

Royal Brother, Ethnic Other: Politicizing Ethnonyms in the Chronicle Compositions of Early Bangkok¹

Matthew Reeder²
Cornell University, USA

Abstract

This article examines a late eighteenth-century innovation in the composition and revision of dynastic chronicles in the Thai language. In chronicles and chronicle passages composed at this time, internally-diverse political networks – the subjects or armies of one monarch or another – are regularly identified as single ethnic groups as never before. This transition is traced through three periods of chronicle (re)writing. Compositions from the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) focus overwhelmingly on the actions of specific individuals. The diverse population, army, and nobility of a kingdom are not endowed with a single ethno-political identification, and are not allowed important roles in the narratives as corporate entities. In extant chronicle texts from this period, the ethnic term “Thai” does not appear at all. In chronicle narratives of the late eighteenth century, however, we can see the tentative introduction of the ethnic term “Thai” as one of the two communities

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper given at the Empowering Network for International Thai Studies (ENITS) conference, Chulalongkorn University, 25 June 2015. The research for the article was partially funded by ENITS, Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University. I am grateful for this assistance. I would also like to thank Tamara Loos, Thanapol Limapichart, Patrick McCormick, Jan Dressler and Emiko Stock for their many valuable comments and suggestions.

² PhD candidate, Department of History, Cornell University.

supporting King Taksin (r. 1767-1782) along with “Chinese”, and a dramatic trend towards the ethno-political identification of the armies from the Irrawaddy valley kingdoms as “Burmese”. Finally, beginning in the last decade or so of the eighteenth century, the diverse peoples and armies of Bangkok were glossed frequently as “Thai”, and even the peoples of Bangkok’s tributary kingdoms were assigned ethno-political identities that distinguished them socially and politically from the “Thai” in Bangkok. In late eighteenth and nineteenth century chronicle compositions, the politicization of ethnonyms facilitated the narration of a chronic history of aggression and deceit not just between certain newly-ethnicized kingdoms, but also between their newly distinguishable sets of officials and subjects. Early twentieth-century historians, in turn, drew from these ethnicized royal chronicle narratives to craft a nation-centered history for modern Thailand. Indeed, the political circumstances that motivated late-eighteenth century chroniclers to promote loyalty to the crown through the repetition of ethnicized us-versus-them narratives of history remain powerful even today.

Introduction

When did Siam become, in the political imagination of its own royal court, a Thai kingdom?³ When did Thai-language dynastic chronicles begin to consider the kingdoms of Pegu and Ava “Burmese”

³ Siam was the name used by most foreigners, including Europeans and Chinese (as “Xian”), for the kingdoms of Ayutthaya (1351-1767), Thonburi (1767-1782) and Bangkok (from 1782). In the Thai language, however, especially in court documents up to the mid-nineteenth century, the kingdom was usually named after its capital or simply called “the capital (*krung* [ᨧᩢ᩠ᨦ])”.

and the kingdom of Cambodia “Khmer”?⁴ In this article, I argue that Thai-language chronicles only began to portray each of the kingdoms of the region as “ethnic” kingdoms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵ This new kind of social claim supplemented, without completely replacing, the pre-existing characterization of kingdoms as networks of personalized royal power.

Two representative passages from Thai-language chronicles can be used to illustrate this shift. The first passage recalls a sixteenth-century assault by Ayutthaya forces on the camp of invaders from Hongsawadi (Pegu).⁶ As a result of the assault, the enemy was successfully repelled from the camp at which they had hoped to wait out the rainy season. A chronicle probably composed in the early-to-mid eighteenth century recounts the event as follows:

[Our] specialist soldiers hacked and stabbed many enemies dead, [...] so their army withdrew to join their main army in Chainaburi. [Our commanders] Phra Thepmanu and Khun Ramdecha followed the enemy up to Chainaburi, and attacked the enemy in the middle of the night, killing many, and then withdrew the army back to the capital.⁷

⁴ My use of ethnonyms reflects, in every case, their historical Thai-language equivalents, not our contemporary English-language understandings. For example, my use of “Burmese” implies the appearance or use of the Thai-language ethnonym, *Phama* [พม่า].

⁵ I am not suggesting an equivalence between what appear to be premodern practices of “ethnic” labelling and modern understandings of what constitutes “ethnicity”. My methodology is to begin with the ethnonyms that appear in premodern Thai sources, focusing particularly on the ones that were later associated with states and nations. By looking at the contexts in which they were used, I trace their shifts in meaning and connotation over time.

⁶ Thai-language chronicles invariably use the name Hongsawadi for the city known to contemporary Europeans as Pegu (Bago in today’s Burmese). Because I focus on Thai-language texts rather than on the city itself, I follow suit.

⁷ See the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 1784 Fragment. The pages of the manuscript are not numbered, but this passage is taken from the 35th page of the front side. This passage was included without edits during the 1790s production of the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Phan Canthanumat Recension, where it can be found on p. 290. I will discuss the 1784 Fragment and the dating of its composition in more detail below. All translations are mine unless stated otherwise in the notes.

This first chronicle passage narrates the event without the aid of ethnonyms. Instead, it refers to the entirety of the opposing troops as the “enemy” and takes care to name the key officials involved.

The second passage narrates a similar strategic context. Again, Siam’s army was attacking an enemy camp. It matters little that this time, the events occurred in 1785 at the beginning of the reign of King Rama I. More importantly, this chronicle passage was composed at the end of the eighteenth century rather than in its beginning or middle:

[Rama I’s brother, the “Second King”] gave a royal order to all the princes, high officials, and commanders of armies and units to lead their troops to attack the Burmese camp. The Burmese fought ably. Thai and Burmese troops shot at each other causing death and desperation on both sides. The Thai army could not break into the Burmese camp, so it withdrew to its own camp.⁸

In the second excerpt, in contrast to the first, the exonym “Burmese” is used several times to refer to the enemy army. The autonym “Thai” also appears there twice.

These two passages illustrate the beginning and end points of an eighteenth-century transition in Thai-language chronicle writing which features an increasing reliance on single ethnonyms to refer to whole kingdoms, armies, officials and populations. In Thai-language historiography, this is when the kingdoms of Hongsawadi and Ava became Burmese, the kingdom of Cambodia became Khmer, and the kingdoms of Ayutthaya and Bangkok became Thai. In this article, I illustrate the transition using examples from chronicles, explain its historiographical significance, discuss the multiple meanings carried by the ethnonyms used, and outline some of the political benefits that chroniclers obtained by employing this narrative innovation.

⁸ Royal Chronicle, Phra Phonnarat Recension, 474. This passage was included with just a few minor edits in the chronicle of the First Reign. See Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Flood Translation, I: 93.

Dynastic Chronicles and Royalist Historiography

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab has been identified as the father of Thai history because of his success at reshaping and promoting a monarch-centered narrative as the national history of the “Thai” people. His narrative places the exploits and glories of the kings of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok at its center. While the prince’s methodology was influenced by the positivist, rationalist trend in Western scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he based his narratives of Thai history primarily on content from dynastic chronicles called *phongsawadan*. Not only did Damrong and his contemporaries craft the flesh of the national history from these chronicle accounts, but they also preserved the chronicles’ skeleton, the focus on the monarchs themselves.⁹ This enduring form of dynastic historiography continued to feature kings, their relationships with other kings, and the activities that demonstrate each king’s supreme power and merit. The royalist national narrative has dominated popular accounts of Thai history ever since.¹⁰

In this article, however, I move in the opposite direction chronologically, looking back in time to the chronicle historiography that provided the foundation for the modern national history produced by Prince Damrong and others. In particular, I trace the heritage of a key feature of the national narrative often taken for granted: the very appropriation of a single ethnic name, such as Thai, Burmese and Khmer, to label the diverse peoples of each of the region’s kingdoms. In so doing, I question both popular assumptions that the kingdoms of Ayutthaya and Bangkok were always Thai kingdoms in their own

⁹ For an assessment of Prince Damrong’s historiographical goals, see Breazeale, “A Transition”, esp. 37-49, and Chris Baker, “Introduction” to *Our Wars with the Burmese*. For two of Prince Damrong’s larger projects which pose the Burmese as a foil to highlight the successes and failures of Thai kings as national leaders, see his books, *Our Wars* and *Biography of King Naresuan*.

¹⁰ I do not mean to overemphasize continuity from *phongsawadan* to modern Thai-language history writing. While Damrong and other modern Thai historians borrow much of the detail and the emphasis on royalty from the *phongsawadan*, their new historical accounts are reoriented to emphasize certain new discourses of history in the context of aggressive European colonialism and the rising influence of the concept of the nation-state. See Thongchai, “Modern Historiography”.

political imaginaries, and scholarly assumptions that the elites of Siam did not claim an ethnic identity for their kingdom until they were inspired to do so by European-style nationalism in the mid to late nineteenth century.

To support this argument, I draw attention to an eighteenth-century transition in the way dynastic chronicles in the Thai language depicted relationships between kings.¹¹ In short, chroniclers began to supplement their representations of these relationships as personal and even familial with a new model of discursive social organization which used ethnonyms to label the armies, peoples and officials of each kingdom as distinct and separate ethno-political groups. Chronicle narratives from the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) are framed in terms of the development or deterioration of peaceful relationships between individual rulers, *phraratchamaitri*, or “royal friendship”. It was not uncommon for one ruler to use kinship terms, like “older [brother]” and “younger [brother]” to address the other. The strength or weakness of such relationships was often in flux; it was the responsibility of individual rulers to maintain them.¹²

While these earlier chronicles narrate wars as personal disputes between royal brothers, later chronicles frame warfare as recurring conflicts with ethnic others. In chronicles and chronicle passages composed or heavily revised in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the latter narrative pattern supplemented, but did not entirely supplant, the former. Even today, a discourse in which the smaller nation-states of Laos and Cambodia are posed as “little brothers” to Thailand persists. Yet, the discourse of ethnic otherness – as Burmese or Khmer, for example, as opposed to Thai – has, since the nineteenth century, increasingly overwhelmed the older discourse of personal royal connections between rulers.

¹¹ In this article, I purposely limit my discussion to the historiography of dynastic chronicles. In other forms of Thai-language expression, patterns of ethnonym use differed markedly. I discuss them in my forthcoming dissertation.

¹² Personalized premodern Southeast Asian political relationships are discussed in the scholarship as forming the basis of the “Mandala system”, which is schematized most famously by Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region*, especially chapter 2 and postscripts 2 and 3. See also Sunait, “Mandala”.

Endowing Ethnonyms with New Meanings

This article is not about modern ideas of what constitutes “ethnicity”, “race” or “nation”. In the Thai language, none of these concepts were clearly distinguished or named until the late nineteenth or even the twentieth centuries. Rather, I focus on the textual remnants of one form of early modern social identification: terms often referred to as “ethnonyms” or ethnic labels. These labels were used occasionally in Ayutthaya-era texts and became quite common by the late eighteenth century. Following anthropologist Fredrik Barth, I regard the practice of ethnic labeling as flexible, a politically or socially contingent effort to draw implicit or explicit contrasts between the labelled persons and others, including those doing the labelling. It inherently involves a process of “othering”, although “ethnic boundaries”, in Barth’s phrasing, were rarely impermeable. The delineations and social relevance of ethnic categories have always been shaped by social, political and economic circumstances.¹³ The appearance of an ethnonym in an early modern text is better interpreted as evidence that a social claim was being made, rather than as evidence for the existence of an “ethnic group” as an objective entity.¹⁴ In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Thai-language compositions, there is abundant evidence that ethnic markers were manipulated and ethnic labels applied in new ways. Social categories were continually reshaped at their margins.¹⁵

While ethnonyms such as Thai, Khmer and Burmese could not be radically redefined all at once, they were dense with connotation in ways that offered benefits to those who could manipulate them successfully. It is important to note that until the end of the eighteenth century, ethnonyms often functioned grammatically as modifiers. They modified not just categories of people, but also languages,

¹³ Barth, “Introduction”, especially 9-15.

¹⁴ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

¹⁵ In this article, I present some evidence of (perhaps unconscious) efforts to reshape political relationships through new uses of ethnonyms. For discussions of precolonial efforts to manipulate ethnic markers (symbols of ethnic identification) elsewhere in the region, see Lieberman, “Ethnic Politics”; Mayouri and Pheuiphanh, *Paths to Conflagration*; and Chandler, “Songs”.

calendrical systems and weaving styles. The “Thai” language, the “Lao” style of clothing, and the “Burmese” calendar were sometimes associated conceptually with Thai, Lao and Burmese ethnic categories, respectively, but they did not define them objectively. Indeed, it was common for the people of the region to speak multiple languages, wear different styles of clothes and reckon time according to different calendars.

In addition, even when words such as Thai, Lao and Burmese were used as ethnonyms to describe people, they were still ambiguous. They could be used to make either a “cultural” ethnic identification or, increasingly in the late eighteenth century, a “political” ethnic identification.¹⁶ In Ayutthaya-era Thai-language chronicles, ethnonyms almost always referred to ethnic categories in the cultural, rather than the political, sense. Ethnic labels carrying a cultural connotation can be found scattered about in these earlier chronicle compositions, but their scope was limited. Sometimes they described an individual or a small group of people who shared certain cultural markers or belonged to a common village community. Sometimes they referred to non-state hill peoples or foreign traders. Ethnonyms, especially for the settled, Buddhist peoples of the region such as “Burmese”, did not yet imply *all* Burmese; nor were the Burmese used as an autonomous narrative agent. Nowhere in chronicles composed in the Ayutthaya period does it say, for example, that “the Burmese” attacked Ayutthaya. Furthermore, while ethnic exonyms were uncommon in Thai-language chronicles, the ethnic autonym “Thai” was completely non-existent. The word “Thai”, referring specifically to an ethnic category of people rather than to the language or another cultural attribute, does not appear even once in a chronicle recension dated to the Ayutthaya period.¹⁷

¹⁶ Following Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, I avoid the ambiguous term “identity” in favor of “identify” and “identification”, forms of the word that encourage us to investigate who is identifying whom. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, chapter 2.

¹⁷ Historian Dhida Saraya, *Becoming Thai*, 131, has written that the word “Thai” was “initially used in the Bangkok Period.” She does not elaborate, but she must be referring to the political sense of the ethnonym Thai which, as I show in this article, was first associated with the Ayutthaya and Bangkok kingdoms in chronicles composed shortly after Bangkok’s founding.

By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, however, chroniclers began to deploy ethnonyms to make *political* ethnic identifications.¹⁸ This was done by appropriating either the name of the language of official communication or the name of the dominant cultural ethnic group (which in any case was usually the same) of each neighboring kingdom to refer to its entire diverse population. In other words, chroniclers began to group the peoples of each kingdom together into broad political categories using the vocabulary of ethnonyms. This is most evident in new or revised passages recounting battles, in which older references to the “enemy army” or, for example, the “army of the lord of Hongsawadi”, were increasingly replaced by the “Burmese army”.

If we accept the contention that Siam and its neighbors did not become “nations” until the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries, then what were chroniclers trying to signal when, a hundred years earlier, they began to gloss diverse armies with single ethnic names? The armies of the region were, in fact, famously diverse. They were raised and dispersed as needed, and consisted of an ad hoc collection of peasants, mercenaries, dragooned traders and war captives conscripted by the princes and officials of the kingdom and by tributary rulers. These nobles-turned-military commanders themselves belonged to an array of local communities and spoke the languages of their troops. The early nineteenth century armies of Siam, for example, were derived from the great variety of communities resident in the kingdom, including Cham, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Mon, Portuguese and Vietnamese specialist and infantry units.¹⁹ The variety of ethnic communities subject to a monarch signified both the extent of his power, as well as the skills and products available to him because ethnic communities were held responsible for procuring particular items of value or offering certain expert services, including military skills. A description of the enemy army mobilized to attack Bangkok in 1785, composed not long after the event, emphasizes the mightiness

¹⁸ My understanding of this new form of ethnic identification builds on what Victor Lieberman, “Ethnic Politics” and *Strange Parallels*, calls “politicized ethnicity.”

¹⁹ Snit, *A Culture*, 125-126.

of the threat by calling attention to the ethnic diversity of the opposing army:

When [King Bodawpaya] heard the news that there was a new reign in the Thai kingdom, he thereupon decided on war against Ayutthaya. He had an army conscripted of Burmese, Mon, Meng, Tavoyan, Rakhaing, Kasae, Lao, and Ngiao; altogether many tens of thousands of people in many divisions.²⁰

How was it possible that King Bodawpaya's army could be introduced as an amalgam of ethnically-differentiated soldiers, only to be glossed later in the narrative, simply and repeatedly, as the "Burmese army"? In contrast, the diverse Hongsawadi armies of the sixteenth century were not described as Burmese (or Mon) armies in the chronicle texts we can confidently date to the Ayutthaya era.

These multiple references to certain ethnic categories (for example, the Burmese army) overlying others (the diverse components of it) only make sense when we realize that ethnic names had come to carry two meanings – cultural and political – which could refer to different (though overlapping) groups of people.²¹ By the late eighteenth century, I argue, chroniclers no longer simply used ethnonyms to identify the variety of languages and ethnic communities among each ruler's cosmopolitan subjects, but they called into existence the notion of the ethno-political kingdom itself.

Ethnonyms in Chronicle Compositions

The three sections that follow take a closer look at the ways in which chronicles composed in the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), the Thonburi period (1767-1782) and the early Bangkok period (1782-1851) narrate clashes between opposing armies. Battle narratives

²⁰ Royal Chronicle, Phra Phonnarat Recension, 471. Calling the kingdom "Thai" was a new development in the First Reign, but calling it Ayutthaya, even though the capital had already been moved first to Thonburi and then to Bangkok, was still common.

²¹ This is not dissimilar to the way many ethnic and national groups are referred to by the same names today. Indeed, Rogers Brubaker suggests that an identification of national belonging can be thought of as a specific form of ethnic identification. *Ethnicity without Groups*, 81-82, 140.

in the chronicles offer compelling evidence for the growing trend toward identifying each monarch's diverse subjects – represented by his army – as a single ethnic group. I group chronicle texts into these three “moments” in order to draw some preliminary conclusions about shifting understandings of political relationships over time, although I do not mean to suggest that the divisions are neat and the differences always clear. My intention is limited to identifying patterns and trends because, of course, chroniclers did not change their writing conventions all at once and in harmony. Rather, the old rhetoric of political connection coexisted with the new trend in classification, even as the older forms gradually became less dominant over time.²²

In short, chronicle narratives composed in the Ayutthaya period focus heavily on the actions of monarchs and other special individuals. Corporate groups of commoners, although rarely allowed important roles in chronicle narratives until the end of the period, were identified by place of residence, social rank, ethnic-village community or relationship to one of the major (royal or noble) figures. The people, army and nobility of a kingdom as a whole were not endowed with any one particular ethno-political affiliation. By the late eighteenth century, in chronicle compositions composed in the reign of King Taksin and perhaps in the early years of King Rama I, we can see the tentative introduction of the ethnonym “Thai” and a dramatic trend towards the ethno-political identification of the armies from Ava that regularly threatened Siam during those years as “Burmese”. The focus of the chronicle on the Thonburi reign remains on the Thai-Burmese conflicts, with very little attention paid to the other kingdoms on Siam's periphery. In this period of transition, ethnonyms were politicized specifically to narrate a chronic history of clashes not just between two sets of kings, but between their newly distinguishable sets of subjects as well – Thai versus Burmese. By the first datable chronicle recension of the Bangkok period, sponsored by Rama I in 1795, and in subsequent chronicles produced throughout the nineteenth century, the subjects of tributary kingdoms were increasingly written into chronicle

²² This is comparable to the transition in cosmological and geographical knowledge traced by Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, chapter 2.

narratives and assigned ethno-political identities that separated them socially and politically from the subjects of the kingdom of Bangkok. I offer evidence from the chronicles themselves to flesh out the three “moments” of transition in more detail below.

Personalized Politics in Ayutthaya Compositions

The most striking quality of the dynastic chronicles that were composed in the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), when compared to chronicles (or, indeed, history textbooks) of later periods, is that they barely mention ethnic groups at all. In the court histories of the kingdom of Ayutthaya, politics was highly personalized and focused most often on specific, named elites. Wars that were later remembered as “Thai versus Burmese” or “Thai versus Khmer” were narrated in these early chronicles almost entirely through the names of individual monarchs, nobles, heroes and cities.²³ Townspeople, farmers and soldiers were not autonomous corporate agents in these narratives. When commoners were mentioned, they were usually tied to a specified member of the royal family or nobility. While no reference appears in these narratives to a “Burmese army”, for example, we frequently encounter “the army of the king of Hongsawadi”.²⁴ Armies and military units, moreover, like the farming families and townspeople of the region, served the chronicle narratives primarily as props for the star actors, the contending rulers and nobles. For most

²³ For modern narratives that provide ethnicized accounts of historical conflicts between Ayutthaya and other kingdoms, see influential works such as Damrong, *Our Wars with the Burmese*, and Wyatt, *Thailand*, esp. 82, 177.

²⁴ This is not to say that there are no ethnonyms present at all in Ayutthaya-era chronicles, although there are certainly fewer than in later texts. Ethnonyms, when mentioned at all, were used to identify individuals, handfuls of individuals, or particular village-communities. For example, a seventeenth-century abbreviated chronicle states that in a battle between King Boromtrailok of Phitsanulok and nobles loyal to Chiang Mai, “four Lao enemies on elephants united to capture the royal elephant” (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Luang Prasoet Version, 216. My translation differs somewhat from Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, Cushman translation, 17). Here, four individual enemy warriors were labelled as Lao even though chronicles from this period did not label the entire Chiang Mai army as ethnically Lao. The masses of Thai-speaking peasants were never identified in these early chronicles as ethnically Thai.

of the Ayutthaya period, chronicle accounts of warfare were thus a lot like stage dramas. The spotlight was reserved primarily for royalty, titled officials and other special individuals, who were each adorned with some combination of battle gear, cleverness and armed forces.

Two examples will suffice. The first is drawn from a fragment of a detailed chronicle which describes a rebellion in Cambodia against the court at Ayutthaya in the 1440s.²⁵ Its leader was Cao Yat, known in Cambodia today as a national hero. Although the extant manuscript was probably copied sometime before the fall of Ayutthaya, the chronicle's linguistic and stylistic features suggest a much earlier composition. It could be as old as the fifteenth century or as recent as the seventeenth, and minor modifications were clearly made here and there as it was recopied over time, but in any event, the fragment probably represents the oldest surviving Thai-language chronicle composition.²⁶

The narrative's treatment of the rebellion in Cambodia is noteworthy for a number of reasons. The fragment specifically notes that Cao Yat was the son of a noble, perhaps from the Suphanburi royal family, first appointed to rule the city of Angkor by the king of Ayutthaya. While Khmer chronicles preserve knowledge of this personal relationship between enemies, it does not appear in any of the subsequent Thai-language chronicles that survive today.²⁷ The ethnonym "Thai" does not appear anywhere in the entire fragment, and the term "Khmer" occurs just three times – in two of the cases, specifically referring to just one of several (cultural) ethnic groups of the region. Even the battle scenes treat the conflict as one between

²⁵ Vickery, "2/k 125", located and discussed one part of the fragment, while another part was later found by Ubonsri, "Revision". Both parts were studied in some depth by Pakron, "Analytical Study". On the dating, see Vickery, "Cambodia after Angkor", 494-495. The dates in the Ubonsri portion of the fragment support Vickery's conclusion that the events occurred in the 1440s.

²⁶ Arguing that the titles of kings and officials are consistent with fifteenth century-use, Vickery "2/k.125", 54-55, believes that the chronicle was first composed shortly after the events it records. Pakron, "Analytical Study", 109, notes that most of the dates lack precision. Therefore, he suggests, the narrative might have been based on oral sources rather than court documents, and put into writing as late as the seventeenth century.

²⁷ Vickery, "2/k.125", 11, 56-61, and "Cambodia after Angkor", 44, 110.

individuals rather than between two prideful nations (as the incident is now recalled in Khmer language histories):

Cao Yat moved the elephants, horses, and troops, and fled away to stay in Troen At for about a month; and then he was able to come in and take Sun village, and he moved on to Congkueap. Khun Kamhaengphet, who governed that town, defended it fiercely. Cao Yat could not take the town, so he employed a ruse and moved the army back. Then the ruler of Phra Nakhon Luang [Angkor] appointed Khun Kraiban Saen to go help Khun Kamhaengphet defend the town of Congkueap.²⁸

Particular nobles, not their armies, serve as the primary characters in the account. All of the moving, fleeing, taking, defending and tricking was done by named individuals, not by commoners or masses of soldiers. The “troops” and “army” are each mentioned once in this excerpt, but they are neither afforded a major role in the events, nor identified with a single ethnonym.²⁹ They are instead only mentioned when tied to their commanders. We can see that the troops are Cao Yat’s troops, and the army is Cao Yat’s army, but the chronicler evidently does not see the relevance in making any ethnic claims about the soldiers as a whole.³⁰

Other dynastic chronicles composed in the Ayutthaya period feature similar characteristics.³¹ The Luang Prasoet chronicle of

²⁸ Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Vickery Fragment, 30. I have adapted Vickery’s translation slightly. The place name Congkueap has not been identified. I have transliterated it directly from the Thai.

²⁹ In fact, there is even less interest here in the “troops” as a horizontal category of people than it might appear. The troops [*ri-phon*] are only mentioned as part of a conventional stock phrase which combines three elements of a typical army – elephants, cavalry, and foot soldiers – to refer to an army as a complete whole.

³⁰ A few scattered ethnonyms do surface in this text: Khmer, Chong, Lao and Pear. Vickery, “2/k.125”, 62, argues that the surprisingly frequent references in the text to a “faction [*phak*]” or “great faction [*mahaphak*]” are copy errors for Pear, but this is speculative. In any case, these ethnonyms do not refer to Cao Yat’s myriad supporters as a single politicized ethnic category.

³¹ This includes, in addition to the chronicles discussed in this section, the portion of the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Cakkraphatdiphong Recension, which was composed sometime in the middle third of the eighteenth century. See Nidhi, “The History of Bangkok”, 294-296.

Ayutthaya is an abbreviated account, perhaps drawn in part from the journals of court astrologers. It records most events very briefly. One of its more detailed passages, however, narrates an invasion by the King of Hongsawadi in the mid-sixteenth century. Here, the Ayutthaya-era pattern of narrating a conflict between kingdoms almost exclusively through the actions of high-ranking individuals and, to a lesser degree, through their handling of armies of the anonymous, non-ethnicized commoners connected to them, is especially evident. This passage features the battlefield death of the chief queen of Ayutthaya's King Cakkraphat, identified in later texts as Queen Suriyothai. By the twentieth century, she had become a hero of the Thai nation; but in the Ayutthaya-era chronicles, like other elite characters, she was never identified ethnically. Simply the "chief queen" in chronicle manuscripts, she only became "Thai" in modern historiography.³²

When King Cakkraphat went out to do battle with the Hongsawadi troops, his chief queen and his royal daughter, on elephants, accompanied him. And when they did battle with the Hongsawadi troops, the vanguard was routed and, colliding with the main army, created enormous confusion. And the chief queen and royal daughter fought with the enemy until they lost their lives on the necks of their elephants. And in that Hongsawadi war, Prince Thammaracha and Prince Ramesuan were lost to the King of Hongsawadi. So Phraya Prap and the chief elephant, Phraya Nuphap, were also taken and delivered to the King of Hongsawadi at Kamphaengphet. And thus the King of Hongsawadi sent Prince Thammaracha and Prince Ramesuan to Ayutthaya.³³

³² The narrative of this battle is dramatically longer in the detailed chronicle recensions of the Bangkok period. See *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, Cushman translation, 31-38. Despite the profusion of detail in that later recension, there are still only a handful of ethnonyms. I suspect that this more detailed account of the battle featuring Queen Suriyothai was composed in late Ayutthaya or, less likely, in Thonburi. Perhaps it is derived from the same recension which also survives in the 1774, 1783 and 1784 fragments of the *Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya*. Like the content in those fragments, the extended content on the battle starring Queen Suriyothai was left mostly unrevised when the whole chronicle was edited and expanded for the Bangkok-era recensions, although words and a few short passages were inserted here and there.

³³ *Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya*, Luang Prasoet Version, 222. The translation is adapted from the *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, Cushman translation, 27.

As in the fragment about Cao Yat's rebellion, particular royal and noble characters also drive the narrative here. The masses of commoners constituting the opposing armies are afforded little agency. The military forces mentioned in this passage that do play a role, "the Hongsa troops", "the vanguard" and "the main army", are associated with place names and noble individuals, but still not identified as ethnic bodies.

Although extant chronicle manuscripts from the Ayutthaya period are frustratingly rare, it appears that up to the fall of the city in 1767, ethnonyms were not used to describe whole political communities of royal subjects or armies. There are hints, however, that chroniclers grew more interested in assigning a greater narrative role to corporate categories of commoners. For evidence, we can look to three manuscript fragments of the chronicle of Ayutthaya which are thought to have been composed in the eighteenth century before the fall of Ayutthaya, but which have copy dates of 1774, late 1783 and early 1784, respectively. The contents of the 1774 and 1783 fragments are almost identical, beginning and ending at exactly the same place.³⁴ They recount a few years in the mid-sixteenth century

³⁴ The Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 1783 Fragment, however, is missing a few pages of content in the middle. Most scholarly discussions of these three fragments, including Winai, "Traditional Thai Historiography", 199-205, and Ubonsi, "The Revision", 26-29, 83-86, and especially 95-100, rely at least partially on an essay by Prince Damrong, "The Story", which compares passages from several recensions of the chronicles. Damrong argues that while the content of the 1783 Fragment is a considerably revised version of the 1774 Fragment, it is almost identical to the later Bangkok era recensions. A closer look at the 1783 Fragment, however, reveals the opposite: it is almost identical to the 1774 Fragment, while the Bangkok Era recensions (at least for the corresponding content) include new passages and minor edits throughout. Scholars relying on Damrong likewise make much of his observation that the dates in the 1783 Fragment match the inaccurate dates of the Bangkok Era recensions, while the dating in the 1774 Fragment is reliable. In fact, the dates in the two fragments are the same. It is not clear whether Damrong simply confused a manuscript from a later recension for the 1783 Fragment or if he was describing yet another 1783 fragment which has since been lost. See Vickery, "Cambodia after Angkor", 318. But was the content of the 1774, 1783 and 1784 fragments composed in the Ayutthaya period, as Damrong argued for the 1774 Fragment, or was it was composed in Thonburi? While we cannot rule out a Thonburi composition, I agree with Damrong and others that the writing style of the fragments appears older than that of the Thonburi and First Reign chronicles, and that an earlier composition date is likely. As I show below, the Thonburi and early Bangkok chronicles also use many more ethnonyms than these three fragments, suggesting that they were composed in different contexts. Finally, Nidhi, "History of Bangkok", 297, argues that chronicle revisions were not a high priority during King Taksin's tumultuous reign. Of course, modifications could have been made during copying.

reign of Ayutthaya's King Cakkraphat, including the kidnapping of his daughter while she was en route to Vientiane to be married to the king of Lan Chang (Lan Xang). After that event, the two similar chronicle fragments narrate the subsequent warfare between armies from Hongsawadi, Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok and Vientiane (Lan Chang).

In contrast to the detailed action in the fragment about Cao Yat and the abbreviated content of the Luang Prasoet chronicle, in these eighteenth-century fragments, “the army” and “the enemy” as corporate characters enjoy a significant role in the narration of events, yet they are still not glossed as single ethno-political groups. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, in which the forces of the kingdom of Lan Chang are pursued by the armies of two reckless officers from Hongsawadi. The armies of those two officers, the Phraya of Phukam (Pagan) and Phraya Suea Han, are ambushed in a mountain pass and scattered in defeat.

When the Phraya of Phukam and Phraya Suea Han, leading [troops], reached the district of Wari, they did not realize in time that the people of Lan Chang were lying there in wait in large numbers. The people of Lan Chang sent out cavalry to bait the people of Hongsawadi, who sent troops out in pursuit. When the people of Lan Chang saw [that the enemy was] almost in their trap, they led out their main army, including elephants, cavalry, and soldiers, to bait the Phraya of Phukam and Phraya Suea Han. The soldiers of the people of Lan Chang who were lying in ambush emerged to attack both sides of the army. The Phraya of Phukam and Phraya Suea Han were utterly routed and vanquished by the Lan Chang *phraya*. The people of Lan Chang, slashing and stabbing, killed a great many of the people of Hongsawadi in that place.³⁵

I have underlined references to “the people”. This example is a bit atypical, as many other passages do not mention “the people” at all, but rather continue to focus on named elite characters. Still, the

³⁵ Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 1774 Fragment, 244. I have modified the translation in Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, Cushman Translation, 55-56, in several respects, including by substituted “people” for Cushman’s “men”. The Thai word, *chao* [เจ้า], is not gendered.

prominent role given to “the people” in this passage, as in several other passages in the 1774 and 1783 fragments, suggests that historiographic conventions had begun to shift sometime in the eighteenth century. Not only were the common people given an increasingly important position in historical narratives, even as historical agents who could drive events, but they could also be read as horizontal social groups connected to one another not only through a common affiliation with a certain ruler or commander, but as an army made up of a rhetorically-coherent “people”.

In dynastic chronicles of the Ayutthaya period, therefore, ethnic labels did not play a significant role in narratives of conflicts between monarchs. Ethnonyms were occasionally used to refer to individuals, sub-communities or factions within a ruler’s royal embrace, but were rarely, if ever, used to gloss the entirety of a ruler’s subjects or army. Horizontal social categories of commoners were not usually allowed a significant role in the chronicle plot, and were grouped together only implicitly by reference to the commanders they shared in common. This latter characteristic of Ayutthaya-era chronicle compositions began to shift, it appears, in the eighteenth century, as chronicle fragments attributed to late Ayutthaya reveal a greater interest in assigning roles in the narrative to horizontal groups of commoners.

The Diverse “Self” and the Ethnicized “Other” under King Taksin

There is not much chronicle evidence from the reign of King Taksin (that is, the Thonburi period, 1767-1782), but what we have – the Chronicle of Thonburi – is revealing. It follows a gripping narrative arc: the dramatic rise and swift fall of the king himself. Most of the chronicle’s content, up to about 1779, was probably composed during Taksin’s reign by an enthusiastic supporter (or supporters) while the remaining content, respectful but not as detailed, was added early in the reign of his successor, King Rama I (r. 1782-1809).³⁶ Unlike most Bangkok era recensions of the Chronicle of Ayutthaya,

³⁶ Nidhi, “History of Bangkok”, 316-317; Ubonsri, “The Revision”, 109-113.

which are harder to use because they are amalgams of content composed and revised at numerous, mostly-undetermined times over the centuries, the bulk of the Chronicle of Thonburi was without any doubt composed in the political context of the 1770s.

One characteristic that the Thonburi Chronicle shares with the 1774, 1783 and 1784 fragments of the Chronicle of Ayutthaya is an overwhelming interest in conflicts with the armies from the Irrawaddy Valley: armies from Hongsawadi in the fragments and from Ava in the Thonburi Chronicle. In contrast, none of these texts pay any significant attention to Siam's major tributary kingdoms of Chiang Mai, Vientiane and Cambodia. They are given little direct attention in the fragments and glossed over only briefly in the chronicle on Taksin.³⁷ The prominence given by the Thonburi Chronicle to the wars with Ava offers some clues about its purpose. As was well-known to both his contemporaries at court and foreign observers, Taksin could not claim royal descent, and the chronicle does not pretend otherwise. Instead, it justifies his accession through a celebratory account of his ability to reunite the constituent parts of the old Ayutthaya kingdom under his authority. Practically, this was accomplished in several ways: Taksin mobilized Chinese merchant capital, distributed gifts and favors, and successfully concluded a series of increasingly ambitious military campaigns against competitors in the area of the old kingdom of Ayutthaya. Looming over these practical efforts to achieve supremacy, however, is the chronicle's depiction of a threatening enemy endowed with a new corporate identity: "Burmese".

The new appropriation of pre-existing ethnonyms to refer corporately to the soldiers and subjects of enemy kingdoms represents perhaps the most potent innovation in chronicle conventions of the late

³⁷ For very brief, one or two-sentence exceptions, see Royal Chronicle of Thonburi, Phan Canthanumat Recension, 522, 524 and 525. These events, however, took place near the end of the reign and were probably composed under Rama I. See Nidhi, "History of Bangkok", 316. It appears that some content about an invasion of Oudong, Cambodia, early in King Taksin's reign is missing from the extant Thonburi Chronicle manuscripts – this section of content appears to have been lost. See the Royal Chronicle of Thonburi, Phan Canthanumat Recension, 498-499. Note that the chronicle's disinterest in Cambodia did not reflect Taksin's own disinterest; he sent armies there several times.

eighteenth century. In the Chronicle of Thonburi, the soldiers of Chiang Mai are presented as Lao, the soldiers of Vietnam as Yuan, and the soldiers of Cambodia as Khmer. Since none of these places are given much attention in the chronicle, however, the impact of the narrative ethnicization of these kingdoms is limited. The perceptibility of this innovation is even further reduced by the continued use of ethnonyms to categorize the multiplicity of communities under each monarch's protection. In addition to referring to the subjects of the tributary rulers of Cambodia and Vientiane as Khmer and Lao despite their actual diversity, the chronicle muddies the waters by also mentioning the Khmer and Lao communities under Taksin's own authority as well. In other words, the chronicle makes use of the same set of ethnonyms to refer to politicized ethnic categories in some places and cultural ethnic communities in others.

The chronicle treats the Burmese, however, as irreconcilable outsiders. Sunait Chutintaranond argues that the attitude of Thai elites towards the Burmese changed completely after the defeat and destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767. In the new chronicle narratives composed in the reconstituted kingdoms of Thonburi and Bangkok, Sunait argues, the two sides were endowed with ethnic identities, Burmese against Thai. The Burmese and their rulers were depicted as ruthless, depraved, eternal enemies of the Siamese.³⁸ In the Chronicle of Thonburi, the peoples and armies of Thonburi are not yet glossed as ethno-politically Thai, but the enemy armies from Ava are repeatedly identified as Burmese. If we compare the content of the Chronicle of Thonburi with that of the three fragments probably composed in late Ayutthaya, all are predominantly about battles with the armies of Burmese-speaking courts: Ava and Hongsawadi, respectively. Yet, we can see a dramatic increase in the use of the ethnonym "Burmese" to refer to the enemy in the Thonburi Chronicle.

³⁸ Sunait, "Image of the Burmese Enemy", 89-94.

Table 1: Uses of ethnonyms to refer to an ethnicized “Burmese” enemy in Ayutthaya-era chronicle fragments and the Chronicle of Thonburi

	Total number of words (approx.)	Incidents of “Burmese” [พม่า/พม่า]	Incidents of “Burmese” per 1000 words	Incidents of “Mon” [มอญ]
1774 (1136) Fragment	6,400	1	0.16	1
1784 (1145) Fragment	6,300	2	0.32	2
Chronicle of Thonburi	24,750	206	8.32	3

The ethnicization of the enemy linked Hongsawadi and Ava together conceptually as “Burmese” and therefore enabled the narration of a troubled *historical* relationship between Burmese kingdoms and Siam.

This was not accomplished merely by weaving more ethnonyms into the narrative. The “us” versus “them” nature of the conflict, facilitated by the ethnicization of the enemy, was promoted qualitatively in the chronicle as well. During the early stages of his campaign to consolidate power, the chronicle recalls an incident in which Taksin magnanimously intervened to save the life of a low-level official, Nai Bun Mueang. Because he had been carrying a letter for Burmese officials when he was intercepted, Taksin’s advisors were suspicious of his loyalties and urged execution. This set the stage for a dramatic scene in which the future king, who had known Nai Bun Mueang before the invasion, overruled his advisors and expounded on the need for unity against a common enemy.

One day, Nai Bun Mueang [...] said that Burma was using him to bring a letter out to [the city of] Canthabun. [...] When the high and low officials and the commanders of armies and units heard this, they did not trust him. They said, “The Burmese faction sent him as a trick. They are using him to monitor us. We cannot trust him enough to put him in our army. He has

forsaken Krung Thep; he should be executed!” [...] Then the king [Taksin] provided the royal explanation, “When Burma besieged Krung Thep, no one had any intention of joining with Burma. But as time passed, perhaps they had to.”³⁹

Not only does the Thonburi Chronicle politicize the ethnonym “Burmese” by using it to gloss the entire enemy army, but the ethnonym is also used, for what could be the first time in a Thai-language chronicle, to stand for an entire kingdom. Grammatically, the Thonburi Chronicle repeatedly deploys the ethnonym “Burmese” so that it no longer modifies a noun such as “army”, “people” or even “capital”, but stands alone. That way, it appears that the politicized ethnic group is propelling the narrative through its own agency, without reference to the sovereign kings or commanding officers ubiquitous in the Ayutthaya-era compositions. I have translated this sense of the ethnic name above following normal practice in English, as “Burma” instead of “Burmese”, but in the Thai language original, the word, *Phama*, is identical. “The Burmese”, or “Burma”, is now a character in its own right.

Interestingly, the development of an ethnicized political “other” did not immediately require an explicit ethnicized political “self”. Despite the Thonburi Chronicle’s more than two hundred references to the Burmese, it still hesitates to identify Taksin’s own kingdom as Thai. Instead of politicizing Taksin’s entire army or population as Thai, the chronicle generally adheres to the old practice of only applying ethnic labels to specific subject communities. Taksin’s own faction, which offers him much-needed support in the year following the defeat of Ayutthaya, is called “Thai and Chinese” ten times. Significantly, these two entwined ethnic communities disappear from the narrative once Taksin ascends the throne and his Thai and Chinese supporters all receive titles. Elsewhere in the chronicle, “Thai” is used

³⁹ Royal Chronicle of Thonburi, Phan Canthanumat Recension, 479-480. The use of “Krung Thep”, the Thai name for Bangkok, to refer to Taksin’s capital, Thonburi, does not necessarily suggest that this is an anachronistic passage composed after the capital was established at Bangkok (and given the formal name, Krung Thep). “Krung Thep” was sometimes used in pre-Bangkok compositions to refer to the capital.

another dozen or so times, usually to describe a particular Thai ethnic village or military unit, alongside other ethnic communities or units labelled, for instance, Mon or Lao. The ethnonym Thai appears to refer to Taksin's entire army in only four or five passages. Although the Thonburi Chronicle declines to identify Taksin's entire realm as Thai, the very use of that ethnonym, even if it is mostly used to make cultural ethnic identifications of factions or village-communities, still distinguishes it from the Ayutthaya-era chronicle compositions.

The introduction of politicized ethnonyms into Thai-language chronicles was just one element in the development of a powerful new form of political narrative. The Chronicle of Thonburi itself, in contrast with previous chronicle compositions, is a notable early example of Thai persuasive writing. Rather than basing King Taksin's legitimacy on claims of cosmic favor or royal ancestry as might be expected of a chronicle intended simply as an element of a great monarch's regalia, this chronicle makes an argument, both logically and emotionally. King Taksin is presented as a moral leader and brave champion against a callous Burmese enemy. It is unclear how widely, among officials, chronicle texts such as this were read, but late eighteenth century works in other genres share a similar attachment to the new practice of applying ethno-political labels, and the new sentiments associated with them.⁴⁰

A Thai Kingdom with Ethnic Tributaries in Early Bangkok and Beyond

In the dynastic chronicles of the Bangkok period (1782-present), ethnicized kingdoms take center stage. Armies, populations, and officials, despite their actual diversity, are often glossed as, for example, "the Burmese army" or "the Yuan [Vietnamese] officials". The autonym "Thai" is finally used with regularity in chronicle compositions to refer to Bangkok's army. Recensions of the dynastic chronicles produced in early Bangkok attach the Thonburi chronicle to the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya to form a continuous narrative,

⁴⁰ See, for example, the poems collected in the Fine Arts Department, *Klon Phleng Yao*.

and then extend the account into the First Reign to about 1790. In the following typical passage from this extended content, which describes some fighting between the “Thai” and “Burmese” armies, ethnonyms figure prominently:

The two generals of the Burmese vanguard ordered the construction of watchtowers in many places at their forward camp. They had cannon positioned on the tops of the watchtowers to fire into the camps of the Thai army. Thereupon [King Rama I] commanded that cannon firing wooden balls from the Taksin era be pushed out to positions in front of the camp, and they fired on the Burmese camp and watchtowers until many of them collapsed. The Burmese forces in the camp were also hit by the wooden projectiles, causing much death and desperation.⁴¹

In late eighteenth-century chronicle compositions such as this one, we finally encounter a historical narrative that would not be out of place in modern history books, in which politicized ethnic identities are assigned to both sides. Although modern textbooks usually narrate premodern historical conflicts as if they had been fought between nations (a form of political community which did not coalesce until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries), they rely on the politicized ethnonyms which emerged in the late eighteenth century and which were later embraced by nationalists. Therefore, passages like the ones found in this section sound familiar to modern ears, which are accustomed to historical narratives driven by named ethnic or national peoples.⁴²

The chronicles composed or revised in the Bangkok period also devote significantly more attention to Bangkok’s tributary kingdoms. This can be seen not only in the new chronicles recording the history of the early Chakri Dynasty reigns, but also in passages added to

⁴¹ Royal Chronicle, Phra Phonnarat Recension, 475. My translation differs slightly from that of the Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Flood Translation, I: 95.

⁴² My understanding of “nation” as a particularly modern phenomenon follows Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*. For the late nineteenth century development of national discourses of race and nation in Thailand, see Streckfuss, “An ‘Ethnic’ Reading”.

accounts of the history of Ayutthaya. Most passages in the Chronicle of Ayutthaya that discuss Cambodia at any length, for example, were late-eighteenth century insertions.⁴³ We can see early Bangkok's newfound interest in its tributaries clearly when we compare the content of the 1784 Fragment, which was most likely composed in late Ayutthaya, with the corresponding content of the Phan Canthanumat Recension, one of the earliest Bangkok era recensions of the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya.⁴⁴ Although it is possible that there were one or more intermediate steps between the recension found in the fragment and the Phan Canthanumat Recension of 1795, the content of the two versions is substantially the same. The content of the 1784 Fragment is taken up almost entirely by an account of Prince Naresuan's clashes with armies from Hongsawadi. It makes only minor references to the military assistance provided by one of Hongsawadi's tributaries at the time, Chiang Mai, and one of Ayutthaya's tributaries, Cambodia.

Many minor edits to the fragment's narrative seem to have been made before or during the preparation of the Phan Canthanumat Recension, which was completed in 1795, but most interesting for our purposes is the insertion of five major passages into the account. All five of these passages add subplots highlighting the roles of Chiang Mai and Cambodia in Ayutthaya's late sixteenth century wars with Hongsawadi. The king of Chiang Mai is depicted in these narrative additions as a loyal, if somewhat bumbling, assistant to Hongsawadi's war efforts. While the earlier content of the 1784 Fragment records the conclusion of an agreement of royal goodwill (*phraratchamaitri*) between the kings of Ayutthaya and Cambodia, the additional passages in the Phan Canthanumat and subsequent recensions expand descriptions of Cambodia's dutiful participation in Ayutthaya's military campaigns until an incident occurs in which Prince Naresuan is angered by the insufficiently respectful behavior of the prince commanding Cambodia's forces. Naresuan menacingly beheads a Lao prisoner of war in the Cambodian prince's presence, which prompts the Cambodian prince to return home embarrassed and

⁴³ Vickery, "Cambodia after Angkor", chapter 10.

⁴⁴ See note 34, above, for comments on the composition and dating of this fragment.

insulted. The new recensions of the chronicle have him and his brother, the king of Cambodia, each declare dramatically that from then on, the royal goodwill between the two kingdoms would be irrevocably broken.⁴⁵ The new passages added to the Bangkok era recensions of the Chronicle of Ayutthaya, in other words, emphasize the subordinate position of both tributary kingdoms, explain the supposed origins of Cambodia's disloyalty, and offer an implicit justification for later efforts to forcefully put Cambodian royals in their place following the (apocryphal) sixteenth century example of Prince Naresuan.

This new interest in putting Bangkok's tributaries in their place likely stems from the changing political situation of the Bangkok period. While King Taksin's power and legitimacy rested on his role in driving out the Burmese, as we have seen in the Thonburi Chronicle, the future King Rama I and his younger brother, the future Second King, made names for themselves not only against Burmese armies, but also in a series of campaigns in Cambodia, Chiang Mai, Vientiane and other weaker kingdoms on Bangkok's peripheries. The new chronicle passages may have been written to justify the expense and risk of these military campaigns, urge unity among officials in their accomplishment and heap honor on the new royal family after their successes. So, new anecdotes about the incompetence of the kings of Chiang Mai and the hero king Naresuan's efforts to put Cambodia in its place in the late sixteenth century were perhaps more about justifying military kingship in the late eighteenth.

In addition to these supplemental anecdotes added to the Chronicle of Ayutthaya, chronicle content composed in the Bangkok Period increasingly used politicized ethnonyms as informal appellations for kingdoms, referring, for example, to "Krung Thai" (the Thai capital or kingdom) and "Muang Khmer" (the Khmer country). Ambiguous references to ethnonyms as "characters" with agency, as we encountered in the Thonburi Chronicle, become even more common in newly-written chronicle narratives in the late eighteenth century and over the course of the nineteenth. When the

⁴⁵ The five new passages can be found in the Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Phan Canthanumat Recension, 286, 291-292, 293-294, 295, and 296-297.

ethnonym *Phama* (Burmese/Burma) or *Khamen* (Khmer/Cambodia) is recorded as acting deceitfully, for example, the chronicle entangles various possible senses of the term: the ethno-cultural group, the ethno-political community and the kingdom itself.

In 1869, the young King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) ordered Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong to compile a dynastic chronicle of the Chakri kings from the founding of Bangkok through the death of his father, King Mongkut (Rama IV).⁴⁶ The account of the reign of Rama I includes a flashback summary of relations with Cambodia during the reign of his predecessor, King Taksin. In this excerpt, the king of Cambodia finds it prudent to resume a relationship of vassalage with King Taksin, but rather than narrating a relationship strictly in terms of personal relations between kings, Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong writes about relations between three ethnicized states.

It was thought by King Phra Narairacha [of Cambodia] that since there was then disorder at Hue, and (the) Thai had taken Banteay Meas, Kampot, Battambang, and Siem Reap, if he remained unyielding and a vassal of (the) Yuan only, that would not be good. He therefore sent Phra-ong Keaw (Duang) to see the commander of the Thai army at Battambang and ask for a truce, agreeing that Khmer would become a vassal state [*prathetsarat*] as before.⁴⁷

This passage includes four ethnonyms: Yuan (Vietnamese), Khmer and Thai (twice). In one case, Thai modifies “army” so we can identify what, in that instance, is given an ethnic label. However, in the other three instances, the ethnonym stands alone. “Thai”, in the second line, just like “Yuan” in the third, have become subjects – nouns – themselves, rather than simply serving as qualifiers for other subjects, such as individuals or armies. The reader is left to judge whether

⁴⁶ Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Flood Translation, xxiii-xxiv.

⁴⁷ Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong Manuscript, 24. This print edition is copied from a manuscript copy of Chao Phraya Thiphakorawong’s original composition, not the more common version revised by Prince Damrong. The prince did not revise this passage, however. My translation varies slightly from that in the Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Flood Translation, 22.

“Thai” and “Yuan” refer to a corporate ethno-political group with agency, or to newly ethnicized states themselves. (I have preserved the ambiguity in my translation by adding a parenthetical “the” before each vague usage.) Notice that the narrative slips between personalized and ethnicized political frameworks. At first, the king of Cambodia worries about his personal vassalage only to the Yuan and not the Thai. By the end of the passage, however, his personal submission is glossed as an ethno-political submission: “Khmer would become a vassal state as before.” Indeed, in this final usage, the ethnonym Khmer is used to refer to the state itself.

These passages illustrate a general transition over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: while chronicles composed in the Ayutthaya period conceived of relations between kingdoms as personal ties between rulers, Bangkok period chroniclers paid more attention to corporate categories and became especially interested in using ethnic terms to describe the armies, populations and officials of the kingdoms in the region. Finally, ethnonyms were used to stand in for states themselves. Personal ties between individual rulers were still important, but a new discourse of ethnic states reshaped narratives of relations between kingdoms.

Why Contrast a Thai Kingdom with Ethnic Others?

By endowing kingdoms, their armies and their peoples with ethnic identities and thus infusing ethnonyms, a vocabulary of social classification, with political meaning, the chronicles communicated powerful narrative messages. Ethnicized, rather than personalized kingdoms, implied a deep and depersonalized history. No longer was a war the result of a simple breakdown in the personal relationship between two rulers, but it could be read as the inevitable result of encounters with a recurrently deceitful ethnicized kingdom. Further, a new monarch or the head of a new dynasty, even when he had established a new capital, like King Rama I, could nevertheless be implicitly positioned as the latest successor of a long tradition of *Thai*

kings, a connection which was not easily made in older narratives.⁴⁸ Likewise, it hardly mattered that the enemies that besieged and defeated Ayutthaya came from Hongsawadi in the sixteenth century and from Ava and Amarapura in the eighteenth, when they could all be called “Burmese”.⁴⁹ The introduction of politicized ethnonyms into Thai-language chronicles enabled the greater mobilization of history to support contemporary political needs by providing a vocabulary that patched over changes in individual rulers, dynastic families and capital cities.

In comparison to older assertions of belonging which relied on tying royal subjects together implicitly through the vertical patron-client ties they shared in common, politicized ethnic labels emphasized unity through the identification of royal subjects as a horizontal social category. The appropriation of an ethnonym to bind together rhetorically the members of a political network could also encompass a far greater number of people than, say, the name of a common hometown. Ethnonyms and the depersonalization of conflicts also facilitated the stereotyping of enemies. Negative assertions about “the Khmer”, for example, could therefore be applied to any “Khmer” individual, and evidence for those negative qualities could be drawn from any historical episodes involving “the Khmer”. This new innovation consequently structured all new accounts of historical episodes, including passages inserted into older narratives.

The novel conceptualization of the ethnic kingdom offered a more durable political imaginary than the notion of the personalized kingdom that preceded it, and anticipated the advent of ethnic nation-states around the turn of the twentieth century. It differed from

⁴⁸ This is “implicit” because while the army and the subjects of a monarch were frequently glossed as a single politicized ethnic group by the end of the eighteenth century, monarchs themselves were rarely identified ethnically until the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ Early Bangkok chronicles reveal some uncertainty in the retrospective application of a politicized ethnonym to the kingdom of Hongsawadi (Pegu). In many chronicle passages composed in the eighteenth century about the sixteenth century wars, the kingdom is referred to as “Mon-Burmese”. By the time Prince Damrong reconsidered these events in his early twentieth century scholarship, Hongsawadi of the mid-sixteenth century was treated as definitely Burmese.

modern nationalism in that there is little evidence of the formation of a political *community*, in which even the common people might have felt a sense of belonging. Many historians, however, do not recognize the emergence of politicized ethnonyms in Siam at all, except as a mid-to-late nineteenth century product of the colonial encounter and, ultimately, as an adaptation of a European intellectual organization of politics. The evidence presented here questions the view that one of the most important characteristics of the modern Thai nation – the association of a Thai people with the state – was adopted from Western models and simply modified to fit local conditions. On the contrary, the identification of the kingdom of Siam as a Thai state cannot be attributed to Western influence, which in any case had reached a nadir in the late eighteenth century, but to the local political demand for a more horizontal notion of political belonging. Alongside an enduring rhetoric of royal brotherhood between kings, which had long characterized narratives of their relations, a new discourse of politicized ethnic identification rapidly emerged in the dynastic chronicles of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, casting neighboring enemy and tributary kingdoms as Bangkok’s ethnic “others” and eventually making the corresponding claim that the kingdom of Siam was, finally, Thai.

References to Chronicle Texts

Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 1774 Fragment (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยา ฉบับปลีก จำลอง จ.ศ. 1136). “พระราชพงศาวดารความเก่า” (Chronicle, Old Content). ประชุมพงศาวดารฉบับกาญจนาภิเษก (*History Series, Kancanaphisek Edition*), Vol. 1, 235-52. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2542 [1999]. [In Thai].

Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 1783 and 1784 Fragments (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยา (ฉบับปลีก) จำลอง จ.ศ. 1145). Unpublished manuscripts. Folding book [สมุดข่อย] numbers 216-217 (previously numbers 2/ก.91 and 2/ก.93). หมูพระราชพงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยาฉบับพิสดาร (Detailed Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya Series), หมวดพงศาวดาร, หอเอกสารโบราณ (Chronicle Collection, Manuscripts Section), National Library of Thailand, Bangkok. [In Thai].

- Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Cakkraphatdiphong Recension (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยา ฉบับจักรพรรดิพงษ์เจ้ากรม (จาต)). ประชุมพงศาวดารฉบับกาญจนานิกเชก (*History Series, Kancanaphisek Edition*), Vol 3, 453-468. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2542 [1999]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Luang Prasoet Version (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงเก่า ฉบับหลวงประเสริฐ). ประชุมพงศาวดารฉบับกาญจนานิกเชก (*History Series, Kancanaphisek Edition*), Vol 1, 207-233. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2542 [1999]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Phan Canthanumat (Coem) Recension (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยา ฉบับพันจันทนุมาศ (เจิม)). ประชุมพงศาวดารฉบับกาญจนานิกเชก (*History Series, Kancanaphisek Edition*), Vol 3, 203-452. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2542 [1999]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Cao Phraya Thiphakorawong Manuscript (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์ รัชกาลที่ ๑ ฉบับเจ้าพระยาทิพากรวงศ์ ฉบับตัวเขียน). Transcribed and ed. นฤมล ธีรวัฒน์ ผู้ชำระต้นฉบับ [Noramon Thirawat]. กรุงเทพฯ: อมรินทร์, 2539 [1996]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicle of Bangkok, First Reign, Flood Translation. *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era: The First Reign*. Trans. and ed. Thadeus and Chadin Flood, Vols 1-2. Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1978 and 1990.
- Royal Chronicle of Thonburi, Phan Canthanumat (Coem) Recension (พระราชพงศาวดารกรุงธนบุรี ฉบับพันจันทนุมาศ (เจิม)). ประชุมพงศาวดารฉบับกาญจนานิกเชก (*History Series, Kancanaphisek Edition*), Vol 3, 469-529. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2542 [1999]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicle, Phra Phonnarat Recension (พระราชพงศาวดาร ฉบับสมเด็จพระนเรศวรมหาราช วัดพระเชตุพน ตรวจสอบชำระจากเอกสารตัวเขียน). Transcribed and ed. ศานติ ภัคดีคำ [Santi Pakdeekham]. กรุงเทพฯ: มูลนิธิ “ทุนพระพุทธรูปยอดีฟ้า” ในพระบรมราชูปถัมภ์, 2558 [2015]. [In Thai].
- Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, Cushman Translation. *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*. Trans. Richard D. Cushman, ed. David K. Wyatt. Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000.

Vickery, Michael. "Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, Vickery Fragment."
 "The 2/k.125 Fragment, a Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya."
Journal of the Siam Society 65, 1 (1977): 1-80.

Other References

Baker, Chris. "Introduction." *The Chronicle of Our Wars with the Burmese: Hostilities between Siamese and Burmese when Ayutthaya was the Capital of Siam*, by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. Trans. Phra Phraison Salarak. Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001. x-xxxix.

Barth, Fredrik. "Introduction." *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Ed. Fredrik Barth. Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 1998. 9-38.

Breazeale, Kennon. "A Transition in Historical Writing: The Works of Prince Damrong Rachanuphap." *Journal of the Siam Society* 59, 2 (1971): 25-49.

Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Chandler, David. "Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts." *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler*. Eds. Anne Ruth Hansen and Judy Ledgerwood. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2008. 31-46

Damrong Rajanubhab, Prince [กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ]. *ไทยรบพม่า (Our Wars with the Burmese)*. กรุงเทพฯ: คลังวิทยา, 2505 [1962]. [In Thai].

Damrong Rajanubhab, Prince. *A Biography of King Naresuan the Great*, translated and edited by Kennon Breazeale. Bangkok: Foundation for the Promotion of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2008.

- Damrong Rajanubhab, Prince. “The Story of the Records of Siamese History.” Trans. O. Frankfurter. *Journal of the Siam Society* 11, 2 (1915): 1-20.
- Dhida Saraya [ธิดา สารยา]. กว่าจะเป็นคนไทย: ว่าด้วยพัฒนาการของชนชาติไท (*Becoming Tai: The Historical Basis of the Thai Nation*). กรุงเทพฯ: เมืองโบราณ, 2553 [2010]. [In Thai].
- Fine Arts Department [กรมศิลปากร]. กลอนเพลงยาวนิราศ เรื่อง รบพม่าที่ท่าดินแดง เพลงยาวรบพม่าที่นครศรีธรรมราช และ เพลงยาวเรื่องตีพม่า (The *Klon Phleng Yao Nirat* Poem “Doing Battle with Burma at Tha Din Daeng,” the *Phleng Yao* Poem “Doing Battle with Burma at Nakhon Si Thammarat,” and the *Phleng Yao* Poem, “On Attacking Burma”), a cremation volume for Chaiphon Phawongphon. กรุงเทพฯ: กรมศิลปากร, 2547 [2004]. [In Thai].
- Lieberman, Victor. “Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma.” *Modern Asian Studies* 12, 3 (1978): 455-482.
- Lieberman, Victor. *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in a Global Context, 800-1830*, Vol 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Mayoury Ngaosyvathn and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn. *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778-1828*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 1998.
- Nidhi Eosewong. “The History of Bangkok in the Chronicles of Ayutthaya.” *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok*. Trans. Chris Baker and Ben Anderson. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005. 287-342.
- Pakron Sonmuan [ปกรณ์ ทรงม่วง]. “การวิเคราะห์พงศาวดารกรุงศรีอยุธยาฉบับหอพระสมุดวชิรญาณ (An Analytical Study of the Ayutthaya Chronicle, a Document of the Vachirayan Archives).” Master’s thesis, Srinakharinwirot University, 1996. [In Thai].
- Snit Smuckarn and Kennon Breazeale. *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos*. New Haven: Yale University, Center for International and Area Studies, 1988.

- Streckfuss, David. "An 'Ethnic' Reading of 'Thai' History in the Twilight of the Century-Old Official 'Thai' National Model." *South East Asia Research* 20, 3 (2012), 305-327.
- Sunait Chutintharanond. "'Mandala,' 'Segmentary State' and Politics of Centralization in Medieval Ayudhya." *Journal of the Siam Society* 78, 1 (1990): 88-101.
- Sunait Chutintharanond. "The Image of the Burmese Enemy in Thai Perceptions and Historical Writings." *Journal of the Siam Society* 80, 1 (1992): 89-103.
- Thongchai Winichakul. "Modern Historiography in Southeast Asia: The Case of Thailand's Royal-Nationalist History." *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*. Ed. Prasenjit Duara, Viren Murthy, and Andrew Sartori. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. 257-268.
- Thongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994.
- Ubonsri Atthapan [อุบลศรี อรรถพันธ์]. "การชำระพระราชพงศาวดารในรัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลก (The Revision of Chronicles during the Reign of King Rama I)." Master's thesis, Silpakorn University, 1981. [In Thai].
- Vickery, Michael. "The 2/k.125 Fragment, a Lost Chronicle of Ayutthaya." *Journal of the Siam Society* 65, 1 (1977): 1-80.
- Vickery, Michael. "Cambodia after Angkor, the Chronicular Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries." PhD diss., Yale University, 1977.
- Winai Pongsripian. "Traditional Thai Historiography and its Nineteenth-Century Decline." PhD diss., University of Bristol, 1983.
- Wolters, O.W. *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, revised edition. Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999.

Wyatt, David K. *Thailand: A Short History*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.