge no Author of the Universe, so they acknowledge no first Legislator."⁹⁶ "But in my opinion," continued the former envoy,

it is one of the most important Articles of the conduct of the Missionaries, to accommodate themselves entirely to the simplicity of the Manners of the Orientals, in their

Food, Furniture, Lodging, and whatever the Rules of the *Talapoins* prescribe, wherein they have nothing contrary to Christianity.⁹⁷

And he cited the example of Robert Nobili, S. J., who had adopted the customs of the Brahmins in India to preach the Roman faith more successfully. But if after all of these efforts, the former envoy concluded, "the beauty of Christianity [still] has not convinc'd" the Siamese to accept the faith, the Europeans would have only themselves to blame "by reason of the bad opinion, which the Avarice, Treachery, Invasions, and Tyranny of the *Portugueses*, and some Christians in the *Indies*, have implanted and rivetted in them," not to mention "the bloody Madness of our Wars."⁹⁸

Clearly, La Loubère respected the culture, religion and character of Siamese people whose moods, he wrote, "are as calm as their Heaven, which changes only twice a year and insensibly." And if they seemed "invincibly lazy" by European standards, it was because of a debilitating climate and a social outlook that placed no merit in action, in the strong belief that it was unnatural that labor and its pains "should be the Fruite and Reward of Virtue." This was the essential difference between their culture and his. For having "the good Fortune to be born Philosophers," reflected the former French envoy, the Siamese naturally showed no interest "at the wonders, which our iniquitude has produced in the discovery of so many different Arts,

whereof we flatter ourselves, perhaps to no purpose, that necessity was the Mother [of our invention]"⁹⁹—a significant admission by a man trained in science, who lived in a burgeoning age of Reason.

In his book, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, Anthony Grafton writes that the intellectual who sets out to describe another culture must make some essential "strategic and tactical decisions" about approaches to be taken, topics to be discussed and the literary form to be adopted. "In each of these decisions, models matter."¹⁰⁰ This clearly was understood by Simon de La Loubère, who not only had made conscious choices of approach and content in writing his account, but who also had consulted widely the relations of other travellers to Siam before casting his own. Moreover, he advocated the use of such examples in the pursuit of knowledge on the principle that "as to what concerns the Description of a Country, we cannot have too many Relations, if we would perfectly know it: the last always illustrating the former."¹⁰¹ Ultimately, in the process of composing his work, he provided a new model for others to follow that rarely has been surpassed for its quality or comprehensiveness. But perhaps his greatest achievement—acknowledged even by contemporaries such as Leibnitz, Mirabaud and Gros de Boze—was giving his remarkable book a rare quality of timelessness that, according to David K. Wyatt, "serves to provide us with the essential sense of continuity of past and present which so vibrantly characterizes Thailand yesterday and today."¹⁰²

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Professor George A. Rothrock, Dr. Merrill Distad and Mr. James Di Crocco, the Honorary Editor of the *Journal of the Siam Society*, for their suggestions and encouragement in the preparation of this manuscript.
2. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h, ed., *Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère "Du Royaume de Siam"* (Paris: 1987) 109–10. Hereafter cited as La Loubère.
3. *Discours prononcés dans l'Académie française le mardi vingt-cinquième d'août, fête de Saint-Louis à la réception de Monsieur de La Loubère* (Paris: 1693) 16. Quoted also in La Loubère, 99.
4. Daniel Larroque to Gottfried Leibnitz, 25 May 1691, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Erste Reihe, ed., series 1, 11 vols. (Berlin: 1970) III, 497. Larroque was a French scholar and the author of several histories and biographies.
5. Simon de La Loubère to Gottfried Leibnitz, 1 June 1691, *ibid.*, VI, 504. The correspondence between the two men covered a wide range of subjects, from their mutual interest in mathematics to friendly chatter about mutual friends in the scientific world, to European diplomacy and even to La Loubère's aid in 1683 in defending a relative who had killed a man in a duel. Indeed, La Loubère admitted on one occasion that he had "no greater joy than to [discuss] philosophy and mathematics" with the German *savant*. (See Simon de La Loubère to Gottfried Leibnitz, 22 January 1681, *ibid.*, 458.)
6. In a letter of 21 July 1691, Leibnitz thanked Daniel Larroque for news he had sent of La Loubère's safe return to France, writing that "we are very much relieved here by having good news of him, and will be delighted to see the relation of his voyage ... " (*Ibid.*, 587.)
7. Gottfried Leibnitz to Hortensio Mauro, March 1681, *ibid.*, III, 470.
8. Gottfried Leibnitz to Simon de La Loubère, 4 February 1692, *ibid.*, VII, 553.
9. William of Rubruck (1215–1270) was a Franciscan priest sent by Louis IX of France in 1253 to open communications with the Mongol Khan. His relation is one of the most interesting and intimate travel records in existence, and it provides the most complete firsthand record available of the Mongol empire at its height. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–1592) served as Imperial ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1555 to 1562, on behalf of the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. His description of his experiences (first published in Latin in 1589 under the title *Turkish Letters*), gives one of the most substantial accounts of Ottoman society and government in the early modern period. Sir George B. Sansom (1883–1965) was a member of the British Foreign Service from 1904 to 1947, holding diplomatic appointments principally in Korea and Japan. The author of three major books on Japanese history, he earned an international reputation as an outstanding authority on the island empire. Like Sansom, W. A. R. Wood (1878–1970) also was in the British Foreign Service, eventually becoming Consul-General to Thailand,

- where he spent sixty-nine years of his public career. In 1924 he wrote the first comprehensive history of Siam to appear in any European language.
10. The two volumes were published originally in Paris and Amsterdam in 1691, followed in 1693 by an English translation. The French edition was reprinted twice more in Amsterdam, in 1700 and 1713, under the title, *Description du royaume de Siam*. Finally, portions of the English translation appeared in Vol. II of J. Harris's *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, in 1705. No doubt the dearth of publications was due to the complete reversal of French fortunes in Siam in 1688.
 11. *Discours prononcés dans l'Académie française* ..., 12.
 12. *Ibid.*, 21. Quoted also in La Loubère, 100.
 13. Gottfried Leibnitz to Simon de La Loubère, 4 February 1692, Leibnitz, VII, 553.
 14. Claude Gros de Boze, *Histoire de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres avec les mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de cette Académie, depuis l'année 1726, jusques et compris l'année 1730*, vol. VII (Paris: 1733) 420–21. Quoted also in La Loubère, 100.
 15. For the biographical details of La Loubère's life, see: Jean Pierre Nicéron, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la république des lettres*, vol. XXVI (Paris: 1734) 151–60; F. Michaud, *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, nouvelle édition, vol. XXV (Paris: 1854) 145–46. See also the introduction of David K. Wyatt to Simon de La Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam* (London: 1693; facsimile reprint, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986—hereafter cited as Wyatt) and especially that of Jacq-Hergoualc'h in his edition of La Loubère's book.
 16. For French efforts in Madagascar, see: Louis Pauliat, *Madagascar sous Louis XIV* (Paris: 1886); S. E. Howe, *The Drama of Madagascar* (London: 1938); and J. Chailley-Bert, *Les compagnies de colonisation sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: 1898). The major printed primary sources for La Haye's "Persian squadron" include: Henri Froidevaux, ed., *Mémoires de L.A. Bellanger de Lespinay Vendômois sur son voyage aux Indes Orientales (1670–1675)* (Vendôme: 1895); *Journal de voyage des grandes Indes*, 2 vols. (Orléans: 1697); François L'Estra, *Relation; ou journal d'un voyage fait aux Indes Orientales* (Paris: 1677); Abbé Barthélemy Carré, *The Travels of ... in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674*, Lady Fawcett, trans., Sir Charles Fawcett, ed., 3 vols. (London: 1947–48, for the Hakluyt Society); A Martineau, ed., *Mémoires de François Martin, fondateur de Pondichéry*, 3 vols. (Paris: 1931–34). For more recent treatments, see: Glenn J. Ames, "Colbert's Grand Indian Ocean Fleet of 1670," *The Mariner's Mirror*, 76, no. 3 (August 1991): 227–240, and by the same author, "Colbert's Indian Ocean Strategy of 1664–1674: A Reappraisal," *French Historical Studies*, 16, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 536–559; J. Barassin, "Compagnies de navigation et expéditions françaises dans l'Océan Indien au XVII siècle," *Studia*, 11 (1963): 373–388.
 17. These efforts included the dispatch of two Siamese embassies to France in 1680 and 1684 respectively. The first was lost in a storm off Madagascar in the autumn of 1681; the second was sent to enquire into the fate of the initial embassy and to request that French envoys be sent to Siam to conclude a treaty of trade and alliance.
 18. The principal contemporary sources for Chaumont's embassy include: "Relation de l'ambassade de monsieur le chevalier de Chaumont à la cour du Roy de Siam," in F. Danjou et Cimber, eds., *Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France*, vol. X (Paris: 1839), and a seventeenth century English translation entitled, *A Relation of the Late Embassy of Monsr. de Chaumont, Knt. to the Court of the King of Siam* (London: 1687); Abbé François Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal de voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686*, Maurice Garçon, ed. (Paris: 1930); Claude comte de Forbin, *Mémoires*, in F. Michaud et Poujoulat, eds., *Nouvelle collection des mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France*, vol. 33 (Paris: 1854); Père Guy Tachard, S. J., *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam* (London: 1688).
 19. For La Loubère's mission, in addition to his own account see: Père Guy Tachard, S. J., *Second Voyage du Père Tachard et des Jésuites envoyés par le Roy au Royaume de Siam* (Paris: 1689); Claude Boulaye de Céberet, "Journal du voyage de Siam, fait par le sr. Céberet envoyé extraordinaire du Roy près le Roy de Siam; et coste de Coromandel pendant les années 1687 et 1688," Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français nouvelles acquisitions, fols. 216–267vo.; Jean Drans and Henri Bernard, S. J., eds., *Mémoire du Père de Bèze sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon* (Tokyo: 1947), published in English translation under the title, 1688: *Revolution in Siam*, E. W. Hutchinson, trans. (Hong Kong: 1968); Père d'Orléans, S. J., *Histoire de M. Constance, Premier ministre du Roy de Siam* (Paris: 1690); J. C. Gatty, ed., *Voilage de Siam du Père Bouvet* (Leiden: 1963).
 20. For the Revolution in, and repulse of, the French from Siam, see: *A Full and True Relation of the Great and Wonderful Revolution that happened lately in the kingdom of Siam in the East-Indies* (London: 1690); *A Narrative of the Revolutions which took Place in Siam in the Year 1688* (Amsterdam: 1692, reprinted by O. Frankfurter, trans., in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, 5 (1908): 1–50; Bèze; Orléans; Bouvet; Père Marcel Le Blanc, *Histoire de la révolution du Royaume de Siam arrivée en l'année 1688*, 2 vols. (Paris: 1692); Tachard, *Second voyage*. For modern accounts, see E. W. Hutchinson, "The Retirement of the French Garrison in the Year 1688," *Journal of the Siam Society*, 28 (1935): 37–77; David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, Conn.: 1984); W. A. R. Wood, *A History of Siam from the Earliest Times to the Year A.D. 1781* (Bangkok: 1924).
 21. See Wyatt, viii–ix.
 22. La Loubère, 100.
 23. Wyatt, 1; La Loubère, 114. To preserve the texture of seventeenth century language, all quotations have been taken from the 1693 English translation (i.e., Wyatt), though I have cited also the page numbers from the French original, edited by Jacq-Hergoualc'h (i.e., La Loubère).
 24. Fernão Mendes Pinto, *Peregrinaçam* (Lisbon: 1614). For a modern English translation of this work, see: Rebecca D. Catz, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto* (Chicago: 1989).
 25. Jeremias van Vliet, *Révolutions arrivées au Royaume de Siam* (Paris: 1673). For a modern English version, see L. F. van Ravenswaay, "Translation of Jeremias van Vliet's Description of the Kingdom of Siam," *Journal of the Siam Society*, 7, pt. 1 (1910) 1–108.
 26. Nicolas Gervaise, *Histoire naturelle et politique du royaume de Siam* (Paris: 1688). Gervaise's book has been translated twice in this century, both times under the title *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam* (Bangkok: 1928, Herbert S. O'Neill, trans.; and Bangkok: the White Lotus Co., Ltd., 1989, John Villiers, trans.).
 27. João de Barros, *Quarta decada da Asia de João de Barros* (Madrid: 1615).
 28. François Pyrard, *Discours du voyage des Français aux Indes orientales, ensemble des divers accidents, aventures et dangers de l'auteur en plusieurs royaumes des Indes etc.* (Paris: 1611). A modern English translation of this work was published by the Hakluyt Society: *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, Albert Gray, trans. and ed., 3 vols. (London: 1887–90).

29. Sir Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Diverse Parts of Africa and Asia the Great* (London: 1665).
30. Father Fernandez Domingo Navarete, S. J., *Tratados historicos, politicos, ethicos y religiosos de la monarchia de China* (Madrid: 1676). A modern English translation of this work was published by the Hakluyt Society: *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarete, 1618–1686*, J. S. Cummins, ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge: 1962).
31. François Bernier, *Voyages de François Bernier ... contenant la description des États du Grand Mogol de l'Hindoustan, du royaume de Kachemire etc.* (Paris: 1670–71; Amsterdam: 1699) There are two English translations of this work, one of which is contemporary: *The History of the Late revolution of the empire of the Great Mogol* (London: 1671). The second, modern rendition was published under the title, *Travels in the Mogul Empire. A.D. 1656–1668*, Archibald Constable, ed. (New Delhi: 1968).
32. Other contemporary travelogues cited often by La Loubère include: Jan Struys, *Les voyages de Jean Struys en Moscovie, en Tartarie, aux Indes et en plusieurs autres pays étrangers* (Amsterdam: 1681); Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Histoire de la navigation de Jean Hugues de Linscot, Hollandais, et de son voyage es Indes orientales* (Amsterdam: 1610); Father Alexandre de Rhodes, S. J., *Histoire du royaume de Tonkin et des grands progrès que la prédication de l'Évangile y a faits en la conversion des infidèles, depuis l'année 1627 jusques à l'année 1646* (Lyon: 1651); the chevalier de Chaumont (see note 18 above); Abbé François Timoléon de Choisy (see note 18 above); Vincent Le Blanc, *Les Voyages fameux du sieur Vincent Le Blanc, Marseillais, qu'il a faits depuis l'âge de douze ans jusques à soixante, aux quatre parties du monde* (Paris: 1648); Father Gabriel Magaillans, S. J., *Nouvelle Relation de la Chine* (Paris: 1688); Jean Albert de Mandelslo, *Voyages célèbres et remarquables faits de Perse aux Indes orientales*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: 1659); Father Nicolas Trigault, S. J., *Histoire de l'Expédition chrétienne au royaume de la Chine* (Lyon: 1616). Linschoten's relation can be found in two English translations. The first is contemporary, *J. H. van Linschoten his discours of voyages into ye Easte and West Indies*, W. Phillip, trans. (London: 1598). The second is a nineteenth century reprint of the 1598 translation, edited by Arthur Burnell and P.A. Tiele for the Hakluyt Society under the title, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, 2 vols. (London: 1885).
33. Other Classical authors La Loubère consulted include: Aristotle, Diogenes, Epicurus, Herodotus, Lucianus, Plato, Pythagoras, Suetonius, Tacitus and Virgil. La Loubère quoted from both the Bible and the Koran, as well.
34. Wyatt, 2; La Loubère, 114–15. As Jean-Baptiste Mirabaud remarked in 1729, "few voyagers ever embarked with as great a fund of knowledge as he ... " (*Discours prononcés dans l'Académie française ...*, 21).
35. Wyatt, 2; La Loubère, 114.
36. *Ibid.*, 36; 207.
37. *Ibid.*, 36–7; 208.
38. *Ibid.*, 37; 208–09.
39. Among other sources, these documents include: "The Life of *Thevetat*, translated from the *Balie*," "The Principal Maxims of the *Talapoine* of Siam, translated from the Siamese," "An Account of the Charges of Justice, translated out of the *Siamese*," "Of the *Siamese* and *Balie* Tongues," and "Rules of the *Siamese Astronomy* for calculating the Motions of the Sun and Moon, translated from the *Siamese*, and since examined and explained by M. *Cassini* of the Royal Academy of Science."
40. *Ibid.*, 1; 114.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 8; 136.
43. *Ibid.*, 3; 119.
44. *Ibid.*, 8; 137.
45. Paul Hazard, *The European Mind 1680–1715*, J. Lewis May, trans. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1964), 23; first published under the title, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris: 1935).
46. *Ibid.*, 45.
47. *Ibid.*, 25.
48. *Ibid.*, 26.
49. Wyatt, 27; La Loubère, 188.
50. Hazard, 34.
51. La Loubère did not innovate here. Rather, he drew upon a tradition in French historical discourse initiated by Jean Bodin in the 1560s. In his book on historical method, Bodin wrote: "There are three proofs in the light of which [ethnic] origins can be known and evaluated when reported by historians," the second of which was to be found "in traces of language." These traces included etymologies of individual words, as well as the spread of language and its adoption by foreign peoples. (See Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, B. Reynolds, trans. [New York: 1945] 337–59.) Thus, La Loubère followed a model for his own research that had been established in the sixteenth century.
52. Wyatt, 9; La Loubère, 140, 141. Pāli (spelled variously by La Loubère as Ballie, Baly and Balie) is used still by monks in Thailand for religious purposes. Evidently, its variants were spoken about the time of the historical Buddha, while linguistically—and to a remarkable degree, phonetically—and to a similar relationship to Sanskrit as modern Italian has to classical Latin.
53. *Ibid.*, 10; 141–42.
54. *Ibid.*, 10–11; 143.
55. These communities included Japanese Christian refugees expelled from their homeland by the anti-Christian policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Chinese and Persian merchants, Makassars, who had been forced out of Malaysia by the Portuguese, Hindus, East Indian Moslems, Peguans, Cambodians, Burmese and a host of others, not including a large number of Portuguese residents, some English and Dutch, and the missionaries who had come from various European countries.
56. Wyatt, 107; La Loubère, 357.
57. *Ibid.*, 104; 351.
58. *Ibid.*, 100; 343.
59. *Ibid.*, 105; 354. These punishments included such sentences as pouring molten silver down the throat of anyone found guilty of robbing the royal treasury; sewing shut the mouth of those who lied or divulged state secrets; and pricking or slicing the temples of officials who had failed to carry out their orders, in order "to punish the Memory." For more heinous offences, the penalties included being devoured by degrees by starving tigers—a particular favorite; trampling by elephants; and wearing the severed head of an accomplice on a cord around one's neck, the better to contemplate one's treason before being executed in turn.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 106; 354.
62. *Ibid.*, 106; 355.

63. *Ibid.*, 29; 190. One also sees the force of European national rivalries in this comment, transported to an Asian setting.
64. *Ibid.*, 26; 185–86.
65. *Ibid.*, 28; 189.
66. *Ibid.*, 24; 176.
67. *Ibid.*, 29; 191.
68. *Ibid.*, 73, 76; 286, 290.
69. *Ibid.*, 73; 286. That divorce was rare, wrote La Loubère, was due not just to the disgrace it brought the family or the power over life and death that husbands—who were allowed polygamous marriages—enjoyed over an adulterous wife, but also to the character of Siamese women, who "are not corrupted by Idleness, nor by Luxury of the Table or of Cloathes, nor by Gaming, nor by Shows"—an obvious criticism of European noblewomen.
70. *Ibid.*, 50; 234. Although fathers ruled in Siamese families with "despotic" authority, they "love their Wives and Children exceedingly, and it appears that they are greatly loved by them."
71. *Ibid.*, 74–5; 288.
72. *Ibid.*, 27; 188.
73. *Ibid.*, 69; 274.
74. La Loubère, 13, 14–18, 62, 64.
75. *Ibid.*, 64; 261. According to accepted European thought: "The Essential Character of the People of Countries extremely hot, or extremely cold, is sluggishness of Mind and Body; and with this difference, that it degenerates into Stupidity in Countries too cold, and that in Countries too hot, there is always Spirit and Imagination, but ... which soon flag with the least Application." (pp. 60; 253.)
76. *Ibid.*, 90; 320. La Loubère attributed the "effeminacy" of the Siamese not to any intrinsic character flaw, but to "the heat of the Climate, the flegmatick Aliments [i.e., the humours], and the Despotick Government."
77. *Ibid.*, 87; 314.
78. *Ibid.*, 66; 265.
79. *Ibid.*
80. La Loubère's chief sources on Buddhism and other eastern religions were: Père Alexandre de Rhodes's *Histoire du royaume de Tonkin ...* (1651); Père Philippe Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum philosophus ...* (1687–88); Père Nicolas Trigault's *Histoire de l'expédition chrétienne au royaume de la Chine ...* (1616); Abraham Roger's *La porte ouverte pour prévenir à la connaissance du paganisme caché ou la vraie représentation de la vie, de la religion et du service divin des Brahmines qui demeurent sur les côtes de Coromandel ...* (1670); Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville's *Bibliothèque orientale, ou dictionnaire universel contenant tout ce qui regarde la connaissance des peuples de l'Orient ...* (1697); Père Fernandez Domingo Navarete's *Tratados historicos, politicos, ethicos y religiosos de la monarchia de China ...* (1676); Johann van Twist's *Description générale de l'Inde, et en particulier du royaume de Gusuratte ...* (1638); Clement Tosi's *Dell'India Orientale descrittione geografica et historica ... con la confutatione dell'idolatrie, superstitione et altri ...* (1662); and finally Père Nicolas Gervaise's *Histoire naturelle et politique du royaume de Siam* (1688), the only one that dealt directly with the Siamese context.
81. Wyatt, 114; La Loubère, 372.
82. *Ibid.*, 119; 380.
83. *Ibid.*, 129, 130; 399, 400.
84. *Ibid.*, 133–34; 406.
85. *Ibid.*, 138–39; 415.
86. *Ibid.*, 126; 393.
87. *Ibid.*, 138, 139; 414, 416. According to La Loubère, the Buddha "seems to have been invented to be the Idea of a Man, whom Vertue, as they apprehend it, has rendered happy, in the times of their Fables, that is to say beyond what their Histories contain certain."
88. *Ibid.*, 140; 417.
89. *Ibid.*, 139; 416.
90. *Ibid.*, 141; 420.
91. *Ibid.*, 142; 420.
92. *Ibid.*, 141; 420.
93. *Ibid.*, 140; 418. Clearly, this was a major part of La Loubère's rationale to write his account of Siam.
94. *Ibid.*, 141; 421.
95. *Ibid.*, 140; 418. Indeed, wrote La Loubère, "before all things it would be necessary to give them the true Idea of a God Creator"—an "omnipotent, all-wise, and most just God, the Author of all good, to whom only everything is due." (141; 418, 419.)
96. *Ibid.*, 139; 417.
97. *Ibid.*, 143; 422.
98. *Ibid.*
99. *Ibid.*, 76; 291.
100. Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1992) 42.
101. Wyatt, 1; La Loubère, 114.
102. Wyatt, ix.