

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Thailand's First Revolution? The role of religious mobilization and 'the people' in the Ayutthaya rebellion of 1688

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(Received 24 April 2020; revised 23 March 2021; accepted 26 March 2021)

Abstract

In the 1680s, King Narai, ruler of the cosmopolitan kingdom of Ayutthaya, was the subject of competing French and Persian attempts to convert him to monotheism. These attempts were not only embarrassing failures; they also helped to precipitate a coup in 1688, in which Phetracha forcefully intervened to place himself on the throne and eject French influence from the realm. But to what extent did the execution of the coup depend on popular involvement? And what ideals and emotions seem to have animated this participation? After pondering the role of ethnicity and xenophobic sentiment, this article considers the construction of powerful discourses of Buddhist intellectual opposition to Christianity, the role of the sangha in the orchestration of the coup itself, and then considers in more detail the extent to which 'the people' demonstrated some kind of autonomous political agency. Lastly, it considers whether the events of the coup and its immediate aftermath were shaped by anti-Christian emotion. As a movement with conservative and restorative aims, 1688 was not a 'revolution' in the modern sense, but it may have ushered in an enlarged sense of popular investment in the legitimation of royal contenders associated with the defence of Buddhism.

Introduction

The revolution which occurred in the Kingdom of Siam in the year 1688 is one of the most famous events of our times whether it is considered from the point of view of politics or religion.¹

On 18 May 1688, the Sangkharat (chief monk) of Lopburi led a crowd of armed men to the walls of the palace where the king of Ayutthaya, Phra Narai (r.

¹ Jean Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire de la révolution de Siam arrivée en l'année 1688* (Lille, 1691), p. 1.

1656–88), lay incapacitated with ill health, and pushed open the side door to let them file through. This was a critical act in the coup that brought the commander Phetracha to the throne and crushed the influence of the French at court, expelling their troops and destroying missionary hopes of a royal conversion. The French engineer, Jean Volland des Verquains, quoted above, compared this with another event of that year: the so-called ‘glorious revolution’ of 1688, which had brought the Protestant William of Orange to the throne of England.² In both cases, a king who had favoured Catholicism and the French had been usurped by a pretender who was antagonistic to both. But was there anything ‘revolutionary’ about the Thai 1688? How far can it be considered an early example of the political agency of the masses and the assertion of a Buddhist identity?

In the 1680s, Ayutthaya was the dominant power of mainland Southeast Asia and a great cosmopolitan trading city, reaching the high watermark of its openness to the outside world.³ Over the course of this decade, a Greek adventurer known as Phaulkon was able to worm his way so far into affairs of state that he became the most powerful figure in the court after the king himself. Narai’s personality magnified the cosmopolitan tendencies of the Ayutthayan state, for he was extremely interested in establishing relations with all foreign powers, from the Dutch to the Persians and Chinese, and became especially intrigued by what he heard about Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) of France, then at the height of his power in Europe. Phaulkon’s rise was associated with his capacity to promote and organize diplomacy with Versailles. Two Siamese embassies reached France and drew crowds of the curious. And two expensively assembled embassies were sent in return, which arrived in Ayutthaya in 1685 and 1687. They were received with awe-inspiring levels of pomp and circumstance. The whole affair generated a very large number of reports, memoirs, and treatises on Siam written by the French.

The French king and his advisers were partly driven by the lure of imperial opportunity, although this only really materialized with the second embassy. Crucial to the whole affair from the start was the possibility—indeed almost the likelihood as it seemed in Versailles—that Narai would convert to Christianity. It was expected that the hundreds of thousands of souls under his command would also convert together with the vassals and petty princes around him: a great new expansion of the Catholic faith on the other side of the world redounding to the glory of the Sun-King of France. Narai’s generosity

² *Ibid.*, dedication.

³ There is much good literature on this subject already. See, for example, Dirk van der Cruyse, *Siam and the West, 1500–1700*, Michael Smithies (trans.) (Chiang Mai, 2002), which may be consulted for a detailed narrative of events, and Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, 2017), Chapter 4. ‘Cosmopolitan’ here signifies a space characterized by ethnic and cultural pluralism, as in the first definition of the term given in Alan Strathern and Zoltán Biedermann, ‘Introduction: Querying the Cosmopolitan in Sri Lanka and Indian Ocean History’, in Alan Strathern and Zoltán Biedermann (eds), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017). One significant example of this is the impact of Persian aesthetics at the court: see Julispong Chularatna, ‘Indo-Persian Influence on Late Ayutthaya Art, Architecture, and Design’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 105 (2017), pp. 43–72.

and patronage towards the French mission, his intellectual curiosity, his awkward relations with the Buddhist monkhood (*sangha*), all gave encouragement.⁴ And surely, once the sheer brilliance of French culture and the magnificence of French kingship were revealed to this Oriental potentate, he could not but seek to imitate it? Meanwhile, the chain of logic pursued by the Safavid court in Isfahan was remarkably similar and they also sent an embassy to claim the king's soul, which arrived in 1686. A kind of cold-war rivalry brewed between Cross and Crescent. Both failed spectacularly.

Naturally, Siamese *khunnang* (or 'mandarins', as Europeans called the palace officials) observed this with alarm, especially when the second French embassy arrived in 1687 accompanied by several hundred French troops—their function both ambiguous and ominous.⁵ By this time, Narai's health had declined and the question of succession had arisen. Amidst the usual factional turmoil, it was rumoured that Narai was about to convert to Christianity or install as his successor a palace favourite who would convert.⁶ Up stepped a pretender, Phetracha, the commander of the royal elephants, who engineered a complex and extremely successful palace coup while Narai lay on his deathbed. Phaulkon died a particularly horrible death. The French were humiliated, and the troops in Bangkok were besieged and then allowed to depart with their tails between their legs. Christians were rounded up and flung into jail.

While contemporary Europeans used the language of 'revolution' to describe this affair, we must immediately concede that it would not count as such according to any modern definition with analytical bite.⁷ It was not propelled by a movement driven to effect structural change in the nature of state and society.⁸ Like the vast majority of rebellions in the premodern world, the aims of the 1688 conspirators were conservative: to restore the monarchy to traditional forms. At its heart were the age-old dynamics of succession dispute and palace coup. And yet, perhaps 1688 signifies something more than that too.⁹ For the French sources describe Phetracha's plot as depending on the mobilization of the populace of Lopburi and indeed across the kingdom, which in turn depended in part on the political agency of the *sangha*. If there was a popular dimension to 1688, does this indicate that the masses

⁴ Explored in Alan Strathern, 'Tensions and Experimentations of Kingship: King Narai and His Response to Missionary Overtures in the 1680s', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 107, Pt. 2 (2019), pp. 17–41.

⁵ Six hundred troops had been sent, but a number died or were incapacitated by illness during the voyage.

⁶ Claude de Bèze, *Mémoire du Pere de Bèze sur la vie de Constance Phaulkon, premier ministre du roi de Siam Phra Narai et sa triste fin*, Jean Drans and Henri Bernard (eds) (Tokyo, 1947), pp. 95–100, 144–5.

⁷ The deliberations of the senate in Macao in November 1688 also referred to the 'revoluções' in Ayutthaya. Stefan Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora in the Portuguese Indies: The Social World of Ayutthaya, 1640–1720* (Leiden, 2011), p. 366.

⁸ In revolutions proper, it is not only the incumbents of office or particular policies that are challenged, but also the principles on which power is distributed and wielded. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge 1979), for example, distinguishes political and social revolutions, but neither apply here.

⁹ As mentioned below, I take my cue from the discussion in Baker and Pasuk's *History of Ayutthaya*, which they were kind enough to let me see in draft form.

were to some extent beginning to make their presence felt as a political force? Or were they merely following orders? What had aroused them? To what extent should 1688 be understood as an expression of popular xenophobia associated with ethnic consciousness or anti-Christian sentiment? What can we deduce about how Buddhist identity construction worked and shaped politics in the premodern or early modern world?

Underlying this investigation is a broader concern with the role of religious identity in the legitimization of monarchical authority. Ayutthaya in the 1680s constitutes one part of a comparative project looking at this question through an analysis of moments of potential ruler conversion—the other cases being Kongo 1480–1530, Japan 1560–80, and Hawaii 1800–30.¹⁰ The terms of comparison deployed in this project (and used occasionally here) derive from a theoretical distinction between ‘transcendentalist’ religiosity—a defining feature of monotheistic and Indic traditions such as Christianity and Buddhism—and ‘immanentism’, a more ubiquitous concern with accessing supernatural power in the here and now.¹¹ Transcendentalism is oriented towards liberation into an ineffable future state of representing the highest end of man. Attaining this salvation is associated with assent to universal-truth claims, which it is understood that others will wrongly reject, and to a defined set of universal ethical principles, which function as a guide to the interior reconstruction of the self, namely soteriology, epistemology, morality, and interiority. Transcendentalism entails a canonization of sacred texts and the attempt to curtail revelation. And it creates clerical elites who evolve unusually strong institutional traditions; they preserve a distinct autonomy from the state while claiming the right to ethical arbitration over it. All this is quite different to what might be called the default form of religiosity: immanentism. Here, the objective is enter into productive relations with the ancestors, spirits, and deities who hold the power to help make the fields fertile, the sick healthy, and ensure victory in the next battle. Note that *all* religions with a transcendentalist element (such as Christianity) also have an immanentist dimension.¹²

These two modes correspond to different ways of sacralizing the ruler. The immanentist mode is *divinized kingship*: the ruler is pushed into contiguity or equivalence with the gods, their humanity is effaced, and they are thereby granted unusual powers to thwart or enhance the worldly well-being of their subjects.¹³ As I have outlined elsewhere, this is readily identifiable in certain aspects of the behaviour and language surrounding the kings of Ayutthaya, and it might be expected to stand as an implacable bulwark against

¹⁰ Therefore, much of my recent work on Ayutthaya will be condensed as a major case study in Alan Strathern, *Converting Kings: Kongo, Japan, Thailand and Hawaii Compared 1450–1850* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

¹¹ These and following concepts are explained at length in Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), Chapter 1.

¹² But the reverse is not true.

¹³ Divinized kingship may in turn be broken down into two subtypes, namely cosmic and heroic kingship, but it is not necessary to explore this here.

conversion.¹⁴ The more perceptive missionaries understood that the awesome reverence with which the figure of the monarch was treated would make it difficult to ‘submit to all the humiliations of the Christian religion’.¹⁵

However, Ayutthayan kingship was also constructed according to a *righteous* register of sacralization, which is more specific to transcendentalist traditions such as Buddhism.¹⁶ In this mode, the king’s relationship to an overarching imperative of collective salvation, his own incarnation of Buddhist virtue, and above all his position as guardian of the *dhamma* and the sangha became of foundational importance. In Sri Lanka, R. A. L. H. Gunawardana referred to the resulting relationship between king and sangha as one of ‘antagonistic symbiosis’.¹⁷ These were two poles of moral authority that both defined each other and yet also competed and even conflicted. In Ayutthaya, that authority on the part of the Sangha was represented by the fact that, despite the extremely exalted position of the king in all other respects, it was not customary for monks to bow in his presence.¹⁸ Over the seventeenth century, European sources marvelled repeatedly at the social status of the monks and their sheer pervasive presence.¹⁹ One of the arguments of this article is that the righteous conception of kingship thereby came to shape societal norms that were expressed through popular involvement in the events of 1688—and this was the real reason why the monotheistic missions never stood a chance.

But any attempt to answer these questions remains hostage to a central problem of source criticism. However voluminous the European texts at our disposal, they cannot substitute for the relative paucity of Thai evidence, in part caused by the destruction of the archives of Ayutthaya after its sacking by the Burmese in 1767. There are some sources in Thai that do remain from Narai’s reign, and elsewhere I have used these, in translation, to help to understand the religio-political context for the events of the 1680s.²⁰ In

¹⁴ See Alan Strathern, ‘Sacred Kingship under King Narai (1656–88): Divinization and Righteousness’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 107, Pt. 1 (2019), pp. 49–78, and ‘Tensions and Experimentations’.

¹⁵ François-Timoléon de Choisy, *Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686* (Paris, 1687), p. 244.

¹⁶ Once again, the two modes were often combined, particularly in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

¹⁷ R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson, 1979), p. 344.

¹⁸ Simon de La Loubère, ‘Étude historique et critique du livre de Simon de La Loubère ‘Du Royaume de Siam’, Michel Jacq-Hergoualch (ed.) (Paris, 1987), pp. 397–8, 439, 452, claims that Narai therefore forbade ‘any monk to come into his presence without expressly being commanded to do so except for the chief Sangkharat’. Guy Tachard, *Voyage de Siam des Pères Jésuites Envoyez par le Roy aux Indes & à la Chine: avec leurs Observations, Astronomiques, et leurs Remarques de Physique, de Géographie, d’Hydrographie, & d’Histoire* (Paris, 1686), p. 416; Nicolas Gervaise, *Histoire naturelle et politique du Royaume du Siam* (Paris, 1688), pp. 190–1.

¹⁹ Just two examples: Gervaise, *Histoire*, p. 65; Cesare Polenghi, ‘G.F. de Marini’s *Delle Missioni* (1663): An Annotated Translation of the Chapters on Cambodia, Siam and Makassar’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 95 (2007), p. 56.

²⁰ Strathern, ‘Sacred Kingship under King Narai’ and ‘Tensions and Experimentations’ make use of: Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (trans., ed.), *The Palace Law of Ayutthaya and the Thammasat*:

terms of reconstructing a Thai perspective on political events, one would instinctively turn to the Ayutthaya Chronicle, but it is usually of little assistance given that the section dealing with Narai's reign from 1663 contains multiple recensions all deriving from the late Ayutthaya or Bangkok era and driven by the dynastic politics of that time, as Nidhi Eoseewong has shown.²¹ Towards the end of this article, I shall use some early eighteenth-century temple murals to test my suggestions about the relationship between religious and political sentiments, while an important role is played by a decree issued in 1663 that is most explicit on the question of religious identity.²²

All historians have, however, been overwhelmingly reliant on European and especially French sources in order to analyse these events, then, and this article is no different. But to what extent may we trust them to yield insights on the inner workings of Siamese society? All French authors deploy the same basic sociology of the coup, echoing the 'three estates' of *Ancien Régime* thought: instead of the Church, the nobility, and the people, we have the monks, the mandarins (*khunnang*), and the people. Each group is attributed with specific interests as well as more overarching emotions.²³ It does not need underlining that European assumptions about the field of religion and its relationship with politics are hardly analytically innocent either. It would do well to start from a position of cautious scepticism about how appropriate French concepts and categories are—even if I shall suggest that they shed light as well as shadow.

Anti-French feeling and ethnicity among the *khunnang* and the people

The most straightforward way of understanding the affairs of 1688 is as a palace coup driven by elite factionalism. There were obvious reasons why most Siamese officials, or *khunnang*, would have cause to resent the accumulation

Law and Kingship in Siam (Ithaca/New York, 2016); Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *Yuan Phai, the Defeat of Lanna: A Fifteenth Century Thai Epic Poem* (Washington, 2017); Tun Aung Chain (ed.), *Chronicle of Ayutthaya: A translation of the Yodaya yazawin* (Yangon, 2005), a Burmese source; R. Cushman (trans.) and D. Wyatt (eds), 'Translating Thai Poetry: Cushman, and King Narai's 'Long Song Prophecy for Ayutthaya', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 89 (2001); Dhiravat na Pombejra (trans.), 'Khlong chaloem phrakiat somdet phra narai: chabap sun manutwithaya sirinthon (sms) [Eulogy of King Narai, Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre Edition]', in Winai Pongsripian and Trongjai Hutangkura (eds), *Moradok khwam songjam haeng nopaburi si lawotayapura wa duai khlong chaloemphrakiat somdet phra narai lae jaruek boran haeng mueang lawo [Legacy of Nopaburi Si Lawotayapura in the Eulogy of King Narai and Ancient Inscriptions of Lawo]* (Bangkok, 2015), pp. 61–140.

²¹ Consider the highly mythicized account of the Thai ambassador's display of magical powers in France in David K. Wyatt (ed.) and Richard D. Cushman (trans.), *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya* (Bangkok, 2000), p. 275. See the discussion in Nidhi Eoseewong, *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok* (Chiang Mai, 2005), pp. 294–308. An analysis of the various accounts of Narai's reign in the different recensions of the chronicle would be a valuable exercise.

²² See the section below on the murals. The decree, *Phraratchakamnot kao [Old Royal Decrees]* 37, *Kotmai tra sam duang [Three Seals Law]*, vol. 5, pp. 98–99 (Bangkok, 1994). Visudh Busayakul (trans.), *The Diary of Kosa Pan (Thai Ambassador to France. June–July 1686)* (Chiang Mai, 2002) is also referred to below.

²³ See, for example, the letter by Vêret, 3 March 1689, in an Appendix to de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 144; Marcel Le Blanc, *Histoire de la révolution du royaume de Siam, arrivée en l'année 1688* (Lyon, 1692), vol. I, pp. 128, 162.

of power and commercial dominance by both Narai and Phaulkon. Moreover, Phaulkon's increasingly feverish diplomacy threatened to bring French power into the heart of the state's affairs at a time when local rulers in the region were all too aware of the threat of European colonialism.²⁴

The French deployment of the category of 'mandarins' is relatively unproblematic in identifying the *khunnang* as an interest group. The relationship of these officials with the king was indeed perennially tense in Ayutthaya.²⁵ It was exacerbated by Narai's determination to keep his officials on a particularly tight leash and the deterioration of his temper in the 1680s.²⁶ They also suffered from his unrelenting desire to fill royal coffers at the expense of other parties in the kingdom. It was not unusual for Siamese kings to seek to personally dominate trade but, in the 1680s, elite families saw Phaulkon developing a particularly ambitious and avaricious policy of royal monopolies hand in hand with European agents. This might well have appeared tantamount to a hijacking of the political and commercial functioning of the kingdom.²⁷ Although Phaulkon refused the office of *phra khlung* out of a desire not to antagonize the *khunnang*, they were naturally antagonized nonetheless by his rapid accumulation of wealth.²⁸

They had to watch the normally rigid protocol of the court bending to receive the arrogant envoys from Persia and Europe in 1685, while strutting French captains such as the Chevalier de Forbin were awarded with major military posts (he was made the governor of Bangkok) or flocked around the king during his hunting expeditions.²⁹ One source claims that Phaulkon had tried to arrange Siamese girls to be supplied for the envoys' enjoyment, which angered the Siamese officials who insisted that they should be provided by the Christian community instead.³⁰

The bloody revolt of the Makassars in July–September 1686 was an unmistakable signal of factional unease and mounting resentment: it was led by a Makassarese prince who had taken refuge in Ayutthaya, but a group of

²⁴ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 20–9.

²⁵ See the section on 'Siamese Absolutism' in Strathern, 'Sacred Kingship under King Narai'.

²⁶ His temper declined following the death of his queen and half-sister in 1681 and the discovery in 1683 that his half-brother Chaofa Noi was engaged in adultery with Phetracha's sister (Dhiravat na Pombejra, 'A Political History of Siam Under the Prasatthong Dynasty: 1629–1688', PhD thesis, University of London, 1984, pp. 343–6). Narai had Chaofa Noi beaten so badly that he was left practically dumb and physically weak (de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 70). Phetracha was involved in administering the beating and may already have deliberately facilitated Chaofa Noi's downfall, given his popularity before this event.

²⁷ According to the likes of La Loubère (*Étude historique*, pp. 367–70), foreign traders had also begun to desert Ayutthaya due to the suffocating impact of royal monopolies. Also see Gervaise, *Histoire*, p. 183; Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 156–7.

²⁸ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 50–1, 100–1. See Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, ca. 1604–1765* (Leiden/Boston, 2007), p. 152, on Dutch evidence for the jealousy aroused by Phaulkon.

²⁹ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 20–30; de Choisy, *Journal*, pp. 198–9.

³⁰ The anonymous letter of an English Catholic cited by van der Cruyssen, *Siam and the West*, p. 324. It is worth noting in this context La Loubère's (*Étude historique*, p. 240) comment that Siamese women did not easily give themselves to foreigners.

khunnang were accused of being involved. The following year saw a further telling outbreak of violence. Phaulkon had stationed some Englishmen in Mergui to take control of trade. They much irritated the local *khunnang*, who then suspected a full-scale takeover when an East India Company frigate arrived in June 1687. The result was a sudden attack by Siamese and Burmese that left at least 60 dead and the expulsion of the English from the port.³¹

It is not difficult then to imagine how the second French embassy, led by Simon de La Loubère and Claude Céberet de Boullay, would have been perceived when it arrived in September 1687 with its large contingent of soldiers under the command of General Desfarges and conveying the demand that they be stationed in Bangkok and Mergui. When this was brought to the king's council in late 1687, the *khunnang* were already primed to agree with Phetracha's representation of it as the spearhead of European imperialism.³² (Indeed, he was correct, for the French had orders to resort to force of arms if their requests were not acceded to.) Phetracha gave a long speech relating 'all the examples of princes of the Indies who, after having received the Portuguese and the Dutch had been despoiled of their estates and reduced to slavery'.³³

Still, Narai agreed to the request. And subsequently it was not only high-ranking officials who had cause to be aggrieved by the French presence. Complaints emanated from Bangkok about the disturbances caused by the soldiers stationed there. They were making a nuisance of themselves in ways that exhibited a distinctly non-Buddhist loss of self-control: drunkenness, riotousness, and sexual harassment.³⁴ In January 1688, the king of Johor wrote to Narai to warn against the policy of allowing foreign powers into one's kingdom. Later that month, a resident Malay was so bold as to inform the king that Phaulkon and the French were conspiring 'against the service of the king, civic liberty and religion' as the Jesuit Le Blanc reports it.³⁵ He was tortured and Le Blanc claims he was thrown to the tigers.

In the early stages of the coup itself, Phetracha dwelled upon these fears of foreign dominion in his accusations of the French and Phaulkon.³⁶ Once he was

³¹ See van der Cruyssen, *Siam and the West*, pp. 412–4; E. W. Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1940), Chapter 6.

³² See also letter of Fontaney, 12 May 1687, in Tachard, *Voyage*, p. 258.

³³ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 88. Some French observers quite understood. See, for example, Volland des Verquains, *Histoire*, p. 15, referring to 'a tolerance so contrary to all the laws of Politics'.

³⁴ Hence Phaulkon's insistence in correspondence that French troops must behave themselves: Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 October 1687, Tokyo Bunko MS 77. Also see de Choisy, *Journal*, p. 258; Claude Céberet, *Étude historique et critique du Journal du voyage de Siam de Claude Céberet, Envoyé extraordinaire du Roi en 1687 et 1688*, Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h (ed.) (Paris, 1992), p. 122; Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company*, p. 129, refers to Dutch evidence as to the anger aroused by the 'impudent wantonness' of the French; Hutchinson, *Adventurers*, p. 166, citing letter of Abbé de Lionne.

³⁵ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 29.

³⁶ And his suspicions of Phaulkon's plotting were far from paranoid: Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 218–27; Lieutenant de La Touche, 'Relation de ce qui est arrivé dans le Royaume de Siam en 1688', in Robert Challe, *Journal Du Voyage des Indes Orientales*, prepared by Jacques Popin and Frédéric Deloffre (Geneva, 1998), pp. 309, 333; de Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 99–101. Phaulkon was well aware of these fears: Phaulkon to Tachard, October 1687, Tokyo Bunko MS 77.

in control of the palace, he summoned General Desfarges from Bangkok to Lopburi, who now felt he had little option but to comply. When Desfarges arrived on 2 June, it is telling that Phetracha had him forced into the traditional position of prostration that the European envoys had refused to assume in their formal receptions with Narai. With a naked sword at his back to keep him on the ground, Desfarges was reproached for the poor discipline and violence of his men. As de Bèze notes, this was a risky move, because Phetracha still wished the French to withdraw rather than face them in open conflict. He was driven to it by the need to show those assembled at court that he was serious in his determination 'to deliver them from the domination of the French, as he had promised'.³⁷

All of this is relatively easy to comprehend without invoking broader expressions of ethnic identity and political community. Even if we conceive these frictions as drawing upon and generating a more generic antagonism towards foreigners, xenophobia may function as a negatively defined emotion (a rejection of x) rather than as the expression of a distinct in-group (belonging to y).³⁸ For their part, the French sources, however, are clear that positive identities were invoked. Evidently, on this point, they must be handled with care. They deploy a language of *patrie* and political principle that may simply be treacherous in a Southeast Asian context.³⁹ They may also be reading events through the lens of their own history, in which communal religious passions and suspicions of foreign involvement had helped to drive political conflict. And yet, it is important to note that, before 1688, French accounts were not inclined to impose categories of national sentiment and religious agitation on the Siamese; on the contrary, it was their *absence* that provoked comment.⁴⁰ It is only in texts written after 1688 that such dynamics are emphasized and previous stereotypes of the Siamese upended in the process.⁴¹ The French saw unusually affable cosmopolitanism morph into hatred, while the famous religious tolerance of the Siamese broke into a spasm of persecution.

³⁷ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 130; cf. Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 218–9.

³⁸ As a comparison with nineteenth-century uprisings against later projects of European colonialism would indicate: consider the 1857 uprising against the British in India, in which an old order based around kingship was defended rather than any defined sense of Indian nationality or ethnicity. On the other hand, it does not follow that such uprisings are merely culturally neutral calculations of material interest; they are normally aroused in order to defend some symbolically resonant features of the old order.

³⁹ For discussion of the contemporary resonances of phrases such as *liberté publique* and *patrie*, I am grateful to Giora Sternberg and Sophie Nicholls. *Patrie* evokes the Roman concept, and was used in the sense of a body politic that could inspire civic as well as religious duties.

⁴⁰ For example, La Loubère, *Étude historique*, p. 356: 'to die for their prince and country (*pays*) is not a virtue in their practice. Amongst them are not found the powerful motives by which our people animate themselves to a vigorous defence.' This is part of a generalizing orientaling discourse. In light of 1688, it was both prescient (because Narai was not defended) and badly wrong (because the people were indeed animated to participate).

⁴¹ One exception is Gervaise, *Histoire*, p. 70, who, writing *before* 1688, notes: 'it is remarkable to what extremes the natural pride of this nation, apparently so humble and simple, will go. There is no good citizen who will willingly suffer a foreigner, whoever they may be, to take precedence over him or to be seated above him.'

In defence of his actions in 1688, General Desfarges commented that with hindsight the French should not have relied 'on the gentleness of the Nature, on the esteem and affection of these Peoples for the French, since we saw them, on the contrary, full of hatred and fury for our ruin'.⁴² What aroused such hatred? The engineer Verquains has it that 'there were few among the two estates who did not allow themselves to be persuaded by [Phetracha's] speeches which had their foundation in religion and civic liberty [*liberté publique*]'.⁴³ This finds an echo in Le Blanc's claim that, after the coup, 'with the general consent of all the different Estates [*Ordres*], Phetracha was ... soon after honoured with the titles of liberator of the Fatherland [*Patrie*] and defender of its Religion'.⁴⁴ Le Blanc reports that one of Phaulkon's spies had recorded Phetracha saying: 'I do not have the honour of being of Royal blood but I am of Royal milk and of a heart entirely Siamese, that was his expression'.⁴⁵ And that Phetracha had once said to Phaulkon: 'It's a shame Sir that you are not Siamese, for you would reign over us after the death of the King just as you govern us now, but the Siamese will want a man of their people [*homme de la nation*]'.⁴⁶

But what was the 'nation' or the 'Fatherland' whose liberty was at stake and who were the 'Siamese people' or 'public' who demanded one of their own as monarch? Scholarship has tended to see cosmopolitan Ayutthaya as an uncongenial environment for the development of proto-nationalism or politicized ethnicity.⁴⁷ However, John S. F. Smith has recently presented a compelling account of how the Thai identity evolved over the early modern period.⁴⁸ Smith observes that Ayutthaya's wars with its neighbours in the sixteenth century had 'led to the growing association of loyalty to the Ayutthayan king with the Thai ethnic majority group' as distinguished from Mon, Lao, and Khmer rivals.⁴⁹ The word 'Thai' itself starts to appear in a few more sources during the seventeenth century. In the portion of the Palace Chronicle written early in Narai's reign, Ayutthaya is referred to as 'krung thai', or 'the Thai capital'.⁵⁰ The surviving extract of the diary by Kosa Pan, the ambassador to

⁴² Desfarges, *Relation des revolutions arrivées a Siam dans l'année 1688* (Amsterdam, 1691), p. 1, and see p. 21.

⁴³ Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, p. 15; cf. also Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 128, for 'civic liberty'.

⁴⁴ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 162, and see pp. 128–32.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52. This echoes a phrase of Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 6, that by showing his concern for the sangha, Phetracha had shown 'his heart to be truly Siamese, full of esteem for his Nation, and contempt for others'.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁷ Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 206–8; Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800–1830. Volume 1: Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 275, 313–30, notes that by the late seventeenth century, local *phrai* had come to regard themselves as Siamese and yet notes four factors that encouraged a looser tie between ethnicity and loyalty than maintained in Burma.

⁴⁸ John S. F. Smith, 'State, Community and Ethnicity in Early Modern Thailand, 1351–1767', PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Michigan, 2019.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

France in 1686, also indicates that the preferred self-descriptor was ‘Thai’ and this is confirmed by La Loubère, who also notes that Thai means ‘free’.⁵¹

At the same time, however, from the early seventeenth century, ‘a revival of popular, court-sponsored Buddhism put an end to the ethnic tensions between the Thai, Mon, Lao, and Khmer ethnic communities’.⁵² These now formed what Smith refers to as ‘the central communities’, being spatially and socially integrated with the Thai, and forming a kind of inner circle based on their cultural affinities as Theravada Buddhists.⁵³ The performance of sacred kingship stood at the heart of this creation of political-cultural community.⁵⁴ Indeed, they were also increasingly liable to merge into the expanding Thai ethnic group. The French missionary Nicolas Gervaise noted that one-third of the kingdom were ‘foreigners’ insofar as they were descendants of prisoners of war from Laos and Pegu, but that they had merged so completely with the Siamese that it was difficult to tell them apart.⁵⁵ These Buddhist groups were thus distinguished from various ‘peripheral communities’, mostly Muslim or Catholics, such as the Japanese, Persians, and Portuguese. These maintained greater cultural distinctiveness from the centre but were incorporated into the state order through the appointment of *nai* (community leaders).⁵⁶ They were, in turn, distinct from the more transient foreign groups such as the Dutch and French who operated on their own terms.

Yet, just as both peripheral and foreign communities were being distanced in cultural terms, so they were acquiring greater influence in political terms through the logic of royal aggrandizement. Kings used these groups precisely because of their shallower local roots and their capacity to unlock the potential of the mercantilist opportunities of the early modern maritime world, rewarding them with privileges and ministries in order to curtail the pretensions of the local *khunnang*. This naturally intensified factional struggles over

⁵¹ He is the ‘Thai ambassador’, for example. See the Introduction by Dirk van der Cruysse to Busayakul (trans.), *Diary of Kosa Pan*, pp. 28–9, and La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 133–4, which also reflects on the term ‘Siam’. John Smith (personal communication, 8 February and 5 March 2017) tells me that Kosa Pan refers to his state as ‘*krung thai*’.

⁵² Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, p. 147.

⁵³ I do not assume that ‘Theravada’ functioned as an emic term in the modern sense (see Peter Skilling et al. (eds), *How Theravāda Is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiang Mai, 2012)). Smith’s analysis is close to Chris Baker’s observation in conversation (Bangkok, July 2016) that a sense of concentric circles of foreignness operated in which a salient inner circle was inhabited by Thai, Mon, Khmer, Lao, and Peguans who had assimilated ‘Siamese’ culture. Alain Forest, *Les missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles): Analyse comparée d’un relatif succès et d’un échec total*, 3 vols (Paris, 1998), vol. III, pp. 379, 445, may be too broad-brush, then, in representing straightforward distinctions between autochthones and foreigners. Note David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Chiang Mai, 2001), pp. 76, 86, who suggests that, as the kingdom’s elite were exposed to cosmopolitan influences, they more self-consciously identified with their own culture.

⁵⁴ Especially from the reign of Ekathotsarot (r. 1605–10), Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, pp. 168–70.

⁵⁵ Gervaise, *Histoire*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Also see Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 81; the headmen were overseen by an official, the *Ōkuyā Phra Khlang*.

succession as different foreign groups fell in and out of favour in alliance with local *khunnang* families. But it also strained against the consolidation of an expanded Thai-Buddhist identity. Narai even allowed the performance of kingship, forming the centre of this mandala-like cultural order, to be influenced by foreign groups, at least in terms of the role of aesthetic glamour. Persian and French material culture—if not, crucially, religion—permeated the court.⁵⁷ It is these tensions that were expressed in the Makassar revolt, the Mergui uprising, and then finally in the coup itself.⁵⁸

Buddhist boundary-making

Some of the quotations above indicate that the French themselves intuited that religion lay at the heart of the self-conceptions driving the ordinary *phrai* who participated in the 1688 coup. Indeed, there are certain indications of defensiveness around the boundaries of Buddhism long before 1688. In the ‘picnic incident’ of December 1636, drunken Dutch misbehaviour in a temple had led to a major diplomatic incident.⁵⁹ In the early 1660s, a Jesuit report refers to a small group of eight people who had converted in 1657 but were now ‘pointed at and called Christians, and the cross of Christ and the Christian way of thinking is considered *stultitia gentibus*’.⁶⁰ The latter phrase refers to the ‘foolishness of the gentiles’ in disbelieving the teaching of the crucifixion (1 Corinthians 1: 23). In 1663, a decree was issued by Narai’s court:

these days many Khaek, Farang, English, Khula, Malays etc. come to shelter under the royal merit. Henceforth, Thai, Mon, and Lao are forbidden from covertly engaging in sexual intercourse with Khaek, Farang, English, Khula, Malay who uphold wrong thinking, so that people should not encounter suffering and woe but should follow right thinking, and not mingle together.⁶¹

This ruling was to be observed on pain of death (although we do not know whether and when it was actually put into practice).⁶² It is important to note that the decree does not express a generic anxiety about foreigners; it does not mention Khmers and Chinese, for example. Rather it refers to monotheists, to

⁵⁷ Strathern, ‘Tensions and Experimentations’.

⁵⁸ Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, p. 147.

⁵⁹ Chris Baker et al. (eds), *Van Vliet’s Siam* (Chiang Mai, 2005), pp. 45–62.

⁶⁰ Polenghi, ‘G. F. de Marini’s *Delle Missioni*’, p. 54.

⁶¹ I am grateful to Chris Baker for providing me with this translation of the text contained in *Phraratchakannot kao [Old Royal Decrees]* 37, vol. 5, pp. 98–9. It is also discussed in Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 208–9.

⁶² The decree is not in itself a ban on conversion, but a ban on sexual relations that may lead to conversion. (We do not see reference to this decree in the missionary sources; it is possible that it lapsed in the 1670s when Narai’s relations with the sangha worsened.) It appears to be a stronger and more religion-focused version of a law from the reign of Songtham (r. 1610–29) or Prasat Thong (r. 1629–56), by which children born to a Thai or Mon parent on one side and a *tang prathet* (foreigner) on the other must not be raised to be *micchādīṭṭhi* (wrong thinkers). Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, p. 181.

groups that were either Muslim or Christian.⁶³ The decree conveys a clear concept of 'heretical' or damagingly mistaken views, which are referred to by the Pali terms for wrong thinking (*micchādiṭṭhi*) and suffering and woe (*apāya dukkha*), and are distinguished from right thinking (*sammādiṭṭhi*). Particularly intriguing is the direct conflation of sexual and religious purity. It may be that sexual relations are seen here as the first step of incorporation into monotheist households. Whatever the case, the decree identifies an 'inner group' of Theravada Buddhists, the Thai, Mon, and Lao, who require protection from a loss of their Buddhist commitment—from conversion. In this light, the much stricter decrees against Christian proselytization issued by Thai kings in 1731 (against preaching to or converting Thai, Mon, and Lao) and 1774 (against Thai and Mon converting) appear to stand in a longer lineage.⁶⁴

Clearly, the widespread European tendency to marvel at the religious tolerance of Thai society obscures a much more complex story of how religious boundaries operated and intertwined with other group identities in late seventeenth-century Ayutthaya.

The intellectual neutralization of monotheism

It is probably no coincidence that the 1663 decree was passed the year after two MEP (*Missions Étrangères de Paris*) priests, Pierre Lambert de Lambert and Jacques de Bourges, had arrived in Ayutthaya. En route to the capital, in April 1662, the pair had encountered a monk in Tenasserim. Their account of the debate with the monk indicates that the political move against monotheistic proselytization glimpsed above was already part of a broader reaction that had a theological dimension too.⁶⁵

Whatever the surface affability that missionaries routinely reported of Thai monks, they were evidently formulating an intellectual neutralization of Christianity in the period leading up to 1688. One key motif is the *redundancy* of Christianity, insofar as Buddhism had superior versions of what Christianity appeared to be aiming at.⁶⁶ If Christian proselytizers were prone to

⁶³ Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, p. 209 refers to three groups: 'Muslims and others from India and the Middle East (Khaek); Muslims and others from the peninsula and archipelago (Khula, Malayu); and Christians from Europe (Farang, English).' It is interesting that it does not mention the Japanese Christians, many of whom had arrived after 1637—presumably because they did not proselytize.

⁶⁴ See the discussion of 1731 below, and Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, pp. 360, 377–8, 412, who is generally concerned to underline that Theravada Buddhism has been 'been more combative than it is usually represented', partly because he takes a long-term view. Also, Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, pp. 204–5.

⁶⁵ Jacques de Bourges, *Relation du voyage de Monseigneur l'Evêque de Béryste, vicaire apostolique du royaume de la Cochinchine, par la Turquie, la Perse, les Indes, &c. jusqu'au royaume de Siam & autres lieux* (Paris, 1666), p. 170. Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, p. 357, argues that in fact the process of intellectual neutralization must already have been stimulated by the presence of Islam. See La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 253–4, on the Siamese facility in debate.

⁶⁶ See Strathern, *Converting Kings*. Compare an argument from 1582 in Marcelo de Ribadeneira, *History of the Philippines and other Kingdoms [1601]*, Pacita Fernandez (trans.) (Manila, 1970) vol. 1, pp. 42–3, 161–2.

brandishing the textual authority of the Bible, it was met by the monks' own deep reverence for their foundational texts.⁶⁷ As for soteriology, Guy Tachard noted that when challenged on the operation of karma and rebirth, 'they scorn what is said to them of original sin and its effects, and they entertain visions of the disobedience and punishment of our first Father'.⁶⁸

Karma also presented a more specific problem for the Christian story. Since Buddhism entirely rejected the notion of sacrifice or the scapegoat—that blood could somehow be exchanged for salvific merit—the suffering undertaken by Christ was not so much moving as puzzling.⁶⁹ If Christ had truly been a good man, he surely would not have ended up the victim of such dreadful punishment. The cross was a thing of shame. La Loubère had to recommend that, in future, the teaching of the crucifixion should simply be avoided until the idea that one may be both unfortunate and innocent was somehow first established.⁷⁰

The most important intellectual move made by the monks was already indicated in de Bourges's account. The monk attending to Lambert's discourse

appeared to listen with satisfaction, confessing in the end that he believed that the Christian religion was very good and the God of the Christians and his were brothers, that his was older and more powerful than the younger; this was seen, he said, when a difference came between them and they were obliged to take up arms, and the younger was defeated, seized and put to death as punishment for his revolt.⁷¹

This is the first mention we have of an innovative connection that was forged between Jesus Christ and Buddha's rival, his cousin and brother-in-law Devadatta. Devadatta was an important character in the *Tiṭṭaka* (canonical texts), later commentaries, and the *jātaka* stories of the Buddha's past lives that formed the principal genre by which Buddhism was popularized.⁷² His story functions as a morality tale on the evils of schism. In its broad outlines, Devadatta joins Gautama's following and thereby attains a degree of supernatural power (*iddhi*). He uses this to convert Prince Ajātasattu, who becomes his disciple. Emboldened by this success, it occurs to the young monk that he should become head of the sangha and so he challenges the Buddha for that role. Thus, he becomes the leader of a breakaway group of monks who try

⁶⁷ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 416–7; Tachard, *Voyage*, I, p. 252. In this and what follows, cf. John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam: With a Narrative of the Mission to that Country in 1855*, 2 vols (London, 1857), vol. I, pp. 336–7.

⁶⁸ Tachard, *Voyage*, I, p. 385. This is a reference to Devadatta, as discussed below.

⁶⁹ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, p. 394.

⁷⁰ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 418–9; Tachard, *Voyage*, p. 235. When the French clerics were undergoing the trials of the post-1688 persecution, they were sustained by the glory of martyrdom; the Siamese merely noted that their well of merit must have been well and truly exhausted: Le Blanc, *Histoire*, pp. 286–7; Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, I, p. 237.

⁷¹ De Bourges, *Relation*, p. 172.

⁷² *Vinaya Pitaka, Khandaka, Cullavagga*, 7, but also elsewhere in the canon. See Tachard, *Voyage*, p. 244, on *Jātakas*.

to assert their superiority by cleaving to a strenuously ascetic form of discipline. Devadatta comes to hate Buddha so much that he tries to kill him several times. This was only one iteration of a struggle between the ambitious monk and the Buddha that was repeated over many past lifetimes. He failed, of course, and was cast down to hell, where he remained suffering for his disastrous karma.

La Loubère began Book II of his *Relation* with a translation of a detailed life of Devadatta from the Pali, which he says was just given to him at the moment of his departure from Siam.⁷³ La Loubère had been looking for a life of Buddha but could not find one (he had to rely on various oral testimonies) and this was evidently the closest he could get. It surely speaks to how central Devadatta had become to the religious encounter that he found such a text already assembled in Pali. His account retained the core of the canonical narrative while also echoing the *jātakas* and perhaps oral tradition.⁷⁴ Other French visitors of the later 1680s also picked up on the theme.⁷⁵

It is in Guy Tachard's *Relation* that we see just how far the Devadatta story could be refashioned in order to draw out the connection with Christ.⁷⁶ In this particular telling, the story has become an origin myth for the division of the world into two religions: Buddhism and its false simulacrum. Only in this account is Devadatta shown failing to grasp the principle of karma, which explains how the missionaries ('who have so much desire to debate') could yet be so ignorant of this fundamental law or descend to allowing men to kill and eat animals.⁷⁷ The original schism of Devadatta had begat more schisms, indeed seven of them, including the Protestant sects. And at the end, Devadatta was hung up on a cross, with a crown of thorns. This is a deviation from the typical image of Devadatta as being held in place in the deepest hell (Avici) by great iron spikes running through his body, as we see in La Loubère's version.⁷⁸ That the Siamese equated Devadatta's punishment with

⁷³ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 426–35. La Loubère recognizes the core point (p. 411) that Devadatta was identified with Jesus but does not expand on its significance.

⁷⁴ Eoseewong, *Pen and Sail*, p. 264, who emphasizes the *Vessantara Jātaka*.

⁷⁵ De Choisy, *Journal*, p. 308; Alexandre de Chaumont, *Relation de l'ambassade de Monsieur le chevalier de Chaumont à la Cour du Roy de Siam, avec ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable durant son voyage* (La Haye, 1733), p. 88; Gervaise, *Histoire*, pp. 118–9, though strangely the latter does not mention the connection to Christianity. Also see Morelli in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 365.

⁷⁶ Tachard, *Voyage*, pp. 398–410. Often painted as a dubious figure in the scholarship, Tachard here shows himself to be an insightful source, no doubt aided by his intimacy with Phaulkon (they both spoke Portuguese) and his determined questioning of a monk onboard the *Oiseau* during his return journey. B. J. Terweil, in his Introduction to Guy Tachard, *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam* (Bangkok, 1999), p. xxx, notes that the story of Devadatta is retold by Tachard with many accurate details. Cf. Donald S. Lopez Jr, *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha* (Chicago, 2013), p. 89. Naturally, in some ways, Tachard's account of Buddhism is garbled, and this telling of the Devadatta story must be unusual in how far it is Christianized—and may even be the result of his conversations with his informant.

⁷⁷ Tachard, *Voyage*, p. 404.

⁷⁸ Lopez, *Stone to Flesh*, p. 84, comments on the accuracy of La Loubère's rendering of Devadatta's punishment.

Jesus's crucifixion is noted also by Choisy, Chaumont, and Gervaise.⁷⁹ La Loubère gives us one further item used as evidence for the identification: that the name of Jesus's mother Mary was rather close to that of the mother of Buddha: Maya.⁸⁰

The missionaries had themselves been inclined to pick up on such uncanny similarities and had their own assimilative narrative to explain them—tending to consider the religions of Asia as a gradual corruption of Christian truth.⁸¹ But they seem not to have realized how much those similarities were being turned against them. Tachard is an exception:

Although there are many things that keep the Siamese at a distance from the Christian law, one can say at least that nothing sustains their aversion as much as this thought: [Given] the resemblance that is to be found in some points between their religion and ours, making them believe that Jesus Christ is no different to this Thévetat [Devadatta] spoken of in their scriptures, they are persuaded that seeing we are the disciples of the one, we are also followers of the other, and the fear they have of falling into Hell with Thévetat, if they follow his doctrine, does not allow them to listen to the propositions that are put to them of embracing Christianity. That which most confirms them in their prejudice is that we adore the image of our crucified saviour, which plainly represents the punishment of Thévetat. So when we would explain to them the articles of our Faith, they always prevent us, saying that they do not need our instructions, and that they know already better than we do what we have come to teach them.⁸²

Tachard notes that some monks had interrupted a theological discussion among the ambassador's party to assert that the core issue was the travails of Buddha while he was a monkey.⁸³ This could be a reference to the *Mahakapi Jataka* (no. 407), in which the Buddha is a self-sacrificing monkey—teaching a king the virtue of compassion for his subjects, no less—suffering at the hands of selfish Devadatta.⁸⁴

Monks' references to the fraternal connection between Christ and Devadatta could seem benign to their missionary interlocutors, but this belied the fact that it amounted to a serious attack. Devadatta symbolized the spectre of schism, the ultimate expression of egotism, which the Theravada tradition

⁷⁹ De Choisy, *Journal*, p. 308; de Chaumont, *Relation*, p. 88; Gervaise, *Histoire*, p. 119.

⁸⁰ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, p. 411.

⁸¹ See Sven Trakulhun, 'Accommodating Buddhism: European Travellers and Siamese Religion in the Eighteenth Century', in Monika Arnez and Jürgen Sarnowsky (eds), *The Role of Religions in the European Perception of Insular and Mainland Southeast Asia: Travel Accounts of the 16th to the 21st Century* (Newcastle, 2016).

⁸² Tachard, *Voyage*, pp. 407–8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁸⁴ There are other *jātakas* involving Devadatta in which Buddha is a monkey too, such as *Cullanandiya Jātaka* (no. 222). Tachard does not appear to grasp the connection with Devadatta, however, and tells the story to show how much 'the people are infatuated with such fables'.

had worked so hard to forestall. Devadatta was Buddha's archenemy, his would-be murderer. Whenever the discourse of Devadatta was deployed, it signified that Christianity had shifted from being merely an inferior form of soteriology to an actively dangerous one.

The discourse served to contain two threats sensed in Christianity: that of similitude and that of immanent power. Both were met by being devalued rather than denied. The Devadatta story deals with the question of 'miracles' in two ways. On one level, Devadatta is simply shown to be much less powerful than the Buddha in immanentist terms. Indeed, in the scriptural (Vinaya Pitaka) version, as soon as he develops his evil ambition, his supernatural powers desert him. And when he lets loose an elephant on the Buddha, the latter miraculously tames the beast.⁸⁵ In Tachard's account too, Devadatta's lack of skill in such matters is put forward as an explanation for why the missionaries could not work prodigies (such as curing men, locating precious metals) in the way that monks could.⁸⁶

On another level, the story conveys an ambiguity about the significance of miracles that derives from the transcendentalist dimension to Buddhist teachings. Elsewhere in the textual tradition, Buddha is critical of the recourse to miracles as a means of conversion.⁸⁷ Note that Devadatta had attained his powers rather quickly and before making much progress towards *nibbana*. As La Loubère puts it, of the companions who joined with him, 'he alone could obtain no other thing than a great strength and the power of doing miracles'.⁸⁸ His short-lived powers may 'work' in terms of attracting the prince—but this is no reflection at all on the worth of his teachings. La Loubère inserts an extraordinary note to the text at this point: 'the miracles of Jesus Christ persuade them that he is Tévatat, but it is necessary to make them see that the miracles which they attribute to Tévatat are to do evil and those of Jesus Christ are for good.'⁸⁹ What does this local discourse amount to? A nullification of immanent power as means to effect conversion.⁹⁰ Any such magic-working the missionaries could claim only demonstrated how badly they had gone awry.

In the context of the embassies of the 1680s, the story was surely particularly pointed. It turned, after all, on a moment of royal conversion. Devadatta uses his powers to draw Prince Ajātasattu, the heir to the throne of Magadha,

⁸⁵ *Cullavagga* 7.2–3. In La Loubère's version, he also only demonstrates his miraculous powers at the start of the narrative, in converting the prince. La Loubère's text does not bring out the miraculous significance of the elephant taming, but elsewhere (*Étude historique*, p. 413) refers to Buddha's miraculous powers.

⁸⁶ Tachard, *Voyage*, p. 246. This is indeed an indication that the French presence—their technologies, telescopes, doctors, as well as their rituals of divine propitiation—had been felt as presenting a challenge in immanentist terms, albeit not one that had succeeded in overturning a confidence in indigenous techniques: see Strathern, 'Tensions and Experimentations'.

⁸⁷ See Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 78–9.

⁸⁸ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, pp. 429–30; cf. *Cullavagga* 7.1. Devadatta's companions attain degrees of enlightenment but he 'attained to that kind of *iddhi* (spiritual power) which is attainable even by those who have not entered upon the Excellent Way'.

⁸⁹ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, p. 429.

⁹⁰ Strathern, *Converting Kings*, looks at the attempts to convert Narai on immanentist grounds.

towards a grievously mistaken corruption of the true law. This must have resonated at a time when Narai's inclinations to Christianity were the subject of rumour.

It was not until the mid-1680s, then, that the French began to pick up on the religious mobilization against them. It had been and was still hard for Christians to grasp hold of the sort of identity that Buddhism established, given that it did not take the form of an equivalent and antagonistic exercise in exclusivist faith. La Loubère attained the firmest grip. He appreciated that—in effect—the Indic religions were not predicated on exclusive belonging as a soteriological imperative, nor on some notion of loyalty to a jealous metaperson, nor on an esteem for 'faith', in the sense of an assertion in the face of doubt—but yet they remained mysteriously unshakeable nonetheless.⁹¹

For Buddhism differed from many of the immanentist forms of 'paganism' that missionaries encountered elsewhere in the world insofar as it had originated as an 'offensive' religion, just like Christianity. It had emerged as one among several consciously defined rival philosophical-spiritual systems, which it claimed were inferior.⁹² As La Loubère notes: 'they do believe themselves more pure and virtuous than the Christians. They alone are *creeng* that is to say, pure and that the Christians are *Cahat* or destined to sin like the rest of mankind.'⁹³

It is simply that Buddhism mounted its project of dominion in an entirely different way to monotheism. Tambiah notes the correlation between the political imagery of the *cakkavatti* who conquers kings but allows them to continue once they have submitted to his righteous overlordship, with the religious imagery of Buddhism subduing other systems but allowing them to persist in a subordinated form.⁹⁴ It follows then that Buddhism would not spring into aggression at the mere presence of another belief system, but only when it was in danger of being dislodged from its hegemonic position.⁹⁵ It was precisely this situation that arose in 1688.

⁹¹ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, p. 416.

⁹² Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*.

⁹³ La Loubère, *Étude historique*, p. 397. Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h only notes that *creeng* approximates more to ascetic or austere, and *cahat* to a word for laymen. According to Chris Baker (personal communication), *Creeng* might be *kraeng* (kraeng) meaning strong, in this case indicating resolute in belief and practice, while *Cahat* might be *sahat* (sahat), from Pali *sāhasa*, which means dire in modern Thai.

⁹⁴ Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 46–7. Indeed, the Theravada monarchs of the region had explicitly asserted their superior Buddhist credentials to justify waging war against each other. Nidhi, *Pen and Sail*, p. 331.

⁹⁵ There was no exact equivalent to 'Buddhism' or 'religion', in emic terms, but the concept of the *sāsana*, the Buddha's dispensation, or perhaps of the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha), functioned in a similar manner. See Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 118, and also Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, p. 396, on the need to protect the Buddhist message for the salvation of people over many lifetimes.

The role of the sangha in the rebellion

From the start, Narai's reign had been characterized by serious clashes with the sangha including assassination attempts.⁹⁶ A number of times, he had purged the sangha, thereby exhibiting his royal duty of maintaining its purity, of course, but also driving defrocked monks into corvée labour and beating down on potential opponents.⁹⁷ The tension between rulership and clerisy typical of societies with established transcendentalist traditions was running high. Missionaries may have delighted in these antagonisms, but it was Phaulkon who understood properly how devastating they were to their designs. Closer to the inner workings of the Ayutthaya court than any other European, he also saw more clearly than any other foreigner how the legitimacy of the king depended upon his upholding Buddhism. If a ruler were to abandon this role, the moral authority of the sangha might translate into political opposition. Indeed, in secret documents sent to Versailles in 1685, Phaulkon laid out a plan for the use of subterfuge and military force in implanting Christianity. This amounted to a recognition that the only means of overcoming a massive legitimacy deficit created by the imposition of a Christian ruler would be through sheer coercion.⁹⁸ He was therefore among those prompting the French to send troops to accompany the 1687 embassy.

Phaulkon's long letter to Louis XIV's confessor, François de la Chaise, provides strong evidence that the sangha were preparing the ground for a revolt.⁹⁹ In February 1685, it emerged that a monk had prophesied that the king would die for being an enemy of religion. Then, in March or April 1686, a paper was found attached to a tree in front of the palace at Lopburi, which described 'the peril in which the Siamese religion found itself. It invited the whole world to open their eyes to an affair that concerned public interest'.¹⁰⁰ From 1687, astrological predictions of a great change to affairs of state surfaced to further stir the febrile atmosphere.¹⁰¹ In that year, Narai purged the sangha again, having several thousand monks 'reduced to the secular condition'.¹⁰² Around this

⁹⁶ The French depiction of the sangha as a distinct element of society is not really problematic. It is not an orientalist distortion to recognize, for example, that the sangha played a *roughly* equivalent role in Siamese society to that of the Church in Europe.

⁹⁷ This issue is explored more fully in Strathern, 'Tensions and Experimentations' and *Converting Kings*.

⁹⁸ Memoir of Phaulkon for Tachard, December 1685, in Adrien Launay (ed.), *Histoire de la Mission de Siam: Documents historiques*, 2 vols (Paris, 1920), vol. I, pp. 179–80; Constance Phaulkon to Père Tachard, 3 October 1687, Tokyo Bunko MS, f. 77; and the longer letter to Père de la Chaise, 20 November 1686, Tokyo Bunko MS, f. 48. Note also de Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 34, 40–1. De Choisy, *Journal*, p. 201: 'when the King wishes to become a Christian, he will have to take measures to safeguard the very well-being of the religion' and note (p. 391) his comment on the political obstacle presented by the monks.

⁹⁹ Phaulkon to de la Chaise, November 1686, Tokyo Bunko MS 48 (transcription in de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 169).

¹⁰⁰ Tokyo Bunko MS, ff. 5–6; de Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 179–80.

¹⁰¹ See *Converting Kings*, and also note the Franciscan missionary Giovanni Battista Morelli di Castelnuovo's report in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 358.

¹⁰² On 12 May 1687, the Jesuit Jean de Fontaney (Letter in Guy Tachard, *Second Voyage du Père Tachard et des Jésuites envoyez par le Roy au Royaume de Siam. Contenant diverses remarques d'Histoire*,

time, a high-ranking monk of 80 had spoken out against the foreigners after an official was beheaded for offending a European officer: Narai had the impaled corpse of the official placed at the monk's door.¹⁰³

All this had happened even though Narai had not in fact succumbed to the pressure exerted by the French embassy to convert. But when his illness worsened in February 1688, he was powerless to stop a rumour that he was about to become a Christian and destroy the Buddhist temples.¹⁰⁴ In his search for a pretext for usurping the crown, Phetracha charged Narai with the crime of even thinking about conversion, and claimed that the king had passed word to the Jesuits that he would convert.¹⁰⁵ This was the climax to rumours or fears about the king's favour for the new sect that had surfaced a number of times.¹⁰⁶

Phetracha had been laying the groundwork for this strategy for many years. He clothed himself with the garb of Buddhist piety, literally as well as metaphorically, for he wore an ochre-coloured robe that approximated that of a monk. In fact, this practice dated back to the year that he had spent in a monastery following the death of Narai's queen in 1680. He had made the most of his time in the *wat*, excelling as a monk and developing strong connections with the monastic hierarchy, and in particular the Sangkharat of Lopburi.¹⁰⁷ It was only against his protestations that he was levered out of the *wat*. This is the strategy that Shakespeare has the Duke of Gloucester deploy in order to become Richard III. By careful prearrangement, Buckingham and a crowd of citizens disturb Gloucester at prayer in between

two right reverend fathers,
 Divinely bent to meditation;
 And no worldly suit would he be moved,
 To draw him from his holy exercise.¹⁰⁸

de Physique, de Géographie, & d' Astronomie (Middlebourg, 1689), pp. 258–9) reported that, for a year, the king had been 'chasing the ignorant out of the pagodas' but, on that day itself, had issued particular orders against the monks, extracting some for his service. This accords with La Loubère's statement (*Étude historique*, p. 373) that when they arrived in the country (in October 1687), 'il venait d'en reduire plusieurs milliers à la condition séculière'.

¹⁰³ De Fontaney in Tachard, *Second Voyage*, p. 259.

¹⁰⁴ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–5, which goes on to say that the Jesuits were therefore 'questioned more than once' about a missionary letter that spoke of the king's regard for Christianity. Phetracha also claimed that Phra Pi was being set up as a Christian puppet (de Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 99–100).

¹⁰⁶ Perhaps since 1676 if we can believe one missionary report: 'And since that time, we have not seen him go to a Temple, in the manner of his predecessors, it was commonly said that he was of the Religion of the Foreigners.' *Relation des Missions et des Voyages des Evesques Vicaires Apostoliques et de leurs ecclésiastiques ès années 1676 et 1677* (Paris, 1680), p. 215. In 1685, there are some signs that officials were alarmed at the possibility of the king's conversion when it became clear that this is what the Chaumont embassy set out to accomplish: de Choisy, *Journal*, p. 251 ('the religion of the pagodes is at an end'). Significantly, the Persian embassy had also picked up on the feeling that Narai's most basic beliefs had been 'shaken to their foundation': Ibn Muhammad Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, John O'Kane (trans.) (London, 1972), p. 99.

¹⁰⁷ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 77–8.

¹⁰⁸ Richard III, Act III, scene VII.

Thus, Phetracha plays the part of the godly man dragged from higher contemplations and propelled to the throne by national need. And thus he sounded convincing when, in 1688, he claimed that his ambitions for his own person extended no further than the temple, and that his only objective was to preserve Buddhism. He was simply carrying out his duty to safeguard the monks from the attacks of a Christian successor.¹⁰⁹ This is the essence of righteous kingship.

Phetracha's alliance with the sangha bore fruit in more concrete and institutional terms. There was no other organizational structure that could rival the sangha in its penetration of all levels of society across the whole kingdom. It was something that men from all social ranks passed in and out of, and the monks daily did their rounds of alms-begging among the laity. Phetracha used the wats of Lopburi to assemble his supporters and, when the coup was finally triggered on 18 May, it was the Sangkharat of Lopburi, held up on the shoulders of those below, who broke the taboos around the palace by pushing open its doors.¹¹⁰

The agency of 'le peuple'

What of the people bearing him aloft; what of the crowd? I was here intrigued by a comment made by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit in their recently published history of Ayutthaya. Perhaps there has been a tendency to downplay the novelty of 1688 a little. Although it may bulk large in the French texts, from the perspective of Thai history, it can seem just one of a whole string of palace coups and usurpations. Baker and Pasuk, however, suggest that there were two new elements in 1688: the monkhood and the mob.¹¹¹

However, this suggestion must be scrutinized in light of the possibility that the evocation of 'le peuple' in these events is merely a chimera of Eurocentric perception. The crowd that marched to the palace might merely testify instead to the hierarchical operation of Siamese society, in which the *khunnang* could mobilize large numbers of men through the royal labour system, personal retainership, and slavery.¹¹² It is certainly true that 1688 indicates that the necessary reliance on *khunnang* for the orchestration of corvée labour placed a powerful weapon in their hands that could be turned against the king. Desfarges tells us that one of Phetracha's allies was the official who kept the

¹⁰⁹ Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, pp. 13–4; Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 48. Accounts in Michael Smithies, *A Resounding Failure, Martin and the French in Siam, 1672–1693* (Chiang Mai, 1998), pp. 84, 90, also note the role of the sangha and populace.

¹¹⁰ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 144; de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 116. The prime role of the Sangkharat in the coup in rousing action against 'the insolence of the French' is brought out in the Portuguese document from Macao, 'Novas do Reyno de Siam', in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 360.

¹¹¹ Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, p. 167; cf. now Smith, 'State Community and Ethnicity', p. 210.

¹¹² This is roughly how Dhiravat, *Political History*, pp. 149–50, describes what happened in earlier succession struggles, as for example that of Prasat Thong.

registration records, which were used to summon *phrai luang* to the *wats*.¹¹³ The personal retainers (*phrai som*), which the rebel *khunnang* had accumulated in large numbers, were also mobilized, as were those in debt bondage or 'slaves' (*that*).¹¹⁴

There are, however, several reasons for concluding that there was a genuinely popular dimension to the mobilization that went beyond merely following orders.¹¹⁵ First, according to Claude de Bèze, on the eve of the coup, the manpower available to Phetracha was deemed insufficient and this prompted Phetracha to turn to the hierarchs of Lopburi to stir up the people.¹¹⁶ The implication is that the monkhood was used to mobilize sections of the population who could not be reached via normal patron–client relations or *corvée* mechanisms.¹¹⁷ Second, we may note the sheer extent of the mobilization in social and territorial terms. It is useful to refer here to a Portuguese account by the Jesuit Francisco Nogueira, based in Japan, whose sources and biases were somewhat different to those of the French, but who also refers to 'a general conspiracy among all the people'.¹¹⁸ The uprising took in the provinces, where monks had been deployed to garner support.¹¹⁹ Tellingly, it operated even in areas where key positions were in the hands of supporters of Phaulkon and Narai, as with the governor of the city of Ayutthaya itself.¹²⁰ Le Blanc records that the people of that city heard of events in Lopburi with joy, such that the governor could not dare 'oppose the fatal torrent which swept everyone away'.¹²¹ One missionary observed:

It is also certain that the whole kingdom was under arms; every day we saw armed men going up to Louvo; the whole way from [the city of] Siam to Louvo was full of them. The lowest of the populace and even the oarsmen of the barges bore arms, something unheard of in the kingdom, except in a period of revolution or extraordinary trouble.¹²²

Third, our sources consistently emphasize the emotional arousal of the local population. For example, just after the arrest of Phaulkon, Phetracha had some

¹¹³ Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 10. Also see the account by La Touche, 'Relation', p. 312, reporting that Phetracha warned those 'of his faction who were city and provincial governors to come and join him', and they brought an army of 70,000–80,000.

¹¹⁴ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 119; see Dhiravat, *Political History*, pp. 71–3, on *that*.

¹¹⁵ On assuming the crown, Phetracha took several measures to please the lower orders. According to Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 45, these helped to cement his position. According to Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, p. 104, he had previously been developing an image as the protector of the poor.

¹¹⁶ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 115.

¹¹⁷ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 144, describes the ill-disciplined crowd as 'slaves and Indians carrying arms for the first time in their lives', but it also includes the Muslim house-guards he controlled.

¹¹⁸ Francisco Nogueira, 'The Account of Father Francisco Nogueira about Events in Siam 1687–1688', Maria Conceição Flores (trans., ed.), in Michael Smithies (ed.), *500 Years of Thai–Portuguese Relations A Festschrift* (Bangkok, 2011), p. 218.

¹¹⁹ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 100–1.

¹²⁰ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 158–9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹²² Abbé de Lionne, 4 January 1692, in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 212.

French officers at Lopburi taken to Thale Chupson fearing that ‘the People, animated as they were against the foreigners’ would turn on them.¹²³ But the French officers decided to make an escape. As part of their flight—and with shades of the picnic episode—they had taken over a barge of monks. The monks then proceeded to raise up ‘the people’ who came to avenge this outrage and clustered on the riverbanks.¹²⁴ The officers ended up holed up in a wat; they were lured out and the ‘perfidious populace’ attacked them.¹²⁵ General Desfarges, whose son was one of these officers, reports that ‘[t]hey were then put on display in Louvo before a multitude of rascals for three hours, who spat in their faces and committed every imaginable outrage. This story ... caused me to reflect on the extremity of our affairs given the extreme hatred the People showed towards us’.¹²⁶

In the fort at Mergui meanwhile, Lieutenant de La Touche was betrayed by the Siamese soldiers placed under him. As he was walked under guard through the town, he claims that he was slapped and kicked by the crowd, who called out from all sides: ‘Hey! Here’s another Frenchman! Take him away, crucify him!’ This last expression surely reflects the role of crucifixion in mustering intellectual and visceral opposition to Christianity.¹²⁷

Fourth, there is some evidence that the ‘people’ had their own political sensibility and sense of legitimacy, which became clear when Phetracha had to reveal that he was not going to retire to the wat after all. He wanted to remove Narai’s half-brothers from the succession, and so had them assassinated. Yet, needing to appear as a supporter of the existing dynasty, he made it seem as if the order for the princes’ deaths had been issued by Narai.¹²⁸ Still, he could not avoid the sense that he had betrayed the princes, who had particular support in the city of Ayutthaya.¹²⁹ And according to de Bèze, their execution on 25 July turned both the monks and the ‘people’ against Phetracha, seeing that his concern for the ‘public good’ merely masked his own ambition. They even briefly took up arms in Ayutthaya, but by then he had mastery of the military.¹³⁰

¹²³ Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 18. Recall that Phetracha wished to be rid of the problem of the French without stimulating an aggressive French counteraction.

¹²⁴ Volland des Verquains, *Histoire*, p. 64.

¹²⁵ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 185.

¹²⁶ Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 32.

¹²⁷ La Touche, ‘Relation’, pp. 332–3. The last phrase is in Latin, evoking the crowds demanding the crucifixion of Jesus in John XIX, 15. Michael Smithies (trans., ed.), *Three Military Accounts of the 1688 ‘Revolution’ in Siam by General Desfarges, Lieutenant de La Touche and Engineer Jean Volland des Verquains* (Bangkok, 2002), note to pp. 81–2, suggests that this report is implausible because the crowd would not have known Latin, but the phrase is surely a translation of the sense of the crowd’s message. In light of the role played by the figure of Devadatta in anti-Christian discourse, it is not at all unlikely that they would have referred to crucifixion.

¹²⁸ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 338. According to Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 34, Phetracha had sworn a holy oath that he was acting in behalf of the princes.

¹²⁹ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 96.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–7. From the perspective of the siege of Bangkok, Desfarges, *Relation*, pp. 47–8, notes that the death of the princes, among other factors, ‘diminished the fury of the Siamese against us, which was at first so great and general’.

There is a broader context in which one might situate this nascent popular agency. The shift to an increasingly commercialized economy in Siam rendered the existing system of *corvée* labour increasingly anachronistic insofar as it obstructed the emergence of a fluid labour market.¹³¹ One consequence of this was that *phrai* began selling themselves into *that* status ('slavery') in order to both escape royal service and raise capital to start businesses, and increasing numbers of *that* then ran away in order to seek further opportunities.¹³² A set of laws quickly passed by Phetracha in 1690 indicate a general anxiety about banditry and crime, and the need to claw back control over labour and the movements of the populace. More speculatively, an increasingly urbanized and entrepreneurial population might anyway be expected to display a greater sense of their own capacity to influence the political sphere.

1688 itself seems to have unleashed a new sense of possibility. Baker and Pasuk argue that, from this point on, people were more difficult to control and refer to a number of revolts in the aftermath.¹³³ The Khorat governor refused to drink the water of allegiance and was supported by a local monk, and his town held out for three years. More serious was the rebellion of a Mon monk, Thammathian, who disguised himself as one of the murdered princes (Aphaithot), studied magic, and led a movement towards the capital. Ayutthaya was thus besieged by a randomly armed mass—an 'undisciplined rabble' according to Kaempfer, which is exactly how Le Blanc had described the rebels in 1688.¹³⁴ These events in the aftermath of 1688 reinforce the sense that commoners might be emboldened to join in snowballing movements to besiege the capital on their own account rather than simply as creatures of the *khunnang*. They illustrate too the continuing political relevance of the *sangha*. Lastly, that these rebellions tended to raise up of contenders claiming to be related to Narai or even one of the dead princes is rather good evidence in support of de Bèze's contention that Phetracha's coup suffered a serious legitimacy crisis of its own as soon as it became clear that he intended to replace the princes.

The persecution of Christianity?

In the weeks after Phaulkon's arrest, Phetracha had most of the Christians in Lopburi and from wider afield rounded up and put into prison. Did this also reflect the arousal of popular religious antagonism? Once again, we must consider source criticism; in this case, the problem is the Christian paradigm of martyrdom, through which an experience of suffering is liable to be presented as persecution on the grounds of faith.¹³⁵ Missionaries departed their homelands half-desiring a painful end. Hence Le Blanc rushes to compare the plight

¹³¹ I am very grateful to Chris Baker for discussing the issues raised in the paragraph, which are also addressed in Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 192–3, 219–20.

¹³² Rabi, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, p. 132.

¹³³ Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 224–7; also see Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company*, pp. 161–4.

¹³⁴ Engelbert Kaempfer, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690* (Bangkok, 1998), p. 37.

¹³⁵ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, I, p. 240.

of the prisoners of Lopburi with the better-known martyrs of Omura in Japan.¹³⁶

It is important then to establish whether the treatment of foreigners and Christians during the coup served political ends that the French sources, and particularly the Jesuits, misconceived. It is certainly true that in a later phase towards the end of the affair in October, the imprisonment of Frenchmen and missionaries seems to have been prompted by Phetracha's desire for a bargaining chip to play in his negotiations with the French over their departure and the fate of Phaulkon's wife.¹³⁷ When the French sailed off in November, Bishop Laneau and the Christian community around him were arrested, in retaliation for the failure of the French to return two hostages.¹³⁸

However, the following analysis concerns the imprisonment and ill-treatment of Christians in the first month or so. The chronology of events in this early phase indicates that it was not driven by the desire to create hostages—because Phetracha allowed most harassment of Christians when he *least* needed to influence French behaviour. In fact, at this point, his political interests were split: evidently he needed to ride a wave of popular anger in order to establish his domestic position, but he also needed to rein in such emotions so as not to weaken his foreign policy, for he did not want to precipitate a French reprisal. In the first two weeks of the coup, from 18 May to 1 June, Phetracha was particularly cautious because he could not yet predict the response of the French in Bangkok and had not yet secured his authority over Ayutthaya.¹³⁹ In this period, several sources indicate that some or most of the Christians in Lopburi had been arrested nonetheless.¹⁴⁰ To those Frenchmen, such as the Abbé de Lionne, whom Phetracha needed to use as go-betweens with Bangkok, it was explained that the arrests were merely due to 'the fury of the Populace'.¹⁴¹ However, once Desfarges had been lured out of Bangkok to visit Lopburi, Phetracha loosened the reins. At around 1 June, 'all Christians

¹³⁶ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 280, and see p. 324.

¹³⁷ See Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, pp. 138–40; a letter of Kosa Pan, 12 December 1693 in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 28; Beauchamp's account in Michael Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses to a Revolution: Siam, 1688* (Bangkok, 2004), p. 82; a letter of Beauchamp, 17 November 1689, in Michael Smithies (ed.), *Seventeenth Century Siamese Explorations: A Collection of Published Articles* (Siam Society, 2012), p. 263.

¹³⁸ I must emphasize therefore that political considerations dominate the timings of the release of prisoners and those who were taken from October to November 1688 onwards. I'm grateful to Tara Alberts for sharing with me some source notes and observations, on the later phase in particular.

¹³⁹ See Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, pp. 63–4; de Bèze, *Mémoire*, pp. 127–30.

¹⁴⁰ The sources diverge a bit on chronology. Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, which is close to the anonymous *Relation des principaux circonstances qui sont arrive dans la Révolution du Royaume de Siam en l'année 1687* (in Smithies, *Witnesses*, p. 16) and Desfarges, *Relation*, pp. 22–3, place the arrests before the Abbé de Lionne's visit on 25 May, as do letters from Lionne (Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 207) and Francisco Nogueira, 'Account', p. 220: 'they immediately began to imprison all the Christians who were at that time in Louvo.' See also Véret, 3 March 1689, in Robert Lingat, 'Une lettre de Véret sur la révolution siamoise de 1688', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 31 (1935), pp. 351–2.

¹⁴¹ Desfarges, *Relation*, pp. 22–3.

were put in prison without any distinction of age, sex, or nationality', according to de Bèze.¹⁴² Once Desfarges had been received, told off, and dispatched, and once it was clear that he was not going to attempt to defend Phaulkon, the latter could finally be executed, on 5 June, which

was followed by a general outburst (*déchaînement*) against all the Christians. The Church and the sacred vessels were profaned; the houses of the Christians were pillaged; they were themselves stripped, they were weighed down with chains; and in a few days the prisons were so full at Louvo, that new ones were to be built in all the quarters of the city.¹⁴³

Phaulkon, the protector of the Christians, was no more and 'as the Christians were odious to everyone, no one feared reprisal for making them languish in prison'.¹⁴⁴ As Phetracha's grip tightened, Christians across the kingdom were rounded up and dispatched to Lopburi.¹⁴⁵

But how far can European references to a generic targeting of 'Christians' be sustained? A closer look at the particular groups who were placed into the 'cangues' or stocks of Lopburi is required. It must be noted, however, that the motivations behind these arrests were multiple and shifted over time according to overlapping factional, strategic, xenophobic, anti-Christian, and especially what I will describe as *anti-conversion* sensibilities, which all played their part. Moreover, our sources conflict at times, each writing from different experiences of these confusing events.¹⁴⁶

It is immediately obvious, however, that this was not simply an anti-French movement. Indeed, some sources even suggest that the French in Lopburi were not in the first sweep of arrests.¹⁴⁷ The 'Portuguese' (containing many people of mixed race), on the other hand, evidently formed a significant number of those targeted from the first in Lopburi. Given that the coup was also directed against Phaulkon, who was a convert to Catholicism and had married a woman with a Portuguese background, it is possible that this entire community came

¹⁴² De Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 125; Le Blanc, *History*, p. 71, also has it that the Christians were arrested by the time Desfarges arrived on 2 June. Phaulkon's seals of office were taken, his house ransacked, and finally his wife arrested at this time.

¹⁴³ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 279–80; cf. the Anonymous, *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo, royaume de Siam, avec un abregé de se qui cest pasé a bancoq pendant le siege en 1688*, in Smithies, *Witnesses*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁴ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 283.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 314. This included a large family of Castilians who were dragged up from Ayutthaya (p. 316).

¹⁴⁶ I have tried to reflect these disagreements in the footnotes.

¹⁴⁷ See La Touche, 'Relation', p. 315, who was taken as a prisoner from Mergui to Lopburi. Another report claims that Phetracha's orders distinguished between the French long established in the country and the troops in Bangkok ('The Recueil des persecutions', in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 250). However, Martineau (12 July 1689, *ibid.*, p. 204) has it that at first some French officers in Louvo were arrested, then some Europeans, Englishmen, and others from Phaulkon's guard, and then finally they arrested all the Christian Europeans, Indians, and others who were found to be in Lopburi.

under suspicion and subject to reprisal as his potential faction.¹⁴⁸ Certainly, his extended household were to be apprehended, as was the norm for fallen officials. But our sources are ambiguous as to how widely or deliberately the Portuguese were targeted.¹⁴⁹ It would seem that the Portuguese in Ayutthaya—who may have numbered *circa* 3,000—were forced to remain in their designated quarter on pain of death.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the political threat emanating from the Portuguese, who were a relatively ‘tame’ presence in the Ayutthayan order by this time, must not be overstated.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Phetracha recognized that he could use their help as a counterweight to the French and, when he called on them to assist him in the siege of Bangkok, they complied.¹⁵² Moreover, to refer to the chronology outlined above, it was when the possibility of a cabal between Phaulkon and other Christians was dispelled and the French threat was contained that the general attack on Christianity occurred.¹⁵³

It seems to have been essentially religious rather than ethnic identity *per se* that was at stake here. This is borne out by the case of an Armenian man who had married a Portuguese woman and become a Christian and was therefore imprisoned, while his brother, who was Muslim, was left alone.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, one source claims that the Portuguese and others were only swept up as part of a movement that was principally directed against the ‘native or naturalized Christians in the country’.¹⁵⁵ The latter presumably refers to the Siamese and Peguan converts who figure prominently in the accounts of the early arrests—we shall return to the significance of this point.¹⁵⁶ However, the range of Christian groups caught up in this move was broader still.¹⁵⁷ Strikingly, it included some English soldiers and girls who ‘although heretics, had been arrested as Christians’.¹⁵⁸ These soldiers may have been imagined to

¹⁴⁸ In previous upheavals, the downfall of a particular official could entail the persecution of the ethnic group he had allied with—hence the Japanese experienced a purge with the fall of the Okya Senaphimuk in 1629: Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, pp. 193–4.

¹⁴⁹ Nogueira, ‘Account’, p. 220, refers to Portuguese being excluded, though this seems an error.

¹⁵⁰ La Touche, ‘Relation’, p. 314.

¹⁵¹ As brought out in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*.

¹⁵² ‘Novas do Reyno de Siam’, in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 363; de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 161, claims that they declared against the French from the first.

¹⁵³ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 225–6, claims that this was initially a fear of Phetracha’s.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312. Equally telling is the seminary priest from Manila who mistakenly believed that it was only the French who were being targeted and so changed to layman’s clothes, but was arrested nonetheless. However, when he denied that he was a priest, they gave him as a slave to a mandarin (*ibid.*, pp. 335–6).

¹⁵⁵ The ‘Recueil des persecutions’, in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, pp. 249–50.

¹⁵⁶ Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 49. Nogueira, ‘Account’, p. 221, refers to the harassment of the Peguan Christians ‘so that they would abandon their faith’. The anonymous *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo*, in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, p. 102, has it that Siamese were left alone but Peguans, Portuguese, English, and French Christians were seized and ‘pillaging, profanation, and rape were conducted with impunity’.

¹⁵⁷ The Cochinchinese and Tonkinese Christians (residing in a quarter called Banplahet) in Ayutthaya were not arrested but were punished in other ways: Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 253.

¹⁵⁸ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 326–8, describes an English girl who is forced to apostatize and five or six English soldiers who converted to Catholicism in prison. Also see La Touche, ‘Relation’, p. 314.

be in Phaulkon's service, and arrested on that score. Perhaps—it is speculation—the 'Danish Huguenots' who were rounded up alongside them also had some role.¹⁵⁹

The arrests in Lopburi therefore gathered in a surprisingly diverse array of Christian groups including Protestants as well as Catholics. However, it was not quite an indiscriminate targeting of all Christians. The Dutch were left alone, for obvious political reasons: antagonistic to the French, they may even have offered some kind of support to Phetracha.¹⁶⁰ They were also regionally dangerous and Phetracha could clearly not afford to antagonize other maritime powers as well as the French and English. The other ethnic group that appears to have been left alone were the Japanese.¹⁶¹ This fits with the fact that they had come to be defined more by their ethnic rather than their religious identity; it is most telling that they are not listed among the communities with false beliefs in the laws of Prasat Thong and Narai.¹⁶² Importantly, neither the Dutch nor the Japanese were associated with proselytization.

There is one last group excluded from the arrests: the Jesuits were allowed a kind of liberty and even protection. This surely represents Phetracha's need to maintain diplomatic relations with France in the hope of staving off a reprisal—and his ability to control the scope of the arrests when it was imperative.¹⁶³ Their special treatment puzzled the other Frenchmen and led to rumours that they had bribed the new ruler. Most likely, they were seen as a hotline to the French throne; this was Phaulkon's one concession to the play of 'religious diplomacy'.¹⁶⁴

However, what needs emphasizing is that this official protection of the Jesuits had to be preserved in the face of popular anger towards them. Le

¹⁵⁹ Phaulkon had Englishmen in his guard (Martineau, in *Documents historiques*, I, p. 204), although most sources on the English imprisoned in Lopburi (such as the 'Recueil des persecutions', in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 251) do not refer to their role, and it seems that the French and English officers arrested with Phaulkon were sent to Thale Chupson: van der Cruysse, *Siam and the West*, p. 448. Ayutthaya had been at war with the English East India Company since August 1687, but the latter proclamation had been clear that this did not affect Englishmen working in a private capacity: John Anderson, *English Intercourse with Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1890), p. 360.

¹⁶⁰ Martineau (12 July 1689, Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 204) says that all Christians were rounded up in the end, except the Dutch 'qui ont repoussé le parti' (which is unclear). The question of the support given by the Dutch to the plotters is controversial. On Phetracha's favour to the Dutch, see Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company*, p. 153.

¹⁶¹ This was so even though Phaulkon also had connections to the Japanese community given that his wife, Maria Guyomar de Pinha, was of Japanese blood. Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 315, notes that her mother and the latter's entire family were given as slaves to the captain of the Japanese, which might reflect the fact that, although they were identified as a threat because of the Phaulkon connection, they were primarily identified by their Japanese ethnicity rather than their religion.

¹⁶² This is something noted by Smith, 'State, Community and Ethnicity', p. 195.

¹⁶³ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 284–8, describes it as a kind of house arrest, but they were evidently allowed out and even profited from the protection of their guards; see also La Touche, 'Relation', p. 323. The anonymous *Relation de se qui cest pasé a Louvo*, in Smithies (ed.), *Witnesses*, p. 102, suggests that the Jesuits were left alone because they were lodged in one of the king's houses.

¹⁶⁴ The concept of 'religious diplomacy' is explored at length in Strathern, *Converting Kings*.

Blanc's narrative is probably heightened by his desire to prove that the Jesuits had not enjoyed any surreptitious advantage and had their own share of suffering to bear.¹⁶⁵ Yet it is essentially plausible in its details of the Jesuits being pelted with stones, forced into prostration when they passed wats, and subject to the taunts of small children displaying the general hatred towards them.¹⁶⁶ Apparently,

[i]t had been rumored that they [the Jesuits] were sent by the King of the Christians to destroy the religion of the Siamese, and that three of them had been placed in the Pagodas to observe the Talapoins and to discredit them. All this was not far from the truth.¹⁶⁷

Although the discussion thus far has suggested some possible strategic and political considerations—variable in their plausibility—that may explain why many of the groups were targeted, in order to make sense of all the evidence, we must also conceive of an expenditure of social energy aroused by the defence of Buddhism in the coup. Evidently, there was a flash of anger at the elite level: Beauchamp, one of the French officers arrested alongside Phaulkon in the palace, tells us that the Kromluang Yothathep (the 'Princess-Queen') had proclaimed loudly that 'all the Christians in the kingdom should be exterminated'.¹⁶⁸ As Bhawan Ruangsilp shows, Yothathep was an important presence at court who was seen as key to the succession and had clashed with Phaulkon in the past.¹⁶⁹ But her outburst reflected a broader mood of antagonism towards Christians among the population at large, which found expression outside the towns of Ayutthaya and Lopburi—in Phitsanulok, to the north, for example, where a Franciscan and a lay priest were chased down by a huge number of men—and had been noted by missionaries at least four months before the coup.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 284–92, emphasizes their general state of fear and the threats emanating from the court.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 206 (and cf. Martineau in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 224, referring to accusations of the 'crime of wanting to destroy their religion'). The reference to the 'observation' of the monks indicates, incidentally, a resentment of the Jesuit practice of 'accommodation' by residing in the temples and so on.

¹⁶⁸ Beauchamp's account in Smithies, *Witnesses*, p. 64. A clue to the princess's connection with high-ranking monks involved in anti-foreigner politics comes from letter of Fontaney, 12 May 1687, in Tachard, *Voyage*, pp. 258–9. La Touche, 'Relation', p. 314, says that after the death of Phaulkon, Phetracha wanted the complete ruin (*la perte totale*) of all the Christians in the kingdom, and Véret, in Lingat, 'Une lettre de Véret', pp. 349, 352, refers to rumours that all foreigners and Christians were to be massacred.

¹⁶⁹ Bhawan Ruangsilp, 'Kromluang Yothathep: King Narai's Daughter and Ayutthaya Court Intrigue', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 104 (2016), pp. 95–110.

¹⁷⁰ 'Recueil des persecutions', in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 249; Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 333–4. We can verify that they were working in Phitsanulok, from Phaulkon's letter to the Pope of 4 January 1688 (de Bèze, *Mémoire*, p. 240). Desfarges, *Relation*, pp. 48–9, notes that the pair had been intimidated since January, which confirms the point above.

The Thai had long distinguished between different Christian and European groups on ethnic grounds and the court was aware of the antagonism between Protestants and Catholics and the scarcely less evident tensions between the MEP and the Jesuits. At the same time, we have already seen how an overarching concept taking in all the Christian groups was taking shape in the popular mind, centred on the figure of Devadatta and the associated symbol of the crucifix. This becomes evident if we consider not just who was targeted, but also the symbolic dimensions to how they were harassed. For example, bamboo crucifixes were used to beat down upon a young Frenchman, while a nun who taught women in the Portuguese camp in Ayutthaya was dragged up to Lopburi and a crucifix was tied to the soles of her feet.¹⁷¹

That the Devadatta equation had moved out of the monasteries is borne out by a missionary report about songs sung in public against the crucified Christ-as-Devadatta. The Christians were accused of having 'attempted the destruction of the religion of their country'. To be a Christian was to be a rascal as Devadatta was; you had 'left your mothers' breasts to take those of a tiger'.¹⁷² Devadatta had not only committed a sin of cosmic, karmic proportions, after all; he had turned against his own, breaking the bonds of kinship as well as monastic accord.

However, it was primarily a rejection of *Christianity as a proselytizing force* that animated the rebels. They were not intent on wiping the kingdom clean of the religion. They were rather triggered by a desire to undermine the threat it was perceived to pose to the hegemonic position of Buddhism. It was, in that sense, shaped by an 'anti-conversion' sensibility. This helps to explain why it was 'native or naturalized Christians', which I take to be a reference to the Theravada 'Central Communities' of Thai, Mon, and Lao, who were targeted in the first actions. It also finds a most explicit materialization in Le Blanc's reports that, on 14 June and regularly thereafter, the prisoners were informed that they would be released if they would pray at the *wats*. He relates many examples of the threats and inducements offered to make the Christians apostatize—a kind of forced reconversion.¹⁷³ Indeed, the missionaries report that some of the Siamese and Peguan Christians succumbed and renounced their faith.¹⁷⁴ They did this under pressure of mockery and insults that indicate how religion was fused with ethnic or xenophobic discriminations, 'being

¹⁷¹ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, pp. 302–6. This reflects the great dishonour attached to the soles of the feet. Note also the treatment of Laneau when he visited Bangkok and had his pectoral cross and episcopal ring snatched away by a 'bunch of barbarians': *ibid.*, p. 250; Desfarges, *Relation*, p. 40.

¹⁷² 'Recueil des Persécutions' MS cited in Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, p. 385. Much of this text is in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, pp. 240–61, but not this quotation.

¹⁷³ Le Blanc, *Histoire*, I, p. 299. This claim deserves to be treated with some caution given that it would be the 'icing on the cake' of a martyrdom narrative. But it is confirmed by other reports, including the Portuguese *Novas do Reyno de Siam*, in Halikowski-Smith, *Creolization and Diaspora*, p. 363. A few of the French sources indicate another motive shaping the persecution, which was to create a pool of victims to satiate the sexual appetite of Phetracha's son, Sorasek. However, Phetracha disapproved of this: Le Blanc, *Histoire*, II, pp. 34–5; Vollant des Verquains, *Histoire*, pp. 131–2.

¹⁷⁴ 'Recueil des persecutions', in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 255.

accused of leaving the religion of the country to embrace that of foreigners and Europeans'.¹⁷⁵ The numbers of Thai, Mon, and Lao who had converted were tiny and politically irrelevant.¹⁷⁶ But they became a symbol of the threat to the Buddhist order that was in fact most concretely realized in the threat of the conversion of the king himself.¹⁷⁷

This did not amount to the sudden acquisition of a monotheistic-style hostility to other faiths.¹⁷⁸ After the French departed, it did not take too long for some monks to become friendly again with the few remaining missionaries in prison.¹⁷⁹ And once the threat from Europeans was shown to be thoroughly extinguished and Phetracha had finally secured his position, they could be released, in April 1691. The missionaries were even allowed to set up their seminary again. At Laneau's funeral in 1696, the monks sent offerings to honour him.¹⁸⁰

Yet there are grounds for thinking that the arousal of an anti-conversion sensibility had produced a lasting change in how proselytizing monotheisms were viewed. The journal of Alexander Hamilton, who visited Ayutthaya in 1719, notes how minor transgressions of temple sanctity by non-Buddhists were liable to incur the wrath of a 'zealous sanctified mob'.¹⁸¹ One way to escape the prison of our European sources and consider how the presence and retreat of European influence was signified in the popular imagination is to consider a number of eighteenth-century mural paintings in several wats.¹⁸² They clearly reflect the cosmopolitanism of the era in their depiction of various foreign figures, but European and Muslim figures are made to speak to the theme of religious conflict. Most striking are the murals of Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam in Petchaburi, to the south of Bangkok. They are painted in a

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁷⁶ On the general inability to convert the Thai population, see Tara Alberts, *Conflict and Conversion. Catholicism in Southeast Asia, c. 1500-c. 1700* (Oxford, 2013), p. 69.

¹⁷⁷ It must be noted that in many respects, the 1688 affair was foreshadowed by the revolt of the Makassarese community in 1686 and their subsequent destruction. Although this revolt cannot be explored here, it is crucial to note that it coincided with a (Persian) attempt to convert Narai to Islam, and rumours that the Makassarese themselves intended to substitute the king with one of his half-brothers if he converted to Islam. Moreover, involved in the conspiracy was a young Cham prince who came from a kingdom whose monarch had recently been compelled to convert from Buddhism to Islam. On the latter point, see the testimony of La Mare in Michael Smithies, 'Accounts of the Macassar Revolt, 1686', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 90 (2003), pp. 75–6, and comment of Smith, 'State, Community and Ethnicity', p. 206.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Sri Lankan history over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which resistance to the Portuguese imperial influence was sometimes expressed in anti-Christian terms, while retaining distinctively Buddhist features of identity construction. See, for example, Alan Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Sri Lanka* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 212, on Vimaladharmasūriya of Kandy.

¹⁷⁹ Forest, *Les missionnaires français*, III, p. 369; Dhiravat 'Political History', p. 452.

¹⁸⁰ De Bèze, *Mémoire*, Appendix VII; Letter of Poquet, 27 December 1696, in Launay, *Documents historiques*, I, p. 332.

¹⁸¹ Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies* (Edinburgh, 1727), pp. 164–5. Cf. the picnic episode of 1636, or the French officers who escaped from Thale Chupson in 1688 and took over a monks' barge.

¹⁸² I'm grateful to Chris Baker for bringing these to my attention and sending me images.

manner distinct from the courtly art of Ayutthaya and, unusually, can be precisely dated, to 1734. As Maurizio Peleggi has shown, one scene depicts a meeting described in the scriptures between the Buddha and the gurus of heretic sects. Here, the latter are dressed in the Mughal style; they are shown being defeated by the Buddha's miracles.¹⁸³ Another scene depicts the failed attempt by Devadatta to kill Buddha by unleashing an elephant upon him: a group of European figures are shown below, forced to marvel at this event. They are looking up to a queer figure: a monk with the hat and moustache of a European. He is probably a Jesuit or MEP priest in accommodative mode, dressed as a Buddhist monk and now forced to accept the power of the *dhamma* through the miracle. The murals at Wat Khongkharam meanwhile show European soldiers as making up the demon troops who threatened the Buddha while he meditated: a perfect expression of the way in which the European political threat was conflated with a threat to Buddhism itself.¹⁸⁴

The Wat Ko Kaeo Suttharam murals were painted a few years after the 1731 decree (see above) passed in the name of King Thai Sa, which prohibited missionaries from translating materials into Cambodian and Siamese scripts, preaching in Siamese, writing books that showed contempt for the Siamese religion, or converting any 'Siamese, Mon, and Lao'—the Theravada groups that stood at the heart of the cultural and political order. Any Siamese, Mon, and Lao who embraced the Christian religion in future 'shall be condemned to death and publicly impaled in front of the seminary'.¹⁸⁵ It was carved into stone and set up to face the seminary. What spurred this was nothing like a crisis, but rather a period of intellectual curiosity about Christianity following the discovery of Laneau's writings in the library by a member of the old royal family. It is remarkable in that Christianity was *not associated with any political threat* at this time. Nor was it even a religious threat, for the mission had become largely moribund.¹⁸⁶ Rather the *phra khlang* at the time seems to have become exercised by the discovery that, in the past, the mission had been actively proselytizing among the core groups of Theravada subjects.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Maurizio Peleggi, 'The Turbaned and the Hatted: Figures of Alterity in Early Modern Thai Visual Culture', in In Anja Eisenbeiss and Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch (eds), *Images of Otherness in Medieval and Early Modern Times: Exclusion, Inclusion and Assimilation* (Berlin, 2012), pp. 61–2, which also discusses an intriguing cabinet from the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century that may represent the Safavid Shah who had attempted to convert Narai.

¹⁸⁴ No Na Paknam, *Wat Khongkharam. Mural Paintings of Thailand Series* (Bangkok, 1994), pp. 16, 94–5; and see Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, pp. 164–5.

¹⁸⁵ Kennon Breazeale, 'The 1731 Edict on Missionary Activities', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 105 (2017), pp. 5–6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Indeed, if there is little record of its enforcement, that is essentially because the edicts were mostly irrelevant given the lack of missionary activity. There were some tensions though—for example, arising from the bishop's refusal to allow Christians to participate in an important Buddhist ceremony. Note too that the documentation around the decree shows a concern to maintain friendship with the king of France—once again religious diplomacy had to be balanced against domestic religious policy. For more on hostility to Christianity in the early to mid-eighteenth century, see Trakulhun, 'Accommodating Buddhism', p. 143.

¹⁸⁷ The third offence noted by the decree was that 'quite a few Siamese, Mon and Lao were lured away from their own religion through deception, so that they would embrace the Christian religion'.

In the eighteenth century, participation in core Buddhist rituals of state was increasingly established as an essential element of political loyalty.¹⁸⁸

There is an intriguing comparison to be made here with Japan, where the early modern flirtation with Christianity had taken the more substantial form of a number of warlord conversions in the late sixteenth century. Yet, once Christianity was ejected by the solidifying Tokugawa regime, and long after it offered any political challenge, it remained as a resonant symbol of disordering ideology and foreign influence throughout the seventeenth century. Suspected Christians were made to trample on Christian images to prove they were not of that faith and Catholic priests (*bateren*) became literary grotesques.¹⁸⁹ In Siam too, it seems, long after the actual threat from Christianity was neutered, it lingered in the popular memory as an archetype of dangerous heresy and potential disloyalty.

Conclusion

If the events of 1688 did not amount to a revolution, nor were they simply a spasm of factional conflict. The French had serious firepower on their side, and Phetracha evidently calculated that something more was called for than the usual manipulations of elite ambition. Instead, he sought to mobilize the population at several levels simultaneously. *Khunnang* and popular resentments of foreign influence were involved, but these were shaped by a sense of a Buddhist political community underpinned by religious discourses of royal legitimacy—which worked to expand the reach of political participation. If we are inclined to see such suggestions as anachronistic for premodern Asia, perhaps the growing tendency to conceive of Asian societies as participating in a global ‘early modernity’ might encourage us to think again. This is not to argue that the Siamese 1688 should be seen as equivalent to its namesake in Britain. But it may reflect certain consequences of urbanization and commercialization, as very briefly essayed above, while obviously precipitated by the strikingly expanded forms of cosmopolitanism facilitated by the global connections of the early modern period.¹⁹⁰ If this led ultimately to a form of boundary hardening, in religious and even xenophobic terms, that too may not be inapposite as a comparable feature of global early modernity.

In very general terms, the analysis presented here is consistent with Anthony Reid’s Weberian evocation of Southeast Asia’s ‘Age of Commerce’ as a conjuncture that favoured the more ‘rationalized’ worldviews of the world religions.¹⁹¹ It is certainly the case that Islam spread across much of the region

¹⁸⁸ See the discussion of eighteenth-century developments in Smith, ‘State, Community and Ethnicity’, pp. 233–5, 273.

¹⁸⁹ Discussed in Strathern, *Converting Kings*.

¹⁹⁰ Baker and Pasuk, *History of Ayutthaya*, Chapter 5.

¹⁹¹ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, 2 vols (Yale, 1993), vol. 2; Anthony Reid, ‘Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia: The Critical Phase, 1550–1650’, in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca/London, 1993), pp. 151–79. I do not depend on the language of ‘rationalization’ itself: for the problems and advantages of this term, see Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, pp. 64–7.

in this epoch, only finding its limit in mainland areas where Theravada Buddhism and Confucianism were already dominant. The case of Ayutthaya suggests, at least, that Theravada Buddhist societies could react to the conditions of early modernity by mobilizing features of transcendentalism that gave rise to both reformist impulses and a highly successful repression of aggressive monotheism.¹⁹²

As for the longer-term implications of the sangha's role in ushering the people of Lopburi and Ayutthaya onto the stage of history, these must be left, in the end, to regional experts and historians of Thailand. From the perspective of the wider comparative project encompassing this investigation, what stands out about 1688 is the crucial role played by the tension-ridden relationship between kingship and clerisy typical of societies founded on transcendentalist traditions. The French could barely see Buddhist identity in Siam before 1688; they were dazzled by Buddhist tolerance and therefore puzzled by Buddhist intransigence towards conversion. Sometimes scholars today can problematize it almost out of existence. There are indeed good reasons for pointing out that premodern Buddhists did not construct boundaries in the way that Christians or even modern Buddhists might do. But this risks obscuring the hard edges that Buddhism might develop under certain circumstances—and with real political consequences. Buddhism, as an 'offensive ideology', has always retained powerful means by which other viewpoints may be challenged and its own epistemological superiority may be asserted; it has had a discourse of the demonic and the heretical to deploy against its enemies. But because this superiority has been asserted not through destroying other religious forms in the manner of monotheism but through encompassing and subordinating them, its aggressive guise was not stimulated merely by the presence of missionaries, let alone Christians. Rather, it snapped into action when Buddhism itself seemed genuinely under threat. No threat was more direct or complete than the conversion of the king himself—the ultimate betrayal of the 'righteous' conception of kingship.

Acknowledgments. This article is based on a seminar article given at the Asia Research Institute (ARI) and the Faculty of History at the National University of Singapore in 2017, which was subsequently turned into a working paper for the ARI. I would like to thank Chris Baker for his generosity in helping me to begin research on Ayutthaya, for reading the longer text on which this is based, and for multiple patient responses to queries. I would also like to thank Vic Lieberman and John S. F. Smith for reading the longer text, and Tara Alberts for discussion of the question of persecution. The readers for the Journal made a number of helpful comments that have improved the article. A British Academy Mid-Career Research Fellowship afforded the research leave to finish my work on Siam, and I am also grateful to the ARI for their support during my period as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow there.

¹⁹² Alan Strathern, 'Transcendentalist Intransigence: Why Rulers Rejected Monotheism in Early Modern Southeast Asia and Beyond', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2007), pp. 358–83.

Cite this article: Strathern, Alan. 2022. 'Thailand's First Revolution? The role of religious mobilization and 'the people' in the Ayutthaya rebellion of 1688'. *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (4), pp. 1295–1328. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X21000159>