

## General Introduction

– I –

As this book was completed,<sup>1</sup> the ceasefire agreement between Vietnam and Laos was officially signed by the belligerents; however, peace has not completely returned to these countries nor on the Southeast Asian peninsula as a whole. Indeed, armed conflict continues among certain nations in this part of the world, including Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, previously known as Siam.

One need only look at the map of Southeast Asia to realize that Siam, located at the heart of the peninsula, is an important strategic point. Currently [as of 1972], according to Siamese government representatives, over fifty thousand American troops occupy several air bases, notably those for B-52s. They are well placed to aim their weaponry in all directions of the peninsula. It should be noted that the international press and radio have repeatedly announced that after the Paris ceasefire agreements some American troops and their planes would pull out of Vietnam and Laos and move to Siam.

In the very interior of Siam, skirmishes between government troops and villagers considered as “communist terrorists” and separatist minorities in the bordering provinces of Malaysia increased

to the point that many military and police posts were attacked by these forces.

All those hoping for peace on earth must find an equitable solution so that nations with different social systems may coexist peacefully. To attain that goal, the general situation in Southeast Asia must be taken into consideration, especially that of Siam, which remains a flashpoint on the peninsula, potentially leading to unpredictable results.

It is also appropriate to try to understand the position of the People's Republic of China, which is often the subject of guesswork about its policies towards this part of the world. To this end, many Westerners, after staying for a few weeks or months in the People's Republic, have conveyed their impressions. I certainly do not wish to compete with all these authors, so on the contrary I will mainly linger over what they lacked in time to discover.

As source material, on the one hand, I will use my conversations with Chinese higher authorities, including Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai; and on the other, my practical experiences during twenty-one years of exile and my contacts with the Chinese people. I will also gain inspiration from contacts some of my children had with classmates or fellow labourers, as the former studied all through high school and college in the People's Republic. They worked as manual labourers in factories and in the countryside just as Chinese students did when China evolved from a transitional era to establishing people's communes and the metamorphosis from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

In recounting my experiences in the People's Republic, I find it impossible to simply state the facts without mentioning some principles of Marxist-Leninist theory applied in the People's Republic according to its distinctive features, differing from those in other socialist bloc nations as well as other communist parties in capitalist nations.

For this purpose, I will strictly limit myself to the role of observer in favour of peaceful coexistence between nations with different social systems, without applying value judgments to the appropriateness of these principles or of the principles themselves. I leave that to the reader.

Before recounting my observations on the People's Republic, I will recall the circumstances that led me to be exiled there. This will be the subject of a brief overview on the following topics: my revolutionary adolescence; my meetings with Mussolini, Pierre Laval, Sir Samuel Hoare, Hjalmar Schacht, Cordell Hull, and the Japanese Emperor Hirohito; the underground Kingdom of Siam; the United Nations of Southeast Asia; my meeting with President Chiang Kai-shek, his vice president, Li Tsung-jen, and President Léon Blum; the reactionary *coup d'état* and my first escape from Siam to Singapore and China; the defeat of the Palace Rebellion; and my escape from Siam to the People's Republic of China.

– II –

Because of my past turbulent revolutionary life, secret service agencies in certain countries have provided “confidential” reports and submitted classified files to their directors related to unconfirmed rumours about me that they had “picked up here and there”.

Sometimes the propaganda generated around me did not produce the effect that these gentlemen of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) intended. For example, among the films fabricated by CIA experts at the creation of the Psychological Warfare School and the National Defence College of Siam [in February 1955], one contained an old photograph of me that the [CIA] film-maker presented as showing the head of the Siamese Communist Party. Whereupon a certain number of my friends declared themselves to be “communist sympathizers”, since I was supposedly head of this party.

However, my arrival in Paris on 8 May 1970 inspired some speculation and interest.

The French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, in its 28 May 1970 edition and weekly English edition of 8 June 1970, headlined a story, “Indochinese Peninsula: Ripe Fruit for Peking”:

Last 24 and 25 April, the leftist Indochinese conference which Prince Sihanouk, Mr. Pham Van Dong, Prince Souphanouvong, and Mr. Nguyen Huu Tho attended was perhaps merely a first step. Indeed, it was announced a bit later that Mr. Pridi, former prime minister of Thailand, a refugee in Guangzhou for several years, had left China for France. Mr.

Pridi, who led the combat against the Japanese before becoming prime minister and being overthrown by the military, had always proclaimed neutral opinions since his exile in Guangzhou. Possibly there was no link between his departure from China and recent events in Indochina, but otherwise, his trip might have interesting significance, considering the former leader's prestige among a section of the Thai elite. Anyway, irritation was expressed in Bangkok at the news.

In a second phase, a closer association might be seen between the Communist Party of Thailand, mostly based on the northeast of the Kingdom, with the People's Republic of China and the new united Indochinese front against American imperialism. For that matter, China has recently established by way of Laos a network likely to facilitate communication with northern Thailand.

– Jean-Claude Pomonti.

*Le Monde* never accused me of complicity in the aforementioned business but simply stated the truth: in Bangkok there was concern about my departure from the People's Republic of China.

Although my arrival in Paris was never a mystery, some secret agents continued to invent all sorts of tales.

Another example may indicate the flimsiness of these spies' reports.

In fact, I arrived in Paris on 8 May 1970 aboard a Pakistan Airlines flight from Canton and have remained in France ever since. However, secret agents dreamed up that the Chinese were in the process of building a road leading from southern Yunnan and crossing Laotian territory so that I might go to Siam with my troops. In certain nations, periodicals printed this tale. Unfortunately, *The Economist*, the financial bulletin of London, published the following report on 20 May 1971:

The Chinese are strengthening their control of northern Laos. Their technique differs from that of the North Vietnamese. By the start of the 1960s, the Chinese discovered that the policy they used in interacting with local tribes was unproductive. Hence, they abandoned the silk glove principle and instead had a network of roads penetrate from Yunnan to Pak Beng on the Mekong, near the Thai border. This granted China direct access to Laotian and Thai tribal groups without having to use the North Vietnamese as intermediaries.

The initial road construction project in the far north was the object of an accord that followed the rules; but the current status of the work, supplemented by a Chinese air defence system, exceeded mightily what

had been planned. Laotians preferred to turn a blind eye, while Thais kept theirs open and preoccupied.

Indeed, the project originated at the start of the 1950s as belonging to a plan to support the renegade Pridi Banomyong in his pan-Thai campaign with the purpose to unite constituents of Thai ethnicity in Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam and southern China. But at the Bandung Conference of 1955, Zhou Enlai opposed Pridi. Meanwhile, work had begun on the network of roads. Beijing decided to step up the pace, but they became the instrument of a new strategic plan, the pan-Miao movement. In other words, even though Beijing abandoned Pridi, the Chinese persisted with the project, albeit from a new perspective. In the Beijing mindset, the Sino-Laotian road network now represented infrastructure of a state yet to exist: the Autonomous Miao Republic of Northern Thailand and Laos, with minor contributions from southern China and North Vietnam. This was one of the major elements of Beijing's scenario for the end of 1970, evidently entailing the dismantling of the current state of Laos.<sup>2</sup>

This type of account contradicted that of another British magazine, *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, no. 25, dated 19 June 1971:

At first, the project of Beijing was requested by the tripartite government established in Laos at the moment of the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1962, which collapsed in 1963.<sup>3</sup>

Through the mediation of my attorney and British friend, *The Economist* sportingly corrected its error by publishing the following in its issue no. 1221, dated 4 November 1971:

Mr. Pridi Banomyong,

We regret that our article on Mr. Pridi Banomyong, former Prime Minister of Thailand, in our Foreign Affairs section of 20 May 1971 seemed to have cast doubt on his integrity. This was not our intent, nor did we wish to insinuate that he had ever abandoned the viewpoint according to which his country, Thailand, should maintain neutrality in international affairs, following the friendship that it preserves with the West as well as the East. He completely opposed the pan-Thai movement advanced by Marshal Phibun, and he informs us that in no way did he participate in any construction proposal for a China–Laos Road.<sup>4</sup>

## – III –

Apart from diverse conjectures, many of my fellow Siamese as well as several foreign friends have questioned me about my experiences of revolutionary youth, escape from my homeland, and observations about my twenty-one years of exile in the People's Republic of China.

As for the media, journalists arrived from time to time to request interviews pertaining to certain events.

When President Nixon announced that he intended to visit Beijing, many press correspondents, including one assigned to the White House, interviewed me. Some asked what I thought would result from the president's visit to Beijing. For example, my interview dated 28 July 1971 with the AFP:

Jacques Armand-Prévost, with assurances of his highest consideration, has the pleasure of informing you that the interview was widely reprinted in the Bangkok press.

Diplo: J. Armand-Prévost.

Bangkok special edition (your service, note 41500).

## PRIDI BANOMYONG STATEMENT

Paris, 28 July (AFP) – 'I believe in the sincerity of the Chinese leadership about peaceful coexistence between nations with different political systems, but I don't know if President Nixon shares the same sincerity, for he was a long prisoner of aggressive ideas,' declared Pridi Banomyong, former regent and prime minister of Thailand, to a representative of AFP today during an exclusive interview on the upcoming visit to Beijing by President Nixon:

'To be sure, this visit represents a step forward and it is a good thing. If President Nixon is a realist, and he is, the only way to resolve the deadlock in Southeast Asia is to visit the Chinese leadership, but the results of this meeting will only be apparent after a while, possibly quite some time.'

Mr. Pridi Banomyong, who was overthrown in 1947 by a *coup d'état* organized by Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, who seized power, went into exile first to Singapore and later Beijing, where he lived for 22 years. He arrived in France in May 1970 where, as a political refugee, he settled into a detached house in Antony, a southern suburb of Paris, where he lives with his wife and children.

Questioned about his possible links and contacts in Paris, Mr. Pridi Banomyong, while specifying that he engaged in no political activity,

nevertheless added: 'I still maintain friendly connections with the embassy of the People's Republic of China and the general delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. I have accepted invitations to receptions at the Royal Thai Embassy, and I received an invitation to visit Great Britain, which I accepted.'

Asked to be more specific about his current activities, Mr. Pridi Banomyong replied: 'I receive a small pension from the Thai government. I sold one of my homes in Bangkok, and with the authorization of the Bank of Thailand, I transferred the money from that sale, which permitted me to purchase this house which, by the way, is in my wife's name.'

Diplo: J. Armand-Prévost.

## PRIDI BANOMYONG STATEMENT II

Paris, 28 July (AFP) – 'At the moment, I am writing my memoirs to earn a living.'

Asked about his thoughts on the current situation in the Indochinese Peninsula and Thailand, especially after the announcement of the visit by President Nixon to Beijing, the former prime minister of Thailand replied: 'At home, risky and, in my opinion, unfounded speculation is under way. In terms of Vietnam, I believe that the Vietnamese are also sincere. For them, what counts is peace and the rebuilding of their country. In negotiations, obstacles to overcome must first be identified to reach any agreement. For example, the initiative of Mr. Pierre Mendès France at the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina. This was a courageous action, and admitting mistakes by previous governments was not dishonorable; France emerged with increased stature. If the Americans follow the negotiation method that the French used with the Vietnamese, peace would be achieved.'

## – IV –

Among impartial authors on the question of Siam, some see the problem clearly; for example, Rayne Kruger, the noted English attorney and author. Kruger did not propose all the ways to obtain an equitable solution, but he did express concerns about peace in this corner of the world, notably in his book *The Devil's Discus*,<sup>5</sup> published in 1964:

A government fell, and a still-young democracy was destroyed because of this death [the death of Ananda]. Three men were slaughtered

for having been involved in it, and others were accused of having participated in the preparation or execution of the plan. The affairs of the death of the king, one of the most confusing mysteries of modern times, is officially closed. But doubt and fear still abide in Siam, and the peace across Asia is unstable, with doubts that justice was done during the outlandish trial of the regicides and fears that this justice was counterfeited by politicians avid for power and military ambitions.<sup>6</sup>

Setting aside neutrals enraptured by world peace who seek peaceful coexistence between nations with different social systems, pro-war propagandists must be denounced for damaging humanity to this extent, using every device to mislead the populace.

Indeed, the American people are aware of the results of governmental intervention in the internal affairs of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, which has cost US taxpayers several billion dollars and a great number of American and Asian lives. Research by the International Institute for Strategic Studies stated that in the Vietnam War the Americans lost US\$108 billion, and almost 1.8 million lives were lost, without considering the physically wounded or psychologically disabled.

Yet even now, against the will of the American people, propagandists continue to repeat that Siam will be the next Chinese objective in a so-called Southeast Asian conquest. On this subject, a 1963 interview with the late Marshal Chen Yi, minister of foreign affairs of the People's Republic of China, is often cited. It dates from when American troops had just moved into Siamese territory to control the country and build military bases to oppose the Indochinese nations. According to certain propagandists, Chen Yi supposedly announced to foreign journalists that Siam would be the next target for Chinese conquest. I listened to radio broadcasts when this news was propagated from foreign stations and Bangkok, the current capital of Siam. Then I asked Chen Yi if he had really stated that to foreign journalists with the same intent as in that broadcast. Chen Yi denied ever making such a statement. Instead, he had answered foreign journalists who asked about the consequences of installing American troops in Siam. He replied that the Siamese people would be discontented to the point that they would rise up one day and the nation would become another Southeast Asian hot spot.



In any event, to avoid armed conflict, believers in the propaganda generated by Chen Yi's 1963 interview had sufficient time to look seriously for a fair solution to peacefully resolve the innate discords among the Siamese people.

Personally, I fear that if no equitable solution is found to the problem of clashes in the nation's interior and internationally, Siam will not be the sole nation to become another Vietnam. There remain several others, including some large nations. History has shown that expeditionary force troops who are displeased with their respective governments have risen up after returning from combat, causing a revolution or civil war. I would like to mention a few relatively recent examples to illustrate this point.

In 1922, Greek soldiers under the command of General Plastiras had intervened in Turkey. On returning to Greece, they launched a revolution, overthrowing the government and arresting six ministers. They were court martialled and sentenced to death. King Constantine I was forced to abdicate.

African soldiers sent by the French government to wage war against the Vietnamese and Indochinese people likewise participated in a people's revolution to free themselves from colonial rule. In addition to their experiences, these Africans learned about the war of the people in Vietnam and Indochina.

## – V –

In Southeast Asia, under American domination and especially in Siam, the psychological warfare method is still used as a legacy of Tsarist Russia. This consists of terrifying innocent people by overstating results and changes that communism would bring. Indeed, in Siam, the image of a frightful spectre was displayed: the "spectre of communism".<sup>7</sup> The population was brainwashed to believe that if communism arrived in Siam, freedom of religion would cease and women would be forced to satisfy all male sexual demands.

An American author, enthralled by the history of psychological warfare, fittingly mentioned the achievement of the thirteenth-century ruler Genghis Khan. Historians are well aware of the great Mongol warrior whose grandson Kublai Khan (1215–94) became emperor of the Yuan dynasty of China at the time when the Venetian

Marco Polo visited the country. Using psychological warfare, this mighty combatant, commanding fifty thousand troops, conquered a major part of eastern Europe, including sections of Russia and Poland. He earned a reputation for ferocity to scare inhabitants of invaded territories. This worked to the point where, when the eminent Mongol announced that he would march into a certain region, the population, already psychologically vanquished, abandoned major urban centres and readily surrendered. Notably, Genghis Khan and his lieutenants had to handle their own propaganda. Whereas, in our day, Southeast Asian communism need not expend any such effort as its enemies perform that function themselves.

Some students have asked my opinion about which nation will be next to turn communist. Not being a prophet, I may be wrong. I leave it to my interlocutors to find the answer themselves. Yet I informed them that certain individuals told me that they have seen a spectre, spirit or what Westerners usually term a ghost. I deduced that these people, fearing phantoms, are in a state of mind where they just might see them, I daresay. Thus, a nation with a populace terrified of communism might indeed likely turn communist. From fear of communism, that country's government could commit noxious errors. In such a case, the populace would rise up against the government. Two large nations have already provided examples.

Tsarist Russia succeeded to a considerable degree in terrifying part of its population with diverse anti-communist propaganda. Ultimately, Tsarist Russia and the conservative government that succeeded it fell on 25 October 1917 after a single series of skirmishes with a handful of Bolshevik vanguard troops.

Nationalist China was more accomplished than anyone else in terms of anti-communist propaganda. It succeeded in scaring women by telling them that, if China became communist, each village would only be allotted a single kitchen knife. Even better, according to their own account at a people's meeting in Beijing, former prostitutes were haunted by communism. Nationalist propaganda warned that if communist soldiers entered the city, they would line up in front of brothels by company, battalion or regiment to the point where prostitutes would die of exhaustion. This did not prevent China from becoming the second major nation in the communist world.

– VI –

Before gathering a few observations, I would like to comment about my name and my country's name.

1. Without digressing excessively from our subject, I would like to explain the reason for which my readers have doubtless seen my name written different ways. Among those who mention me, some correctly transcribe my first name in Roman letters as Pridi. But my family name is transcribed differently, according to respective phonetic systems, as Panomyong, Phanomyong, Bhanomyonka and Banomyong. In 1920, the Siamese legation in Paris, which delivered my passport, transcribed my name as Bhanomyonka, but changed this in 1925 to Banomyong. I had this transcription of my name by the aforementioned legation certified by French authorities, and I duly informed the Paris law faculty where I was studying for my doctorate. Since then, I have always written my romanized name as Banomyong. Some Westerners, now elderly, know me by my former official title, which they transcribe either as Luang Pradit or Luang Pradit Manudharm.<sup>8</sup> As for me, it is not a question of personal pique, but rather a wish to avoid any reader confusion on the subject.
2. In terms of the origin of diverse names for my country, I wish to point out that many foreigners with longstanding knowledge of my homeland still prefer today to call it Siam. This is because the name is several centuries old, whereas the name Thailand is quite recent.

In 1939, jingoistic inhabitants of this country became aware of the Nazi doctrinal notion of a super race to the point where they dreamt of a great Thai empire composed of all the people of Thai ethnicity in Southeast Asia and southern China. The chauvinistic linguists of Bangkok, the current capital of my country, suggested that the long-established name of my homeland Siam be changed to a new one, Thailand. They habitually consulted the nineteenth century Sanskrit-English dictionary of Sir Monier-Williams for the simple reason that Sanskrit words are among sources for Thai etymology. It was discovered that the word "Syam", that the British and French slightly mispronounced as Siam, derived from the Sanskrit term *Syama*, defined as "black" by the dictionary of Sir Monier-Williams.

They presumed that the word *Thai* did not originate from this term because denizens of ancient India called the Southeast Asian peninsula *Suvarna Bhumi*, or golden land. These linguists therefore looked to another hypothesis by which Europeans had called our country *Seahm Law*, a name originally given by the Chinese. The linguists were surely familiar with the Teochew or Chaozhou dialect spoken by most Chinese residents of Siam. This differed from the varieties spoken by hundreds of millions of Chinese, especially the Mandarin or Northern Chinese dialects, in which our country is termed *Sianlo*. At any rate, no historical document suggests that in past eras Europeans first travelled to China before visiting our land.

In 1497, the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama discovered a maritime route to India that reached Africa. Europeans who had taken the same route to the Far East called my country Siam, as did the Indians, Ceylonese and Malays. This choice of name was not arbitrary. In the nation's old written statutes from when Ayudhya was the capital of Siam, and recognized by King Rama I of the current dynasty in his collection of law texts known as the Three Seals Code, the country's name was recorded in Pali as *Sama Padesa* and transcribed into Thai as *Pades Sayam*. *Pades* means country, and in Pali, *Sayam* or *Sama* means equality. Foreigners slightly mispronounced this in English and French as *Siam*. For several centuries, our ancient kings used the name of Siam for the country in their discourses and treaties with European countries.

Most of the nation's citizens were of Thai ethnicity, and the common folk called their homeland *Muang Thai*, with *Muang* meaning city or nation. Yet our ancient kings rightly understood that their kingdom was composed of numerous nationalities and ethnic groups. So, for the sake of unity and equality for the country's citizens, it would be better to use *Sayam* or *Siam* as an official national name.

However, most of the Council of Ministers voted to rename the country. The parliament duly adopted the name *Thai* for the country, from *Prades Thai*. Thus, following the advice of a jingoistic polyglot, the country's name became Thailand in English and *La Thaïlande* in French.

I believe that if the country's new name had to be adopted to show that our nation is composed mostly of people of the Thai race, it would have been more aptly called *Muang Thai*, as the common

folk do, instead of adding to *Thai* or *Thaï* the respective suffix *-land* or *-lande*. In this style, the name resembles several former British colonies of that era, such as Zululand, Nyasaland and Somaliland. For example, after gaining independence from Great Britain, Ireland changed its English name to Eire.

At the time I also pointed out that we had no need to follow the example of other independent European nations whose English names ended in *land*, for their respective languages belonged to the same family as English. For example, Iceland or the Netherlands. But my opinion did not prevail.

In 1946, after the end of the Second World War, when a democratic government regained power, the English and French names of my country were restored to Siam, as in 1939.

During my long exile from my native land, I have always carried a diplomatic passport issued on 4 December 1947 by the London embassy of my country, called the Royal Embassy of Siam in London, and another passport issued by the Siamese embassy of Nanjing, China. My nationality, as recorded in these travel papers, is Siamese. Although these permits expired after two years, they might have served as proof of identity that I am a citizen of Siam.

But in 1949, the name of Siam was again changed to Thailand, following the wishes of those who took power after the anti-democratic *coup d'état* of 1947.

Nevertheless, the country's new name was by no means definitive. Indeed, about five years ago, a faction within the very group holding power proposed during the drafting of a constitution, now obsolete, to re-adopt the traditional name for the country. But this faction was a minority in the appointed constitutional assembly, so their motion was rejected. And the strife over this subject continues.