

National Emotions and Heroism in King Vajiravudh's Anti-Chinese Propaganda Writing

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Abstract

The royalist nationalist propaganda writings of King Vajiravudh Rama VI—acclaimed author of the infamous *Jews of the Orient*, published originally in Thai since 1914—represent some of the finest examples of Anti-Chinese propaganda penned by major nationalist leaders of Thailand in the 20th century. Vajiravudh was a prolific author who produced more than a thousand fictional and non-fictional pieces within his lifetime literary oeuvre. A significant portion of these works was intended as political propaganda, many of which could be justifiably categorized as anti-Chinese pieces.

As much of Vajiravudh's writings also serve as the core texts in much of Thailand's nationalist propaganda campaigns through much of the early-20th century, it has also come to define the problematic relationship between the Thai conservative ruling class and their ethnic Chinese financial patrons. This makes for very complex national emotions—despise of ethnic Chinese capitalists while venerating royalist conservative political leaders, most of whom, in fact, are of Chinese descent. This also unavoidably bleeds into the realm of everyday social values and relations between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese commoners in Thai society, their own interpretation of nationalist propaganda, and their own adapted emotions toward each other. This article provides a textual and historical analysis of such writings.

Keywords

nationalism, ethnic Chinese, propaganda, emotion, Vajiravudh

Introduction: Justification of Absolute Power

By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, much of what was known to the West as the “Far East” had been thoroughly transformed, with varying degrees of success, through the chaotic forces of colonization, modernization, and nation-building. For Siam's Crown Prince Vajiravudh, who returned from his studies in Oxford in 1902 and was to succeed his father, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), upon the latter's death in 1910, the prospects of ruling as absolute monarch were

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daunting. Chulalongkorn was a tough act to follow. His administration was credited with the extraordinary feat of surviving the height of imperialist aggression and preserving Siam as the only state in Southeast Asia not completely colonized by European powers. Ironically, however, as the threat of colonization receded with the outbreak of political unrest in Europe in the early 20th century, there appeared to be less justification for the absolute power of the Siamese monarchy. The 1910s had witnessed the collapse of one imperial monarchy after another. Vajiravudh himself experienced a foiled coup, which included a plot of regicide (Numnon, 1979), during the very first year of his reign.

Despite Thai monarchists' claim that Chulalongkorn's success in modernization and reform saved Siam from the dire fate of being colonized by the West, the country was far from being the most successful case of modernization in the Far East. Comparisons with non-colonized states in East Asia could suggest two equally humbling conclusions. Either the Siamese monarch had fallen short in leading his country, like Japanese Emperor Meiji, to modernization and glory as a world-class superpower, or Siam might profit from doing away with the monarchy altogether and becoming a republic like Sun Yat-sen's Republic of China. Vajiravudh suddenly became heir to the throne when his half-brother, Crown Prince Vajirunhis, died suddenly of typhoid fever in 1894. The future king had much soul searching to do in order to come up with a few legitimate reasons why his reign should matter at all in the midst of the grand, chaotic, global transformations of the early 20th century (Wongsurawat, 2011).

Vajiravudh, Master of Propaganda

In any event, this article is not so much about the emotions of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) himself, but concerns itself, instead, with the emotions invoked for the purpose of furthering his nationalist and nation-building policies in his propaganda writings. Vajiravudh was probably the first major influential propagandist in the modern Siamese socio-political arena. The absolute monarch wrote his own propaganda, and he remains the most prolific author among all Thailand's chief executives. With over 2000 articles to his credit and nearly a hundred pseudonyms, Vajiravudh explored and experimented in almost all the literary genres known to the Siamese educated elite in the earliest decades of the 20th century (Vella, 1978). This article will focus on the three genres in which Vajiravudh invested a great deal of time and effort and which represent the bulk of his publications. They include essays of social criticism, many of which were serialized in newspapers, published in novels and novelettes, and presented in plays. Considering the themes and content, it is clear that Vajiravudh purposefully penned his literary works—both fiction and non-fiction—as propaganda to support his various nation-building policies. The congruence between timing and subject matter is quite striking in most cases.

This article will explore and investigate four pieces: two newspaper essays, one play, and one novelette. All of them demonstrate the fundamental themes of Vajiravudh's nationalist policies: what it means to be "Thai"; the heroism of being "Thai"; and how one is expected to profess such heroism through devotion toward the monarch. All four works showcase and encourage support for the king's most important nationalist campaigns, especially the establishment and operation of the Wild Tiger Corps (เสือป่า) and Siam's boy scouts or "tiger cubs" (ลูกเสือป่า).¹ The four examples from the three genres mentioned above were also designed to reach out and influence different audiences within the Siamese general public. The two essays, *Clogs in Wheels* and *Jews of the Orient*, are non-fictional social commentaries on current affairs covered in Thai-language daily newspapers. They clearly target the literate public in major urban centers and influential business sectors, which would include a significant portion of the ethnic Chinese community in Bangkok. The play, *Heart of a Warrior*, was composed first and foremost for the entertainment and indoctrination of

members of the boy scouts and Wild Tiger Corps. This audience mainly consisted of the younger generation, including masses of children who were entering a system of compulsory education for the first time in the reign of Rama VI. Lower to mid-level state officials seeking career advancement through politically correct and privileged social activities also took an interest in this drama. Finally, the novelette, *Heart of a Young Man*, took the form of a collection of letters from a youth recently returned from years of study in the United Kingdom. The letters are addressed to his best friend, who is still residing abroad. In the foreword, Vajiravudh made clear his hope that this account would allow his friends, relatives, and colleagues in the court and the royal government of Siam to have a better understanding of the difficulties faced by a young man like himself returning from abroad in that period and adjusting, adapting to, and serving in the conservative, bureaucratic environment of the Siamese state. It seems fair to infer that the *Heart of a Young Man* was intended to gain sympathy and to lay some groundwork for possible alliances among the ruling elite of the kingdom.²

The function of emotion in these pieces was paramount, reflecting Vajiravudh's unconventional dual role as monarch and propagandist, an anomaly in Thai history. Before his time, the Siamese court had never been lacking in priests and poets to sing praises and glorify the king's political dominance in his realm. The absolute monarch was expected to make decisions and to simply give orders. Absolute power was proclaimed to belong to the king. Hence, it was not customary for the sovereign to be seen trying to convince his people to obey his orders and support his policies. In this respect, it is clear that Vajiravudh's vision for his kingdom and people was quite different from that of his predecessors. His would not be the traditional empire full of docile, parochial, and benighted subjects. He wanted to build a nation-state whose citizens were educated, cooperative, and politically conscious. His propaganda writings were, therefore, designed to provoke emotional responses, a sense of camaraderie among his people but also feelings of awe and admiration toward the king.³ Vajiravudh's propaganda writings were crucial instruments through which he sought to cultivate in his people the right emotions. The king described what and how one is supposed to feel like part of the glorious Thai nation. His was a highly complex, emotional, yet pragmatic vision. He took into consideration the complexity of domestic politics in the period of the early 20th century when colonial aggression was a thing of the past and the country had already begun to modernize. He was also well aware of the crucial tides, trends, and tendencies of global politics of that era. Vajiravudh's propaganda was designed to convert transnational capitalists into Thai nationals and, in turn, to transform ordinary Thais into heroic patriots. The king's "national emotions" were crafted with the lofty aspiration of establishing basic foundations for the great nation that Siam was destined to become.

Loyalty and Courage: Model Japanese Virtues and Vajiravudh's Ideal Nationalist

Despite the limited success of King Chulalongkorn's reforms and modernization campaigns, the Siamese monarchy had not survived imminent threats of colonization merely by luck. Of all the remaining crowned heads in Asia — excepting perhaps the Japanese monarchy, which was thoroughly transformed in status and power in the course of the Meiji Restoration—the Siamese ruling dynasty should be considered among the most flexible and adaptable of the royalist regimes. The 19th century witnessed a paradigmatic shift of the Chakri Dynasty's worldview and political alliances in the international arena that few ruling monarchies in Asia could have achieved in such a short period of time. The first three reigns (Rama I–III, 1782–1851) clearly followed a China-centered foreign policy and prospered greatly as a result of trading within the Chinese tribute system. These arrangements peaked during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor toward the end of

the 18th century. Afterward, within only a few years of his ascension to the throne, King Mongkut, Rama IV, mindful of the devastating defeat of China in the First Opium War, promptly agreed to join the new British order of colonial trade through the peaceful signing of the Bowring Treaty, the Kingdom's very first "unfair treaty," in 1855. The ratification of the Bowring Treaty, which effectively ended Siam's century-long history of trade with China through the tribute system, also brought about a drastic change in the Chakri Dynasty's orientation toward international trade and politics. Within barely 60 years of Mongkut's ascension to the throne in 1851, the Siamese ruling elite ceased to derive most of its wealth and political clout from successfully manipulated tribute missions to China. The Chakri were suddenly a dynasty whose entire civilized and modern glory now stood in the limelight of British influence. King Mongkut started by teaching himself English and then arranging for English tutoring with native-speaking instructors for his royal children from a very early age. His son and successor, King Chulalongkorn, went further by sending most of his own surviving sons to be educated in leading institutions throughout Europe. Finally, 55 years after the signing of the Bowring Treaty, Siam had its first Oxford-educated monarch, King Vajiravudh, Rama VI, who ascended the throne in 1910 (Wongsurawat, 2016).

By the time Vajiravudh ascended the throne, the memory of China as the model of civilization was felt to be the distant past. Despite the seeming early success of the Chinese Revolution in putting an end to two millennia of dynastic rule, the newly established Republic was fraught with problems, and the overall image of the Chinese nation remained "the sick man of Asia." In choosing a nation-building model for his reign, Vajiravudh had ample reason to refer to China only as a negative example. Sun Yat-sen's republic appeared to be the most chaotic and least unified among the few remaining non-colonized Asian nations. It was also the only Asian nation, at that point, to have succeeded in toppling its millennia-old monarchist regime. Vajiravudh's ideal vision for Siam was heavily influenced by the militaristic monarchist superpowers of that era, particularly Prussia, under Kaiser Wilhelm II, and Meiji Japan (Boontandha, 2013). This must have seemed, in many ways, the only viable direction of development for Siam during Vajiravudh's reign, considering all the limitations and challenges to the stability and justification of Siam's absolute monarchist regime. In the earliest decades of the 20th century, Prussia and Japan were two important monarchist regimes to survive modernization and to flourish as world powers. They were also, in particular, two foreign powers that did not have major historical baggage vis-à-vis Siam from the worst of the colonialist era. Japan appeared to be the most congenial model for Siam's further development and for her ascension to a much-anticipated status as a world power. Japan was an Asiatic state which, like Siam, had been ushered into the modern era with the threat of an unfair treaty. Japan was signing the Treaty of Kanagawa with delegates from the US in 1854, only a year prior to Siam's ratification of the Bowring Treaty. Japan's era of modernization, known to most as the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), coincided almost exactly with the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the Modernizer of Siam (1868–1910). By 1905, Japan had become the first Oriental empire to defeat a leading European power through its victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). In the meantime, however, Siam had just been forced to sign over large areas of her (perceived) vassal states in Indochina to French gunboat diplomacy (Winichakul, 1994).

In one of his best-recognized propaganda treatises, *Clogs in Wheels* [โคลนติดล้อ], Vajiravudh (under the pseudonym, Atsawaphahu)⁴ likened obstacles to modernization to mud clogging the wheels of progress. He cited Japan as a prime example of a nation that managed to achieve civilization and progress by effectively removing the mud from her wheels,

This includes nations that have achieved progress, or as many refer to as "civilization." The most obvious example is Japan, which has progressed to "civilization" with great speed. Japan is still covered with numerous mud stains, but we must admit that there is not so much mud clogging her wheels.

What about our Siamese nation?

We have also managed to progress cautiously because we see fit to be mindful and think things over carefully. Even though when compared to Japan, our progress should be considered quite slow, yet, we are not so muddy and full of stains.

But what about our wheels?

Our wheels are completely filled with mud clogs! It is true that our car could continue to move forward, but the mud is becoming such a great obstacle. Hence, the day will come when we feel that even though we need to progress rapidly to avoid danger, we could not do so because of the mud (Atsawaphahu, 2010).

Considered a major example among Vajiravudh's prolific propaganda writings, this argument clearly shows that the king regards a lack of nationalist fervor to be the greatest obstacle slowing Siam's progress, compared to Japan. In fact, Siam had recently taken many steps toward modernization through the mega projects of Chulalongkorn's reign. In that period a great deal of vital infrastructure was created in the form of railroads, telegraph lines, factories, and hospitals, etc. To establish Siam as a mighty and prosperous nation-state, however, there remained lacking two fundamental virtues perceived as essential to the success of Japan's nationalist movement in the Meiji era. These were the soldierly virtues of loyalty and courage.

Loyalty, in the case of Meiji Japan, denoted, most importantly, loyalty toward the emperor, who was the symbol, the embodiment, the leader, and the ruler of the empire. The person of the emperor was one among the most important foundations of modern Japanese nationalism from the late-19th to the early-20th century. The same national legend which proposed that every Japanese emperor is a direct descendent from the divine lineage of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, suggested that the Japanese race was the most glorious and pure of all races. The Japanese Empire, protected by the military, was governed under the divine guidance of the sacred person of the emperor. Loyalty toward the emperor, therefore, was an affirmation not only of the divinity of the Japanese monarch but also of the superiority of the Japanese race and, consequently, of the undeniable superiority of the modern Japanese nation-state. Loyalty became the ultimate foundation of every Japanese citizen's self-esteem, his *raison d'être*, the fundamental inspiration for him to devote himself to the betterment of the nation. The individual would always put his own personal interest aside in favor of the collective welfare of the Japanese race.

Courage is a soldierly virtue. In Japan's case, it is not surprising that the modernizing and military forces of the Meiji Era appear to have been almost one and the same. Although it is widely accepted that the Meiji Restoration replaced the feudalistic military dictatorship of the Tokugawa Shogunate with a centralized nationalist regime under the divine leadership of the Emperor, the leaders of the movement that undermined the Shogun's rule were primarily from dissenting warrior clans of the South. The founding fathers of the first Meiji cabinet and the drafters of the Meiji constitution were mostly from the samurai class. From the onset of the Restoration, the military had a central role in molding and shaping modernized Japan. Courage enables people to face obstacles, to accept challenges, and to move forward, regardless of all uncertainties. This soldierly determination was a crucial driving force that allowed Japan not simply to survive the imperialist aggression of Western powers but also to defeat an enemy European empire in combat. Japan was now in a position to set the terms of negotiation following its signal victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

Many interesting and useful parallels can be drawn between the Japanese and Siamese cases of modernization and nation-building from the late-19th to the early-20th century. The Chakri kings are not Siam's sole ruling dynasty, unlike the case of the Japanese royal family. However, Thai

monarchs also associate themselves with divinity. Historically, they have been cast as reincarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu, and as exemplifiers of the kingly Buddhist virtues widely recognized as “Dhamma Racha.” Like the Japanese imperial regime, the royal Siamese governments of kings Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh managed to negotiate their survival in the face of Western imperialist aggression and even benefit and flourish from some of the trade and tariff agreements imposed on them through gunboat diplomacy in the mid-19th century. Nonetheless, there remained a few fundamental differences that rendered nearly impossible the promotion of loyalty and courage as the foundation of Siamese nationalist sentiment which Vajiravudh intended to establish as the core governing policy of his reign.

The Siamese Dilemma: Falling Short of the Nationalist Ideals

Siam’s geographical location at the heart of peninsular Southeast Asia is right at the intersection of major trade routes, both land and maritime. For commercial travelers on their journeys to and from three fabulously lucrative trade destinations—the Subcontinent, China, and the Spice Islands—Siam was a useful and profitable way station. Like most of her neighbors in Southeast Asia, Siam constantly hosted great numbers and varieties of foreign travelers—traders, diplomats, laborers, religious pilgrims, prisoners of war, etc. As a result of centuries of mixing and mingling, settling and resettling, on continental Southeast Asia, it was practically impossible, by the early-20th century, to claim any degree of racial purity for any specific group, including those in control of political power. Racially-based nationalism, so potent an ideal in Meiji Japan, was much less convincing in a kingdom where nearly the entire entrepreneurial class was either of Chinese or Persian descent. The Chakri dynasty itself included over 50% Chinese ancestry within its royal bloodline (Skinner, 1957).

Setting a warrior ruling class as the prime exemplar of the Siamese people’s courage was also a problematic propaganda trope. Siam’s era of modernization had never included a massive expansion of military might in the way that Japan had done in challenging European gunboat dominance and winning the Russo-Japanese War. Siam had mostly survived her greatest threats of colonization through ingenious diplomacy. The modernized Siamese military of the late-19th century was primarily for show in order to reaffirm Siam’s place among “civilized” nations. The kingdom had to demonstrate an awareness of modern war technology and consequently acquired a battleship, or two, of her own. Among the top generals of the Siamese armed forces—Prince Chakrabongse and Prince Paribatra being two of the most notable examples—there was little doubt that Siam could only be badly defeated and would be put in an even worse situation if she relied on military force to resist her Western oppressors. It was the general consensus in the court of King Chulalongkorn that Crown Prince Vajiravudh, unlike his younger brothers, would need only some basic military training. He received specific orders from his father to devote his time to the study of more “civilian” subjects, such as political science, economics, history, and foreign languages (Boontandha, 2013). This attitude toward the governing and safeguarding of the kingdom from threats of colonization actually yielded quite impressive results throughout Chulalongkorn’s reign. Nevertheless, being denied more extensive military training seriously undermined Vajiravudh’s aspirations to lead the Siamese nationalist movement as a well-trained and heroic warrior king.

At the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the mindset of much of the Siamese elite and crucial aspects of Siam’s foreign policy still remained heavily influenced by the Sino-centric paradigm of the late-18th century. The extensive influence of the ethnic Chinese trade network on the Siamese political elite and the reliance on diplomacy and compromise in Siam’s foreign policies were major obstacles to Vajiravudh’s Japanese-inspired theme of a more martial nationalistic propaganda. In order to successfully establish a vibrant nationalist movement solidly grounded

upon the glorious virtues of courage and loyalty, Vajiravudh's propaganda had to actively negate the admiration and taste for things Chinese that had long charmed the Siamese elite. Effective nationalist propaganda was needed to discourage the old "Chinese habits," and political and business elites had to be encouraged to take practical steps to become ideal nationalistic citizens. Vajiravudh focused great energy on discouraging "Chinese-ness" in his kingdom and his people. Rather than characterizing this ancestry as a set of inborn features of race, birth, or gender, the weakness for things Chinese was presented as an unhealthy appetite that could, with determination, be overcome.

Creating the Ideal Hero: "Converting" to Courage and Loyalty

How could Siam actually implement Vajiravudh's nationalist propaganda, which trumpeted racial purity and a militaristic ruling culture when, in reality, Siam from the late- 19th to early-20th century measured up to neither of these ideals of the modern nation-state? The answer to this paradox is key to understanding the apparent bizarre self-loathing and apologetic "anti-Chinese" narrative of Vajiravudh's propaganda writings. One of the most common tropes in the king's nationalistic works is the juxtaposition of hero and villain. He offers vivid and passionate descriptions of what it means to be a hero and then contrasts this idea with a foil, an equally convincing profile of the sort of person who is clearly a malefactor. To create a potent nationalist message, Vajiravudh often substitutes the term "hero" with "Thai," assigning all positive qualities to a person or a character simply because he/she is a Thai national. The villains, on the other hand, are usually described as being Chinese, part Chinese, or of Chinese descent, and that description alone often appears to identify the source of all his/her evil actions and intentions. This Thai-Chinese dichotomy presents a spectrum of good and evil in which the pure Thai is imagined as the absolute good and the pure Chinese is assigned to the other end of the spectrum, representing the ultimate evil.

In the world created by Vajiravudh, the author and propagandist, the fact that a character is half Chinese or of Chinese descent is a highly significant part of the character profile and is frequently explaining all the villain's flaws and failures. One of the best known and well-received of these propaganda pieces, the play *Heart of a Warrior* [หัวใจนักรบ], employs this narrative technique frequently and poignantly. Composed in 1913 for the indoctrination and entertainment of members of the Wild Tiger Corps and boy scouts, it tells the story of a retired official, Phra Phiromwarakon, who is tempted away from the righteous path by an ethnic Chinese lawyer, Sun Beng,⁵ who offers his younger sister to the old man as a concubine. Under Sun's influence, Phra Phirom is induced to do everything possible to prevent his eldest son, Sawing, from being drafted into the military and to prohibit his youngest son, Sawat, from joining and training as a boy scout with the Wild Tiger Corps. At the beginning of the play, Phra Phirom's friend, Luang Manu, a judge who is also a Wild Tiger troop leader, attempts to dissuade his friend from being too influenced by Sun Beng and advises to allow Sawat to join the Wild Tiger Corps:

Luang Manu: I know Sun Beng, your concubine's brother, is a prolific writer. But I must beg you not to forget that Mr Sun Beng is not even half Thai.

Phra Phirom: What! What do you mean by that!

Luang Manu: Nothing, sir. I did not intend to be rude. Yet, I think that it would be difficult to expect Mr Sun Beng to feel the same feelings that pure Thai people should feel (Vajiravudh, 1975).

The suggestion is that because Sun Beng is ethnic Chinese, he is not patriotic and sees no reason for anyone to be so. The crafty lawyer is also constantly looking for ways to avoid being drafted

for military service. He vehemently opposes young men joining the Wild Tiger Corps, which, in wartime, could send volunteers into combat who had otherwise been successful in avoiding the regular army draft.

Sun Beng is then juxtaposed with the heroic character of Luang Mani, a young official who is courting Phra Phirom's daughter, Urai. Phra Phirom says that he does not want his daughter to be widowed if Luang Mani is called up in the time of war. He insists that he will only bestow his daughter's hand if the young man resigns from the Corps. However, Urai intervenes and proclaims that she wants never to see Luang Mani again if he leaves the Wild Tigers. She then passionately declares what it means to her that Luang Mani is a member of the Corps:

Urai: I sincerely think that the best quality of Luang Mani is that he is a member of the Wild Tiger Corps. In fact, he could most easily avoid his manly duties. He is a high-ranking official with a permanent position which prevents him from ever being drafted to the military under any circumstance. Even if there were a war, he could avoid combat without any negative implications.

Phra Phirom: That's it! He already has a way out of being forced into being shot or slashed to pieces in the battle field, but he then applies to join an organization that could send him to his death. Is this person good or insane?

Urai: He's a good, brave, and pure Thai gentleman. On the contrary, people whose duty it is to perform manly duties, yet, constantly try to avoid being drafted like your eldest son. I think such a person is a coward. It is a pity that he is born Thai. It is a pity that he is born a man (Vajiravudh, 1975).

When enemy troops actually descend upon Phra Phirom's locale, the old man is proven completely wrong. Sun Beng shows himself to be the ultimate villain, shooting Phirom's eldest son in the back as he attempts to deliver an important message to Thai troops in the neighboring district. The treacherous Chinese then tries to claim favors from the enemy general for assassinating Sawing and reveals that he is actually registered as a subject of the enemy empire. In the end, Phirom's youngest son, Sawat, the Boy Scout, is able to pass through enemy lines and deliver a call for help to the Thai army base. Re-enforcements are dispatched to rescue Phra Phirom's district. The enemy ultimately decides to withdraw, but not before hanging Sun Beng. Even they are so repulsed by his treachery that they cannot bear to have such a despicable person among their allies.

After all this, Phra Phirom has a change of heart and applies himself to join the Wild Tiger Corps. Luang Manu and Luang Mani happily welcome him into their troop, explaining away all his former sins due to the bad influence of Sun Beng. Toward the conclusion of the play, Luang Mani provides a concise explanation as to why ethnic Chinese like Sun Beng are not to be trusted.

Luang Mani: It is difficult to trust this sort of people. They change their nationality so easily. When they're with us Thais, they appear to be Thai. When they're with the enemy they then become one of them. If they could just decide to be one thing, that would be better. If they could just be Chinese that would be fine. But as it is, we can't see exactly what they are. They're like bats, neither bird nor beast. This makes them really difficult to deal with (Vajiravudh, 1975).

That the ethnic Chinese could not be trusted because of their slippery loyalties, and that they would most definitely abandon or even turn against their host country in time of war are concerns to which Vajiravudh returns again and again in many of his most influential propaganda pieces. The play *Heart of a Warrior* is a very clear example of Vajiravudh's nationalistic message and the

other general themes of his propaganda. It was intended to encourage and reinforce the beliefs of a like-minded young generation of friends and colleagues. These supporters apparently subscribed to Vajiravudh's nationalist ideals and to his vision for the modern Siamese nation. They had already decided to join the nationalist initiative dearest to the king's heart, the Wild Tigers. The tone of *Heart of a Warrior* is morally decisive and rather subjective. Much of the narrative is clearly presented in terms of "us" and "them." Those who have become members of the Corps are already on the correct patriotic track, supporting the progress, prosperity, and glory of our Siamese nation. Those who have not yet joined remain ignorant and misguided. The Wild Tigers had, therefore, to continue their patriotic mission of turning the minds and hearts of friends, family members, and colleagues who had not yet joined the ranks of the king's patriotic organization or taken the glorious side of the royalist nationalist movement.

When he wrote for the general public in the Thai-language newspapers, the king was attempting to convince a less supportive and mostly less privileged audience. In these addresses, Vajiravudh adopted a more argumentative tone. In *Wake up, Thailand* [เมื่อไทยจงตื่นเถิด],⁶ which the king penned under the pseudonym Atsawaphahu, he discusses in detail the problem of the untrustworthy ethnic Chinese, their vague national status, and undetermined loyalty. The tone is much more accusing than in *Heart of a Warrior*:

If there were to be a war in Thailand, would the Chinese not make haste to leave us as soon as possible? If anyone believes that the Chinese would remain with us even when war is approaching, that person is definitely laughable (Atsawaphahu, 1985).

In the same piece, the king also made a point of discrediting the dissenting views of a few Chinese journalists who wrote for several Chinese publications in Siam and who had pushed back against his anti-Chinese propaganda.

Pure Thai nationals need to weigh and consider most carefully before listening or deciding to trust the words of someone who is Thai by birth, Chinese by profession, and British by registration.⁷

Vajiravudh had plenty of reasons for viewing the ethnic Chinese minority in Siam as one of the biggest obstacles to his nation-building campaign. They not only made up the largest ethnic minority in his kingdom, but they had also become economically dominant. Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs had extensive financial influence due to their long history of sojourning in Siam where they traded, settled, and prospered. However, with the arrival of European imperialist threats, many among these wealthiest and influential Chinese rushed to be registered as European colonial subjects so as to reap the benefits of the extraterritoriality which the Europeans had forced upon Siam along with their unfair treaties and gunboat diplomacy. This, from Vajiravudh's viewpoint as an absolute monarch of Siam, made his country's position vis-à-vis the imperialist powers even more vulnerable. Rather than having a sense of gratitude toward a country that had hosted them for generations, most ethnic Chinese chose instead to side with the European aggressors and to exploit the economic weakness of Siam even further.

National Emotions: Negation of the Chinese Self for the Sake of the Nation

The task that Vajiravudh set for himself was a daunting one. The central policy of his reign would be to establish Siam as a modern nation-state, driven by the nationalist fervor of its citizens. In fact, however, at least a third of the population also qualified as citizens of the Republic of China.

Furthermore, the majority of the country's richest entrepreneurs were ethnic Chinese who registered as subjects of foreign imperialist powers. It is not surprising that the king found ample reason to be suspicious of and even to demonize the huge Chinese minority in Siam. Some of Vajiravudh's most famous propaganda works picture the ethnic Chinese as the antithesis of the 6th king's nationalist ideals, for they were neither loyal to Siam nor courageous enough to sacrifice themselves for their host country in times of war. Yet, in many other of Vajiravudh's leading propaganda pieces, including the ones already mentioned, there are numerous apparently apologetic or disclaiming statements related to the Chinese or Chinese-related identity of the writer and/or the protagonist. The king's most infamous essay, *Jews of the Orient* [พวกฮิวแห่งบูรพาทิศ] (published in the royally sponsored *Nangsuephim Thai* newspaper in 1914), provides a long and elaborate disclaimer from the very first page:

...In voicing this opinion, I harbor no ill intentions. Nor have I begun considering this matter with hatred towards the Chinese. On the contrary, I have many reasons to feel friendly towards the Chinese. This is not only because the Chinese are fellow Asians, but also because I have many childhood friends who are Chinese. Thus, what I am about to write does not arise from personal feelings. I will voice my opinion on a general question. It will not be a personal problem (This is purely for the greater good, not for my own personal gain.) (Atsawaphahu, 1985)

The admission that the author of anti-Chinese propaganda had many Chinese friends or, in more than a few cases, was himself of Chinese descent, appears to be almost as common a trope in Vajiravudh's writing as his criticism of the Chinese minority in Siam. He might have believed that these relationships lent credibility to his comments and demonstrated that he had privileged knowledge concerning the Chinese because he was also, in certain respects, one of them. At the same time, these connections may be meant to suggest his objectivity. He was not simply criticizing the Chinese to ingratiate himself with pure Thai folk but was taking pains to admit the flaws of people with whom he was somehow actually related. In fact, Vajiravudh sometimes claimed that his damaging accusations of the Chinese race were actually based on information gained from a friend who was himself Chinese.⁸

In the third chapter of *Jews of the Orient*, the author recounts a story about a childhood friend whose father was a Chinese immigrant to Siam. The friend had confided to Vajiravudh that he had once accompanied his father to visit relatives in China and had overheard a Chinese official talking to his father,

You need not consider your savage wife as your wife. You could bring her back as a slave to your Chinese wife. Your savage son would also be useful as a servant in your household. (Atsawaphahu, 1985)

Having described how Chinese relatives regarded the Thai wife and her offspring, Vajiravudh concludes the anecdote with his half-Chinese friend's decision, henceforth, to become a truly pure Thai and to be forever loyal to Siam. Most intriguing is how the term "Thai thae"—ไทยแท้, literally "pure" or "genuine" Thai—is employed here. It is the same term used by Urai to describe her perception of Luang Mani in relation to his taking part in the Wild Tiger Corps in the play *Heart of a Warrior*. In the same way that the half-Chinese friend made a decision to become a pure Thai, despite having a Chinese father and a whole host of Chinese relatives, Luang Mani's status as "Thai thae" was actually due to his conscious decision to commit to the Wild Tiger Corps, rather than to his family background or upbringing. Deciding to become "pure Thai" was like deciding to join the virtuous party in an epic struggle between good and evil. It was the decision and the commitment that determined one's destiny, not the cultural origins or biological ancestors.

This intriguing idea of the possibility of redeeming oneself from the status of the detested ethnic Chinese to adorable Thai patriot is most clearly expressed in the epistolary novelette entitled *Heart of a Young Man* [หัวใจชายหนุ่ม]. The collection presents some life experiences of a young man named Praphan Prayunsiri as told in personal letters to his best friend, Prasoet Suwat. The collection appears to be autobiographical in many parts. Much of the storyline revolves around Praphan's experience returning to Siam after having sojourned abroad for many years, furthering his studies in an elite institution in the United Kingdom. Praphan had encountered numerous difficulties, readjusting and reintegrating back into Siamese society when he returned. He had had trouble finding a job that he really liked in an institution that would allow him to make full use of the modern knowledge he had learned abroad. He faced conflicts with his parents who wanted him to go along with a marriage they had arranged for him. After successfully avoiding an arranged marriage, he still faced many difficulties in marrying the woman of his choice and eventually had to divorce her. When the novelette was serialized in the *Dusit Samit* newspaper in 1921, the savvy contemporary readers of *Heart of a Young Man* would certainly recognize the parallels between the male protagonist and the Oxford-educated monarch, who penned the novel under his favorite pseudonym, Ramachiti, which he often used for his fictional works about the West. In the prologue of the first publication of *Heart of a Young Man* as a volume, he wrote:

I have selected only the most interesting of these letters to be published so that readers of *Dusit Samit* newspaper could understand the perspective and experience of a young Thai man who had the opportunity to further his studies in Europe (Vajiravudh, 1975).

This clarification makes a strong suggestion that the author would like to explain, through the letters of Praphan, his experience of having spent such a long time abroad and the difficulties he had in readjusting and reintegrating back into the society of his home country.

Vajiravudh, writing as Ramachiti, portrays Prapan as a rather sympathetic and likable character. Though he suffers from various drawbacks, he is sincere and tries very hard to do what he perceives as correct and virtuous. He also gets into a lot of trouble upon his return to Siam, not only due to the naïveté of his youth but also due to the rather backward and uncivilized social circumstances in his home country, where his peers tend not to take very kindly toward the young man's modern ideas from the West. The most intriguing about Prapan's character is the fact that he appears to be the son of a wealthy Chinese bureaucrat. Many aspects of his family life and upbringing sound very Chinese. His father's house is on Hua Lam Phong Road, which is right on the edge of Bangkok Chinatown. His father continues to observe Chinese holidays and religiously practices ancestral worship. More importantly, upon his return, Praphan's parents have already arranged for him to marry a daughter of an ethnic Chinese tax farmer. Considering Vajiravudh's general attitude toward the Chinese in his propaganda writings, it is not surprising that Praphan, the ethnic Chinese protagonist, would have a rather complex relationship with his own Chinese-ness. It is rather obvious that Praphan, like Vajiravudh, is an Anglophile. He seems to prefer all things Western and appears to be ashamed, or at least annoyed, by his father's constant expression of the family's Chinese heritage.

In his second letter, Praphan writes to Prasoet from his stopover in Singapore. He expresses his annoyance at being mistaken for a Chinese by a British innkeeper, who only offers him lodging once it has been established that he is not Chinese after all. Praphan complains that he has not been enjoying his time in Singapore because there are so many Chinese around. Yet, he sees the benefits of having time to get used to being around these people again, since Bangkok is also full of Chinese:

Dear Prasoet, you know how much I hate having to socialize with the Chinese. I don't understand why my father is so fond of them. And I am also so annoyed that he continues to give offerings to the gods and ghosts every Chinese New Year. I have written many times to suggest that he cease to follow these Chinese traditions. Yet, his constantly replies, 'Although you do not know to show gratitude towards your ancestors, you must not force me to cease my sense of gratitude towards them.' He is so old fashioned it is beyond my ability to comprehend. I am actually quite worried that I might have to quarrel with him once I return home. (Vajiravudh, 1975)

Once Praphan arrives in Bangkok, he is further shocked to see how "Chinese" his younger brother, Prapha, looks, especially since people have often commented that the two brothers look so much alike. A significant portion of Praphan's homecoming reads much like an anti-Chinese nightmare as he comes back to discover that his entire family and close associates are so extremely Chinese. Worse still, he cannot help but sneer and make fun of them in nearly every one of his letters to Prasoet. Praphan frequently refers to Kimnoey, the woman his parents had selected as his wife, as "Madame Sun," because she tended to wear too much jewelry, which, in his opinion, makes her look more like a Christmas tree than anything remotely attractive. Eventually, he manages to break off the engagement and marries Urai, the woman of his own choosing. Yet, the marriage is plagued with difficulty. Ironically, a nasty quarrel between Praphan and Urai during their short-lived marriage is triggered by Praphan's attachment to his own Chinese heritage:

Urai simply refused. She said if we must go live in my father's house, we might as well move to Chinatown since the stench of the Chinese would be just as bad. It is quite bizarre for her to say such a thing since, to be fair, her own father is no less Chinese than mine. (Vajiravudh, 1975).

Eventually, not surprisingly, the couple go their separate ways and soon obtain an official divorce. In no other works of Vajiravudh do we find the protagonist having to struggle so much with the paradox of his dislike for all things Chinese while having to admit that his Chinese heritage is an undeniable part of his identity. In the end, modernized, Westernized, British-educated Praphan reconciles with his traditional overseas Chinese family and with backward conservative Siamese society. As to how such a critical adaptation can take place, Vajiravudh applies his favorite narrative solution for turning a troubled protagonist into a lovable hero: Praphan joins the Wild Tiger Corps, and everything develops henceforth in a more positive direction.

Joining the Wild Tigers seems to give Praphan a sense of responsibility and belonging. Not only does he receive the opportunity to improve his manliness through military training, but he also gets the chance to socialize with like-minded, modernized gentlemen from a wide variety of government organizations. After joining the corps, Praphan experiences great improvements in all aspects of his life. At work, he is promoted to the rank of Luang Boribanbarommasak. In his personal life, Praphan manages an amicable divorce from Urai and, by the end of the last letter (#18), is telling of his successful courtship of Miss Sisaman, the well-educated, well-mannered daughter of a high ranking official who also happens to be a good friend of his father. It appears that there is indeed a middle ground in Siam in which an Oxford-educated young man could continue to enjoy his modern life-style and even employ his progressive perspectives and Western education for the benefit of society. At the same time, he manages to remain on good terms with his father by acquiring a suitable wife from the aristocratic class in the traditional fashion, seeking approval and parental guidance before entering into married life.

As Vajiravudh, under the pseudonym Ramachiti, notes in the foreword, the purpose of writing the novelette went beyond the desire to promote intergenerational understanding among colleagues, courtiers, and the elite circle of readers of the *Dusit Smith*. The story is also an arresting invitation to the Siamese ruling elite. Regardless of the weight of their traditional Chinese background, they

should allow themselves to be transformed into respectable and heroic “pure Thai” or “Thai Thae.” By participating in the king’s nation-building project and in patriotic social activities such as the Wild Tiger Corps, even the most deeply and traditionally Chinese aristocrats, like Praphan and his father, could become both modern and Thai. Becoming more Westernized—or more precisely, more Anglicized—did not mean that they would be completely cut off from all their oriental roots.

Conclusion: The Redeeming Qualities of National Emotions

Nationalist fervor is the ultimate redeeming quality that makes an ideal Thai—pure, manly, and courageous—of any half-Chinese, civilian, divorcé, or even those with a lifetime of regrets behind them, like Phra Phirom in *Heart of a Warrior*. Vajiravudh’s anti-Chinese propaganda clearly establishes what, from the author’s point of view, constitutes the ideal Thai person of the modern era. He is courageous, selfless, responsible, and loyal. Most importantly, he is a patriot in the sense that his whole *raison d’être* is the glory of the monarch as the embodiment of the nation. To project an even more vivid image of the ideal Thai protagonist, Vajiravudh provides the antithesis of that ideal, an antagonist who frequently appears in the form of the ethnic Chinese character. The Chinese is generally the perfect villain: a selfish coward who only looks out for his own interests and would not think twice about selling his friend, or even his host country, in order to save his own skin. The Vajiravudhian Chinese villain is almost always registered as a colonial subject. His nationality remains ambiguous and his loyalty constantly shifting. Being a coward, he is no good as a soldier. Being selfish, he would not even consider joining the Wild Tiger Corps. In terms of personal relations, the Chinese villain is often portrayed as unreliable and promiscuous, impossible as a husband, untrustworthy as a colleague.

During Vajiravudh’s reign, the tides turned quite drastically for Siam. Gone were the days of glorifying the Chinese heroes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*, both of which were translated by the royal commission of Rama I. The late-19th to early-20th century was a time when the sun did not set on the British Empire. Vajiravudh’s mission was to complete Siam’s paradigmatic shift from a Sino-centric vassal kingdom of the Great Qing Empire to a modern nation-state. He worked hard to prepare the nation to be accepted, included, and respected in the Anglicized order of international trade and politics in the wake of the colonial era. His grandfather, King Mongkut, had overseen the reorientation of the kingdom toward the British colonial trade system through his ratification of the Bowring Treaty. King Chulalongkorn, Vajiravudh’s father, had furthered modernization in myriad ways, for example, by investing in railroads, postal service, hospitals, centralization of state power, and by sending most of his sons to be educated in Europe. As the first fully modernized, hence Westernized, hence Anglicized Siamese monarch, Vajiravudh had to lead his kingdom into fully modern statehood, acceding to the European standards of the era. Through his sensational and efficacious nationalist propaganda, he hoped to encourage his people to bond emotionally with what was to them a novel and alien concept of “the nation” and to establish himself as the ultimate nationalist leader (Wongsurawat, 2016).

Vajiravudh envisioned his nation as strong, powerful, and modern in the grand tradition of the great nations of the West, even as Siam held on to its glorious (somewhat transformed) Oriental characteristics by taking Meiji’s Japan as its model of modernization and nation-building. That great island empire of the East had become a first-class world power in its own right, following its spectacular defeat of Tsarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. In carrying through his grand propaganda campaign, convincing himself and his people of the potential greatness of the Siamese nation, Vajiravudh had also to distance himself, his people, and his nation-building project from Chinese ways and Chinese-influenced traditions that were considered obsolete and backward in

the early 20th century. These very traditions were embedded in the foundation of the state and in the foreign policies of his predecessors in the first three reigns of the Chakri Dynasty. Most of the family and business connections of the kingdom's highest elite circles of aristocrats and entrepreneurs were related to Chinese culture and proud of their heritage. But Siam had to break free of its 18th-century Sino-obsessions in order to fully succeed in the modernizing and nation-building projects of the 20th century.

Nationalism was the only path to redemption. Just as the non-military protagonists of Vajiravudh's anti-Chinese propaganda realized the authenticity of their "Thainess" by joining the Wild Tiger Corps, so Vajiravudh would wash away the impurities of his own heavily Chinese influenced bloodline by sheer willpower to be "pure" Thai. His lack of military training would be made up for by his absolute devotion to the founding and development of the Wild Tiger Corps. Similarly, ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, if they chose wisely, could easily transform themselves into "pure" Thai by joining or making donations to the monarch's various nationalist projects. These important symbolic actions were a way of ensuring that they could carry on being the dominant and monopolizing force in much of the Siamese economy. Having found the means to trump race with patriotic fervor, the absolute monarch could pose as the ultimate leader of the nation without having to prove the impossible racial purity that was the crucial foundation of the Japanese emperor's claim of divinity.

Vajiravudh's anti-Chinese propaganda writings provide the perfect guide to emotional re-education for modern Siamese citizens of the early-20th century. Heroic conversion, according to the vague concept of being "pure Thai," appeared to depend fundamentally on turning one's will toward the proper object, and on making correct expressions of loyalty and courage. Vajiravudh's propaganda provided reference narratives of how a successfully converted "pure Thai" hero should appear, act, and feel. The king envisioned the proper responses which could be expected from family, friends, colleagues, and Thai society in general when a young candidate successfully achieved the authentic feelings and acted out his role as a "pure Thai." The monarch's idealized expressions of these so-called "national emotions" came in a wide variety of forms—almost as varied as the classes and ethnic backgrounds of his audience. There were social critiques presented in newspaper articles for the literate general public, plays for students and young professionals in training, and serialized, highly stylized novelettes for fellow aristocrats. Siam during Vajiravudh's reign would establish herself as a modern nation-state with a rigorous royalist-nationalist movement without having to undermine either her political or economic elites. All one need do to become the ideal Thai was to redeem oneself from its hated origins—the tribute trade, Confucian ethics, ancestor worship, all that had provided the peaceful and prosperous foundations for the survival of the nation through the colonial period. Now, Siam had to model herself as a modern and heroic European.

Notes

1. The Wild Tiger Corps was a civilian paramilitary unit established by King Vajiravudh in 1911. Its main purpose was to provide military training for civilian volunteers so as to be able to support the military in times of war. Vajiravudh also believed that military training could help build character as well as allow unit members from different backgrounds to socialize, expand, and take advantage of the social network created through their affiliation with the Wild Tiger Corps. Along with the Wild Tiger Corps, Rama VI also established a youth version of the unit, the "tiger cubs," intended to provide minor support for the activities of the Wild Tiger Corps as well as to be a form of extracurricular activity and social educations for young boys of schooling age.
2. The fact that the novelette was first serialized in 1921 in the king's semi-private newsletter, the *Dusit Smith*, which circulated only within the king's experimental democratic community of "Dusit Thani,"

clearly indicates that the intended audience was initially limited to the inner circle of the king's courtiers and close acquaintances (Malakul, 1970).

3. The fact that much of his propaganda also targeted members of the royal family and influential courtiers may suggest that the king was not nearly as popular among his colleagues as his father and predecessor, King Chulalongkorn. Despite arriving after the worst of European imperialist aggression, Vajiravudh's political position within his own court was much more precarious than that of his father's.
4. *Clogs in Wheels* was first published in Thai as a serialized social critique article *Nangsuephim Thai*, which was the Thai-language royally sponsored newspaper and Vajiravudh's main propaganda mouthpiece, in 1915. There were altogether 12 articles to the *Clogs in Wheels* series. Each article describes in detail a serious obstacle to the advancement of the Thai nation as well as possible remedies for such a predicament.
5. Sun Beng's character is obviously based on Vajiravudh's perception of the Chinese revolutionary Sun Yatsen. He rose from humble backgrounds through modern education but remains uncultivated since he lacked proper upbringing. He is well versed in modern knowledge, especially international law and political theory. Yet, he is sly and untrustworthy. He only employs his modern knowledge to fulfill his own selfish desire and does not hesitate to take advantage of his less knowledgeable or less fortunate countrymen. We could find this sort of description being made of Sun Yatsen in quite a few propaganda pieces in the 1910s.
6. *Wake up, Thailand* was first published in 1914 as a series of social critique articles in the royal sponsored *Nangsuephim Thai* newspaper.
7. This statement was clearly an attack on Xiao Focheng (or Seow Hudseng) who owned *Jeno-Siam Warasap*, the first and highly influential Chinese-Thai bilingual newspaper in Siam during Vajiravudh's reign. Not only was he a prominent leader of the Chinese community in Bangkok but also a vocal critic of Vajiravudh's anti-Chinese propaganda. It was well known within the Chinese community of Bangkok that Xiao's father was a Hokkien Chinese born in British Malaya and that Xiao himself, even though he was born in Siam, was registered from a very young age as a British subject (Intharaphirom, 2004).
8. This particular narrative technique also allows the targeted audience, in this case, the literate Thai general public, to identify with the author more easily. Since the majority of the readers of the limitedly circulated Thai-language newspapers in the early-20th century were the urban-educated middle to upper-middle class who would most likely live in the vicinity of or do business with the ethnic Chinese, or perhaps themselves be of Chinese descent, and therefore, could all imagine themselves having similar conversations or experiences as recounted by the author in the article.

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