

Thai or Siam?

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Apart from Siamese cats, Siamese twins, and—of course—*Anna and the King of Siam*, readers may have encountered the phrase “Thailand (formerly Siam)” in anything ranging for scholarly tomes to travel brochures. What is the story behind this two-name situation, and why, when, how (and how many times) did the name of the country change?

Below we suggest answers to these questions, first giving a somewhat sweeping thousand-year historical overview. We then see how the two names *Siam* and *Thailand* (along with related forms *Siamese* and *Thai*) function in present-day usage, where they have an interesting but somewhat complicated set of semantic associations. In general, names used formerly as toponym and ethnic term respectively have, in one sense at least, come to communicate different ideological positions in current Thai political debates. This is clarified below. Finally, as an epilogue, we briefly consider how some Western scholars have recently been using (or avoiding) one or another of the two names.¹

First Era: AD 600-1250

The word *Siam* (in the form *syam*) first occurs in Old Khmer inscriptions of the seventh century (starting in A.D.611), although this has not been generally recognized.² The meaning is not certain, but it is probably a toponym referring to some location in the lower Chao Phraya River basin. In surviving inscriptions of this period, *syam* occurs four times to designate female slaves (“ku syam”)³ and once to identify a landlord-official (“poñ syam”), who donates rice fields to a temple.⁴ In one case *syam* occurs in a list where the preceding entry has the word *vrau* in the same sentence position.⁵ *Vrau* has been considered the name of an ethnolinguistic minority group, possibly ancestors of the modern Bru or Brau people (Jenner 297). The parallel syntax suggests that *syam* may have functioned at that time in a similar way, perhaps as a toponym which could also be used to refer to people of the area. In Old Khmer syntax, a head noun is followed by a modifier. Syntactically then *syam* is acting as a direct modifier in these cases.

Similarly, later on *syam* occurs in slave lists on inscriptions of the Champa and Khmer kingdoms, dated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Luce 124; Briggs 62; Coedès, *Indianized States*, 140). From about the same period there is also a well-known bas relief panel of Angkor Wat showing mercenaries of the Khmer army, who are identified as *syam-kuk*, perhaps “of the land of Siam.” One cannot be certain what ethnolinguistic group these mercenaries belonged to, but many scholars have thought them to be Thais. At about the same time (from AD 1120 onwards) in Pagan to the west *syam* occurs over twenty times in Old Mon and Burmese inscriptions. One *syam* reference is to a high government official, but the term mainly occurs in lists of temple slaves, both male and female (Luce 124). Some are identified by occupation, such as dancers, weavers, or carpenters.

Second Era: AD 1250-1850

Chinese records of the Yuan Dynasty tell about a journey to *Xian* (perhaps pronounced something like “shiem” at that time) by a Chinese traveler, Chen Yi Zhong, who fled from Chinese political troubles and sought refuge there in 1282. The source uses a character, apparently for the first time, which from that period onwards refers to Siam/Thailand.⁶ One assumes the Chinese toponym is a borrowing from Khmer or Cham *syam*. It probably referred to the Thai “city-state” kingdom of Sukhothai, perhaps including some of its dependencies. Chinese potters, for example, are known to have been living in Sukhothai at this time.

A century or so after this, when Thai power consolidated in the lower Chao Phraya River area, Chinese records refer to *Xian-Lo*, a compound probably based on Chinese names for Sukhothai- Suphanburi (*xian*) and Lopburi, or Lavo (*lo*), an old city in the Ayudhya area. Ayudhya became the capital city and it and its surrounding territory were called *krung Sri Ayudhya* (“The Glorious Capital Ayudhya”) by Thai inhabitants. This was in a sense then the name of the country at that time.

According to traditional dating, the first Thai-language source is from AD 1292.⁷ The word *syam* does not occur in the first few inscriptions, but it does occur in one of 1388.⁸ There it is used in a monk’s title: *Syammahathera*, a compound form with *syam* followed by the Pali forms *maha* + *thera* (i.e. “great” + “elder monk”), presumably “the reverend monk of Siam.” (Henceforth, for

convenience, we Romanize *syam* interchangeably as *Siam* or *siam*. Thai writing does not distinguish between upper and lower case.

It is interesting that in the few other recorded uses of *Siam* in Thai language sources of the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, this general pattern is repeated. That is, the form *Siam* is the first component in an otherwise Pali or Sanskrit compound. This can be seen in the form *siam-phakk* (spelled as though *siam* + *bhaga*) “the region of Siam” (Pali *bhaga* “side, part”). This is used in the classical poem *Lilit Yuan Phai* (21), an epic war poem traditionally dated in the reign of King Trailok (1448-1463). Using *siam* in a Pali-Sanskrit compound this way reverses the normal Thai syntactic pattern of head noun plus modifier. In other words, *siam* is treated as though it were an Indic stem form.

Similar forms appear also in the *Jinakalamalipakaranum*, a local Pali chronicle of the northern Thai Principality of Lan Na (Chiangmai): *siam-desa* and *siam-rattha* refer to the area (*desa*) or state (*rattha*) of Siam, which one passage further identifies as the Sukhothai region (121). The chronicle is attributed to a high-ranking monk, Ratanapañña Thera, also known as Phra Sirimangkharcarya, of the period of King Muang Kaeo of Lan Na, who reigned from 1495 to 1526.

The term *Thai* is documented from the thirteenth century inscriptions of the Sukhothai period of King Ram Khamhaeng, traditionally dated AD 1292. On the inscriptions this term is used more than twenty times, where the clear contextual use is as an ethnic label. Typical functions include describing individual people, describing a collective (*mu'ang thai* – a Thai socio-political unit), and referring to cultural matters such as the Thai writing system (*laisu'thai*) or the Thai calendrical system. These “Thai days” (*wan thai*) contrast, in these inscriptions, to other calendrical systems such as Mon, Khmer, or Indic. In all these cases the word is used as a modifier following normal Thai word order: head noun plus modifier, syntactically opposite to the way *siam* is used. The form also appears as a part of the names of several kings, and probably in the name *Sukhothai* itself.

Clearly, then, *Siam* is a loanword into Thai, where it is treated as a “foreign” element following Pali-Sanskrit word order in compounds. *Thai*, on the other hand, is an original word and used according to the normal syntax of the language. As for meaning, *Siam* seems to retain the earlier meaning of a location. *Thai* also seems to have taken on the meaning of “free,” since the Thai people had become free of the Khmer rule. “Free” in the sense of “free-enterprise economy” seems to be emphasized on King Ram Khamhaeng’s in-

scription. When Ayudhya became a Thai political center, there were trade contacts with Chinese, Japanese, Arabs, and, from the sixteenth century, Westerners. The Thai people continued to refer to themselves as *Thai* and to their realm as *Mu'ang Thai*, *Krung Thai*, and *Krung Sri Ayudhya*.⁹

Foreign traders, on the other hand, consistently referred to the realm as *Siam* or a variant. For example *Siam* – spelled *Syam* – occurs on an Italian map of 1556 for the lower Chao Phraya river area (Thapthong 93). The first appearance in English may be from 1592, in the writings of James Lancaster, who used the form *Siam* (Smith 164).

It is interesting that the French traveller, Simon de la Loubère, noted that in 1687-88 “the name Siam is unknown to the Siamese,” and that they instead “give to themselves the name of Tai, or free, as the word now signifies in their language” (6). La Loubère was of the opinion that *Siam* had entered European languages from “The Portuguese of the Indies,” who presumably had learned it from other Asian peoples. At about the time of La Loubère’s visit, a Thai, Ambassador Kosapan (O’kphra Wisutsuntho’n), went to the court of Louis XIV. Kosapan used *Siam* when speaking in French but when writing dispatches in Thai he referred to his country as *Krung Sri Ayudhya* or *Krung Thai* (Wiraprachak 35, 55).

In 1805 King Rama I authorized a legal code, the “Law of the Three Seals.” The word *Thai* was used in these laws more than 150 times, sometimes in the meaning of ethnic group, sometimes in the meaning of “free” as opposed to slave. In contrast, *Siam* occurs only three times, each time again as though an Indic compound, for example *siam-phasa*, from Sanskrit *bhasa* “language,” and *siam-prathet*, from Sanskrit *prades* “country” (*Kotmai Tra Sam Duang* 1: 8; 4: 217). The latter is a clear reference to the King’s realm.

In 1853, during the Reign of King Rama III, for the first time the name of the country appeared on a minted coin. The term used was *Mu'ang Thai* – the same term that had occurred some 550 years previously in the Sukhothai inscriptions (Yongbunkoet 268ff.). Also during this period James Low, the British administrator of Wellesley Province in Malaya, published the first grammar of Thai in English. He referred to the *Th'ai* or *Siamese language* in the title of his work, and the English spelling *Thai* seems to have been fixed from this date.¹⁰ The spelling *Tai* had occurred previously, as in the English translation of La Loubère’s work.)

During the same reign, Prince Mongkut, who at that time was still a monk, referred in correspondence with the Buddhist Order in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) to

the Thai state as *Krung-rattanakosin-thep-maha-nakho'n-bowo'n-ratcha-thani-waen-khwaen-siam-rat-chonnabot*. Notice that the term *siam-rat*, from Pali *rat-tha*, related to Sanskrit *rastra* "state," occurs as part of a long compound form (Phumisak 357).

Third Era: 1851-1939

Later, when Mongkut became King Rama IV (r. 1851-1868) he separated the name of the capital city from the name of the country, on the Western nation-state model. The name of the country in the Thai language was to be *Prathet Siam*, and in Western languages *Siam*. In international agreements the King used "Rex Siamensis" (The King of Siam, as though Latin) in his title. Formerly kings had used royal seals rather than signing their names. These names were used in 1856 in the Bowring Treaty with England (Smith 164). On coins and documents of the period, however, the country was also called *Krung Siam* (Yongbunkoet 174). Note that this use of *Siam* now followed the normal Thai word order: noun plus modifier.

Not only did this king establish these official names using *Siam*, but also he believed that the nation had been saved from disasters and that the "miraculous survival must have been due to some protective deity. Consequently he ordered a gold statuette cast to represent the god and called the image 'The Lord Protector of Siam' (*Phra-siam-thewa-thirat*). The image has been enshrined in the Grand Palace and revered by every king and citizen of the country since" (Khannakammakan Kanchat Ngan Somphot... 40). The use of *Siam* as a part of the deity's name was felt to be appropriate. Especially in a Pali-Sanskrit compound of this type, the form *Siam* has a feeling of "sacral power" (*khwam-saksit*) that the ordinary, common form *Thai* would lack. It would seem quite odd to substitute *Thai* for *Siam* in the name of this deity.

King Rama IV's interest in the name of the country was part of a wider concern with appearing to be "civilized" (the notorious "Anna" being part of this program). One might even see some metaphorical links: the King required new standards and forms of dress for those in his presence; similarly, the "civilized nation" required a "proper" name.

King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V, who reigned from 1868 to 1910, followed the general naming patterns established by his father. He used as his own royal title *Siamin*, from *Siam* plus *Indra*. The country was referred to on coins in several ways, but always using *Siam*. *Krung Siam* was used as before. In 1898

special platinum coins (*satang tho'ng khao*) were minted with the name of the country appearing in the quasi-Indic form as *Siam-ratch-anacak*, "The Kingdom of Siam." In 1909 a three-headed elephant coin was used with the name of the country as *Siam-rat* ("The State of Siam"), as formerly (Yonbunkoet 200, 214). Postage stamps, which started in this reign, used only *Siam*, in both its Thai and English forms.

King Rama VI (1910-1925) also used *Siamin* in his title, and called the country *Siam-rat* in Thai and *Siam* in English. This use was followed by his successor. King Rama VI wrote a national patriotic song using the classical Thai *Khlong* verse form. It was called *Khlong Sayamanusatsati* ("In Commemoration of Siam"):

As long as Siam endures and lasts,
We too remain our lives preserving.
Were Siam destroyed, could Thais endure?
We would die out and the Thai heritage be
finished.

(Phumisak 362)

In this song, as the translation shows, *Siam* indicates the nation, but *Thai* indicates the people. *Siam*, however, could still denote a locality during this period, as is clear in a 1932 article by Prince Wan, a leading Thai etymological scholar and diplomat. He wrote that *Tai* (with an unaspirated initial sound) had been the original self-reference term, but "when we migrated into this land of *Siam* we called ourselves *Thai*."¹¹

After the 1932 revolution, Sanga Kanchanakhaphan (Khun Wichit Matra) wrote the national anthem using the phrase *phaendin siam* (the "land of Siam"). Here is the translation of the first verse:

The Land of Siam means "Golden City"
The Thai people have set up a majestic country
there
Continuing their Thai ancestry from the earliest
times,
Keeping their Thai unity, and increasing.

The song shows meanings for *Siam* and *Thai* similar to the preceding ones. But here there is also an interest in etymology. There is an explanation of "Land of Siam" as meaning the "Golden City." This etymology (or folk-etymology) is based on a Pali item meaning "dark or golden." After the 1932 revolution,

Prathet Siam (in the Thai language) – using Thai word order – and *Siam* (in English) were used as official names of the country up until 1939.

In 1934 Prince Damrong Rajanubhap (sometimes known as “the father of Thai history”) wrote: “*Thai* and *Siam* are not too different. They can be separated. *Thai* is a native word, *Siam* is a foreign loanword.” On another occasion he wrote: “*Thai* is the name of a group of people, *Siam* is the name of a land or a nation. In my writings, for a long time I have preferred to use *Thai* and *Mu’ang Thai*. But there are times when I just cannot substitute *Thai* in place of *Siam*” (24: 5; 23: 250). Prince Damrong’s opinions are an interesting prelude to attitudes and developments five years later.

Fourth Era: 1939-1945

In 1939 Prime Minister Phibun (Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram) had the name of the country changed from *Prathet Siam* to *Prathet Thai* (in the Thai language), and to *Thailand* in English. (The original announcement was to be effective from June 24, 1939; it was subsequently confirmed by Parliament, and the Regent approved it on October 3 (Dantrakun, *Thai*, 10-11).

Thus the name *Siam* was abandoned for a new one, *Thailand*, thereby linking the word *Thai* not only with the name of the national race but also with the concept of “freedom” (Terwiel, *History*, 13). The reason was given as follows: “The name of the nation being either *Thai* or *Siam*, the people are mixed up. Some call it *Prathet Thai*, some call it *Prathet Siam*. But most of the citizens call it *Prathet Thai*, which, in any case, corresponds with race and what the Thai people favor” (Dantrakun, *Thai*, 132). The official announcement was made in the “First National Mandate” (*ratniyom*). The form *Thailand* can be seen as translating *Prathet Thai* or *Mu’ang Thai* directly into English, hence meaning “the Land of the Thais.” Making up this compound in English, according to a member of Phibun’s cabinet, was the idea of “the senior person.”¹²

Although Phibun would probably not have admitted it, his changing of the nation’s name was in some ways parallel to what Rama IV had done a century earlier. That is, Phibun wanted Thailand (as it had become) to be considered a “great power” (*maha-anmat*) as well as “civilized.” The nation’s name change was part a more sweeping program, including the following “civilizing” innovations:

(1) Citizens had to wear hats and Western-style trousers and dresses, instead of traditional Thai dress.

(2) Certain (uncivilized?) Thai ways of life, such as chewing betel nut, were outlawed.

(3) Husbands and wives were to kiss each other each morning as the husband left for work (as people did overseas).

(4) A new greeting word (*sawatdi*) was to be used, following the overseas “hello/goodbye” model.

(5) The new year was to begin on January 1, rather than in April, as it had traditionally.

(6) The Thai writing system was reformed, eliminating thirteen letters and making other spelling changes.

(7) The pronoun system was to be simplified.

(8) A new capital city was planned at Phetchabun.

(9) Chinese were to have Thai-style last names.

(10) In some cases, Thai people themselves had to change their names. For example, a name possible for both sexes had to be changed to a “single-sex” one.)

Phibun’s inspiration undoubtedly came partly from Hitler and Mussolini, and he even called himself “the leader” (*Phu-nam*).¹³ His slogan was: “Follow the leader and the nation will be saved.” His program has been called chauvinistic (*klang chat*, in Thai) because ethnic minority groups were supposed to be subject to ethnic Thai majority norms (or to Phibun’s conception of them). At the same time Phibun supported a “Pan-Thai” nationalistic movement. With Japanese backing, Phibun and his followers hoped that Thai-related ethnic groups in Burma (the Shans) and in Laos (then under the French) would be “restored to their rightful place” under direct Thai rule.¹⁴

The name change to *Thailand* was part of a larger program which had many opponents. There were many anti-fascist critics who were opposed to Phibun and all of his reforms. A leader among them was Pridi Phanomyong, who pointed to the Nazi-like chauvinistic overtones of *Thailand* as a national name. He also argued it sounded like the name of an English or French colony and hence was all the more inappropriate. *Siam*, on the other hand, he supported as the English name of the nation, citing the scholarship and authority of King Rama IV, who had instituted the use of this name as noted above (Phanomyong 8-10). Pridi acted as Regent during this period and was later Prime Minister for a brief time in 1946.

Fifth Era: From 1946 to the Present

As World War II was ending, Phibun, who had declared war on the Allies, using the name *Thailand*, fell out of favor. The Government of Thawee Bunyaket changed the English and French name of the country back to *Siam* once again shortly after the close of the war. However, the name *Prathet Thai* was retained in the Thai language. As for the motive for changing the foreign name back to *Siam*, one recent study suggests: "Thawee's declared policy was to adhere to the [World War II] Peace Declaration. A notable action of his government was the announcement from the Prime Minister's Office on September 7, 1945, which changed the name of the country back to *Siam*. Apart from the belief that this was the proper and traditional name, it was, probably, hoped that the change of name would allay the fear of any Thai imperialism as well" (Santaputra 338). In fact, at the very time of the name change, England was pressing the Thais for heavy war reparations. Since it had been *Thailand* (under Phibun) that had declared war on England, perhaps it was now thought that *Siam* emphasized a complete change of regime: the new government annulled Phibun's declaration of war as invalid and pledged support for Allied post-war policies.¹⁵ This name situation — *Siam* in English but *Prathet Thai* in Thai — was used until the time that Phibun returned to power.

On April 8, 1948, after a stormy period in Thai politics, Phibun became Prime Minister once again. Although many of the extreme policies of his earlier period were not restored, several former innovations were put back into force. Among them: *Thailand* was promptly reinstated as the official English name of the nation and has been so ever since.

One convenient way to summarize the basic name changes of the Thai nation over the past century or so is to consider what appeared on postage stamps, as in Table 1. However, the question of the name of the country — *Thailand* or *Siam* — was not resolved once and for all in 1948. There has been wide discussion both inside and outside of Parliament on this issue. Both sides of the question try to produce evidence, often based on etymology (or folk-etymology) to support their choice of name.¹⁶ Others support holding a plebiscite to determine the people's choice on the matter.

Starting with the first name change in 1939, there has been Parliamentary debate as to the name on four occasions when a new constitution has been drafted, in 1949, 1961, 1968, and 1974. The results have been that the *Prathet Thai-Thailand* faction has won by a considerable margin each time.¹⁷ However,

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a small *Siam* faction has kept on trying to have *Siam* adopted as the official name (whether only in English or also in Thai). This faction still hopes that sometime the Parliament will reconsider the matter. The main argument put forward in favor of *Siam* is that it represents all citizens of the country, not only the ethnic Thais. This, it is said, will foster national unity, especially among non-Thai ethnic groups such as Chinese, Malays, and Hill-tribes. Part of this factionalism is undoubtedly personal: Pridi Phanomyong, who had fled the country, and his followers had always been opposed to the *Thailand* change, for they considered the hybrid word to have objectionable chauvinistic and nationalistic connotations.

In many cases, *Siam*, even if not an official name of the nation, is still widely used. It occurs in royal contexts, such as in *Siam-inthara-thirat*, in the official title of King Bhumiphol (Rama IX) himself, and in *Siam-ratcha-kumari* (Royal Princess of Siam), which the King recently officially bestowed on his daughter, also known as Princess Srinthorn. But on an entirely different level, it also occurs in quite wide modern use in names of hotels, nightclubs, shopping centers, and businesses.

Siam, then, for Thai speakers is at present semantically complex. (1) In some cases the name has associations of sacral power (*khwam-saksit*), an association not felt in the common word *Thai* (as in the title of the Princess noted above or in King Rama IV's "Lord Protector of Siam"). In this case *Siam* is treated as a foreign loan conforming to Pali Sanskrit compounding rules. It is used in a way similar to other Thai "royal vocabulary" items (*rachasap*), where

Table 1. The Name on Postage Stamps.

	<i>Thai language</i>	<i>English language</i>
1880-1939	Siam	Siam
1939-1945	Prathet Thai	Thailand
1945-1948	Prathet Thai	Siam
1948-	Prathet Thai	Thailand

non-Thai loanwords are often substituted for Thai vocabulary when referring to royal persons, monks, and others. (2) As a token of political ideology, *Siam* connotes for its proponents an anti-nationalistic, anti-chauvinistic position. However, there may be more specific personalities involved here, too: followers or admirers of Pridi seem especially apt to favor *Siam*. (3) Since *Siam* is well-known and widely-accepted among foreigners, another use of *Siam* in Thai is to produce a “Western feeling” or “overseas association”; hence it is an appropriate component for names of Western-oriented Bangkok businesses.

Thai, on the other hand, seems at first more straightforward as a name. But in fact (particularly with the official demise of *Siam*) two distinct senses need to be identified. (1) *Thai* can be used for ethnicity, language, and perhaps race. This is essentially its use on the original Sukhothai inscriptions. In this case it would be distinct from other perceived ethnic units, such as Khmer, Mon, Chinese, Hill-tribe, or Western/Caucasian (the Thai word being *farang*)—whether or not these groups constituted national political units. (2) On the other hand, *Thai* can refer to legal nationality and citizenship status in the modern nation-state context. For the majority of people in Thailand, (1) and (2) would coincide. But for minority groups, for example, Hill-tribe people and Malay-speaking Muslims of the South, *Thai* would apply only in the sense of (2). The mismatch between (1) and (2) could result in excluding these groups or lead to labels like *Thai-Islam* to refer to the Muslim minority.

Epilogue: Siam, Thailand, and Modern Western Scholarship

Western scholars who write about Thai history and society in English can be loosely classified into four categories with respect to how they use (or avoid) Siam/Siamese and Thailand/Thai. Naturally, in any given case there may be a mixture of criteria. (1) The first group of scholars uses both Siam and Thailand as names of state. The names are applied *chronologically*: Siam is used for the pre-1939 era and Thailand for afterwards, with or without a concession for the switch during 1945-48. If necessary, Thailand may also be used more generally. That is, it may be projected backwards into the past so as to enable reference to the pre- and post-1939 time-span all at once. This can be seen in the titles of two recent Thai history books, Terwiel's *A History of Modern Thailand, 1767-*

1942 (1983) and Wyatt's *Thailand: A Short History* (1984). A related practice is to quote and discuss primary sources using whichever names actually occur in them.

(2) Scholars of the second group typically call attention to the name problem at the outset in a note or comment, and then proceed to choose one or the other name for general use quite arbitrarily, or so it would appear. Sometimes Thailand is selected; sometimes Siam, or sometimes it is even stated the two are used interchangeably.¹⁸

(3) A third use is a distinction made areally, and seems confined mainly to linguistics. These Western scholars regularly use Siamese to refer to Standard Thai language or to closely-related Central Thai dialects, but Thai – or more frequently Tai – to refer to the entire language family, including dialects outside of Thailand proper.¹⁹ The use of Siamese has an

(4) The fourth group selects ideologically between Thailand and Siam, interesting similarity to the pre-nineteenth century areal use of Siam. and here there are two diametrically opposed sub-positions, each reflecting an indigenous Thai ideological usage, which the Western scholars may or may not be aware of:

(4a) *Anti-Siam*. The first position favors Thailand and rejects the name Siam entirely, considering Siam old-fashioned, Western, or even elitist and neo-colonial – in any case, ideologically objectionable. For example, in a recent book review one Western scholar (Wright) takes another (Terwiel, *History*) to task for using Siam for the pre-1939 period. This, it is claimed in the review, is using “Thailand’s old colonial nom de plume, Siam.” The reviewer considers this unwarranted since “the Thais have never called their realm Siam” (Wright 684). There are interesting parallels here to the feelings expressed by Phibun and his followers.

(4) *Anti-Thailand*. Opposite to this would be Western scholars who prefer Siam and use it to the exclusion of Thailand, even for the period after 1949. A good example is Anderson’s recent translation of Thai short stories, which he calls *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*. In this book, dealing with literature of roughly the “Vietnam period,” Anderson explains why he avoids Thailand: he calls it a “mongrelization” dating from the Phibun period and is to be completely avoided (26).²⁰ This follows in the ideological tradition of Pridi Phanomyong, Sulak Sivaraksa (who expressed sentiments similar to those of Anderson), and other Thai intellectuals. (Some would consider themselves to be politically to the left of center.)

In spite of the above scholars, the name Thailand is probably here to stay, but Siam too lingers on. The full story of the terms Thai(land) and Siam may not be entirely finished, even now.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank colleagues in the Faculty of Asian Studies, the Australian National University, for comments on and assistance with this paper, which Tony Diller has helped me translate into English.

2. Others have implied the word first occurs in the eleventh century: Briggs 62; Luce 124 (generalizing from Coedès, Inscriptions, whose observations were actually somewhat different). These studies were made prior to the availability in 1981 of Jenner's Old Khmer lexicon. The final -m of syam on Khmer inscriptions is indicated by an anusvara sign, a small raised mark. Whether or not this toponym had an Indic source in a form meaning "dark, yellow, golden" has been the subject of debate, and such an etymology (or folk-etymology) for this item has been used in recent political debates; see discussion of "Fifth Era." Others have argued the form is from a Thai word meaning "shovel," but this is difficult to justify. On the earliest inscriptions the word is treated syntactically as indigenous Old Khmer vocabulary.

Later on, when this item appears written in Thai script (of all periods), its symbol-by-symbol transliteration would be S-Y-A-M (with the vowel A phonemically long). In modern Thai this is pronounced as [saya:m], with automatic epenthetic schwa-like short a vowel in the first syllable and an automatic rising tone in the last. As we see in the course of this paper, when Europeans began to represent the toponym on maps, sometimes they used the form SYAM (possibly based on indigenous spelling), sometimes SIAM (perhaps based on sound). In any event, it was the latter form that became widespread in Western languages, and for that reason the spelling SIAM was subsequently used by Thais themselves to Romanize what would actually be SYAM in a spelling-based transliteration. The form SIAM should be read keeping this in mind.

3. Inscriptions K557 (dated AD 611), K127 (AD 683), K154 (AD 685), K904 (AD 713) (Coedès, Inscriptions, 2: 21, 89, 123; 4: 54).

4. Inscription K79 (AD 639) (Coedès, Inscriptions, 2: 69).

5. Inscription K127 (AD 683) (Coedès, Inscriptions, 2: 89).

6. I am indebted to Dr. Wong Yin Wai for this information. Wade-Giles transcription for the relevant character would be hsien (tone 1). In modern Chinese, Thailand is now referred as tai-guo.

7. The Ram Khamhaeng Inscription (Prachum Silacaru'k, 1: 15).

8. Inscription 9 (Prachum Silacaru'k, 1: 125).

9. Silpakorn 35; La Loubère 7. Mu'ang and krung refer either to a reader G or to its lead-in city. Thai, or better Tai, is also used by members of the ethnolinguistic group more generally, including those outside of Thailand proper.

10. The Thai alphabet has separate letters for aspirated and unaspirated [t] sounds. Similar sounds in Indian languages were represented as "t" and "h"; this would have been known by the British civil servants like Low.

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11. Wan 421. The original initial stop [t-] was subsequently [th-]. Also, the spelling of “Thai” on early inscriptions was without a final “-y,” added later under the influence of Pali models.
12. Dantrakun (Thai, 75) is quoting Luang Wichit Wattakan’s report of a cabinet meeting in 1939. Luang Wichit himself claims he advised using simply “Thai” as the English equivalent name for the country, instead, of “Thailand”. However, another participant in this meeting claimed that Luang Wichit himself had supported the name “Thailand” (Phanomyong 8). It is interesting how rapidly many foreign scholars – and particularly American ones – made the required name change in their publications.
13. Note Hitler’s policy to force name changes as part of his anti-Semitic program. See Renick.
14. In March 1941, under Japanese mediation, Thailand gained territorial concessions from the Vichy government in France. In June 1942 a victory of Thai troops in the Shan states was publicly announced. The Japanese Prime Minister Tojo formally transferred the Shan territories to Thailand during his visit of July 3-5, 1943 (Santaputra 240, 297).
15. On December, 1946, the 55th member of the United Nations was accepted as “Siam” (Santaputra 364).
16. Thus, in these debates, “Siam” is etymologized either as “golden” or “black”, depending on one’s perspective, and “Thai” is often associated with “free” or “large” (the meaning of a Chinese word with a similar sound).
17. In 1961 the vote was “Prathet Thai,” 134 votes; “Siam,” five votes (Dantrakun, Thai, 272).
18. Hong (x). For an example explicitly mixing this usage with the preceding one, see Santaputra (14).
19. For example, this is the normal usage of Professors William J. Gedney and Fang Kuei Li. Some Thai scholars (writing in the Thai language) are introducing the same distinction now by spelling the word “Thai” with and without a final silent - y. The latter method for these scholars denotes the language family, while the former is the more familiar national term.
20. See also the English translation of Direk Jayanama’s memoirs.

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