

The Emergence of Proto-entrepreneurial Groups in the City of Ayutthaya During the 17th-18th Centuries^{*}

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Abstract

This article attempts to view the emergence of proto-entrepreneurs, groups of people whose social and political status were achieved as a result of commercial wealth, in the society of Ayutthaya. As Kings and nobilities needed trading experts to cope with international trade expansion, resident foreigners and mestizos were able to utilize their skill, and came to dominate commercial activities of Siam. Some outstanding merchants were drawn into the court of Siam and appointed officials while other maintained their wealth and economic strength by making close connections with high-rank nobles and officials. This consequence of social changes in context of economic changes during the 17th-18th centuries significantly reveals the emergence of proto-entrepreneurial groups who were forerunners of the bourgeoisie in Ratanakosin Era. Proto-entrepreneurial groups can be categorized into four groups: the private merchants and tax farmers in Ayutthaya, the trading expert officials and the court merchants, the traders and peddlers, and the local officials.

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Undertaking various commercial ventures on private capital and for lucrative purposes, proto-entrepreneurs became visible in Siam during the Ayutthaya Period around the 17th century due to the kings' attempt to sustain political and economic stability, and the rising demand for forest products from outside markets.

Proto-entrepreneurs were groups of people who invested their own capital in many ways to make profits in various levels. The word "capital" does not mean only an amount of money but also junks, carriers, forest products, manpower, etc. that helped them to accumulate more wealth. Merchants and covert merchants, most of whom were *Munnai* or officials who involved in trade, were included in the proto-entrepreneurial groups. Proto-entrepreneurs emerged from the expansion of trade in Ayutthaya and Southeast Asia at that time. Most of these people were under the *Munnai-Phrai* (commoner) system. Though some of them were outsiders, they had, in some reason, to be under the patronage and protection of *Munnai* of Ayutthaya for extra convenience and extra chances to make a deal with some *Munnai* who took part in trade activities.

In brief, Siamese entrepreneurs were brought into existence by the help of the kings who strove for the close control over state commerce. In so doing, administration system had to be strengthened to the extent that the kings could control a significant number of vassal states and manpower in the hinterland. Beneficial to the kings' trade speculation, the accomplished reforms paved the way for the emergence of proto-entrepreneurs in the city of Ayutthaya.

As a tool to govern the Siamese, the *Munnai-Phrai* system was also applied to integrate foreign traders who settled permanently on the land of Ayutthaya while the *Phra Khlang Sinkha*, a department within *Krom Phrakhlang* or *Krom Tha* or the department of commercial and foreign affairs, was set up to undertake royal trade and monopolize import and export goods. It was; therefore, inevitable that *Phra Khlang Sinkha* together with *Krom Phra Khlang*, engaged foreign trade experts to operate royal trade, thus resulting in the emergence of the proto-entrepreneurial

groups in Siamese society. Consequently, it was practical to exercise control over these immigrants or expatriates by according their places under the *Munnai-Phrai* system.

Proto-entrepreneurial groups were groups of people who invested their own funds in many ways to make profits, for example, hiring Chinese junks, smaller vessels, rafts, oxen carts, and trading in forest products, etc. Some of them used their skills to make certain types of processed products such as pottery and sugar for selling or exchanging. The proto-entrepreneurs began to play important roles in Ayutthaya society when investors, kings, noblemen and high ranking officials needed groups of people to be their merchants. Therefore, this group of merchants and middlemen gained more social recognition. And the more the market places and trade network were expanded, the more these new groups mushroomed.

Most of the proto-entrepreneurs were foreigners such as Chinese, Indians, Japanese, and Europeans and “mestizos” or the mixed-blood groups who settled down and engaged in trade in Siam. Mostly, the nobility did not deal with trade by themselves so foreigners and “mestizos” became their trading representatives, and while these people worked for them they could make profit for themselves too. Their position and status were not similar to *Phrai* and *That* (slave) who were the majority in Ayutthaya and always labored over the collection of goods, or ‘Suai’, from the outmost areas to send to the king and their masters without being paid.

Due to a changing socio-economic situation, Ayutthaya’s trade system was re-organized by King Prasat Thong for a more fruitful management of the royal revenues. In the book *English Intercourse with Siam in the seventeenth Century*, John Anderson stated that after King Prasat Thong ascended the throne in 1629, he begun the system of royal monopolies to a degree previously unknown.¹

¹ John Anderson, **English Intercourse with Siam in the Seventeenth Century** (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1890), p. 253.

Consequently, the reformed system of royal monopolies and the expanded economy gave rise to the emergence of 'Setthi' or the rich as a distinct social group from the already existing 'Khunnang' (nobleman) and 'Phrai'. Some upward social mobility occurred under the *Munnai-Phrai* system when *Phrai* or even foreigners could rise in the social status by accumulating money from trade involvement. Because of their wealth, they were welcome into the court and treated with respect and prestige. This is a significant phenomenon because this shift of status was not concerned with class mobility as it had happened before in Ayutthaya society.

Emerging Social Groups in Siam

While direct references to proto-entrepreneurs are hard to come by, one of the sources that reflects the existence of this emerging social group is the Ayutthaya's penal code, the *Phromsakdi*. Basically, when King Trailok initiated the *Munnai-Phrai* system around the mid of 15th century that served as a hierarchy grading the royal objects' authority, duty, and status in the social structure, *Phrai* ranked the lowest with the *Sakdina* of 25 while the top ranking official, or *Khunnang*, had *Sakdina* of 10,000. All Siamese subject were organized and classified under the Codes of *Promsakdi*, *Phra Aiyakan Tamnaeng Na Thahan Huamuang* and *Phra Aiyakan Tamnaeng Na Ponlaruen* (laws of Civil and Military Hierarchy).

During the reign of King Prasat Thong in the 17th century, *Sakdina*'s ranking seemed to expand to include new group of people, i.e. traders, *Setthi*. Since the addition coincided with the period of great trade expansion and royal control over commerce, it can be assumed that flourishing commerce in Siam encourage the growth of this new social group.

Mentioned in *Kham Hai Kan Khun Luang Ha Wat*, a number of *Setthi* were seated in front of the throne when King Borommakot

gave an audience to Sri Lanka's envoys.² Thus, although the *Setthi* were formerly lower-ranked commoners, their commercial expertise and their wealth gave them higher place within Ayutthaya's society. Their new status denoted the same honor as the dignitaries' in court.

Established in 1612, the inheritance code, a part of the Three-seal Code separated the *Setthi* into the titled and untitled categories.³ The last row seats in an audience with King Borommakot might have been reserved for the untitled *Setthi* promoted from foreign merchants.⁴

Since the monarch had laid commercial strategies with different foreign countries, the foreign merchants of different purposes and origins were utilized extensively with high respect in consideration of their trade competence.

Principally immigrants, these emerging social members can be traced back to three groups: the war prisoners and political refugees from neighboring kingdoms, the foreign merchants from distant countries, and the trade representatives.

The group of war prisoners and political refugees from neighboring kingdoms

Some having been captured in war with Siam whereas others escaping from social unrest in their motherland, the Mons, Laotians, Khmer and Burmese took refuge in Siam in the Ayutthaya Period. An example of this group is the Mon, most of whom residing along the Siam-Burma frontier, the Mons migrated to the kingdom time and again.

² **Kham Hai Kan Khun Luang Ha Wat** (Nontaburi : The Collecting books project Sukhothai Dhammathirat University, 2004), p. 94.

³ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Ruang Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang** (Three Seals Code) (Bangkok, Krom Sinlapakorn, 1978), p. 357.

⁴ **Kham Hai Kan Khun Luang Ha Wat**, p. 94.

Following Prince Naresuan's flight from Burma in the mid of 16th century, the first wave of fugitives was allowed by King Mahathammaracha to settle down at *Bang Li*, *Ban Mai*, *Makhamyong*, *Ban Khamin*, *Ban Hua lam*, and outer Ayutthaya. The biggest group was that of *Phraya Kiet* and *Phraya Ram* who dwelled in *Ban Khamin*.⁵ The second wave entered Siam as prisoners of war during King *Naresuan*'s reign (1590–1605). Again, more Mons found asylum in Siam in the reign of King *Prasat Thong* (1629 – 1656) after the unrest in *Hongsawadee* (Pegu) in the 17th century.⁶ In the reign of King *Narai* (1656 -1688), the Mons fled from Burma and settled in *Sam Khok* and *Wat Tom Tha Hoy*.⁷ During the 18th century, in the reign of King *Borommakot* (1732 – 1758), again fleeing from the war with the Burmese, several waves of Mons were allowed to stay at *Ban Pho Sam Ton* (the village of three Bodhi trees). In addition, other neighboring nationalities including the Laotians, Khmer, Burmese, and Shan migrated to Siam from time to time as well such as the 1,773 Khmer in the reign of King *Narai*⁸ and the 773 *Kheak Minangkabao*, foreigners who lived in Cambodia.⁹ In the reign of King *Thai Sa* (1709 – 1732), the Khmer were permitted to stay at *Wat Khang Khao* (Bat Temple).¹⁰

Among these refugees, some earned their living as craftsmen, artisans, traders, and compradors dealing with foreign merchants while the others worked as laborers. All of them were governed

⁵ Richard D. Cushman, **The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya** (Bangkok : Siam Society, 2000), pp. 88-89.

⁶ Van Vliet, "Description of the Kingdom of Siam" in **Ruam Ban Tug Prawattisat Ayutthaya Kong Van Vliet** (All Records of Ayutthaya History of Van Vliet) (Bangkok : Krom Sinlapakorn, 2003), p 49.

⁷ Richard D. Cushman, **The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya**, p. 257.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 248

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

by the *Munnai-Phrai* system and headed by each group's court-appointed chief.

The group of foreign merchants from distant countries

Coming from lands further away, the Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Moors, Malays, and Portuguese were obliged to emigrate in Siam mostly for commercial purposes. Meanwhile, a certain number preferred to pursue their forefathers' skills, opted for mercenary service, or ended up in ateliers for arts and crafts.

Each group practiced their profession within their own community outside the city wall. Probably, as pioneering immigrants with significant numbers, the Chinese and the Moors acquired the privilege to live wherever they wished to, either inside or outside the city wall and among the local people. Moreover, they were the most recognized by the king and other foreigners at the time.

Chinese

Leaving their homeland before the 13th century, the Chinese were the largest group that dispersed throughout Southeast Asia, including Siam. Putting down their roots by marrying Siamese or other local women, these immigrants transferred agricultural knowledge and metallurgical skills to local people.¹¹ The huge heads of the Buddha image in *Wat Thammikarat* and *Wat Phanan Choeng* show Chinese influence and confirmed the Chinese people's arrival in Southeast Asia before the rise of Ayutthaya.

At least before the reign of King Prasat Thong, considered as the largest and oldest foreign community, the Chinese were earning other privileges as well. According to several research papers, it is concluded that exempted from conscription, the

¹¹ William G. Skinner, **Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History** edited by Charnvit Kasetsiri (Bangkok : The Foundation of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1986), p. 1.

Chinese found themselves independent and recognized as merchants commuting between Ayutthaya and the hinterland.

Most of the Chinese immigrants came from Siam's export destinations in southern China i.e. Guangzhou, Fujian, and Guanxi.¹² The Sino-Siamese trade was strengthened by the innate trade expertise, art of navigation, and language proficiency of the Chinese.

Amounting to over 3,000 in number in the reign of King Narai, the Chinese lived mostly along the Pa Sak River in the east of the city, in the vicinity of the port of Ayutthaya. From *Wat Phanan Choeng* to the mouth of *Khao San* and *Suan Phlu* Canals were located many large Chinese communities each of which distinguished by an impressive shrine. Others were found at *Ban Kao Luang* near *Wat Phu Khao Thong*. In the reign of King Thai Sa, a wealthy man named *Si* and his group lived and ran their business in a two-story mansion that housed 16 rooms at *Wat Tha Rab* market.¹³ Although there were many Chinese markets within the city wall, the biggest one at "the far end" of the city, which *Kam Hai Kan Khun Luang Wat Pradu Song Tham* indicates as *Talat Nai Kai* or *Talat Thai Muang*, allowed the Chinese immigrants and Siamese to operate their businesses in shops and distribute the imported goods.¹⁴

Apart from being traders and merchants, some Chinese started pursuing their forefathers' occupation as agriculturalists growing sugar cane and vegetables and raising livestock, while others opted for distilling spirits.¹⁵ Among other common professions were doctors,

¹² Wallapa Burutrattana, "Original and Development of Chinese in Thailand" in **Chinese in Thailand** (Bangkok : Praybhidaya, 1974), pp.1-2.

¹³ **Kham Hai Kan Khun Luang Ha Wat**, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵ William G. Skinner, **Chinese Society in Thailand : An Analytical History**, p. 14.

Chinese opera actors, and acrobats.¹⁶ Only a handful of successful Chinese merchants were appointed as royal merchants and court officials. In the reign of King Sua (King Tiger) and King Thai Sa, the title of *Phrakhlang* or the minister of treasury and foreign affairs was granted to a Chinese court official whose decline in power and influence later on was significantly followed by the Chinese immigrants' rebellion against the court of King Borommakot. Since the Chinese merchants played an active role in Siam's rice exportation to China, especially during King Thai Sa's reign, they could easily climb higher to the top of the social echelon.

Moors

Second only to the Chinese, the 'Moors' were Muslims from India, Arabia, Turkey, and Persia. Although coming to Siam for a commercial purpose, they ended up creating a permanent community to the south of the city at *Khu Cham Canal*.

Outstanding among the Persian Muslims was Sheikh Ahmad who had led his group to settle at Ayutthaya since the reign of King Ekathotsarot.¹⁷ As a successful trader, he served as the *Phrakhlang's consultant* in the reign of King Song Tham, and eventually became one of the most prestigious officials in the Ayutthaya Period. After the Portuguese seizure of Malacca in 1511, another Moorish exodus was witnessed in Siam. The Moors were so capable that some of them came to be engaged as officials in the court of Ayutthaya, especially the one entitled *Phrakhlang* in the reign of King Narai.

Since the beginning of the 17th century, the Moorish influence was enhanced in proportion to commercial growth in the Bay of Bengal. As Siamese court representatives on the western coast of

¹⁶ Simon de La Loubère, *A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam*, p.47.

¹⁷ Praya Komarakul Montri, *Sheikh Ahmad and the Bunnag's ancestors* (Nontaburi : Sri Panya, 2004), p. 18

Siam, the Moors were not only keen on understanding the Persian and Indian markets, but also had perfect connections in the arena, resulting in higher profits for the court.

The Moors' rapid rise to power resulted from King Narai's ascension to the throne. Although the Moorish *Khunnang* retained royal favor for a long period, the Moors' reputation was later tarnished because of a Persian court official named Haji Salim Mazandarani whose wrongdoings had been exposed by Constantine Phaulkon.¹⁸ However, after the reign of King Narai, the Moorish prominence radiated again in the Siamese court.

Japanese

As Christian fugitives from Shogun Ieyasu's religious persecution, the Japanese had been present since early 16th century. Around 1,000 Japanese immigrants founded their settlement in Ayutthaya in 1610 on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, opposite the Portuguese village.¹⁹ Although driven away by King Prasat Thong, they returned later to trade in deerskins---one of Ayutthaya's most important exports to Japan. Finally, apart from supplying the Dutch East India Company's (VOC) deerskin and animal hide monopoly, some of them acted as brokers and collectors for the VOC, other merchants, and the court.

Portuguese

The Portuguese were the foremost European immigrants in Siam. Since the reign of King Rama Thibodi II, their influx benefited Siam's trade and military services. Nicolas Gervaise recorded that in the

¹⁸ Dhiravat na Pombejra, **Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources** (Bangkok : Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, International Series No.1), p. 183.

¹⁹ Naoko Iioka, **Siamese Junk Trade with Japan from the 17th to the Early 18th Century**, p. 76.

reign of King Narai, 3,000-4,000 Portuguese lived in Ayutthaya,²⁰ and most of them were mestizos. He also recorded that these Portuguese preferred to die of hunger than to work for their living.²¹ Despite the negative conception from some sources, many sources pointed out that the Portuguese practiced different professions such as those of mercenary, jeweler, navigator, merchant, translator,²² doctor, clerk,²³ and confectioner.

The group of trade representatives

In duty bound to be stationed in Siam, this group comprised European trade representatives from different East India companies i.e. Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) or Dutch East India Company, English East India Company (EIC) and French East India Company in the reign of King Narai.

From the 17th century to nearly the end of the Ayutthaya Period, the VOC sited their office and representatives in Siam on the east bank of the Chao Phraya River. Opposite to the Japanese village, their community including an office or factory situated only two kilometers from the city.

The Dutch influence in Siam was distinguished by their involvement in both economics and politics. During the reign of King Prasat Thong, according to Dutch sources, the King called for Dutch

²⁰ Nicolas Gervaise, **The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam**, p. 46.

²¹ Ibid., p.46.

²² Krom Sinlapakorn, **Bun Tuk Rueng Sam Pantapab Rawang Prathet Thai Kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thee 17, Lem 4** (The Records of relations between Thailand and other countries, vol. 4) (Bangkok : Department of Fine Arts, 1982), p. 83-86.

²³ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Bun Tuk Rueng Sam Pantamaitri Rawang Prathet Thai Kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thee 17, Lem 2** (The Records of relations between Thailand and other countries, vol. 4) (Bangkok : Department of Fine Arts, 1970), p. 127.

fleets to aid his forces during the campaign against Pattani and Songkla.²⁴ In the following reign, Prince Narai, in August 1656, asked for a small number of men and guns but his request was tactfully declined by the VOC's director in Ayutthaya.²⁵ The Dutch was one of the most important customers to the *Phra Khlang Sinkha* who bought many items of forest products.

Still, the VOC's leaders at Ayutthaya office were vested with ranks, titles, insignia and *Sakdina* of *Khunnang*. Both de Marees and Schouten were at first apparently untitled but bestowed with insignia of office. After the VOC office had been reopened in 1633, Schouten and van Vliet were, however, appointed officials by King Prasat Thong. Throughout the 17th century, the VOC's directors and a couple of their close subordinates such as administrators invariably held official positions including ranks, titles, insignia and *Sakdina*.²⁶ A VOC director, Mr. Westerwolt, together with his subordinates, Mr. van Rijck and Mr. Hendrick Indijck had been bestowed by King Prasat Thong, according to status, with a parcel of land, gold betel boxes and saber following custom.²⁷ In spite of their typically granted titles, Okluang Apaya Wari, Okluang Witsit Sakon, Okkhun Apaya Wari, and Okphra Sire Sakon, they had no responsibility in court but were recognized as *Nai* under the *Munnai-Phrai* system or master of their followers and subordinates to higher

²⁴ Dhiravat na Pombejra, **Court, Company and Campong: Eassys on the VOC Presence in Ayutthaya** (Pranakorn Sri Ayutthaya : Ayutthaya Historical Study Centre, 1992), p. 13.

²⁵ George Vinal Smith, **The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand** (Northern Illinois : Center for Southeast Asian Studies Special Report, 1977), p. 35.

Finally, in October, Prince Narai with the aid of his supporters, and of the Japanese-Thais, Pattani, Malays, and Persian Muslim moved to the Palace to overthrow King Si Suthammaracha.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

ranking officials. Furthermore, the position of official gave these foreigners status within court culture, which was very important in everyday contact with the Thais.²⁸

A source from 1732 showed that 240 families lived in the Dutch village, including men, women, and children, mostly mixed-blood from Dutch father and Thai or other Asian mothers.²⁹ To control this new social group, particularly the mixed-blood children staying with their parents, Kings of Ayutthaya classed them under their *Nai* or masters who were underlings of *Khunnang* of each immigrant group. As being compatriot of Siam, this immigrant *Khunnang* not only had charge of his subordinates but also rightfully gained this manpower to fulfill their commercial tasks.

Conscripts or not, the mestizoes became Siam's important manpower. In the reign of King Chai Racha, the Portuguese were conscripted to take part in the battle between Ayutthaya and northern towns. King Narai conscripted the Laotians in Ayutthaya to fight against the Vietnamese. Before the fall of Ayutthaya, the Christians were summoned to fire cannons at the invading Burmese. Furthermore, after the Siamese king's Persian Ambassador Haji Salim Mazandarani had been accused of corruption and dismissed by King Narai, all Muslims including recent converts would have had to render services as common *Phrai*.³⁰ or they had to pay tax to the court.³¹ This evidence emphasizes the Muslims' privileged position in Ayutthaya.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

²⁹ Theodorus Jacobus van den Heuvel, "A Journey to Phra Phutthabat, 1737" in **In the King Trail : an 18th Century Dutch Journey to the Buddha's Footprint** edited by Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra (Bangkok : The Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1997), p. 36.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

³¹ Simon de La Loubère, **A New Historical Relation of the Kingdom of Siam**, p. 110.

Since there was no source of any troop levies imposed on other immigrants including the Muslims, all of them were supposed to pay taxes or render specific services to the court instead of serving the annual six-month corvée, which was called *Suai*. Consequently, they obtained a better chance than local people to concentrate on trade or other activities all year round. The above-mentioned *Suai* covered multiform tributes delivered by specific groups of immigrants. For example, concerning junk trade, the Chinese could implicitly win the kings' favor by their skill or experience in navigation. According to La Loubère, *Phrai* were allowed to pay in rice, sapanwood, aloes, hides, ivories or other commodities³² in lieu of their corvée.

With the help of these preferences, the emerging social members developed into proto-entrepreneurs who later played a significant role in the international trade of Ayutthaya.

It is quite difficult to divide them into groups because of their partial overlapping in duties and status. The boundaries between their duties and status were frequently crossed. However, to make a clear description of them, these people are categorized into four groups of proto-entrepreneurs according to their duties and status.

The Ayutthaya proto-entrepreneurs

From the reign of King Prasat Thong to that of King Ekathat, around the late 17th century to the 18th century, proto-entrepreneurs were offered chances to involve themselves in trade formerly reserved for kings, members of the royal family, aristocrats, and high dignitaries. They can be separated into four groups as follows:

³² Ibid., p. 94.

1. the private merchants and tax farmers
2. the trading expert officials and the court merchants
3. the traders and peddlers
4. the local officials

Economic change and the foreign markets' increasing demand for forest products led the Siamese court to reform their regime to become more efficient over other towns in the hinterland because more completely subjugated towns meant more yield for export and eventually more financial gain to the kingdom. The table below reflects the quantities of exports in the reign of King Prasat Thong* as well as many groups of people who involved in the activities.

* We do not have export data which Phra Klang Sinka, as an exporter, sold them in the reign of King Narai but the export data of the VOC help us to estimate the quantities of goods that were gathered up for the company, the King, and other proto-entrepreneurial groups, we can say that the export trade of Ayutthaya in the reign of King Narai was larger amount than King Prasat Thong reign's. See the export data of VOC in Ayutthaya in George Vinal Smith, **The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand Thailand**, pp. 80, 82, 88, 89.

*Selected Export Items of Ayutthaya's trade in the reign of King Prasat Thong*³³

Commodity	Volume of Export
Lead in small pieces	2,000-3,000 piculs *
Tin	1,500-2,000 piculs
Sapanwood	30,000-40,000 piculs
Elephant tusks	50-60 piculs
Ager wood	60-70 piculs
Gitta gomma	10-120 piculs
Tsieran or black wet wax	70-80 piculs
Black cane sugar	3,000-4,000 piculs
Cambodia Nuts	600-800 piculs
Deer skins	120,000-130,000 pieces
Roe skins	35,000-40,000 pieces
Buffalo skins	200-300 pieces
Buffalo horn	2,000-3,000 pieces
Rhino. horn	200-300 pieces
Coconut oil	1,500-2,000 pots
Cow butter	150-2,000 pots
Wet indigo	5,000-6,000 pots
Teak posts	400-500 pieces
Teak planks	800-1,000 pieces
Bird skins	3,000-4,000 pieces
Coyang salt	1,500-2,000

* 1 Picul = 60.48 Kg.

For want of either middlemen or operators, the court engaged the proto-entrepreneurs to fit into this niche. In return, the more the proto-entrepreneurs were involved in trade, the larger the sums of money they could accumulate and the higher the echelons they could reach in society.

³³ Van Vliet, "Description of the Kingdom of Siam 1638" in **Van Vliet's Siam** (Chiang Mai : Silkworm Books, 2005), p. 170-171.

The private merchants and tax farmers

From among the private merchants who were resident foreigners and mestizos, some outstanding private merchants were drawn into the court of Siam and appointed officials afterwards while others maintained their wealth and economic strength by making close connections with high-rank nobles and officials. Their services were rewarded with special privileges, commodity monopolies and commissions. The relationships were based on a “win-win situation.” And to analyze the issue further, both groups could be singled out by their allegiances.

According to the Three Seals Code, resident foreigners making a fortune in the trading arena were found in a large number in Ayutthaya. Although untitled as *Khunnang*, or not engaged in official duties, these men of means won so much recognition from the court that they were allowed to have an audience with King Borommakot as other foreign *Khunnang* when the envoys from Sri Lanka came to Ayutthaya.³⁴ The conclusion may be reached that they were promoted from common *Phrai* to probably a kind of *Munnai* and it was one of the many ways to include them into the social structure of Ayutthaya.

As indicated in various sources, Ong Lai-hu, Che-sua Si, Ong Heng-chuan and others were men of fortune in the reign of King Thai Sa.³⁵ Having strong connections with the court, they enjoyed the royal trust and preferential trade. Some of their offspring became officials or *Khunnang* such as Mua Seng, Ong Lai-u’s son, served King Taksin as Luang Aphai Phanit,³⁶ and another son of this wealthy man named Chin Rueng, who became a millionaire of Chonburi.³⁷

³⁴ Kam hai Kan Khun Luang Ha Wat, p. 94.

³⁵ Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit : Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, p. 163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

In addition, other resident foreigners had their own profession, for instance, Chin Kong Seng owned and rented out Chinese junks to any merchants,³⁸ Quosaemon and Gumbe, two Japanese, were deerskin brokers,³⁹ and Francis Robson though having an English name was a Portuguese translator.⁴⁰ In the context of a port city, the resident foreigners and mestizos practiced their careers independently. Whether brokers, collectors, middlemen, navigators, translators, or in any walk of life, they represented the true mechanism of the changing Siamese overseas trade.

For a fine result in taxation and corruption eradication, the tax farm policy was implemented since the reign of King Borommakot. Appointed as tax farmers, the foreign residents would be entitled *Khunnang* for practical reasons. A great number of private merchants jumped at this stepping-stone to reach higher positions in the social hierarchy. In theory, the court succeeded in milking the targeted revenue while the tax farmers were more empowered, became wealthier, and titled.

The trading expert officials and the kings' merchants

The trading expert officials and the kings' merchants had grown up since Ayutthaya achieved greater administrative control over her satellite towns and manpower resources in the 17th century. These strategies contributed to a higher efficiency of forest product collection, and logistics from Siam to external markets. However, the phenomenal trading expansion needed the intervention of "experts" in various fields ---shipbuilding, navigation, and

³⁸ **Ruang Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang** (Three Seals Code), p. 367.

³⁹ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Ekasan Kong Hollanda Samai Krung Sri Ayutthaya** (Dutch Papers) translated by Nanta Sutkul (Bangkok : Department of Fine Arts, 1970), p. 224.

⁴⁰ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Bantuk Ruang Sampanthapab Rawang Krung Siam kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thi 17, Lem 3** (The Records of Relations between Siam and other countries, vol. 3), p. 140, 153.

marketing--- to streamline the *Phra Khlang Sinkha* and *Krom Tha*.

On account of their qualifications, most immigrants who were appointed as officials were under the *Munnai-Phrai* system. Although the kings did not wish to have them control manpower like local officials, the trading expert officials managed to eventually have it all their own way.⁴¹

Some were appointed as officials and others were invited to take part in the kings' trade; the merchants of the kings traded with foreign merchants to support the crown's maritime activities.

As mentioned before, the inheritance law in the Three Seals Code indicated two kinds of wealthy men or *Setthi* in Siam: one with and the other without ranks and titles.⁴² The former could be any merchant who eventually became an official with ranks, titles, insignia, and *Sakdina* while the latter could refer to other rich merchants in Siam. Anyway, the court of Siam attempted to include both groups into the *Munnai-Phrai* system for practical control and contact.

Exemplifying the trading expert who later became a high dignitary in the Siamese court, the Persian Sheikh Ahmad, one of the Bunnag family's ancestors, led his followers to settle at *Ban Tha Kayee* near the port of Ayutthaya at the end of King Ekathotsarot's reign. Not only establishing connections with the Ministry of Treasury and Foreign Affairs for commercial purposes, the Sheikh also came to be so influential in the Crown's Treasury that he was titled *Phraya Sheikh Amad Rattana Racha Setthi*. The King also gave him and his followers some land and allowed them to build their houses and cemeteries.⁴³ Serving the court of Siam through

⁴¹ Nidhi Aeusrivongse. **Kanmuang Thai Samai Phra Narai**. (The Politics in the Reign of King Narai) (Bangkok : Mathichon, 1984), p. 21-22.

⁴² Krom Sinlapakorn, **Ruang Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang** (Three Seals Code), p. 357.

⁴³ Praya Komarakul Montri, **Sheikh Ahmad and the Bunnag's ancestors**, pp. 18-19.

many reigns, his descendants kept up the family's distinction as well as high standing in the Rattanakosin Period.

Apart from ranks and titles, the trading experts and the kings' merchants were bestowed with privileges in the form of financial gain, the crown's protection and patronage. On behalf of the monarch, the kings' merchants could buy monopolized goods i.e. copper, rice, teak wood, coconut oil, lacquer, benzoin, and others at a lower price and sell them immediately with a high profit margin.⁴⁴ Okkhun Thura Suribat's carrying some goods for himself, on King Narai's behalf, from the English ship⁴⁵ illustrated the officials' exploitation of their position. Moreover, manipulating with some officials, the kings' merchants could underpay the Crown's goods behind the kings' back.

Moreover, being endowed with authority, trading expert officials were able to have *Phrai* and *That* in their power. This manpower helped facilitate the trade in various aspects: commodity production and sales, communication with incoming foreign merchants, transportation to the hinterland, etc.

Among prominent trading officials and the kings' merchants in King Narai's reign was Okya Phichit ("Pieschyt" or "Pieschijt"). Formerly named Abdu'r-Razzaq from Gilan and having connections with King Narai since he was a prince, Okya Phichit had sent him extraordinary goods from India and Persia⁴⁶ before

⁴⁴ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Bantuk Ruang Sampanthapab Rawang Krung Siam kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thi 17 Lem 3** (The Records of relations between Siam and other countries, vol. 3) (Bangkok : Department of Fine Arts, 1979), p. 64.

⁴⁵ A letter of George Gosfright and Thomas Ivatt to the Consultant Councils of Bantam on 18 Jan, 1682 cited in Department of Fine Arts, **Bantuk Ruang Sampanthapab Rawang Krung Siam kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thi 17, Lem 3** (The Records of relations between Siam and other countries, vol. 3), p. 65.

⁴⁶ Dhiravat na Pombejra, **Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources**, p. 180.

being appointed later as an official. When King Narai went to war against Lanna, he was appointed as the King's chief accountant to transact the Crown's commercial affairs.

To exercise his power, Okya Phichit allowed none other than his associates to trade with the king's storehouses and urged them to compete with others, especially the Dutch. Finally, he was accused of corruption and stripped from his rank and title before death with the extra humiliation of having pork oil/fat rubbed all over his body.⁴⁷

Another influential dignitary in the court of King Narai was Okpra Sinaowarat or Aqa Muhammad Astarabadi. Holding great power over the ports of Mergui and Tenasserim for a very long time, Okpra Sinaowarat intrigued the appointment of his associates as rulers of many towns from Mergui, Tenasserim, Petchburi, Kuiburi, Pranburi and Bangkok.⁴⁸ Coming from many sources, one of his most important wealth probably derived from his monopoly on selling eaglewood which had been ranked the most profitable trade in Siam for more than 30 years.⁴⁹

After Aqa Muhammad's demise, it was time for Okya Wichayen or Constantine Phaulkon, the most well-known foreign official in the court and history of Siam to rise to prominence. A Greek from Cephalonia, extremely resourceful, witty and eloquent, Okya

⁴⁷ DRB 1663, 9 Dec. 1663 entry, 655-662 cited in Dhiravat na Pombejra, **Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources**, p. 182.

⁴⁸ IOR, E/3/40 no.4696 & G/21/17A, 18-32; RR 2, 202-213 cited in Dhiravat na Pombejra, **Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources**, p. 178.

⁴⁹ A letter of George White to Robert Parker at 1629 cited in Department of Fine Arts, **Bantuk rueng Sampanthamaitri Rawang Prathet Thai kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thi 17 Lem 2** (The Records of Relations between Thailand and others in the 17th century, Vol. 2) (Bangkok : Department of Fine Arts, 1970), p. 272.

Wichayen had been a sailor on vessels of the English East India Company, EIC, to the East Indies. With his acknowledged linguistic proficiency in English, Portuguese, Malay and Thai, he could perform business with foreigners as well as locals. Therefore, it took him only a short time to be promoted as a high-ranking official. He was raised to the highest position and authority only nine years after his arrival in Siam.⁵⁰ On Phaulkon's suggestion, King Narai appointed a few Englishmen, his connections, to be stationed at Mergui and Tenasserim, one of the most important ports of Siam. He also invited some English Company's employees to leave their jobs and serve King Narai on his merchant fleets⁵¹ to carry the King's export goods from the port of Mergui to destination in the Bay of Bengal.

Usually, he exercised his power to obtain preferential prices for his desired import goods and sometimes even asked for undersold lots from the *Phra Khlang Sinkha*.⁵² His trading business was said to be the biggest of all,⁵³ with 5-6 vessels in possession and the resources to invest 300,000 Francs in the French Company.⁵⁴

In sum, the expert officials and the kings' merchants were expatriates confided with court positions and duties due to their competence, resulting in the opportunities to amass their fortunes. Becoming at last officials in the *Munnai-Phrai* system, they established their individuality and hung on to their influential livelihood.

⁵⁰ Engelbert Kaempfer, *A Description of the Kingdom of Siam (1690)* (Bangkok : White Orchid Press, 1987), p. 30.

⁵¹ Krom Sinlapakorn, *Bantuk Ruang Sampanthapab Rawang Krung Siam kab Nana Prathet nai Satawat thi 17, Lem 3* (The Records of relations between Siam and other countries, vol. 3), p. 316.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵³ Krom Sinlapakorn, *Prachum Pongsawadan vol. 15*. (Bangkok : Kurusapa, 1964), p. 288.

⁵⁴ Krom Sinlapakorn, *Prachum Pongsawadan vol. 29*. (Bangkok : Kurusapa, 1968), p. 155.

The traders and peddlers

Coming into focus during the 17th-18th centuries, the traders and peddlers were natives and foreigners who opted for trading involvement in the form of household industry. Unlike the earlier counterparts, they were forced by the new economic context to supply more diversified and processed commodities to the increasing markets, than simply rely on collecting products from nature. Since the 17th century, the traders and peddlers were those who produced and sold their own goods or crafts.

Motivated by the rising demand for processed merchandises, the population's ways of living shifted from the self-sufficient to a trade oriented economy. In addition, encountered all over Ayutthaya were different manufacturing communities and marketplaces. Each ethnic group engaged in specialized occupations. For example, Mons were specialists in making pottery and Chinese were blacksmiths.

Nicolas Gervaise recorded a trading scene in Siam in the late 17th century as follows:

*“the majority of the population is engaged in trade. Some spend all their time trafficking on the river with their wives and children in large boats commonly called myrous, from which they almost never disembark. Others dwell in the towns, remaining in their shops, where they retail the goods that they have bought wholesale off their ships, work at their own trade and sell what they have made.”*⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Nicolas Gervaise, **The Nature and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam** (Bangkok : White Lotus, 1998), p. 98.

In the late Ayutthaya Period, around King Borommakot's reign, the Chao Phraya River was crowded with more than twenty thousand floating houses and shops,⁵⁶ and markets were set up everywhere. Representing the thriving circumstance were 61 markets within the city wall of Ayutthaya, 30 markets outside the city wall, 4 floating markets and 52 *Yan* or *Pa*, literally manufacturing communities and marketplaces.⁵⁷ For instance, *Ban Moh* or pottery village, situated outside the city wall, produced stoves, many kinds of pots, dishes, pans that were made from clay.

Distinct from those in the Sukhothai Period, markets in Ayutthaya were controlled by the authorities. Both traders and consumers had to abide by rules and regulations set by the court. Acting as market controller, the *Kamnan Talad* was appointed to protect the customers' interests and maintain the law-abiding transactions including prices, consignment, illicit goods, etc.⁵⁸

The most interesting phenomenon in the 18th century that reflected the socio-economic change in Ayutthaya was the manufacturing and sales of processed products in markets. Apart from such important locally processed products as pottery and sugar, a wider available selection consisting of metal mortars, hardware, ready-made partitions, wooden furniture, bronze ware, and others confirmed the existence of artisans and their firm niche in an urbanized society. Mostly resident foreigners, the skilful Persian navigators sold long mooring ropes made out of twisted coconut bark while the Chinese blacksmiths possessed so much forged iron know-how that several hardware shops were opened in the market.

⁵⁶ **Kam Hai Kan Khun Luang Wat Pradu Song tham**, (Bangkok : the Prime minister secretary-general office, 1991), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.12-14.

⁵⁸ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Ruang Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang** (Three Seals Code), pp. 486.

Furthermore, a characteristic of the 18th century's extravagant lifestyle was found in luxury goods i.e. foods and sweets from China, clothing from India and China, and other luxury accessories obtained from international trade.

Moreover, since the 17th century Ayutthaya had become a true port city, with the fresh product available at the morning and afternoon marketplaces⁵⁹ featuring in the Siamese's new way of life. With trade and other occupations taking up all of their time, people in Ayutthaya could not catch fish, grow rice or cultivate vegetables for daily meals but had to buy fresh food from vendors to cook at their dwellings. The most surprising scene was the existence of fast food stalls near a country market at the Ayutthaya outskirts called *Ban Sala Kwian*, where small stalls were opened to serve both travelling traders and peddlers from far away towns such as Nakhon Ratchasima and Battambang and their customers.⁶⁰

Strongly implied in the *Kam Hai Kan Khun Luang Wat Pradu Song Tham*, the extensive growth of local trade was propelled by the traders and peddlers. With the help of the peddlers' logistics, many goods i.e. sugar, Khmer cloth, sea food, wax, honey, silk, benzoin, etc. which originated within the hinterland were carried to and sold at Ayutthaya. Wholesalers and retailers were found at the markets too, *Ban Tha Klong*'s nails and spikes a good example, were wholesaled to the traders and retailed at *Talad Faed* or Twin market in the city wall.⁶¹ From near and far, whether they were craftsmen, wholesalers, traders, peddlers, or retailers, all parties depended on private capital and profit making.

Parallel to the emergence of these new social members and economic growth especially in the 18th century were the unprecedented use of cash in daily life, urban people had to use

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 12-14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 4, 12.

cash to buy necessities especially rice. In King Prasat Thong's reign, people were found having 5 to 20 cowries on themselves for food or necessities shopping at a market.⁶² And such practice remained until the last reign of the Ban Phlu Luang Dynasty.

Under the *Munnai-Phrai* system, these new social members were considered as the professionals who lived a trading life of which the profits could save them from conscription by hiring those in the lower status to work in their places by payment of cash in lieu of corvée to the court.

The local officials

The "local officials" refer to the administrative officials in the society including the *munnai* or masters of the commoners in the kingdom. Under the *Munnai-Phrai* system and the high-ranking nobles, the local officials were authorized to perform certain duties including meeting the Royal Crown Trade Organization's demand in terms of goods. The court's flourishing trade not only allowed them to collect goods but also provided them with withholding percentage for the service rendered. Of course, the dishonest could corrupt by selling the unlawful surplus to the smugglers or needing merchants.

Since the reign of King Song Tham, the local officials had stood on their dignity due to the wealth of some local *Khunnang* such as Okluang Thammatrailok, the governor or *chao muang* of Tenasserim who was considered by Van Vliet as one of the richest officials in the reign of King Song Tham.⁶³ More recognized by reason of their rapid growth in the reign of King Prasat Thong, these officials drew

⁶² Nicolas Gervaise, **The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam**, p. 102.

⁶³ Van Vliet, "Jot Mai Hed Van Vliet" in **Ruam Bantuk Prawatsat Ayutthaya Kong Van Vliet** (Historical Account of Siam in the 17th century in **The Records of Ayutthaya History of Van Vliet**) (Bangkok : Fine Arts Department, 2003), p. 264.

much attention from the authorities as indicated in some laws in the Three Seals Code issued at that time. It is revealed in the laws that some officials were involved in bribery, corruption, embezzlement of the court's goods, manpower, and facilities.⁶⁴

Undoubtedly, to hinder exploiting them by others, a royal monopoly was imposed on such popular goods as eaglewood, ivory, tin, and sapanwood. Moreover, law breakers were executed, such as a governor of Pitsanulok for corruption in the reign of King Narai,⁶⁵ and a governor of Ligor or Nakhon Si Thammarat was replaced because of his personal dealings with the Chinese merchants, which were against the express orders of King Borommakot.⁶⁶

Having access to various towns, certain foreign merchants could get in touch with local officials who were willing to supply their demands. In addition, the local rulers played a substantial role in enriching themselves and handing down their wealth to the following generation.

In the reign of King Borommakot, a typical restriction on trade was imposed on officials who had abused the relative liberty of trade in the reign of King Thai Sa. Dutch sources pointed out that many officials---Okphra Choduk Ratchasetthi and Okluang Sipiphat ('Cicipat')---were dissatisfied with the King's monopolization of the popular and expensive export goods of Ayutthaya i.e. ivory, gold, silver, sapanwood, eaglewood, tin, lead and jewels⁶⁷ for fear of their deprivation.

⁶⁴ Krom Sinlapakorn, **Ruang Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang** (Three Seals Code), pp. 485, 509, 511, 516, 693.

⁶⁵ Nicolas Gervaise, **The Nature and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam**, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra, "Tipping Balances : King Borommakot and the Dutch East India Company" in **In the King's Trail : An 18th Century Dutch Journey to the Buddha's Footprint** edited by Remco Raben and Dhiravat na Pombejra, (Bangkok : the Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1997), p. 68-69.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that resulting from the kings' achievement in overpowering the dependent towns and in controlling the manpower in the hinterland, the prosperous trade in Ayutthaya attracted different kinds of foreigners from near and far to the kingdom of Siam. On an unprecedented scale, the economic system was subjected to private capital and profit making strategies. Not only to supply the soaring export demand but also to churn out more wealth for the royal treasury, the royal monopoly department or *Phra Khlang Sinkha* strengthened and reorganized by King Prasat Thong and as a result became instrumental to trade expansion maximizing profit. In this socio-economic context, an opportunity was opened to locals as well as immigrants for investments, wealth and power accumulation, and social mobility. Eventually, new social members considered as "bourgeois" or Ayutthaya proto-entrepreneurs emerged and were to last until the fall of the capital when only some of them could survive the 1760s war against the Burmese. Leaving behind Ayutthaya marketplaces, they resumed their forefathers' professions in the new Rattanakosin Era.

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