1

Old Bangkok:
An Ethnohistorical Overview

Bangkok, the capital of Siam since 1782, served from the outset as the kingdom's ceremonial, administrative, commercial, and demographic centre — a primate city in every sense of the term. In speaking of its "premodern" phase, 1782–1910, covering the first five reigns of the Chakri dynasty, the city is conventionally referred to as Old Bangkok, or more formally, Ratanakosin. Thus, the 129-year time span from 1782 to 1910 may be termed the Ratanakosin period. As Ratanakosin, the city is often visualized as the walled and moated artificial island that still carries its name, but the physical contours of Old Bangkok reached well beyond those confines to incorporate the densely populated urban periphery. From the very outset, the Bangkok conurbation expanded progressively in area and population, attracting a diverse citizenry representing a multiplicity of ethnic communities while expediting Siam's growing prosperity and accelerating modernization. Yet, until the rise of the absolute monarchy and nationalism in the decades crossing into the twentieth century, Old Bangkok retained much of the feudal political and social alignment that had in former centuries characterized the ancestral capital of Ayutthaya. This introductory chapter briefly surveys Old Bangkok's spatial design, political structure, social organization, and ethnic diversity in their historical context as background to the five historical studies of the city's principal ethnic minorities that follow in Chapters 2 to 6, plus the five summary ethnohistories of lesser communities contained in Chapter 7. In fact, the present chapter can be considered to add yet a further ethnohistory in its discussion of the role played by Old Bangkok's Thai ruling elite and Thai commons in the city's nineteenth–twentieth century modernization.

Ratanakosin, The Jewel of Indra

City of Angels, Great Metropolis, Excellent Jewel of Indra [demiurge of the Vedic heavens], Capital of the World, Endowed with the Nine Precious Gems [divine virtues], Happy City Abounding in Great Royal Palaces, Replica of the Celestial City Founded by Indra and Built by Vishvakarman [Indra's architect], City Wherein Dwell Vishnu's Avatars [the Chakri dynasty kings, also associated with such kindred celestial avatars as Rama and Buddha] (Thipakorawong 2009*a*, p. 75).

Celestial Metaphor

At a grand celebration in mid-1785, culminating three years of painstaking planning, preparation, and construction, the royal city of Bangkok was formally consecrated with the above-cited grandiose, densely metaphorical title. In conformance with the traditional Thai interpretation of the Brahman cosmos (Lithai 1985; Ivarsson 1995), that majestic Sanskrit-based appellation envisaged the Siamese capital as an earthly replica of the supernal city of Sudarsana ("Suthat" in Thai), abode of the thirty-three deities ruled by Indra, lord of the Tavatimsa Heaven ("Dawadoeng Sawan" in Thai), at the summit of the cosmic Mount Meru. Not merely in name but far more substantively in its physical layout, political structure, and social organization, Ratanakosin was designed to evoke Indra's celestial city. Sparse surviving evidence suggests that Bangkok's precursor, Ayutthaya, had early on been laid out along similar lines, only to deviate progressively from its cosmic design as the city evolved over the course of its four centuries' lifetime (1351–1767). Reviving the ancient mystique, the new capital as well as the kingdom over which it presided came to be known as Ratanakosin — "the Jewel of Indra". Even today, with Ratanakosin a quaint reference to bygone days, Bangkok continues to be popularly known as Krung Thep — "the City of Angels". Quite unintentionally but strangely prescient, that subtle shift in emphasis from Indra's magisterial pre-eminence to the ascendancy of a contentious gaggle of lesser deities expresses much of Bangkok's storied history.

Following the tradition firmly established at the ancestral capital of Ayutthaya, the founders of Ratanakosin sought to associate themselves metaphorically with the Brahman deities by exploiting numerous allusions to Mount Meru's supreme habitants: Indra, Vishnu, Rama, and Buddha. As self-professed avatars of those heavenly beings, they retained the customary title of "celestial prince" (*chao fa*). They found it fitting to meld Brahman and Buddhist iconography in their selection of the Emerald Buddha image, set upon its soaring dais suggestive of Mount Meru, as the kingdom's palladium, in large part for its emerald green hue, the color of Indra, bespeaking the

fertility of the rice fields, the bounty of Indra's rain-making might. The image of Indra's mount, the celestial elephant Airavata ("Erawan" in Thai), with Indra mounted upon its shoulders, was installed as a featured symbol on many of Bangkok's royal edifices and was in due course adopted as the official emblem of the Bangkok Municipality. Indra's weapon, the lightning bolt (*vajra*, or *wachira* in Thai, iconographically represented as a trident), became a popular motif of Thai royalty and was eventually incorporated in the title and royal regalia of Rama VI (King Wachirawut). In parallel fashion, Vishnu's weapon, the bladed discus (*chakra*, or *chak* in Thai, also associated with the dynasty's founder in his former capacity as minister of civil affairs) was adopted as the Chakri dynasty's crest and continues to be proudly displayed as the privileged emblem of the kingdom's armed forces. And Rama was eventually selected as the personal avatar of the Chakri kings, with episodes from the Ramakien (the Thai version of the Ramayana epic) adorning the mural-clad inner wall of the Chapel Royal (Wat Phra Si Sasadaram, popularly known as Wat Phra Kaew), and his heroic statue today gracing the forecourt of the former Front Palace (the viceroy's stronghold, sited some 200 metres due north of the Grand Palace). Such examples of the ruling elite's affinity for the celestial symbolism embodied in the gods and accouterments of Indra's heaven could be extended endlessly (Wales 1931; Smith 1978).

The interminable associations between Thai sovereignty, Brahman cosmology, and Buddhist ethics served as an essential validation of the Thai elite's rule over the loosely structured, ethnically diverse feudal Siamese kingdom. As the defining mystique surrounding a new and insecure dynasty reigning over a kingdom only recently shattered by war, the celestial imagery penetrated deep into the Ratanakosin psyche. Most elaborate of all those allusions was the physical design of Bangkok itself in the form of a mandala (*monthon* in Thai), simulating the layout of Indra's celestial city (see "The Mandala as Urban Template" in the concluding chapter). As depicted in tapestries, murals, and illustrated manuscripts, the mandala image simplifies the three-dimensionality of Mount Meru onto a two-dimensional topography — in effect an aerial projection of Indra's heaven atop Mount Meru, dividing the celestial city into an octagonal ring of precincts surrounding the pre-eminent ninth precinct, the citadel, at the pinnacle — each precinct identified with a Brahman deity possessing specific auspicious attributes, contributing to the integrity of the whole. That propitiously symmetrical arrangement was applied purposefully in Old Bangkok, a city radiating from the centrally positioned City Pillar (*lak moeang*), surrounded by the royal palaces and temples, encircled in turn by

partitioning water channels and roadways, all surrounded by the city wall with its sixteen bastions and major gates (eight each for the Grand Palace and Front Palace zones) and by the City Moat (*khu moeang*) (Naengnoi 1991, pp. 18–25). Overlooking all was the great celebratory monument (*phra prang*) of Wat Arun, erected in the Second Reign as a visionary rendering of Mount Meru in glorification of Ratanakosin and its reigning dynasty (Wat Arun Rachaworaram 1983; Chatri 2013).

Earthly Design

The 1767 relocation of Siam's capital from devastated Ayutthaya to Thonburi, some sixty kilometres downriver, marked a turning point in Thai history. The new stronghold, founded in haste to defend a fledgling regime under threat of imminent attack, soon showed its deficiencies in its constricted confines, inadequate fortifications, and crumbling shoreline, as well as its inauspicious asymmetry. The city's cross-river expansion a decade later to incorporate "East Thonburi" — more than doubling the dimensions of the whole from 0.9 to 2.2 square kilometres — sought to remedy those shortcomings, though the cross-river bifurcation contributed to the city's defensive vulnerability (Map 1.1). Efforts to formalize Thonburi's riparian unity by adding a moat and wall to the east-side precinct (Amphan 1994) did little to ease the disquiet. It appears that toward the end of the Thonburi reign a plan was thus mooted to move the royal redoubt to the east bank. But realization of that plan had to await the coup of 1782, which brought to power the Chakri dynasty.

Within the two weeks immediately following the 1782 coup, the decision to recentre the city from the west bank of the river to the east was confirmed. The new, enlarged riverine capital — more than redoubling its former area to 4.6 square kilometres — was laid out as a cosmically demarcated stronghold for the ruling elite, the inner citadel for the aristocracy and the outer precincts for the nobility, with the commons relegated to the "wilderness" beyond the walled and moated bounds. The expanded city's basic parameters were quickly marked out (Map 1.2): the City Pillar was ritually planted at the riparian site's precise centre; a sizeable Chinese immigrant community was evicted from the delimited area; the precise positions of the new royal palaces were determined (Thipakorawong 2009*a*, p. 6). The new city was laid out to accommodate the southern and northern zones of royal occupation and authority, demarcated by its latitudinal axis. Under the dual supervision of the king and viceroy (*uparat*, or heir presumptive), a workforce was mobilized and construction materials were acquired; the new city's waterlogged terrain was drained, cleared, levelled, and raised; a new
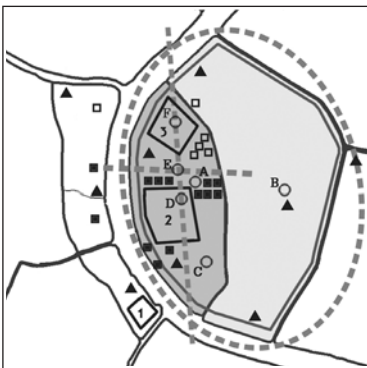
MAP 1.1
The Thonburi mandala, pre-1782
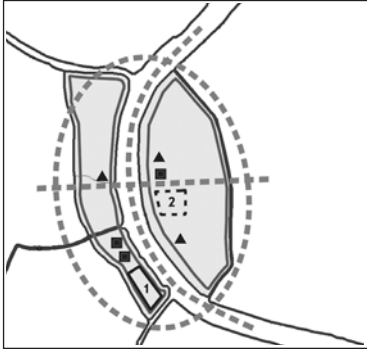
MAP 1.2
The original Bangkok mandala, 1782–85
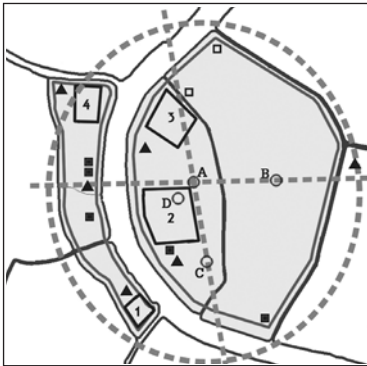
MAP 1.3
The revised Bangkok mandala, 1809

	= Thonburi/Bangkok
	= Bangkok citadel
▪▪▪▪	= Mandala perimeter, axes
A	= City Pillar
B	= Brahman temple and ritual swing
C	= Spirit shrines
D	= Emerald Buddha image
E	= Royal cremation ground
F	= Sinhalese Buddha image
1	= Thonburi Grand Palace
2	= Bangkok Grand Palace
3	= Front Palace
4	= Rear Palace
▪	= King's entourage palaces
▫	= Viceroy's entourage palaces
▲	= Major royal temples

moat was excavated to circle the city; a new city wall was erected; the newly appointed aristocracy's palaces and nobility's mansions were built; and the existing temples were rebuilt to meet royal specifications (Thipakorawong 2009*a*, pp. 59–60). The thousands of Khmer, Lao, and other war captives conscripted to implement that massive task were assigned settlement sites along the new city's sparsely populated outskirts.

Whereas Bangkok was founded with great fanfare, its subsequent evolution proceeded at a gradual, largely unpublicized pace. Imperceptibly, the political significance of Thonburi as the city's west-bank precinct slipped steadily toward obscurity. After the construction of Thonburi's Rear Palace (residence of the short-lived adjunct viceroy) in 1785, no further palace was built on the west bank over the remainder of the new dynasty's First Reign. In the following years the deaths of several senior royal family members residing along the Thonburi riverfront opened opportunities for the downgrading of their palaces. Particularly telling was the dissolution of the Rear Palace in 1806. That incremental downgrading of the west bank as a royal quarter truncated the original Bangkok design to the 3.7 square kilometres east-bank walled and moated city, eliminating Ratanakosin's cross-river vulnerability and leaving the capital a distinct island — but unaesthetically asymmetrical in its elemental design (Map 1.3).

The citadel's south-north division between the king's and viceroy's zones became increasingly apparent over the course of the First Reign as the sons of the king and viceroy were awarded their own palaces upon their coming of age. (To be sure, there was little outward evidence to distinguish the princes' "palaces" from the nobility's "mansions". The rank and status of their occupants were their essential differentiating characteristic.) Fourteen princely palaces were built between 1785 and the close of the First Reign, ten within the southern zone (for nine of the king's sons and one grandson) and the other four in the northern zone (for the viceroy's four senior sons) (Table 1.3). Accentuating that division was the recentring of the city from the City Pillar (Map 1.2, site A) to the newly instated Royal Cremation Ground (*thung phra men [= meru]*, that Thai term referring to the towering crematory monuments erected there for the funerals of ranking royals) (Map 1.3, site E). That crystallization of the citadel's south-north divide was further confirmed by the pairing of two great royal monasteries, the former — Wat Photaram (later renamed Wat Phra Chetuphon) — standing directly behind the Grand Palace as the king's signature temple and the latter — Wat Mahathat — adjoining the Front Palace under the viceroy's patronage. The parallel association of those royal temples with the Grand Palace and Front Palace was corroborated not only by their position as

TABLE 1.1
Bangkok palaces: Locations over the course of the
first five Chakri reigns, 1782–1910

Reign	Citadel	City (outside the citadel)	Outside (outside the walled city)	Total
First Reign (1782–1809)				
1782–1785				
King's entourage	2	4[a]	–	6
Viceroy's entourage	1	4[a]	–	5
1785–1809				
King's entourage	10	–	–	10
Viceroy's entourage	4	–	–	4
Second Reign (1809–1824)				
King's entourage	10	4	–	14
Viceroy's entourage	–	1	1	2
Third Reign (1824–1851)				
King's entourage	9	9	–	18
Viceroy's entourage	4	7	3	14
Fourth Reign (1851–1868)				
King's entourage	1	–	5	6
Viceroy's entourage	2	4	–	6
Fifth Reign (1868–1910)				
1868–85				
King's entourage	2	14	3	19
Viceroy's entourage		–	1	1
1885–1910				
King's entourage	1	2	19	22
Viceroy's entourage[b]	–	2	5	7
Total	46	51	37	134[c]

Notes: [a] Palaces located in Thonburi and established during the Thonburi period (1767–1782), included in the original Bangkok mandala.

   [b] Because of the early deaths of the successive viceroys of the Chakri dynasty, a number of viceroys' sons' palaces were established for them by the respective kings. Thus, seven viceroys' sons' palaces are listed as having been established after 1885, following the death of the last viceroy and abolition of his post.

   [c] Not all these palaces survived to 1910.

Sources: Derived from Damrong (1964) and Naengnoi (1991), supplemented by a number of individual princes' commemorative biographies (funeral souvenir volumes).

virtual palace annexes but also by their many elements of internal symbolism associated with the king and viceroy, respectively.

Under the Thai elite's conspicuously polygynous marital norms, the proliferation of princes, each of whom required his own palace upon attaining maturity, intensified space constraints within the citadel over the successive reigns, ultimately leading it to burst its aristocratic bounds. Thus, nineteen out of thirty-two new princely palaces were built outside the citadel in the Third Reign, nine out of twelve in the Fourth Reign, and forty-seven out of forty-eight in the Fifth Reign (Table 1.1). Even with the growing dispersion of palaces and also the establishment of discrete ministry headquarters, however, the city's north-south divide was retained (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). Beyond the declining relevance of the citadel as the aristocratic enclave, the spread of royal residence and ministry headquarters into the noble quarter contributed to the gradual easing of status consciousness that accompanied the opening up of the walled city during the later decades of the nineteenth century. With growing dynastic self-assurance and an increasingly outward-oriented worldview, entry and exit through the city gates was eased for commoners, with the traditional 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. city gate curfew being abolished early in the Fourth Reign. The urban expansion of "metropolitan Bangkok" accelerated in the Fourth and Fifth Reigns with the addition of an outer moat, the Phadung Krung Kasem Canal — again more than doubling the cityscape, to 8.6 square kilometres — and a network of new roadways bounded by rental shophouses and tenements that facilitated the intrusion of commerce and commoners into the walled city. By the 1880s, the emerging Bangkok metropolis including both the west bank and the city's southern riverine extension covered an inexact oval with latitudinal and longitudinal dimensions of some five and ten kilometres, respectively (Thailand, Post and Telegraph Department 1883; Wilson 1989). By the turn of the century, that ovoid urban expanse had come to consist of "a vast agglomeration of villages" some thirty kilometres in circumference (Jottrand 1995, pp. 28, 438; Antonio 1997, pp. 13–30).

Over the course of the Fifth Reign, Old Bangkok's utilitarian, earthly design diverged ever further from its symbolic, celestial template with the substitution of Western imperial grandeur for Eastern cosmic metaphor as the cityscape's defining mystique. The citadel was profoundly reshaped with the decommissioning of the Front Palace, creation of the Great Esplanade (*sanam luang*, a major expansion of the old Cremation Ground), and cut-through of Rachadamnoen Avenue (the King's Promenade) to the new Dusit Palace and its surrounding cluster of princely villas several

MAP 1.4
Bangkok: The king's and viceroy's zones,
1782–1885

MAP 1.5
Bangkok: The post-mandala city, 1910

A	= Grand Palace
B	= Front Palace
C	= Former Grand Palace
D	= Rear Palace
E	= Wat Phra Chetuphon
F	= Wat Mahathat
G	= Wat Chana Songkhram
H	= Wat Bowon Niwet
I	= Wat Suthat
■	= Kings' and sons' palaces
□	= Viceroys' and sons' palaces
▲	= Temples
▨	= Royal Cremation Ground/ Great Esplanade
✕	= City Pillar
✳	= Giant Swing
+	= Spirit shrines
- - -	= Main roadways
▭	= City wall
●●●	= King's zone/viceroy's zone boundary
○	= Ministry headquarters

1. War
2. Interior
3. Foreign Affairs
4. Finance
5. Capital
6. Agriculture
7. Royal Household
8. Justice
9. Education
10. Public Works

● = Other major government facilities

kilometres to the north. Adding to the proliferation of royal residences, various ministries and other government offices were stationed at convenient locations within the walled city, and later without as well, as Western-style public administration replaced the old personalized feudal arrangements. At the same time, Chinese, Western, and Indian business enterprises along with Lao, Malay, Khmer, Vietnamese, and other artisans' and wage workers' neighbourhoods penetrated the Old City in ever-greater numbers. The very idea of Ratanakosin as an elitist stronghold paled with its merger into the greater metropolitan area through the improvement of transport routes, bridging of the City Moat, demolition of the city wall, gates, and bastions, and construction of commoners' housing and marketplaces. The cosmic metaphor of Ratanakosin was thus increasingly attenuated as the greater presence of metropolitan Bangkok gained prominence, until finally, after more than a century of escalating deviation from the celestial archetype, it was laid to rest as obsolete myth. Today, after decades of mounting urban modernization, a newly conceived "Ratanakosin Island conservation movement" seeks quixotically to revive prominent physical features of the nineteenth-century city's royal heritage, introduce new elements to enhance the Old City's imagined historical image, and eliminate non-royal traces considered to be inappropriate intrusions (Chatri 2012, pp. 129–45). After a century-long interval of relentless urban modernization, that anachronistic, misconceived campaign to resurrect as a monarchist monument a selectively refashioned image of the former Ratanakosin cityscape comes as much too little, far too late.

Political Space and Social Place

Simply and cogently stated, "the landscape of Old Bangkok was a visible representation of the structure of society" (Tomosugi 1991, p. 127). As an aerial projection of the Jewel of Indra atop the cosmic cone of Mount Meru, Old Bangkok's political space was a bounded topography of its privileged precincts; correspondingly, its social place was a vertical projection of its people's status hierarchy along the cosmic slopes. Particularly important in the nobility's social positioning for political advantage was their spatial location relative to the king and viceroy, and correspondingly, the commons' location near their noble patrons. The confluence of social status and political rank within the city's physical confines formed "a single architectural-cosmological scheme … in which territorial and functional aspects … [were] incidental and derivative" (Tambiah 1976, pp. 141ff). The vision of political space as a symmetrical plane, expressed primarily through centricity and radiation, meshed with the notion of the feudal lord and his retinue of vassals

and servants as a social unit. The first aspect of Bangkok's spatial symmetry concerned the siting of the city's precincts, wards, quarters, and districts in concentric rings of successively lesser status spreading from the city's sacred centre to its profane outskirts. The second aspect was axiality, direction, and orientation, which referred to the positioning of settlements, villages, and neighbourhoods north and south of the city's ritual core, reaching to its most peripheral upstream and downstream extensions.

It has been said, in reference to the graded radiation of premodern Siam's feudal polity from the sacral centre to the secular periphery, that "Siam has always been a hierarchical domain, differentiated not only by class and status, but by ethno-geography as well" (Thongchai 2000*a*, p. 41). The Bangkok microcosm from the outset conformed to that broad social design. As a miniature likeness of the kingdom, the capital was laid out in a series of concentric zones of habitation radiating from the royal citadel in successively diminishing degrees of eminence: Within, the aristocracy and nobility gathered in the citadel and surrounding walled city. Without, along the urban periphery, the settlements of the lower social strata — freemen, debt bondsmen, war captives, and hereditary slaves of diverse ethnicities. In principle, and to a diminishing degree in practice as time and circumstance eroded the original vision, those valorized inner and outer zones of habitation were reserved for the elite and the commons, respectively. With rare exceptions — those exceptions becoming increasingly less rare as time went by (as later discussion will amplify) — no member of the elite would deign to live without; without special sanction, no commoner household or village would dare settle within.

Complementing the hierarchical radiation of settlements from the sacral centre was their placement above and below the city's lateral axis, running between the king's and viceroy's respective strongholds and thus separating the city's upstream and downstream precincts. Under Siam's feudal institutions, the viceroy maintained a political presence considerably more influential than simply the king's factotum, which was why he was considered virtually the "second sovereign"; he headed an administration which, though of lesser authority than the king's, boasted its own nobility militia, revenue base, and subject population (Englehart 2001, p. 80). Though ranking beneath the king in the formal status hierarchy, he habitually emphasized his equivalent royal spiritual power (*saksit*) and charisma (*barami*) (see the "Thai Yuan" discussion in Chapter 7). He contested often quite blatantly for power (Nidhi 2002), and in so doing, he often exercised virtually independent authority over what he considered his share of the kingdom's peoples and territories. Within Bangkok, his zone of occupation

and control lay to the north of the city's lateral axis, while the king's lay to the south. Not only the palaces of his princely sons and the mansions of his noble subordinates but the many commoner settlements occupying the city's northern outskirts lay within his ambit of authority.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw Bangkok's demographic fulcrum slip downstream with the growing presence of the international market economy. The commercially minded, maritime-oriented districts stretching downriver flourished with the establishment of scores of foreign-invested enterprises — rice mills, sawmills, workshops, shipping firms, agency houses — and the accelerated immigration of wage workers to staff those ventures. That buoyant expansion stood in contrast to the economic stagnation of the city's northern, inland-oriented precincts as the viceroy's power, status, and wealth faded. The viceroy's feudal command over his hinterland client communities withered as the traditional redistributive economy gave way to capitalism, as refugee and captive arrivals declined, as Chinese merchants and tax farmers gained control of the inland markets, as state revenues were centralized increasingly in the hands of the king. With the political eclipse of Siam's last viceroy in 1875, followed by his death a decade later, the city's north-south dualism came to an end, and the remaining vestiges of the former viceroy's political authority were appropriated by the now absolute monarch. More than any other single development, that event signalled the formal end of Siam's feudal order and ultimately marked the onset of Old Bangkok's demise.

Rulers and Ruled

> *Siamese rulers saw their own position as far ahead of, or high above their subjects, those under the shadow of their protection. It is difficult to measure the distance, but the extent of the gap was sufficient to enable the élite to "look back" or "look down" … on their subjects and the marginal minorities, not as They, yet not as We, but perhaps as Theirs* (Thongchai 2000*b*, p. 55).

Much like Old Bangkok's physical design, its political structure and social organization, viewed as an aerial projection of the cosmic social order (Lithai 1985, pp. 494–501), comprised a series of concentric rings of descending power and status spreading from centre (peak) to periphery (base). Beyond Bangkok, the rural hinterlands were inhabited by peasant villages, Thai and non-Thai. Many districts and even entire regions of lesser fertility were settled by ethnic minorities: war captives forcibly carried off to domesticate formerly uninhabitable tracts, refugees from oppression in

neighbouring states granted permission to settle marginal lands under a hospitable regime, indigenous tribal groups relegated to servile subsistence in the remote uplands. Minority communities with special qualifications — warriors, artisans, scholars, merchants, administrators — were invited to establish their settlements close to the capital; a few, exceptionally, even within the walled city itself. Within the city wall, the exclusive residential zones of aristocracy and nobility complemented and confirmed the strictly segregated social strata of feudal Siam. The easing of those spatial constraints as the nineteenth century wore on corresponded, in turn, with the gradual liberalization of the kingdom's social hierarchy.

The Ruling Elite
In their self-justified rule over the lower social strata, Old Bangkok's ruling class saw itself as an organic society of unique merit in the cosmic order, a select upper crust imbued with a sense of immutable political authority, social superiority, and moral righteousness. The gap between the Thai ruling elite and the Thai commons was sufficiently wide that the elite verged on a distinct sub-culture. As of the close of the nineteenth century, it has been observed, the Thai ruling elite, "Regarding themselves subjectively as almost a supra-ethnic or supranational cosmopolitan ruling caste, … lorded it over the Siamese nation-people as colonial masters with a royal Thai face" (Kasian 2001, p. 6, quoted in Harrison and Jackson 2010, p. 14). As in other premodern civilizations both East and West, "the idea that the aristocracy belonged to the same culture as the peasants must have seemed abominable to the former and incomprehensible to the latter" (Eriksen 2010, p. 123). The two social worlds distinguished themselves discernibly in terms of such disparate culture traits as dialect (though collectively Thai), religious conviction and practice (though jointly Theravada Buddhist), gender relations and marriage, sources of income and wealth, diet, dress, and locus and style of habitation. Despite their common ethnicity as "Thai," the social bounds separating elite from commons were strictly observed, and infringements were punished through both judicial sanction and social censure. In sum, the Thai commons (visualized as an ethnic entity in its own right) was dealt with by its masters no differently than the other ethnic constituencies.

The ruling elite comprised the aristocracy (*chaonai*) and nobility (*khunnang*), their heads of household invariably holding titled rank (*yot, bandasak*). Irrespective of personal qualifications, virtually all occupied executive government positions, albeit often no more than pro forma. In theory, the king (abetted by his viceroy) held unfettered power to tax, to

conscript labour, to appoint officials, to reward and punish. In practice, however, he had limited ability to govern at a distance. As a second-best option under those circumstances, it was considered advantageous for him to allow his surrogates broad autonomy (Englehart 2001, pp. 13–14, 33). Was the king therefore "an absolute monarch whose every whim was law" or was he "comparatively helpless" in the clutches of his vassals (Englehart 2001, p. 12)? Both views carry an aura of validity: the king may have exercised "absolute control" within the restricted ambit of court and capital, but he was relatively "helpless" in his reliance on his self-interested minions beyond that. That spatial diffusion of authority speaks directly to the kingdom's feudal political structure.

Beyond the king (the *maharat*), the highest office in the land was held by the viceroy (the *uparat*), conventionally the king's younger brother or eldest son. The intimate association between king and viceroy was symbolically validated in the court's preoccupation with the Ramakien (the Thai Ramayana). That intricately plotted, multi-layered tale of ancient statecraft, valour, and chivalry has as one of its essential themes the bond between Rama ("Phra Ram"), prince of Ayodhya (patronymic of Ayutthaya), and his younger brother, Lakshman ("Phra Lak"). Lakshman's loyalty, devotion, obedience, respect, and deference to Rama were virtues historically associated with the Thai viceroy's fealty to his king (Goss 2008), despite the fact that those ideals were repeatedly sacrificed to the ambitions of Siam's colorful series of viceroys. That fraternal, elder-younger royal pairing animated the Thai cultural (spatial, political, social) theme of dualism — higher-lower, inner-outer, right-left, south-north.

It has been conservatively reckoned that the ruling elite at the Thai capital during the decades before the move from Ayutthaya to Thonburi/Bangkok constituted no more than 2,000 persons out of Siam's total population of perhaps two million (and Ayutthaya's possible 200,000) (Turton 1980, p. 253). Of Bangkok's initial population, it may thus be inferred that about 1,000 (less than 1.5 per cent) constituted the ruling elite as of 1782. That number probably doubled by 1851, and it more than doubled again to reach about 6,000 persons by 1910, reflecting a decline to well below 1 per cent of Bangkok's total inhabitants. (By comparison, no more than 1.7 per cent of China's total population in the late 1800s is said to have belonged to the gentry (Wakeman 1975, p. 22).) The growth of Old Bangkok's ruling elite was slower than that of the capital's overall population growth partly due to the accelerated urban in-migration of commoners (a large share of whom were Chinese) with the easing of feudal constraints on mobility and the city's rising economic opportunities

as the nineteenth century wore on, and partly due to the steady rise in upcountry government postings for the nobility as the kingdom's national integration proceeded.

The ruling elite was ethnically Thai by default; entrants of non-Thai ethnicity automatically became "Thai" by virtue of their enhanced status affiliation and were expected to assimilate fully into elite Thai culture, though that expectation was not always wholly fulfilled. Two principal routes of entry into, as well as rise within, the ruling elite presented themselves: for men, advancement through the ranks of the military or civil service to positions of command; for women, marriage (or concubinage). "In essence, [inter-ethnic relations between the elite and commons] centred upon the … elite's exchange of administrative protection and facility for an income of rents, interest and bribes; it was reinforced by inter-marriage and, ultimately, by … cultural assimilation" (Brown 1988, p. 172). An old Thai saying had it that "women strive upward, men reach down", referring to the use of women as a medium of exchange in the kindred's struggle for upward social mobility (Loos 2005). Attesting to that social convention are multiple documented cases of Mon, Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Cham, Thai Yuan, and Chinese female contributors to the Chakri royal lineage. Even the Chakri dynasty's founders were of mixed Mon-Chinese-Thai ancestry; many of their close collaborators, awarded senior positions in the new regime, were non-Thai; and many of their royal descendants could boast ethnic minority maternal descent. As a result, the ruling elite, traced to its ancestral roots, was actually the kingdom's most ethnically diverse social group (with the possible exception of the Buddhist clergy).

The Commons

The overwhelming preponderance of Siam's population were commoners. Nearly all of those lesser subjects of the crown were subsistence-oriented farmers, whose surplus output was regularly siphoned off to fill the state coffers, support the ruling elite, and sustain the monkhood. However, the commoner presence in Old Bangkok, as at the kingdom's lesser urban centres, constituted a special case, consisting primarily of traders, artisans, military personnel, minor functionaries, and others with specialized skills, as well as staff and servants in the retinues of the ruling elite — all of whom were subjected to relatively lenient rates of taxation and were exempted from corvée service. In particular, the Chinese, Persians, Portuguese, and certain other immigrant-descent groups were technically considered temporary sojourners even after generations of residency and were thus treated as a separate case from the commoner class at large.

Until the abolition of slavery and corvée — a gradual, stepwise process that lasted from 1874 to 1905 — the commons comprised freemen (*phrai*) and slaves (*that* or *kha*), and their dependants, of all ethnicities. (Resident "sojourners" — mainly Chinese, Indian, and Westerners — formed a separate category.) Freemen were divided into two categories: *phrai luang*, serving the king; and *phrai som*, awarded to individual princes or nobles. That division was not as straightforward as it appears: "The varieties [of freemen] were often mutually overlapping and sometimes contradictory.… The categories were ad hoc, locally defined, and coined for administrative convenience" (Englehart 2001, p. 111). Though nominally free, the king's men were bound in periodic service (*rachakan*, commonly translated as corvée) to government departments (*krom*) under the direction of the senior nobility and their provincial subalterns (*nai*) (Akin 1975, p. 105). Those bound to princes or nobles were generally subjected to relatively lenient treatment, making for much slippage between categories. To cope with that issue, a comprehensive procedure of manpower registration, tattooing, and direct oversight was exerted over the king's men, and the individual princes' and nobles' men may in many cases have been similarly controlled. The agrarian commons was thus not far removed from serfdom, leaving reference to *phrai* as "freemen" something of a misnomer (Khachon 1976; Chatchai 1988).

Even more serf-like were the various forms of slavery, which ranged from debt bondsmen and war captives, both technically redeemable (though rarely possessing the resources to purchase their freedom), to non-redeemable slaves (Cruikshank 1975; Turton 1980; Chatchai 1982). Obtained through capture in war or through abduction, purchase, indebtedness, birth, or other means, slaves — Thai as well as other ethnicities — formed a far greater portion of the kingdom's population, and particularly its urban population, than is ordinarily recognized. While the permanent, irredeemable enslavement of war captives (many of them Khmer, Lao, Mon, and Malay) and abducted outlanders (primarily tribals from the frontier uplands) had been a principal source of manpower acquisition in earlier centuries, the preponderance of slaves during the Ratanakosin period appear to have been debt slaves (a status akin to indenture), most of them destitute Thai peasants. "Figures for the proportion of the population with the status of [slaves] are either non-existent or disputed for every period of Thai history. Even approximate orders of magnitude … are difficult to assess, let alone the proportions of different types [or ethnicities] of slave" (Turton 1980, p. 274). Yet, it has been conservatively conjectured that in

the mid-nineteenth century around a quarter of the kingdom's population were slaves, while perhaps nine-tenths of Bangkok's non-Chinese population were slaves (Turton 1980, p. 275).

The position of slaves was generally inferior to that of freemen. By and large, calls on their labour services were more frequent and onerous; rates of in-kind revenue extraction were higher; security of productive land tenure was lower; freedom of movement was more tightly restricted; access to patronage was less readily available and less benevolent. In short, they were generally condemned to a lower standard of living. In addition to their toil as agricultural workers on the royal lands and the private estates of the ruling elite, as conscript labour in the construction and maintenance of pubic works and in military service, and as craftsmen in personal service to their patrons, a privileged minority of slaves were household servants and personal attendants to the ruling elite, forming the major part of many titled officials' retinues at public events. War captives as well as frontier villagers "swept up" (*kwat*) in the course of slave-raiding forays fell under the direct control of the king and viceroy; many groups of those captives were in turn deployed to senior royals and favoured nobles for use on their own estates. And so, a number of captive ethnic minority settlements came to be scattered along the Bangkok periphery. An 1805 decree incorporated war captives into the total mass of redeemable slaves, but there is no evidence that any of those unfortunates ever resorted to (or were able to avail themselves of) that means of regaining their freedom over the subsequent generations.

Throughout Siam, ethnic minorities formed a major part of the commons. They comprised five social categories: refugees from oppression in neighbouring states, war captives from armed conflicts with nearby kingdoms, tribals abducted from the frontier uplands by raiding parties, destitute immigrant labourers from foreign ports, and economic adventurers from near and far. Tribal captives were relegated to the bottom rung of the social pyramid as hereditary slaves; war prisoners were accorded a higher standing within the slave category with the prospect of eventual release to freeman status; and refugees were provided a standing equivalent to, but not within, the Thai freeman population. Both economic adventurers and wage workers from overseas, finally, were held at arms-length, even if resident over several generations. At Bangkok, as throughout the kingdom, that status hierarchy was associated with residential location, with the general pattern of settlement radiating from the city in accordance with declining social standing.

Masters-Minions, Patrons-Clients

Under Siam's feudal regime, the social hierarchy coalesced around a continuing flow of goods and services passing between superiors (*phu yai*, or *nai*) and inferiors (*phu noi*, or *phrai*) — primarily goods and labour flowing upward, protection and privilege down (Akin 1975, pp. 108–13, Akin 1996, pp. 96–114; see also "Feudalism in Comparative Perspective" in the concluding chapter). Those superior-inferior, master-minion ties were embedded in a formal administrative apparatus joining designated officials and their charges in a "relationship [that superficially] resembled that between a medieval lord and his serfs" (Englehart 2001, p. 36). The hierarchy of formal links for each ministry or department (*krom*) ran sequentially from the many villages under its authority up the administrative ladder through village headmen, district chiefs, and provincial functionaries to the central authorities. At each succeeding level, each official had under his supervision a cohort of subordinates who were bound to do his bidding. Whether that mechanism was essentially benevolent or coercive probably differed greatly from case to case and in any event cannot be determined from the scattered anecdotal evidence. Certainly, it was often oppressive, tension-filled, and fragile. However, a persistent impulse runs through Thai historical writings stressing the benevolence of superiors to their inferiors. That is nowhere better expressed than in the standard euphemistic translation of "*nai-phrai*" (superior-inferior, or master-minion) as "patron-client". The dynastic apologists and many later historians defended the system by spinning a fantasy of the happy peasant, the grateful servant, the satisfied slave. Alternative appraisals (e.g., Somsamai 1987; Chaiyan 1994; Chatthip 1999) have been slow in emerging and have generally not been well received.

As formally instituted, hierarchical relations under the *nai-phrai* system were prescribed from the top down, leaving few options open to the *phrai* to negotiate their obligations, change their place in the system, or escape it entirely. Under that arrangement the minority communities, dealing with their masters (*nai*) across ethnic boundaries, stood at a particular disadvantage. Supplementary to the formal *nai-phrai* system, however, was a parallel network of informal, socially embedded patron-client relations, a system featuring interpersonal bonds built on close association and mutual consent (Akin 1975, pp. 114–16). "Unlike feudal relations of lord to vassal [the link] between patron and client is voluntary and may be terminated unilaterally by either party" (Hanks 1975, p. 199). The informal patron-client system, based on universal social principles of reciprocity, mutuality, and trust, mitigated the authoritarian, coercive, oppressive inclination of

the formal *nai-phrai* system. It is only after the unravelling of the feudal "social contract" between rulers and ruled in the closing decades of the Ratanakosin period that informal patron-client relations rose to dominance as a social institution. In hindsight, students of Thai social history have sown much confusion through their unwarranted conflation of the two systems, one formal, the other informal; one centrist, the other localized; one administrative, the other communal; one authoritarian, the other consensual.

The informal patron-client system was, and continues to be, built on "connections" (*sen*). It was initially nurtured by the inadequacies of the formal *nai-phrai* system in meeting the commons' basic needs. Its chains of informal social links, coalescing into entourages, alliances, factions, and "circles of affiliation" within which benevolence and self-interest merge seamlessly, remain a pervasive presence in Thai social and political life (Hanks 1975, pp. 200–207). Major patrons in local patron-client networks today continue to include such community leaders as village headmen, landowners, employers, moneylenders, temple abbots, and village toughs and political bosses (*nakleng*, *chao pho*, *tua hia*, etc.) (Akin 1978). Not well attuned or sympathetic to the impersonal efficiencies of the market system, Thai society continues to rely on such socially embedded relations in daily life as a conventional means of smoothing business transactions, gaining political favour, ensuring preferential treatment, claiming protection, and the like, a lingering vestige of an earlier era.

Ethnic Minorities

There [on Bangkok's rickety trams] will be found sitting together yellow robed Siamese monks, long bearded Arabs, sarong clad Malays, voluble Chinese …, dark-skinned Tamils, Burmese, Mon, the panung-clad Thai and members of a host of other races [including the occasional starched-shirted, ruddy-faced, heavily sweating European gentleman] (Seidenfaden 1927, p. 35).

Bangkok's vibrant multi-ethnic street scene in the early twentieth century was not simply the exotic sideshow of harmonious coexistence that the abovementioned imaginative rendering of the port-city's comings and goings seeks to convey, but lay at the very heart of the city's social and political dynamics. The ethnic diversity infusing the capital's everyday existence enlivened the evolving synergy between indigenous Siam and the encroaching cosmopolitan world well into the era of the nation-state, but the Thai effort to accommodate the West was not its essential driving force. It has been suggested that "alongside the colonial enterprise, the

Siamese rulers had an equivalent project of their own, concerning their own subjects, a project which reaffirmed their superiority, hence justifying their rule…. It was a project on the 'Others Within'" (Thongchai 2000*a*, p. 41). In fact, Siam's policy toward ethnic pluralism, on open display in Bangkok, differed from the coercive Western colonial model in its benign impact on the ethnic minorities (see "The Port-City's Plural Society" in the concluding chapter). Unlike the Western colonial establishment, the Thai ruling elite over the course of the first five Chakri reigns pursued a strategy of indirect rule over Bangkok's ethnic minorities, a feudal practice that did not systematically intrude upon or discriminate among the respective ethnic communities and thus had far fewer and far less disruptive implications for the capital's minorities than was the case in the neighbouring Western-ruled colonies. Some of the vital aspects of that policy frame and its urban implications are examined below.

Some Demographics

Who were Siam's and Bangkok's ethnic minorities, and how prominent a place did they occupy in the kingdom and its capital? The norm of population estimates from late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century Siam — at that time a loosely defined amalgam of central state, provincial hinterlands, and peripheral dependencies — rose from about three million to some six million inhabitants (Sternstein 1984, p. 45, fig. 1; Grabowsky 1996, p. 75). Within that rising total, the many non-Thai ethnic groups settled in central Siam may well have collectively equalled, or possibly even exceeded, the number of self-styled Thai (Lieberman 2003, vol. 1, p. 319). Broadly speaking, the ethnically Thai peasantry was concentrated in the highly productive wet-rice floodplain of the lower Chaophraya River basin, while Chinese merchant communities were concentrated in the market centres. Large elements of the other major ethnic minorities were settled along the lower-yielding periphery of the kingdom's agrarian heartland. In the kingdom's outer regions — the north, northeast, south, and southeast, as well as the western highlands — non-Thai ethnic groups significantly exceeded the Thai. Thus, within the kingdom as a whole, only a plurality of the population consisted of ethnic Thai. To gain an impression of the kingdom's changing ethnic composition over the course of the Ratanakosin period it is useful to review the sequence of contemporary population estimates (Table 1.2). Those estimates are highly variable, but the overall trend shows a fairly steady rate of increase from less than three million as of 1782 to a benchmark figure of eight million

TABLE 1.2
Population of Siam, by ethnic group, 1822–1904
(contemporary estimates, in thousands)

Year	Source	Thai	Lao	Chinese	Malay	Khmer	Mon	Karen	Other	Total
1822	Crawfurd	4,200	...	700	15	50	42	...	...	5,007
1835	Roberts	1,600	1,200	500	320	...	...	...	...	3,620
1839	Malcolm	1,500	800	450	195	...	...	...	...	2,945
1854	Pallegoix	1,900	1,000	1,500	1,000	500	50	50	...	6,000
1864	Mouhot	2,000	1,000	1,500	1,000	350	50	...	...	5,900
1885a	de Rosny	1,600	1,000	1,500	1,000	600	40	160	...	5,900
1885b	de Rosny	3,500	1,000	1,520	1,200	620	40	35	...	7,915
1890	Rautier	3,000	1,300	3,000	1,000	1,000	...	400	...	9,700
1899	v. Hesse-	3,000	1,500	3,000	1,000	1,000	...	500	...	10,000
1901	Aymonier	3,000	1,000	2,000	1,000	800	100	100	...	8,000
1903	Little	1,700	2,000	700	600	...	...	...	...	5,000
1904	Lunet ...	1,766	1,354	523	753	490	130	130	51	5,197

Source: Grabowsky 1996, p. 75 (source citations listed in Grabowsky 1996, pp. 84–85).

for 1910 (Sternstein 1984, p. 45, Fig. 1), with the ethnic Thai component slipping, percentage-wise, from about half the total to around a third over that thirteen-decade time frame.

As a microcosm of the Siamese kingdom, Old Bangkok could well be described as a city dominated by non-Thai ethnic minorities, ruled by a tiny Thai ruling class. The city's colourful reputation rested heavily on its diverse assortment of Chinese, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Malay, Cham, South and West Asian, Vietnamese, Burmese, and indigenized Portuguese communities, plus a sprinkling of Western expatriate newcomers. (Chapters 2 through 7 provide individual ethnohistories of a number of those Old Bangkok ethnic minorities.) The Chinese, by far the largest of those minorities, were themselves composed of five cultural sub-species: Taechiu, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, and Cantonese. The small Western community could similarly be divided among its oft-contentious ethno-national constituencies, led by the British, French, Germans, and Americans. Less well defined was a category termed "*khaek*", consisting mainly of South, West, and Southeast Asian Muslims (though the term *khaek* was extended "racially" to include, indiscriminately, South Asian Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians). Despite their shared religion, Bangkok's nineteenth-century Muslims were of diverse language, sect, custom, and origin, ranging from Arab, Persian, and Indian traders to Malay and Cham war captives and more recently arrived bonded labour from the troubled colonial empires of British India and the Netherlands Indies. Similar complexities governed the classification of other ethnic constituencies. What is clear is that Bangkok's various ethnic minorities did not interact easily; they coexisted in the port-city severally as discrete client communities under the patronage of the Thai ruling elite, each being allowed internal administrative autonomy in return for guarantees of political tranquility and economic cooperation. Old Bangkok was thus very much a plural society.

Within Bangkok, as for Siam as a whole, the ethnic minorities collectively far outnumbered the ethnic Thai. Contemporary estimates of the capital's population vary widely, due in large part to observers' widely differing conceptions of the territorial extent of the Bangkok conurbation (as distinct from Ratanakosin, the walled and moated inner city); a comprehensive review of fifty-nine contemporary estimates of "built-up" Bangkok's 1780–1900 population rises from 75,000 to 800,000 (Sternstein 1984, pp. 43–45, ft. 4). Those figures suggest a remarkable more-than-doubling in Bangkok's share of the kingdom's population over the course of the Ratanakosin period. As late as 1908, however, it could still be reliably reported that "no satisfactory official census has yet been taken in Bangkok, and it is difficult to estimate,

even approximately, what the population may be" (Wright and Breakspeare 1908, p. 248). Despite those cautionary words, it is possible to hazard some broad estimates of Old Bangkok's evolving population and ethnic composition. (The estimates provided here refer to the built-up, relatively densely populated urban-village area of Bangkok-Thonburi, covering both sides of the river.) Tables 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 present such estimates for the start, midpoint, and close of the Ratanakosin period. However, be warned! In the absence of firm census or survey data, those figures are no more than best-fit approximations. Their rounding to thousands or higher orders of magnitude is meant to suggest as much; such rounding also avoids the spurious accuracy intimated by the common practice of presenting patently inexact figures down to the single digit.

Development Phases

Irrespective of the uncertainties clouding the evolving magnitude and composition of Old Bangkok's multi-ethnic population, it is evident that the city's many minority communities constituted a lively panoply of individual villages (*ban*, *bang*), settlements (*nikhom*), communes (*tambon*), neighbourhoods (*chumchon*), and districts (*yan*). Together, in the shadow of the city's many palaces, mansions, temples, and marketplaces, and later its proliferating numbers of shophouses, government offices, and entertainment locales, they set the tone and character of Bangkok's social and economic life. Bangkok's urban agglomeration grew throughout the Ratanakosin period as a dispersion of ethnic clusters radiating outward from the royal citadel, strung north-south along the river and east-west along its major side-channels and feeder canals, and later along its growing grid of carriageways. Maps 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8 identify the evolving distribution of those minority settlements over three successive phases: (a) the recovery from Ayutthaya's destruction during the brief Thonburi period (1767–1782); (b) Bangkok's establishment and expansion over the first three Chakri reigns (1782–1851); and (c) the capital's accelerated growth and incipient modernization through the fourth and fifth Chakri reigns (1851–1910). Though an oversimplification, it may be said for heuristic purposes that in their ethnic make-up the first phase was marked by Ayutthaya refugees, the second was identified with war captives, and the third was characterized by economic adventurers and wage workers.

The first phase (1767–1782), spurred initially by an inflow of Ayutthaya refugees of diverse ethnicity (Map 1.6), saw the start of a sustained revival of the Siamese kingdom. A scattering of Mon, South Asian, indigenized Portuguese, and Hokkien Chinese settlements had since the late Ayutthaya

TABLE 1.3
Bangkok population: Major ethnic constituencies, 1782, 1851, 1910
(approximations)

Major ethnic constituencies	1782	%	1851	%	1910	%
Thai	20,000	26.7	75,000	25.0	240,000	30.0
Chinese	25,000	33.3	150,000	50.0	400,000	50.0
Other	30,000	40.0	75,000	35.0	160,000	20.0
Totals	75,000	100.0	300,000	100.0	800,000	100.0

Sources: Author's approximations, based on Skinner (1957); Sternstein (1982); Sternstein (1984); and the various other sources cited in Chapters 2–7.

TABLE 1.4
Bangkok population: Chinese speech groups, 1782, 1851, 1910 (approximations)

| Chinese speech groups	1782	%	1851	%	1910	%
Taechiu	15,000	60.0	110,000	73.3	240,000	60.0
Hokkien	8,000	32.0	20,000	13.3	60,000	15.0
Hakka	…	…	8,000	5.3	40,000	10.0
Hainanese	…	…	8,000	5.3	40,000	10.0
Cantonese	2,000	8.0	4,000	2.7	20,000	5.0
Total Chinese	25,000	100.0	150,000	100.0	400,000	100.0

Sources: Author's approximations, based on Skinner (1957) and the other sources cited in Chapter 6.

TABLE 1.5
Bangkok population: Non-Chinese ethnic minorities, 1782, 1851, 1910
(approximations)

Ethnic minorities	1782	%	1851	%	1910	%
Mon	8,000	26.7	15,000	20.0	30,000	18.7
Lao	6,000	20.0	18,000	24.0	30,000	18.7
Malay	5,000	16.7	15,000	20.0	32,000	20.0
Cham	3,000	10.0	8,000	10.7	12,000	7.5
Persian	3,000	10.0	4,000	5.3	8,000	5.0
Arab	1,000	3.3	2,000	2.7	3,000	1.9
Indian	…	…	3,000	4.0	15,000	9.4
Indonesian	…	…	1,000	1.3	5,000	3.1
Portuguese	2,000	6.7	3,000	4.0	6,000	3.8
Khmer	2,000	6.7	6,000	8.0	10,000	6.3
Vietnamese	…	…	…	…	7,000	4.4
Westerners	…	…	…	…	2,000	1.3
Totals	30,000	100.0	75,000	100.0	160,000	100.0

*Sources*: Author's approximations, based on Tomlin (1831); Crawfurd (1967); Pallegoix (2000); and the various other sources cited in Chapters 2–7.

MAP 1.6
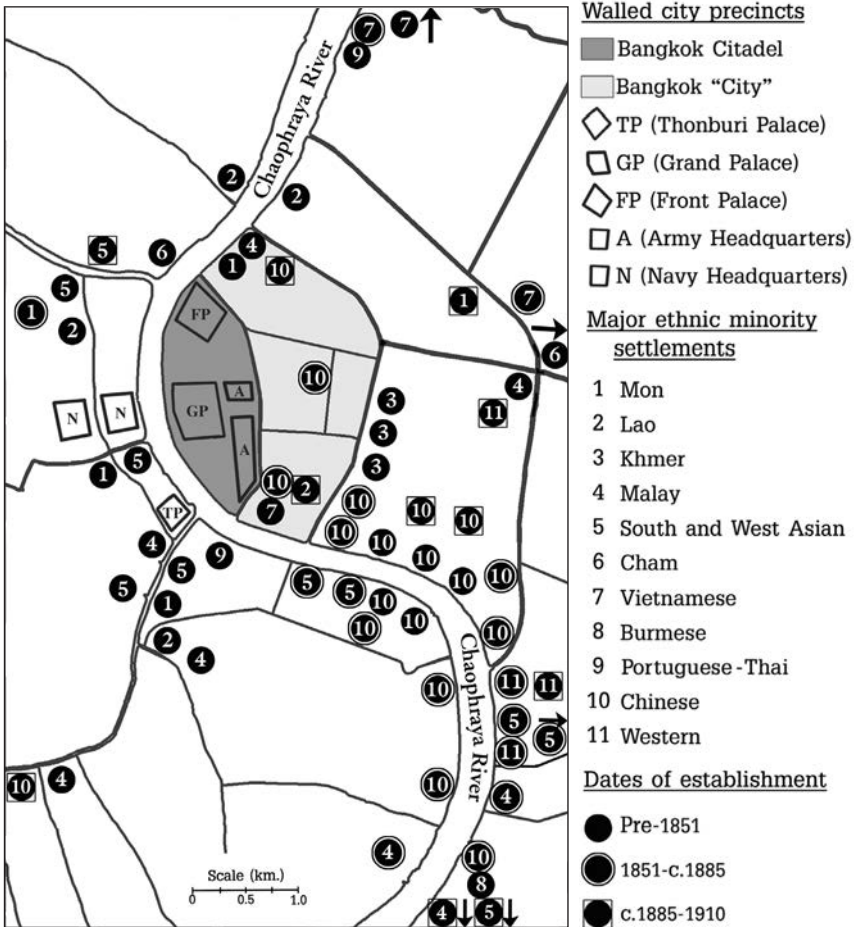**Thonburi: Notable ethnic minority settlements, 1767–1782**
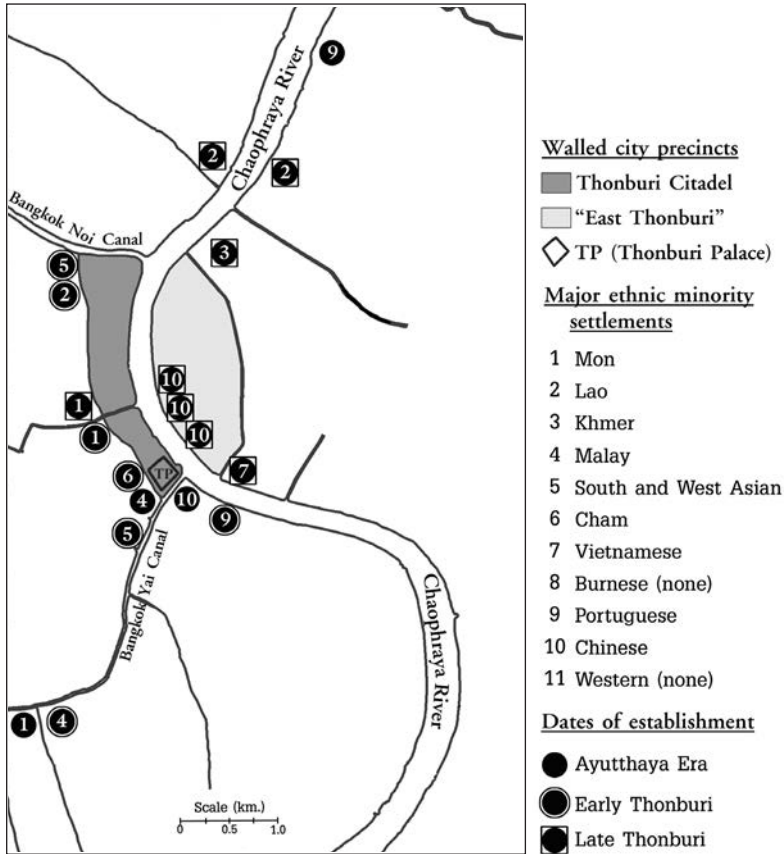
era dappled the banks of the lower Chaophraya River and its offshoot Bangkok Yai Canal in the vicinity of the Thonburi fort and customs post (later rebuilt as the Thonburi Grand Palace). In the months and years immediately following the 1767 fall of Ayutthaya, a straggle of new communities arrived at Thonburi in response to King Taksin's efforts to populate his stronghold with the surviving remnants of Ayutthaya's population. The Thonburi citadel was quickly filled with the residential compounds of the old Thai elite who had managed to survive the slaughter, avoid Burmese captivity, and return from their hinterlands dispersal. The early years of Taksin's reign also witnessed the establishment of a ring of Mon, Malay, Persian, Arab, Cham, Lao, Portuguese, and Chinese refugee

MAP 1.7
Bangkok: Notable ethnic minority settlements, 1782–1851
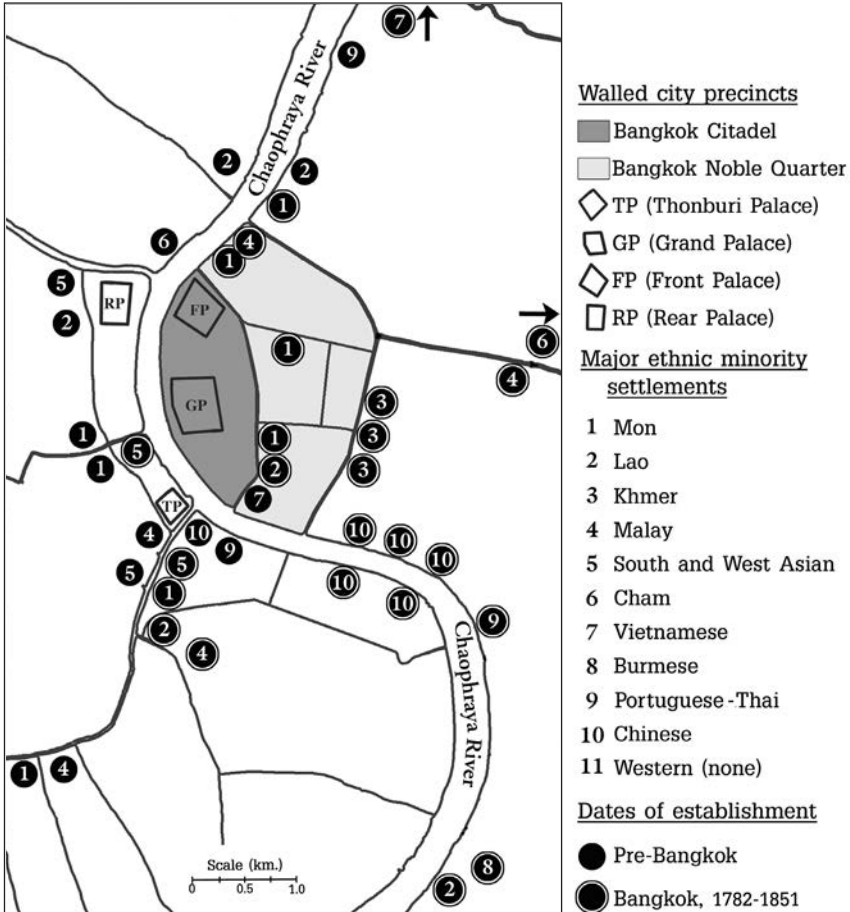
settlements along the outer edge of the Thonburi citadel. Over the ensuing years, Taksin's continuing policy of strengthening Thonburi's military and mercantile position turned to the gathering of immigrants from further afield. A substantial number of Chinese settlers were recruited from Siam's eastern seaboard provinces and from Taksin's ancestral Taechiu homeland; they were provided a privileged residential tract directly across the river from the Thonburi citadel. Additional convoys of fugitives from civil war in southern Vietnam were afforded sanctuary at a site directly downstream. In the closing years of the reign, arriving contingents of Khmer and Lao

MAP 1.8
Bangkok: Notable ethnic minority settlements, 1851–1910

Walled city precincts
- ▨ Bangkok Citadel
- ▢ Bangkok "City"
- ◇ TP (Thonburi Palace)
- ⬦ GP (Grand Palace)
- ◇ FP (Front Palace)
- □ A (Army Headquarters)
- □ N (Navy Headquarters)

Major ethnic minority
   settlements
1 Mon
2 Lao
3 Khmer
4 Malay
5 South and West Asian
6 Cham
7 Vietnamese
8 Burmese
9 Portuguese-Thai
10 Chinese
11 Western

Dates of establishment
- ● Pre-1851
- ◉ 1851-c.1885
- ⬤ c.1885-1910

war captives were provided settlement sites directly cross-river and upriver from the Thonburi citadel. By the close of the Thonburi reign, the capital boasted perhaps 75,000 inhabitants, containing elements of over twelve ethnic minorities.

Over the course of the second phase (1782–1851), after the capital's cross-river relocation and territorial extension, the number of minority settlements scattered about the Bangkok periphery grew rapidly (Map 1.7). Immediately after the 1782 decision to move the citadel to the east bank, the Chinese settlement occupying that precinct was evicted, to be re-established

several kilometres downstream along the Sampheng waterfront. That new downriver Chinese presence quickly coalesced into Bangkok's main commercial anchorage and bazaar. In addition, soon after the new capital's founding, the residential compounds of several ranking Mon and Malay leaders and the associated dwellings of their entourages were established within the city's noble precincts. On the other hand, with the departure of the Cambodian refugee elite settlement formerly situated within the city wall back to their homeland, the associated Khmer commoner village was relocated to a less eminent site without. Growth of the established Mon, Indian, Persian, Cham, Portuguese, and Chinese communities prompted the hiving off of a number of settlements toward the urban fringe. In addition, a cordon of new settlements of freshly arrived Lao, Malay, and Cham war captives materialized along the urban outskirts during the first and second Chakri reigns. The process of relocating war captives to Siam's agrarian hinterlands, and their leaderships to the Bangkok outskirts, culminated during the Third Reign. First, the Lao war (the so-called Chao Anu Rebellion) of 1827–1828; second, the extended Vietnamese/Cambodian conflict of 1831–1845; and third, the Patani campaigns of 1832 and 1838 gained Siam a multitude of Lao, Khmer, Cham, Vietnamese, and Malay war captives, with contingents of their elites and leading artisans being diverted to the Bangkok periphery.

Throughout the third phase (1851–1910), the city's ethnic diversity evolved along liberalized lines and at an accelerated pace (Map 1.8). Siam's negotiation in 1855 of a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Great Britain (the Bowring Treaty), followed by a series of virtually identical treaties with other Western powers, opened Bangkok to free trade and extraterritorial privileges for resident Western nationals and their Asian subjects. Although the privileged position of the Chinese merchants who had formerly handled the royal monopoly trade was thereby destroyed, the anticipated decline in the China trade did not occur. Instead, Chinese participation in Bangkok's export economy continued to expand, in tandem with the Western commercial incursion. With the trade boom, the city's cosmopolitan population increased rapidly, along with the formation of new Chinese, South Asian, and Western "sojourner" neighbourhoods, inhabited predominantly by hardworking, savings-focused, self-employed, ethnically differentiated entrepreneurs. At the same time, the hardening of Siam's land borders in the face of encroaching Western imperialism ended the influx of refugees, war captives, and abducted slaves from adjacent states and the peripheral uplands, strangling the cultural vigour of Bangkok's Lao, Khmer, and other inland-oriented settlements. The changing demographic balance

between hinterlands manpower sources and market-oriented overseas immigrants caused the weight of Bangkok's non-Thai population to drift downriver. Furthermore, with the relaxation of residential constraints and upgrading of the urban infrastructure, the walled city's noble precincts — now generally referred to by the Western community as the "City" — were invaded by bourgeois neighbourhoods of Chinese, South Asian, and Western shopkeepers, artisans, and professionals. Through all that, however, the Bangkok citadel remained a Thai royal ceremonial centre and residential enclave until the closing decades of the Fifth Reign and continued even thereafter to resist non-aristocratic intrusion.

The Politics of Diversity

"Not only was [the] profusion of ethnicities not a problem in the old system, kings positively gloried in it" (Englehart 2001, p. 50). Bangkok's ethnic diversity advertised the kingdom's vitality. It spoke to the ruling elite's success in resolving the traditional manpower problem. Locating the leadership of Siam's various ethnic minorities at the centre of power, furthermore, facilitated the rulers' control and patronage of the minorities while providing for their self-representation and the effective negotiation of their concerns.

For purposes of administrative expediency, the Siamese feudal state customarily allowed its respective ethnic minorities a high degree of internal autonomy, or self-governance (though — with some exceptions, particularly the "sojourner" communities — they were not thereby absolved of their contributions to the state's periodic tax or corvée levies). That political strategy, strikingly evident in Old Bangkok, links with the broader proposition that "Bangkok's political structure was 'segmentary' rather than functionally differentiated and organically unified" (Chaiyan 1994, pp. 4–5). It bespoke the rulers' purposeful "benign neglect" of their minority communities, a policy that persisted until the major government reforms of the 1890s. Under premodern Siam's feudal policy of indirect rule, the minority communities were allowed to govern their internal affairs under the administration of their own leaders, who were in affirmation thereof awarded senior positions in the nobility — typically at the rank of *phraya*, roughly equivalent to army colonel, departmental director-general, or provincial governor. Those officials represented their constituencies at court, dealing directly with the state ministers on behalf of their ethnic communities both within the capital and far beyond, extending to the kingdom's very frontiers. For instance, Chaophraya Mahayotha, head of Siam's Mon community, served as intermediary for the many Mon settlements of the

Meklong River basin and the Kanchanaburi upland districts reaching to
the Burmese border; the Vientiane princes residing along Bangkok's Bang
Yi-khan riverfront represented the Lao population centre at Saraburi and
the many Lao-peopled districts scattered across the Siamese northeast;
Phraya Chula Rachamontri, head of the Persian community, served as
putative interlocutor for the various Muslim minorities concentrated at
Bangkok and its hinterlands as well as Siam's deep south; and Phraya
Chodoek Rachasethi held responsibility for the Chinese-populated districts
at Bangkok and also served as liaison with other Chinese population centres
throughout the kingdom. Under that arrangement, the respective ethnic
group leaders were responsible for maintaining their communities' internal
law and order as well as ensuring their compliance with tax impositions
in addition to periodic manpower levies for military campaigns, public
works projects, state ceremonies, and the like. Many of their daughters
were married off into the highest echelons of the ruling elite, ensuring
the political integration of their kindreds, and more broadly their ethnic
constituencies, into the Siamese state.

Bangkok's minority communities were assigned settlement sites near
to or distant from the city centre not so much in keeping with ethnic
considerations per se as in correspondence with their political ranking, social
status, and occupational skills. First, a ring of leading refugee settlements
(Mon, Portuguese, Cham, Persian, Vietnamese, and Hokkien) occupied
preferred sites directly adjacent to the Thonburi and Bangkok citadels.
Second, ranking settlements of war captives (Lao, Khmer, Malay, and Cham)
were situated along the outer periphery of the Thonburi and Bangkok city
precincts. Third, a string of "sojourner" settlements (Chinese, South Asian,
and Western) stretched along the river well downstream from the walled
city. And lastly, small settlements of hereditary slaves (Karen, Khmu, and
other nondescript "tribals") were relegated to the more distant hinterlands,
though small groups were assigned to menial service in individual elite
households and some of the city's royal temples.

That concentric pattern of ethnic dispersion along the Bangkok periphery
was closely paralleled by the dispersal of occupational specializations. In its
original conception, Thonburi had been intended specifically to function
as a military strongpoint, and early Bangkok continued that emphasis. The
river, moats, walls, bastions, and surrounding armed camps all combined to
serve as defensive works for the royal redoubt (Naengnoi 1991, pp. 18–25).
Surrounding the growing citadel, ethnic minority militias were assigned to
serve as the backbone of Bangkok's defences: Mon gunners and marines
were assigned to the fortifications downstream from the capital, and Mon

land forces upstream; the Portuguese and Vietnamese provided artillery battalions; the Cham manned the freshwater navy; Lao, Khmer, and Malay contingents contributed musketry, sapper, elephantry, and other specialized combat units. Thai infantry cohorts, supported by foot soldiers drawn from other ethnic constituencies comprising the bulk of the army, were conscripted from peasant villages scattered far and wide about the Siamese countryside (Battye 1974, pp. 1–63; Snit and Breazeale 1988, pp. 125–26). The loyalty of that military assemblage in warfare was ensured by the dependants left behind in their villages.

As artisans, Bangkok's ethnic minority communities ensured their economic viability by differentiating their occupational skills and products. The Mon were known for brick- and pottery-making; the Khmer were adept at producing ritual paraphernalia such as monks' alms bowls and funerary fireworks, as well as dance masks, costumes, and musical instruments for pubic entertainments in which they performed; the Lao were master boat-builders and woodworkers; the Cham were expert silk weavers; the Portuguese served the crown as gunsmiths, ships' chandlers, compradors, and interpreters; the Vietnamese were talented in the decorative arts of stained-glass, niello, mother-of-pearl, and lacquerware; some of the Malays were skilled as boatmen and pilots, and others as gold and silver jewellers. Many of those craftsmen had been brought to Bangkok in the first place specifically to serve in the Royal Artisans Department (*krom chang sip mu*) (Phromphong 2004).

Trade and maritime transport, supported by a broad range of mercantile services, were the traditional specialties of the Chinese and South Asian communities. Over the course of the early Chakri reigns and culminating in the Fourth Reign their mercantile influence spread inexorably beyond the city wall to the riparian districts of Sampheng, Khlong San, and Bang Rak. Later they were joined by an assortment of Western firms reaching downstream to the Yan Nawa and Bang Ko Laem districts. The shoreline downstream from the city came to be pockmarked initially with their lime kilns and then with their rice mills, sawmills, dockyards, and warehouses.

Lastly, along the outermost urban periphery, the ethnic minorities cleared tracts for market gardens, fruit orchards, piggeries and poultry runs, livestock pasturelands, freshwater fisheries, and charcoal smoulderies to satisfy the city dwellers' daily demand for fresh produce and cooking fuel. The dominant presence of ethnic minority hawkers and shopkeepers in the city's many strategically placed land- and water-based farmers' markets reflects their enthusiastic participation in the urban-oriented agrarian trades, reaching from production to consumption, while Thai peasants, most of

them located further from the city and specializing in wet-rice cultivation, shared less interest in exploring the economic opportunities presented by Bangkok's growing consumer market.

From Old Bangkok to New

Ethnicity serves as the womb in which a putative nationality slumbers until some societal impetus causes it to be awakened. It would assist the study of nationalism if it could be ascertained what precisely those societal impulses are, and to determine at which exact point in time or development it is possible to speak of nationality instead of ethnicity (Spira, 2004, p. 263).

The Law of Entropy

In physics, entropy denotes the inexorable, systematic degradation of cosmic matter and energy to an ultimate state of inert uniformity. In the social sciences, it refers to the ineluctable, cumulative intensification of societal complexity from an initial state of systemic order toward an ultimate state of chaos. Linking those two quite dissimilar physical and social principles, a free-thinking physicist has averred that "entropy inevitably disrupts mankind's best-laid plans" (West 2011). Entropy lay at the very heart of Old Bangkok's evolution over the course of the nineteenth century, culminating in the increasingly densely populated and ethnically variegated city's physical, political, and social transformation over the turn of the twentieth century and beyond. Bangkok had been conceived in accordance with a clear and consistent vision of its place in the cosmic order, expressed as a body of primordial propositions that were thought to ensure the city's propitious destiny. As the city grew in physical scale, demographic density, social intricacy, economic sophistication, and cultural vitality, however, it became increasingly difficult to adhere to that primeval design, and in the rush to prosperity as the nineteenth century wore on, the original vision faded and was eventually forgotten. The result was growing urban disorder, disorganization, and systemic dissonance.

Successive reigns witnessed the progressive deviation of Bangkok's urban design from its ideal symmetry under the influence of accelerating social change. With that, the myth of Ratanakosin as a sacred city reserved for the habitation of "deities" inevitably vaporized. Increasingly, the outward-oriented pressure of residential crowding at the centre complemented the inward pull of commercial opportunity to override the ritual concerns for cosmic conformity and the political concerns for dynastic legitimacy in the shaping of the Bangkok cityscape. Within the walled city, the cumulative

spread of palaces beyond the confines of the citadel corroded the original conception of a capital spatially stratified between royal and noble zones of occupation (Map 1.4). Under the practice of unfettered royal polygyny, the multi-generational households of the successive Chakri kings and viceroys grew exponentially. As each of the successive rulers' many adult sons formed their own households, growing pressure on the available terrain encouraged the construction of twenty-five palaces outside the citadel bounds by the end of the Third Reign and eighty-eight by the end of the Fifth. Though outside the citadel, nearly all those palaces continued to be sited in conformity with the south-north dualism of the king's and viceroy's respective zones of occupation and control (Map 1.4). An analogous tendency to overcrowding and resultant expansion beyond the city wall arose in the precincts populated by the city's similarly polygynous nobility.

Adding to the walled city's rising density over the successive reigns was the emergence of a number of commoners' settlements in the interstices between the elite's residential tracts. Select coteries of both Thai and non-Thai slaves and freemen had from the start formed a substratum of servants, staff, and other subordinates nested within the sprawling residential compounds of the city's elite. Added to that initial presence, constraints on access to the walled city eased during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns with the relaxation of curfew, residency, and landholding regulations, construction of metalled roads and sturdy bridges, drainage of remaining waterlogged tracts, and introduction of rental shophouses and tenements. Increasingly, prosperity, changing fashions, and the accompanying demand for new luxury goods and specialized services induced an influx of artisans' workshops, shopfronts, and peddlers along the walled city's streets and alleys, waterways and crossings. With them appeared a number of new commercial neighbourhoods and marketplaces (Tomosugi 1993, pp. 13–15; Prani 2002). Under those swelling impulses, the city wall and moat were gradually reduced to a vaguely emblematic social boundary in the mind of the Thai elite; to many commoners they came to be seen as a threshold into a world of economic opportunity. Those evolving circumstances wore the aristocratic mystique of Ratanakosin increasingly thin, and the memory of the walled city's sacral configuration as a replica of Indra's heaven melted away.

That entropic decline of the Bangkok mandala was complemented by rising dissatisfaction with the spiritual potency and metaphorical applicability of Brahman cosmography as the kingdom's elite sought to accommodate the intellectual challenge of Western scientific rationalism (Reynolds 2006b, pp. 171–80). Spearheaded by the efforts of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and his minions to liberate Buddhism from the Brahman

mythos, the metaphysical trappings of Bangkok's spatial symmetry were systematically deconstructed. In the process, and in line with the Chakri dynasty's consistent Buddhist fundamentalism, the influential role of the Brahman adepts at the Thai court was gradually marginalized while the place of Buddhist ritual in royal ceremony was brought to the fore (Tambiah 1976, pp. 227–28). All that goes far toward explaining why the king's closest confederates in the revisionist enterprise omitted reference to Bangkok's celestial template from their compilation of the dynastic chronicles.

Dismantling Ratanakosin
The Fifth Reign residential spread of Bangkok's ruling elite beyond the crowded confines of the walled city, combined with the commons' penetration into the inner city's emerging commercial neighbourhoods, proceeded relentlessly, to the point where the physical integrity of Bangkok's inner precincts became seriously compromised. Bangkok's first postal directory (Thailand, Post and Telegraph Department 1883) illustrates the issue in its formative stage. The four-volume register of mailing addresses was compiled to accommodate the spatial distribution of the capital's social order. The first volume lists the addresses of Bangkok's royalty and senior nobility (covering the walled city), while the subsequent three volumes list the addresses of the commoners residing at successive degrees of distance from the centre — the inner, built-up precincts featuring streets and lanes while the outer suburbs are identified in terms of villages and other residential nodes along the river, transport canals, and irrigation, drainage, and boundary ditches. But the physical realities refused to comport precisely with the social status presumption, as substantial numbers of officials had already by the 1880s moved beyond the city wall, and many commoners' residences were already listed within. The spatial mingling of the major social strata had thus by the early 1880s already proceeded to a point preventing any definitive linking of the walled city with the ruling elite.

Relations between the successive Chakri kings and viceroys, and thus between the city's southern and northern zones, had often been strained. Early in the Fifth Reign they reached the breaking point with an armed confrontation that proved disastrous for the viceroy (Mead 2004, pp. 60–64). His defeat culminated in his political eclipse and set King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) on the path to monarchist absolutism. The discredited viceroy's death in 1885 provided the king with a unique opportunity to abolish the ancient viceregal office and dissolve the power base it represented. The Front Palace was abandoned as a royal residence; by 1898 it had been reduced by over half its former expanse to make way for the creation of the Great Esplanade (*sanam luang*) (Map 1.5). The viceroy's signature temples (Wat

Mahathat, Wat Chana Songkhram, Wat Phra Kaew Wang Na) were also reduced in size and standing. Similarly, the princely palaces within the Front Palace zone, left vulnerable following the loss of their chief source of support and security, declined in number over the ensuing years as they reverted to the crown with the death or eviction of their occupants (Maps 1.4 and 1.5). The Front Palace nobility and lesser staff were reassigned, many to minor postings upcountry within the reorganized state bureaucracy. With that restructuring, the division of the city between the king's and viceroy's respective zones of occupation and control came to an end.

Just as the divide between the king's and viceroy's south-north zones was eliminated, so was the east-west demarcation between the city's royal and noble precincts progressively obscured. Of the 134 palaces built over the course of the first five Chakri reigns (Table 1.1), only fifty were still serving in that capacity as of 1910, and only half of those were located within the walled city (Map 1.5). That dispersal of royal residence was accompanied by the scattering of seats of ministerial power. The Western custom of separation of place of work from place of residence in government service was introduced to Bangkok in the early 1880s and was institutionalized over the following decade. The procedure of converting old palaces to ministry headquarters and affiliated offices proved both a convenient and cost-effective means of housing the modern bureaucracy. By 1910 four of Siam's ten ministries as well as many subsidiary departments were quartered in such converted premises outside the citadel (the other six ministries were still situated within the citadel) (Map 1.5). That dispersion of the administrative apparatus quickened in subsequent years, first beyond the citadel and then further, beyond the city wall.

Over the course of his forty-two-year reign, King Chulalongkorn became increasingly engaged in the kingdom's modernization, or "civilizing process" (*kabuan kansiwilai*), through the adoption and adaptation of selective attributes of Western culture (Thongchai 2000*b*). In his effort to cope with the menace of Western imperialism he came to envisage the kingdom's political salvation in nineteenth-century European terms, within the context of royal authoritarianism. A major step in his campaign toward absolutism was a comprehensive bureaucratic reform, first mooted in 1888 (Chulalongkorn 1989), culminating four years later in the concentration of administrative control in his hands (Mead 2004, pp. 94–104). In the aftermath, his 1897 grand tour of fourteen European capitals provided him with long-anticipated personal exposure to the elaborate protocol and opulent lifestyle of the European aristocracy that glorified the cult of absolute monarchy, which was adopted as his own (Stengs 2009, pp. 30–77). Immediately upon his return he set in motion a comprehensive programme
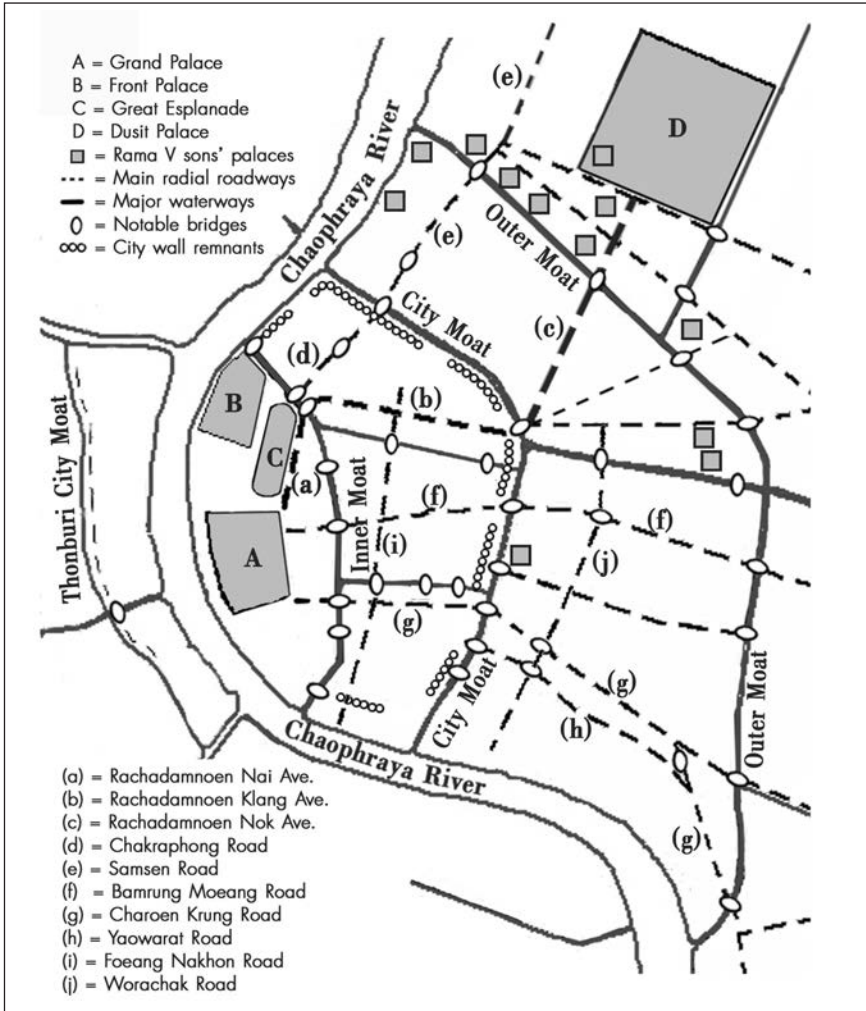
to replicate that Western style of stately grandeur in Bangkok (Peleggi 2002, pp. 84–90).

Initial steps toward the capital's modernization had been taken in the early 1890s with the upgrading of the transport infrastructure in Bangkok's chief commercial districts. That mobilization of bureaucratic resources in the cause of urban development marked a significant departure from the former convention of benign neglect of the city's ethnic minority communities. A supporting factor in the municipal development programme was the expropriation of right-of-way for the construction of royally sponsored streetside shophouse and tenement lines, markets, and tram lines, both within the walled city and in the built-up outer districts. Those new commercial relations between the ruling elite and the commons systematically ignored the former distinction between the walled city and the outer districts in favour of indiscriminate property development both within and beyond the walled city bounds.

After the king's 1897 European excursion, that work was relegated to lower priority to accommodate the redesign of the capital's royal precincts. The capstone of that project was the construction of the Dusit Palace, a new grand palace more than three times the size of the old, sited one-and-a-half kilometres northeast of the walled city (Map 1.9). The Dusit Palace was set in the midst of the Dusit Garden (*suan dusit*) district, a new royal quarter embellished with a number of sumptuous European-style royal villas and two royal temples. The Dusit district construction project, particularly the Dusit Palace itself, featured the import of scores of shiploads of costly European construction materials, furnishings, and statuary, plus the hiring of teams of Italian architects, civil engineers, artists, and artisans (Lazara and Piazzardi 1996). The overall cost was never disclosed but is known to have had dire consequences for the state budget (Brown 1992, pp. 57, 117).

Of the nineteen palaces that King Chulalongkorn built outside the walled city for his sons (Table 1.1), eleven were established in the immediate vicinity of the Dusit Palace (Map 1.9). The surrounding district, formerly an exurban agrarian tract known for little more than its scattering of fruit orchards, was overrun by the residences of lesser royals, court attendants, and government functionaries relocated from the walled city, opening space within the inner city for the accelerated infiltration of commercial establishments. Chulalongkorn himself finally abandoned the crowded, antiquated Grand Palace in 1907 in favour of the modern, far more spacious Dusit Palace. With the majestic prospect of Rachadamnoen Avenue serving as the umbilicus between the old citadel and the new royal quarter, Bangkok — at least from the royalist perspective — was transformed at the turn of

MAP 1.9
Bangkok: The metropolitan cityscape, 1910

A = Grand Palace
B = Front Palace
C = Great Esplanade
D = Dusit Palace
▢ = Rama V sons' palaces
--- = Main radial roadways
━ = Major waterways
0 = Notable bridges
∞ = City wall remnants

(a) = Rachadamnoen Nai Ave.
(b) = Rachadamnoen Klang Ave.
(c) = Rachadamnoen Nok Ave.
(d) = Chakraphong Road
(e) = Samsen Road
(f) = Bamrung Moeang Road
(g) = Charoen Krung Road
(h) = Yaowarat Road
(i) = Foeang Nakhon Road
(j) = Worachak Road

the century into a metropolis unbound, euphemistically termed a "city of magnificent distances" (Sternstein 1982).

Just as the Dusit project put the final obliterating touch on the former conceptual integrity of the Bangkok citadel as the capital's political, social, and cultural core, so did the piecemeal demolition of the city wall and its gates and bastions as well as the enhanced bridging of its moats effectively erase not only the physical bounds but also the celestial associations of the Old City (Map 1.9).

In a telling metaphor of Ratanakosin's transformation from bounded redoubt to open precinct within the greater Bangkok metropolis, the brick rubble from the city's demolished defences was carted off to surface the newly installed thoroughfares. The principal land routes radiating from the walled city to the greater Bangkok metropolis (Map 1.9) were greatly improved in the succeeding years to accommodate motorized traffic. In addition, they came to be served by a network of electrified tramlines radiating from the central tram terminus (located directly alongside the city pillar shrine) toward the metropolitan area's rapidly expanding outer commercial and residential districts (Wright and Breakspeare 1908, p. 242). Less interest was shown in the concentric perimeter roads circumscribing the old city centre. By the close of the Fifth Reign, Bangkok's former physical demarcation between rulers and ruled had been emphatically reversed. The transformation was cogently symbolized by the construction of many handsome vehicular bridges crossing the city's numerous waterways (Map 1.9). Some 2,000 bridges are said to have been erected to accommodate the rapidly spreading road network of this "Venice of the East" (Wright and Breakspeare 1908, p. 241).

Bangkok's unrestrained turn-of-the-century expansion thus spelled the end of the old royal redoubt of Ratanakosin. With that transformation the aesthetics of Indra's celestial city were abandoned in favour of the West's secular architectonics. A new, more public expression of sovereign power was introduced, with "monumental public spaces as suitable stage sets for the performance of [royal] spectacles" (Peleggi 2002, p. 94), serving the Fifth Reign cult of kingship (Stengs 2009) to fit the temper of the times. That double re-creation of the capital's royal space along with the metropolitan area's opening up — a reconfiguration both outward to accommodate the city's flourishing emporium and inward to celebrate its exuberant royal grandeur — effectively eradicated Old Bangkok. With those developments, the Ratanakosin era — the historical phase during which Bangkok's morphology had assumed the guise of Indra's celestial city — came resoundingly to a close.

With that physical transformation, the city became an arena for accelerated social change: a levelling of social strata, a homogenization of communal residence, a melting pot of ethnic identities. The increasingly compulsive pursuit of an improved, modern lifestyle through monetized transactions, mass-market-oriented artisanship and small-scale manufacture, wholesale and retail entrepreneurship, and wage work in the inner city's rapidly expanding commercial neighbourhoods and along its newly popular shoppers' walkways and dry-goods markets brought members of different ethnic groups into close and constant contact. Questions of ethnicity

were submerged beneath the common quest for profits, rents, wages, and interest. A new achievement-oriented, Thai-centred national identity was being forged.

Thai Ethno-nationalism

Surrounded by a tightening ring of Western colonies as the nineteenth century wore on, Siam's multi-ethnic feudal polity sought to defend itself with its reinvention as a nation-state under an absolute monarchy (Mead 2004). With that strategic policy redirection at the culmination of a century and more of progress, imminent adversity was transformed into putative virtue. It is as if the Thai ruling elite took heed of the Shakespearian aphorism: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." The kingdom's political transformation over the decades spanning the nineteenth-twentieth century divide involved, among its many far-reaching measures, territorial concessions and consolidation, administrative rationalization and centralization, ethnic integration and social levelling, accommodation to Western technology and cultural norms, and a secularized cult of kingship. It was the climax of Siam's metamorphosis from feudal state to nation-state. At the heart of that "political project" stood ethno-nationalism, an approach to nation building featuring a conscious effort to promote social inclusiveness (Conversi 2004). In the case of Siam's plural society, Thai ethnicity (*chat thai*) proved to be the cradle and abiding core of the emerging Thai nation (*moeang thai*); Thai "racial" identity and Thai national identity were mysteriously fused (Saichon 2003, pp. 59–82), leaving the ethnic minorities little option but to accommodate, integrate, and ultimately assimilate.

Under the impact of the Siamese state's nationalist policy, sizeable elements of Bangkok's plural society evaporated as recognizably distinct ethnic constituencies. Many ethnic place names lost their former significance as their residents blended into the broader community or moved out to be replaced by new occupants of nondescript origin. The association between particular ethnic groups and traditional livelihoods declined as formal patronage links with the old aristocracy and nobility unwound. Theravada Buddhism was promoted as a pillar of the Thai nation-state in legislation, the state budget, the schools, and the workplace. Minority kindreds were influenced to adopt Thai surnames, language, religion, and other culture markers, submerging their (former) ethnicity under a Thai veneer. Reference to ethnic minorities in official documents was terminated, just as allusion to the ethnic affiliations of individual localities, military units, and family lineages declined precipitously. Open recognition of the

maternal non-Thai ethnic pedigrees of major branches of the royal family
and other elements of the ruling elite dissolved. The double meaning of
"Thai" as both ethnic and national denotation came to be revitalized several
decades later in an effort to stamp out remaining resistance, following
the eclipse of the absolute monarchy, in the hands of a newly populist,
chauvinist regime (Streckfuss 1993; Barmé 1993, pp. 14–17, 138–44). By
the mid-1930s the process had proceeded sufficiently that official statistics
could submerge most of Bangkok's traditional ethnic diversity under the
"Thai" label (Table 1.6).

TABLE 1.6
Bangkok-Thonburi population, by ethnic group,
1933/34 and 1937/38

	1933/34[a]	1937/38[b]
Thai	572,186	593,162
Chinese	246,407	285,564
Khaek[c]	23,887	5,603
Western	1,542	1,040
Other	1,591	5,084
Total	845,613	890,453

Notes: [a] Ministry of Interior, 2.2.5/428 (2476 [1933/34]).
[b] Population Census of 1937/38.
[c] Indian and Malay. The dramatic fall in the "khaek" numbers
between 1933/34 and 1937/38, entirely spurious, remains
unexplained.
Source: Porphant (2013), p. 163 (1933/34 "Chinese" typographical
error adjusted).

Ethnic integration is not a one-way process; it entails accommodation
from both parties involved, and rarely is it easily or entirely achieved. While
Bangkok's ethnic minorities have been extensively "Thai-ized", the city's
Thai core has selectively absorbed many of its ethnic neighbours' culture
traits — linguistic terms, social mannerisms, spiritual beliefs, dietary habits,
entertainment traditions, artistic and architectural motifs, etc. — to the
point where ethnic differentiation has been largely dissipated. Nevertheless,
a century after the waning of Bangkok's plural society, the metropolis
today — and even more perceptibly Thailand's upcountry provinces and
outlying regions — retains many traces of the kingdom's historical ethnic
diversity. Throughout the city today can still be found numerous religious,
linguistic, architectural, occupational, culinary, and other cultural traces of

the old plural society, and the city still harbours the remains of a number of long-established ethnic minority neighbourhoods — Chinese, Muslim, Portuguese-Thai, Western — that continue to resist full assimilation into the Thai cultural mainstream, despite the changing scale and texture of the city's urban society, despite the submersion of the former pattern of personalized elite patronage of individual minority communities beneath the nation-state's depersonalized social movements, class interests, political ideologies, and regional affiliations, vestiges of ethnic pluralism endure. Both within the capital and upcountry, the Thai government continues to pursue its policy of national integration, contending with the kingdom's diverse ethnic and ideological outliers through a succession of innovative programmes in its unending quest to blend all under a single "Thai" national identity. The chapters that follow trace some of the historical roots of Thailand's still-incomplete march toward that idealized ethnic homogenization. They underline the lingering relevance of ethnicity to any understanding of what it means today to be "Thai."