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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, October 17, 1905, the English language Straits Times daily newspaper based in the British colony of Singapore made the following pronouncement:

A Royal Carnegie - King Founds A Library in Siam.

The King of Siam has established a national library of Buddhist and Siamese literature in Bangkok. The Crown Prince of Siam will officiate as President of the new institution, and Dr. Frankfurter will be responsible for the duties of librarian.¹

Though this article is brief, it does make quite a claim. The act of the reigning King of Siam in promulgating a national library for the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand’s former name until 1939) is compared to public library development in the United States as promoted by Scottish-American steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Are there grounds for a comparison between Carnegie’s philanthropic work in the United States and the act of founding a new national library by King Chulalongkorn?

Between the years 1886 and 1919, Andrew Carnegie, a contemporary of Siam’s King Chulalongkorn, donated millions of dollars for the creation of 1,419 public libraries stretching between the United States’ east coast and the American territory of Hawaii.² His philanthropic acts forever altered the trajectory of American public libraries. Carnegie’s program had no official status, nor did it even have an official name. However, as the years between 1886 and 1919 progressed, more and more Americans

¹ “A Royal Carnegie,” The Straits Times, October 17, 1905.
heard about the generous largess that Carnegie was willing to bestow onto communities in the United States in order stimulate the growth of public libraries in the country. Representatives in massive numbers from large and small American communities wrote to Carnegie requesting funds to build public libraries in order to ensure that they received the benefits of a public library, the cornerstone of American intellectual progress and a hallmark of a civilized nation growing into a modern age. Though the application process was arduous, and communities had to meet certain qualifications for the maintenance of the library and its collections after the library was established, American communities across the country prospered from Carnegie’s generous philanthropy, so much so that Andrew Carnegie is commonly referred to as the patron saint of American public libraries.\(^3\) Carnegie made no qualifications about what materials were housed in the new libraries. Access to information and the promotion of literacy were prime aims for Carnegie in his work, and it mattered not whether communities were near large, important urban centers, as even small, far-flung communities received his charity.\(^4\)

Concerning the case of King Chulalongkorn and the establishment of a new national library in Siam, it is really somewhat inaccurate to call the subject of the aforementioned article a “national library” for Siam as founded by the King. In the Thai language, this new library was called *Ho Phrasamut Wachirayan samrap Phranakon*.\(^5\) This literally translates to the “Royal Wachirayan Library for the Royal Capital (Bangkok).” Thus, “national library” is found nowhere in the official Thai language name; its rendering as such in English is somewhat dubious. For all intents and purposes

\(^3\) Ibid., 11.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Though the country was known as Siam during this period, the name of the language had always been known as “Thai.” This name refers to both the dominant ethnic group and its language within the Kingdom of Siam.
within this study, the name “Royal Library for the Capital” shall be employed. This research argues that this semantic context within the Thai language term is more appropriate than its English language approximation. However, this being said, this library was certainly conceived by the Siamese government and the foreign press as a de facto national library (issues which this research touches upon in the sixth and seventh chapters).

A brief definition of national libraries is warranted. In the European context, national libraries emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries out of collections which had originally been forged as private royal or monastic libraries during Europe’s medieval era. With the advent of the nation-state in Europe during the 19th century, and the concomitant yet stilted growth of democratization in the Western world, many former royal and monastic library collections were amassed into new, national libraries which reflected the emerging political machinations of the new nation-state. Lerner states “…the national library’s role is often defined in terms of preserving [emphasis added] the national cultural patrimony, and making it readily accessible to those who would study it.” Following this definition, one may argue that Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital performed the same role; however, arguments in the six and seventh chapters state that the actions of library administrators in developing the Siam’s Royal Library for the

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6 Contemporary and historical Thai language scholarship concerning this library often refers to it in the abbreviated form as “Ho Phrasamut samrap Phranakhon” (Royal Library for the Capital) or “Ho Phrasamut,” (Royal Library), respectively (omitting the term Wachirayan in both forms).
8 Lerner, 108.
Capital articulate a disjuncture between Lerner’s definition of a national library and the actual functions and scope of Siam’s library.

In 1905, King Chulalongkorn promulgated the establishment of the library. However, this library did not appear in a vacuum. The Royal Library for the Capital promulgated by King Chulalongkorn was actually an amalgamation of three semi-private, royal and religious libraries found on the premises of the main royal complex in Bangkok and at one of the major royal Buddhist temples near the complex. These three libraries were known respectively as the Wachirayan Library (essentially, a literary club of private royal collections), the Hor Monthiantham (Royal Dhamma House; the Dhamma referring to the primary religious code of Buddhism), and the Ho Phuthasatsanangkhla (The Buddhism Collection). Since the 18th and 19th centuries, these three libraries, the precursors to the Royal Library for the Capital, had acted as repositories of sacred and secular palm leaf manuscripts on a variety of subjects and a growing number of print works which were produced in Siam and foreign countries. Though the latter religious works libraries were private, royal libraries, the Wachirayan Library was a subscription library open to all Siamese citizens who could afford membership and who could meet approval for entry by the library’s administrative committee. However, upon the promulgation of the new Royal Library for the Capital, these conditions were dropped, and the new library became accessible to all Siamese. In this regard, the comparison with Carnegie and his project for establishing public libraries in the United States seems somewhat appropriate in terms of what appears on the surface to be a democratizing of

10 Ibid.
access to information. However, by investigating the history and development of Siam’s new Royal Library for the Capital, one finds a marked disjuncture between the institution and the vast library-building project in the United States funded by Carnegie.

The Library’s history is problematic as its standard narrative does not reflect major shifts in the conceptualization of Thai historiography. Practically all Thai and English language accounts of the history of this important institution treat the first few decades of its existence rather passively. The birth of the Library appears as a fait accompli outgrowth of pre-existing libraries within recent Siamese history.11 For these sources, the Library’s emergence provides more proof of Siam’s growing (yet ill-defined) modernity, along with other vital state institutions during the same time.12 Academic studies of Thai librarianship as a whole seem to ignore the important early years of the Royal Library of Siam; this suggests that a probing analysis of the library’s early years is not necessary. These studies tend to concentrate on the growth of library development in the provinces between the 1950s and 1980s.13 Of course, these are important subjects within the field of library science in Thailand. However, the need for a critical analysis of the history of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital is apparent when one considers the following information.

13 This issue is particularly salient in Uthai Sangpichitara, “The Development of the Modern Library and Library Education in Thailand” (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 1979), and Suwakhon, The National Library of Thailand.
The years between the 1880s and 1932 constitute the years of Siamese monarchial absolutism. Though successive Thai states had always been ruled by a monarchy since the advent of their history, these years specifically denote a period when absolute authority vested in the monarchy (under King Chulalongkorn and two successive Siamese monarchs following his reign) became ascendant. The dynasty, known as the Chakri Dynasty, came to power in 1782 and established Bangkok as the new capital of the Siamese Kingdom after the predecessor Siamese capital of Ayutthaya was sacked by the Burmese in 1767. By the 1880s, the years following his minority rule, King Chulalongkorn and other royal administrators – generally, the king’s many siblings and relatives – had sidelined all potential opposition and consolidated nearly all political power within the Kingdom of Siam in the hands of the elite royal family. This period coincides with the zenith of European colonialism in Southeast Asia. Siam’s neighbors of Cambodia, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, and Malaya had all fallen victim to the insatiable palate of European colonial pursuits, driven by a desire to “civilize” the “uncivilized” and expand their economic prowess. Though threatened with territorial loss and colonial subjectivity by competing European powers during his long reign, King Chulalongkorn remained the only indigenous sovereign in Southeast Asia. Due to the threats of European colonialism, Siam, under King Chulalongkorn, began instituting a number of institutional and administrative reforms as influenced by European methods. Scholars view this period within Siamese history as one of a continued and multifaceted process of modernization of the nation. The perception of being “uncivilized,” which defined

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groups as lacking some abstract European ideal of modernity, emboldened European powers to threaten Asian lands with formal colonialism; thus, Siamese leaders were more than willing to reform their governance and promote Siamese civilization to avoid the same fate as their neighbors.\textsuperscript{16} And to a large extent, Siamese leaders were successful in averting total colonization. However, what lacks from this standard narrative is the supposition that the Chakri regime began to control Siam and its subjects more along the lines of European colonial administrative methods.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, it is within this milieu that the problematic history of the Royal Library for the Capital arises.

Concerning the authority which libraries possess in society, Fernando Baez states, “We have to remember that museums and libraries were closely linked to the nation’s power structure.”\textsuperscript{18} This research proffers that this statement be taken further in the case of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital: The Library was not only linked to Siam’s power structure, it was an active agent within the power structure by defining and promoting what Siam was and what constituted the nation through publications composed by the Library’s royal administrators and published as Royal Library for the Capital editions. These publications became standard educational treatises on Siamese history, society, politics, and literature. The Library also acted as a warehouse of “raw material” to facilitate knowledge production within a growing amount of print-scholarship


\textsuperscript{17} Benedict Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies” (paper presented at the Conference of the State of Thai Studies, Chicago, March 30, 1978); this offering was one of the first academic works to argue that Siam is more accurately understood as a quasi-colonial state during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries; see also, Batson, 12.

concerning the new notion of Siamese cultural identity. During this era (and the present era in Thailand), Siam was replete with non-Thai peoples, such as Khmer, Lao, Burmese, Chinese, and many others who represented potential sources of minority unrest to the ruling ethnic Thai absolutist regime. This research details how the Library’s royal administrators consolidated competing sources of information that were deemed to conflict with the emerging royalist-nationalist, Thai-dominated identity of the Kingdom. Far from promoting the egalitarian ideals which we find in Carnegie’s philanthropic work in establishing American public libraries, as an obverse, Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital was an active agent operating to promote the hegemony of the Chakri regime through its collection policies and the production of knowledge (as argued in the sixth and seventh chapters).

Within the sixth and seventh chapters, this research examines the scope of history during first twenty years of the Library’s existence, covering the latter years of King Chulalongkorn’s reign (1905-1910) and the entirety King Vajiravudh’s reign (1910-1925). It investigates the actions of the library’s administrators and the publications which the library scholar-officials (including some Westerners who acted as chief librarians) published while amassing Siam’s literary heritage within the centralized location of the Royal Library for the Capital. Also, this research examines the Royal Library’s role within the dissemination of newly constructed knowledge within the Kingdom. The scholar-librarians who administered the institution enabled and promoted great epistemological changes within the kingdom, and they greatly enlarged the collections and functions of the Royal Library for the Capital. This period of the early

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years of the Library marks distinct changes in official discourses of knowledge within Siam. Simply put, Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital was central to this process. It acted as a sort of foundry wherein knowledge was manipulated and forged. This knowledge promoted a new construct of the Siamese nation, and it promoted the primacy of the newly constructed, unilateral Thai history which buttressed the legitimacy of the ruling Chakri elite; their views, in this process, were the only ones articulated. The institution therefore acted as both locus and agent for discriminating knowledge production and its dissemination. The intent through this research is to expand upon the constructs of the Library’s history which have been put forth by the Thai government as well as Thai and foreign scholarship over the past century. Its role within the absolutist Siamese regime has not yet been fully articulated in scholarship; its relationship to other processes of Siamese internal-colonization has yet to be realized.

Concerning the establishment of the new Royal Library for the Capital, King Chulalongkorn stated the following:

Prosperous cities overseas have state libraries to house and preserve collections of all their books, because they are a source of knowledge for the nation. [The Library] is considered an important part of government. Such a Library, however, does not yet exist in Siam…The establishment of this Library will be of benefit and will bring honor to this country.

This research starts with this statement – the leitmotif in most Thai and English language scholarship concerning the birth and history of the Royal Library for the

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20 Chakri hegemony over print information during this period of investigation is articulated in two articles: Craig J. Reynolds, “Mr. Kulap and Purloined Documents,” and “A Seditious Poem and Its History,” in Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts, Craig J. Reynolds (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

21 Quoted from Jory, “Books and the Nation,” 357.
Capital – and it provides the catalyst for an investigation of the early operations of the library.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research is essentially to “stitch together” the early history of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital by examining it alongside nation-building processes (and arguably colonial processes) which occurred concomitantly during the first two decades of its existence spanning the later reign of King Chulalongkorn and the reign of King Vajirivudh (1905-1925). The aim is to expand the Library’s role within the greater narrative of Thai history; its inclusion into the wider historical processes of Siamese history is certainly warranted. Within the growing body of literature of Siam’s history during the absolutist era, one finds that scholars have primarily focused on the greater processes of social, political, legal, and economic modernization of the nation-state of Siam.\(^{22}\) They have treated the emergence of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital, as the precursor to the Thai National Library, with an air of cursory institutional development of the nation: The birth of this library was a \textit{fait accompli} and nothing more. The vast majority of scholars have treated the institution with indifference at the expense of larger and more important processes operating in Thai history. Thus, this research offers a fresh and necessary engagement by combining an examination of the institution’s history, concomitant political policies in the nation-state of Siam, and the major personalities associated with it as part and parcel with Thai history. This research applies modern notions of political science to library history and promotes the importance of informed

historical analyses concerning library history within the fields of library science, general history and Southeast Asian studies.

In undertaking the required research of the early history of the Royal Library for the Capital, one must look to the most obvious source of published information on the library. That source is the library itself (renamed the National Library of Thailand in 1932). While there are several important sources of historical information of the Library, the information itself seems perfunctory and scant. However, by using both primary sources and academic exegeses (secondary sources) on library science/librarianship and Thai history, in both English and in Thai, the possibility of constructing a more robust and complete early history of Siam’s Royal Library appears. This process uncovers the important role of the institution for Siam.

The sources reviewed here constitute a bricolage of literature. This being said, all of these sources must be included in this literature review as they all, in some way, support this research. One may thus divide the literature into three broad categories: 1. information published by Library personnel or the Siamese/Thai government itself concerning the library’s history (these are treated as primary source documentation), and works on library science development within Thailand; 2. histories of contemporary national library development within the non-Western world and applicable library science (and other social science) theory; 3. pertinent histories of Siam/Thailand which cover the period of study, 1905-1925, including more current research which suggests the Chakri Dynasty instituted colonial patterns of governance within nation-building processes. The latter category is necessary for contextualizing the historical milieu of Siam, its inhabitants and the political machinery at work in the kingdom. These categories are
necessary, but their divisions are arbitrary and several works which are discussed are applicable to more than one of the categories. These categories, however, provide some basic organization of major themes of this research.

Concerning the first category of works, relating to the body of literature produced by the Royal Library itself and/or successive Thai governments within the past century, primary sources within this category have been produced in both Thai and English languages. One finds fairly detailed, descriptive histories of the Royal Library published within four basic, important sources: The Vajiranana National Library of Siam, Guide-book to the Vajiranan Library and the National Museum, Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat (History of the National Library), and The National Library of Thailand all provide a basic historical framework of the institution and its administration (these titles also provide evidence to the fluidity of the institution’s name over the past century). With regards to the first two publications, which were published during and shortly after the era of investigation within this research, one finds adequate historical descriptions of the background and early history the Royal Library for the Capital. The history concerning the Library’s genesis (as an amalgamation of three former royal libraries), the history of library administration and description of library organization are all presented with basic description. Though there is some important detail within these works, they are fairly straightforward, informational pamphlets; they are quite are matter-of-fact regarding the establishment of the Royal Library for the Capital. They follow the same tropes which future scholars of Thai history have

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23 Coedes, The Vajirana National Library of Siam.
25 Maenmat, Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat (History of the National Library).
employed and perpetuated about Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital, as they do not suggest how this library’s emergence was connected to larger processes of political, social and educational development of the Kingdom.

Regarding the latter two works of this category, *Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat* (History of the National Library), and *The National Library of Thailand*, there are no major deviations from the content within the previous two works. *Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat* (History of the National Library) is a fairly significant source as it provides a few quotations of some of the early library administrators concerning the needs in creating a modern, centralized facility for Siam’s literary heritage. These important sources are explored here. However, as expected, there are no major philosophical debates within this work about the birth of the Royal Library, nor is there much evidence on the ramifications that this library had in stimulating the epistemological evolution within Thai knowledge. *The National Library of Thailand* presents a plethora of information concerning the current collection and services offered by the library (by the year 2000). The information is appropriate in depth and scope for promoting the importance of the National Library in the modern era. The treatment of the early history of the Royal Library for the Capital (as the progenitor of the National Library) takes up only the first two pages. The historical elements are not developed in depth. By its publication in 2000, the predictable trope within the scholarship concerning the Library’s history is embedded within this work: The Royal Library for the Capital was founded in 1905 by command of King Chulalongkorn, and this process resulted in an official
National Library by 1932. For some reason, according to this work, this span of years suggests no need for further investigation.

Thai library science scholarship in general offers little selection in regards to the modern library history of Thai libraries or libraries beyond Thailand’s borders. Though there exists some important scholarship concerning the growth of information technology in Thai libraries over the past few decades, there exist no critical analyses of modern library history in Thailand (in Thai, English or any other language). An exception is a doctoral dissertation by Uthai Sangpichitara entitled, “The Development of the Modern Library and Library Education in Thailand.” In this work, Uthai presents an unprecedented study, almost encyclopedic in scope and depth, concerning the education of modern librarianship in Thailand (up until 1979). Though this work is an important contribution towards our understanding of the development of librarianship within Thailand, it, like the aforementioned works, does not offer anything beyond basic historical information concerning the early years of the Royal Library for the Capital. According to the author, the Royal Library for the Capital simply became the National Library a few decades after its establishment.

However, there are some important contributions to the early history of the Royal Library for the Capital which deserve special mention in this literature review: a work entitled, Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries) and a brief article

27 Siriwongworawat, 1-2. I have kept the tradition of referring to Thai authors and subjects by their given names in the body of the research and in the bibliography.
29 Ibid., 31-32.
30 Damrong Rajanuphab, Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries) (Bangkok: 1969). (translated by Joshua C. Mika)
entitled, “Books and the Nation: The Making of Thailand’s National Library.”31 The former work is a detailed administrative history of the Library that was composed by Prince Damrong, half-brother of King Chulalongkorn. As this research argues in the sixth and seventh chapters, Damrong was inarguably the most important Siamese personality involved with library administration during the early years of the institution. After years of government service which included modernizing and expanding the Siamese education system and revamping the Ministry of the Interior to increase the central government’s authority over the Siamese provinces, Prince Damrong was assigned as the administrative Committee Chairman of the Royal Library for the Capital for nearly two decades. This position offered the prince nearly unfettered power in governing the Library and its collection. He was easily the most important contributor towards the Library’s development and its greatest scholar-official who composed many well-known historical treatises utilizing the growing collection of the Library (many of these were considered benchmarks of Thai historical works). As a result, Prince Damrong became known as the “father of Thai history.”32 Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries) is an indispensable primary source which provides essential, critical information for nearly all attributes of the foundation, development, administration, and problems of the early years of the Royal Library for the Capital. This research draws heavily upon this essential primary source.

Finally, the impetus of this research owes a great deal to the suggestions which historian Patrick Jory proffers in his article, “Books and the Nation: The Making of

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Thailand’s National Library.” Jory provides the only clarion call for further investigation into the history of the early years and development of the Royal Library: “One institution [in Siam] which has received comparatively less attention but whose role in the construction of the concept of the Thai nation was no less significant is the national library.”33 Though his article suggests a basic framework for analyzing the Library’s role within the Chakri regime, and he accurately states that the Royal Library for the Capital was vastly important in promoting new epistemologies (spurred greatly by the works produced by Prince Damrong in his capacity as the Committee Chairman of the Library), Jory’s work is, unfortunately, too brief for a thorough explication of the Library’s history. Moreover, he fails to mention some rather important components which certainly affected the role and development of the Royal Library, such as the use of foreign scholar-librarians in the library’s development. Nonetheless, Jory’s work is the sole academic offering which begs for further investigation into the history of the Royal Library of the Capital as it related to larger political machinations of the country.

Though there seems to be dearth of critical analyses of Siam’s Royal Library, this should not dissuade one from attempting to do research on its history and its important role in Siamese history. In order to analyze the development of the Library, it is necessary to examine case studies of the history and development of modern librarianship within other non-European lands. This research examines the development of national libraries in certain Southeast Asian regions and Africa, regions which experienced varying degrees of subjectivity to European colonialism. Though Siam was the only nation in Southeast Asia that was not a de jure European colony, this fact is somewhat

dubious. Modern scholarship of Thai history has proffered that Siam should be considered a semi-colony; and at times, scholars argue, Siam also acted as a colonizer towards its own citizens in emulating European colonial processes within the Kingdom (processes related to instituting colonial-inspired jurisprudence and educational policies).\textsuperscript{34} Siam oftentimes had to satisfy European colonial demands with regards to its territorial sovereignty. It was frequently under the threat of outright colonization by European powers which led to Siam agreeing to unfair trade treaties and accepting European extraterritoriality within its sovereign boundaries.\textsuperscript{35} Siam’s history during this period is discussed in greater length and detail later in this research as it elucidates the greater processes which occurred during the early history of the Royal Library for the Capital.

One may draw distinct parallels between modern library development in other colonial realms and the development of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital. Within the cases of Singapore, Indonesia and Nigeria, all of which experienced outright European colonization, one finds that modern library development within these colonies germinated at approximately the same time during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries (concomitant with Siam). Similar to the case of modern library development in Siam, early library collections within these colonies developed as collections which mainly addressed the information needs of the ruling elite.\textsuperscript{36} These collections did not cater to the majority

\textsuperscript{34} Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State,” 218-219.; see also, Loos, Subject Siam; Thongchai, Siam Mapped.

\textsuperscript{35} See chapter 7 in Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History.

subject populations, and their works generally were not in indigenous languages of the respective colonies (thought this is one aspect which is somewhat different in the case of Siam, as discussed in the sixth chapter). In three related works, entitled “Colonialism, Ethnicity, and Geopolitics in the Development of the Singapore National Library,”37 “The History of the National Library of Indonesia: The Bibliographic Borobudur,”38 and “The Evolution of the National Library of Nigeria: Antecedents, Establishment, and Recent Development,”39 their research shows that there were shared trajectories within collection development policies in the development of colonial state libraries on par with the case of Siam’s Library. These early modern libraries within the colonial milieu – including within Siam – became loci of literary and material culture centralization and acted as either de facto or de jure agents which buttressed their respective colonial regimes. Similar to processes in the development of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital, these colonial libraries produced knowledge for colonial authorities and collected (potentially) competing sources of knowledge and authority. This argument, that libraries became coercive loci of ideological control, is further buttressed by similar theoretical sentiments expressed in Christine Pawley’s article, “Hegemony’s Handmaid? The Library and Information Studies Curriculum from a Class Perspective.”40 Pawley argues further that elite members of educational institutions, such as libraries, were central to the mission of transmitting effective dominant culture to non-elites.41 Citing Pawley’s work in combination with other case studies of colonial librarianship is more

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37 Luyt, “Colonialism, Ethnicity, and Geopolitics in the Development of the Singapore Library.”
38 Massil, “The History of the National Library of Indonesia: The Bibliographic Borobudur.”
41 Ibid., 127.
than apt in the study of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital. As stated within the fourth, sixth and seventh chapters, these same hegemonic forces were actively operating in the creation and development of Siam’s Library.

Lastly, in discussing theoretical constructs related to the development of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital, two important works must mentioned: Benedict Anderson’s seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, and a pertinent essay on museum development entitled, “Oriental Antiquities/Far Eastern Art” by Craig Clunas. Anderson proffers that the rise of nation-states, though beginning in Europe, was not solely a uniform, European phenomenon. Given the rise of spread of print technology and the decline of sacred languages throughout the globe (at an uneven pace), and the emergence of standardized vernacular languages, particularly in the 19th century, there was a reflective trend in the rise of literacy rates, which, in turn, gave rise to “unified fields of exchange and communication” by members who communicated with the same written vernacular.

According to Anderson’s thesis, these factors enabled the emergence of “imagined communities,” i.e., nation-states bounded by specific geographic borders where the vast majority of its citizens will never see or meet one another, though they will all share certain culture mores (as established by a hegemonic, dominant culture). Anderson’s thesis can certainly be applied to the case of Siam in the early 20th century, as a distinct growth in print material arose concomitantly with a growing, educated Siamese

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44 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.
Naturally, this affected the birth of institutions like modern, centralizing libraries (these are salient points which are discussed more in the final section of the literature review).

According to Clunas, in his article “Oriental Antiquities/Far Eastern Art,” institutions such as national museums, and by extension national libraries, began amassing, displaying and “protecting” collections which reified the validity of these nation-states which promoted national development. This stimulated growth in nationalist discursive practices among a growing, literate populace (again, as dictated by elites, according to Pawley).

The third category of works concerns the general knowledge of Siamese history during the period of my investigation of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital, spanning the later reign of King Chulalongkorn and the reign of his son, King Vajiravudh. These works constitute the strongest scholarly works for these respective reigns, and they have all been lauded for promoting important, new trends within the field of Thai history. However, the one overarching critique of these works is that the role of Siam’s Royal Library for the Capital amounts to a mere footnote in the process of historical development during the years 1905-1925. As with the aforementioned primary source evidence published by the National Library itself concerning the history of the Royal Library for the Capital, the following sources, yet again, perpetuate the lack of academic study of this Library. This notwithstanding, the following works are essential for inclusion in this research as they provide historical frameworks and theoretical

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45 See “Introduction” in, Scot Barme, Woman, Man, Bangkok.
46 Clunas, 414.
suggestions which are pertinent to an analysis of the Royal Library’s important role in larger processes of Thai history.

Covering the reign of King Chulalongkorn, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy’s Modern Image, and Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand, these works discuss the rise of Siamese nationalism and the emergence of a sort of Siamese political “modernity” (i.e., absolutism) as vectors in examining Thai historical processes. With the ever-present specter of European colonialism looming around the Siamese kingdom, these important works discuss how the ruling Siamese family, the Chakri Dynasty, rose to the apogee of political power, weathered the threat of colonialism (by appeasing European hunger for commercial and territorial desires) and began emulating European colonial practices within their own kingdom. In great depth, these works discuss the emergence of a powerful royal bureaucracy, the ascendency of the central government, and the birth of modern education. However, these scholars have not investigated the emergence of the Royal Library for the Capital as a phenomenon which promoted an increasing elite hegemony over knowledge production and the dissemination of information.

Concerning the reign of King Vajiravudh, the son of King Chulalongkorn, three important works entitled, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Absolute Dreams: Thai Government under Rama VI, 1910-1925, and

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48 Peleggi, *Lords of Things*.
49 Loos, *Subject Siam*.
50 Vella, *Chaiyo!*. 
51
Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand.\textsuperscript{52} These works continue the discussion of an increasing ascendency of the monarchy’s power during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century; and like the aforementioned works covering King Chulalongkorn’s reign, the Royal Library for the Capital remains surprisingly underrepresented and elusive in the historical narrative. This is even more surprising as these works describe in great detail the spread of literacy throughout the urban population of Bangkok, the literate population’s growing involvement with emerging civic and nationalist processes,\textsuperscript{53} and the birth of modern Thai historiography as dictated by Prince Damrong in his capacity as Library Committee Chairman. The rise in print material during this reign was unprecedented in Thai history, and new fields of study concerning archaeology and lexicography spurred Siamese scholarship and national, historical investigation.\textsuperscript{54} The Library’s important role in these processes, again, cannot be overstated, yet the institution receives little attention within these important works.

\textsuperscript{51} Greene, \textit{Absolute Dreams}.  
\textsuperscript{52} Barme, \textit{Woman, Man, Bangkok}.  
\textsuperscript{54} Peleggi, \textit{The Politics of Ruins and the Business of Nostalgia}, 16.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGIES

This project examines the larger colonial-inspired processes instituted by the Chakri regime based in Bangkok as they emerged in the nation-state of Siam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This research also examines the administration policies and projects pursued by the administrators of the Royal Library for the Capital in amassing of the literary heritage of Siam, as these were part-and-parcel with larger colonial-inspired processes previously mentioned. Also, this research provides some background and history to the indigenous concepts of libraries and print material and print technology. By examining colonialism as a vector within Thai history, this research demonstrates that the Royal Library for the Capital indeed acted as a colonial enterprise in amassing and creating distorted and censored knowledge of Siam’s subject populations. Once combined, these topics of investigation suggest that the history the Royal Library for the Capital has not been fully articulated in historical scholarship. Moreover, this research suggests that the historiography of Thai intellectualism is incomplete.

The methodologies of this research draw heavily upon primary source material, and to a lesser extent, secondary source material. Though it suggests theoretical arguments and certain philosophical concepts, such as nationalism, modernity and colonialism, to help elucidate historical processes at work in the Royal Library for the Capital as mentioned in the literature review, the intentions are to let the primary sources speak for themselves. Primary sources – like any source – are far from perfect. Sometimes they are fraught with inaccuracies, biases and inadequate information.
However, in crafting history, these sources are, simply, the most important components in creating sound research. One would not know of historical events and one could not trace historical processes and historical trajectories without these critical sources.

Primary sources have the ability to create a *Zeitgeist* of historical eras. Eye-witness accounts and personal recollections may convey raw and exciting emotions while documenting violent or stimulating events. However, natural human emotions may also occlude the reality of the historical event during documentation. Newspaper accounts may inflate the actual events in order to increase readership, and this process may unwittingly leave an indelible (and potentially inaccurate) mark upon the event. One’s personal recollections within a diary may skew the reality of a historical event in order avoid personal responsibility for the outcome of an event; conversely, one may inflate one’s participation within an event to portray a more integrated role with the positive outcome of a historical event. The permutations of inherent fallacies within primary sources are endless. However, it is necessary to admit these precautions when performing historical research.

Concerning the primary sources of *The Vajiranana* [Wachirayan] *National Library of Siam*, Guide-book to the Vajiranan [Wachirayan] Library and the National Museum, Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat (History of the National Library), and The National Library of Thailand, their inclusion in this research is very important.

Though, admittedly, the information they convey may be circumscribed, the descriptions of the Royal Library for the Capital in some of the longer passages may be considered the

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55 Coedes, *The Vajirana National Library of Siam.*
57 Maenmat, Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat. (History of the National Library)
de facto official government (or at least, official Library administration) definition and scope of the institution. Also, though some of these primary sources were composed after the period of investigation of this research, they remain primary sources of information as the institution of the Library and/or the Thai government remained the source which published the works. Therefore, these sources remain part of the official discourse of the Library’s history. Thus, with proof of the official definition, description and scope of the Library’s authority embedded within these primary sources, one may then use this information as benchmarks. By combining this information with other primary and secondary sources, one may reveal a deeper and more probing historiography of the library.

The inclusion of indigenous language primary sources is quite important in performing this research. If one relies on a translation of an indigenous language source, this may be acceptable, and it is certainly expedient in conducting research, but one runs the risk of including a potentially degenerated message by going through at least two sets of filters before the message is applied to the research.59 With regards to Prince Damrong’s vastly important Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries),60 the author provides an invaluable, first-hand account of the early evolution of the Royal Library for the Capital and how it, through its administrators and personnel, conducted any dialogue with the governing central authorities. This important information is lacking within most of the other primary sources (aside from sources available only at the National Library or National Archives in Bangkok); without it, it might be impossible to

59 For this reason, unless noted, I have performed all Thai language translations.
60 Damrong, Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries).
construct a detailed analysis of the Library’s history. Its scope would certainly be limited without the prince’s work.
CHAPTER 4

SIAMESE COLONIAL PURSUITS: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SIAM IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

In order to understand the history regarding the birth, functions and development of the Royal Library for the Capital during between the years 1905-1925, one must examine the larger processes of, what scholars have deemed, “national development” within the Kingdom of Siam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Until the latter decades of the 20th century, scholarship of Siamese/Thai history had promoted a narrative which argued that massive political, educational and institutional changes during the reigns of King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh were evidence of modernization of the nation. In particular, this narrative lauded the Siamese monarchs of King Chulalongkorn, and to a much lesser degree King Vajiravudh, for setting Siam on a trajectory of positive modernization, while Siam’s neighbors had each been conquered by European colonialism.61 These tropes were well-embedded within Western scholarship as they were borrowed from Thai language scholarship, of which a large body was composed during the period of historical investigation (1905-1925) and within the milieu of the Royal Library for the Capital. However, within the latter decades of the 20th century, and continuing today with contemporary scholarship, critical analyses of these modernizing processes which occurred in Siam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries have posited that the ruling Chakri Dynasty (to which the current King Bhumibol of Thailand belongs) pursued colonial projects in crafting new, national institutions and bodies to enforce royal hegemony emanating from the capital, Bangkok,

61 Thongchai, Siam Mapped, 3; see also, Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State,” 200.
within the geo-body/nation-state of Siam.\textsuperscript{62} This is an important argument to understand as it is only since the 1870s that Siamese leaders began to conceive their nation as defined by boundaries, represented by continuous segments on a map denoting their (assumed) sovereignty vis-à-vis other sovereignties.\textsuperscript{63} Lorraine Gesick has produced a sound exegesis on Thai historiography which states that under the guise of modernizing the nation, the Chakri Dynasty really sought to enact the following within Siam:

From Chulalongkorn until the Revolution of 1932 [which replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy], the state took the form of a modernizing, absolutist regime with a concern for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and with a need to deny or minimize social discontent or ethnic and political plurality within its border. New, royally sponsored institutions such as the Vajirayana National Library [the Royal Wachirayan Library for the Capital], the Archaeological Society, and the Royal Academy or Rachabandit Sapha (“Council of Royal Pundits”), in all of which prince-savants predominated, in turn governed how knowledge of the past would be produced.\textsuperscript{64}

Thongchai argues that Siam, which had been a somewhat amorphous political unit on mainland Southeast Asia, became \textit{Siam}, a geographically-bounded political unit defined by the modern concept of physical, cartographical demarcations as aided by European techniques of mapmaking. This resulting incarnation of \textit{Siam}, according to Thongchai, was a geo-body/nation-state finely articulated on a map and negotiated

\textsuperscript{62} Anderson, “Studies of the Thai State,” 210; Anderson claims that it is dubious to consider the developments in Siam during this period as national development. He believes the developments reflected more of a colonial administration as found elsewhere in (colonized) Southeast Asia.

\textsuperscript{63} Thongchai, 10-110. Thongchai’s terminology of the geo-body, I believe, represents the most accurate description of the nation-state of the Kingdom of Siam. It is the most apt terminology when critically analyzing the overall political machinations during the period of investigation.

through European colonial practices and discourse. Progressively, during this period of investigation, and primarily during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, vassal territories, which for centuries had paid both regular and irregular tribute to the various Siamese royal dynasties (based at the former Siamese royal capitals of Ayutthaya, the predecessor capital of Thonburi and, finally, Bangkok), one by one, were usurped into formal European colonies. Malay, Khmer, Burmese, and Lao kingdoms and princedoms – all of which had either competed with the Siamese for centuries (such as the Burmese and Khmer), or had been involved in various tributary relationships with the Siamese – abruptly exited their former relationships with the Siamese by being absorbed into European colonial states. These were the new realities of European imperialism which the Chakri Dynasty faced.

The ruling elite of Siam both feared yet, ostensibly, respected the might of the European colonial powers and their abilities to absorb Siam’s former foes and tributary states. To ensure its own survival, and to promote the notion that Siam was more civilized than its neighbors, as colonialism both produced and was a byproduct of the binary discourse of civilized-uncivilized nations and peoples, King Chulalongkorn initiated colonial-inspired projects to enforce the Siamese ruling elite hegemony over the varied subjects who now resided within the new geo-body of Siam. Educational, provincial administration and (Buddhist) religious reforms became hallmarks of the internal colonization, as current scholarship now articulates; and King Chulalongkorn’s half-brother, Prince Damrong, who was the singular most important figure in the study of

65 The term reform, I argue, is writ small for the term colonial processes.
the Royal Library for the Capital, was also one of the most important figures in these reforms.\textsuperscript{67}

Before educational reforms were enacted by King Chulalongkorn, basic education for males, including rudimentary literacy, had been the purview of the Buddhist monks at their monasteries. However, this process was strictly informal, and the quality, design, and content of this type of education which had existed on mainland Southeast Asia for so long were deemed inappropriate and potentially fatal in the pursuit of progress for the geo-body of Siam. Chulalongkorn therefore placed the mission of creating massive educational reforms for the state in the hands of his able brother, Prince Damrong. Quoting the official history of the provided by the Thai Ministry of Education:

In 1884, Prince Damrong was entrusted with the organization of government schools for general public in compliance with the King’s [Chulalongkorn] gracious desire: ‘The organization of government school [sic] for the general public follows the deliberation that people traditionally send their sons to be educated by monks in various monasteries since the old days. Monks benefit from the boys’ odd-job services and their parents support, so these boys are taken under their care willingly. In reference to this tradition, it may be said that schools for the general public have long been in existence at every monastery. Nevertheless, these teacher monks have given instruction at their own convenience; and their minimal qualifications vary from one to another. The contents of teaching have never been planned. Thus, the instruction given in that manner has not yet produced the kind of knowledge beneficial for the public.’\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{68} A History of Thai Education (Bangkok: Ministry of Education, 1976), 16.
Thus, between the years 1880-1892, Prince Damrong initiated wide-reaching and pervasive reforms within Siam to counter the problems of uneven educational development and general backwardness of education, particularly of far-flung (and potentially rebellious) provinces.

During his tenure, Damrong oversaw the creation of standardized textbooks, which were the sole texts on which annual examinations were based. Thus, not using the official text would result in not passing official examinations. This process eventually led to the nationalization and standardization of educational practices by the end of his tenure in 1892. These general reforms instituted in Siam largely mirrored British educational standards, practices and subjects. According to David Wyatt, due to these educational reforms, “once schools [in the provinces] were founded with Bangkok’s support, they were not allowed to teach in the local dialects and had instead to teach standard [central] Bangkok Thai [language].” Moreover, other pressing objectives with regards to wide-ranging educational reforms were King Chulalongkorn’s following desire:

In order…[for] rationalization and modernization of the [absolutist] administration and the broadening of the bases of political responsibility, it was necessary to ensure that there existed a large body of educated and competent youth among the nobility and royal family.

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69 David. K. Wyatt, The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 70.; Anderson draws similar comparisons with the imposition of the Russian language on German minorities during the same era in Imagined Communities, 87.
70 David K. Wyatt, Siam in Mind (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002), 73.
This process was meant to ameliorate the problem of the over-dependence on foreign advisors who had been hired to assist the Siamese government with general bureaucratic reforms during King Chulalongkorn’s long reign.\textsuperscript{72}

Thus, by stamping out local variants in language through officially sanctioned processes regarding education and knowledge in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Prince Damrong established a precedent in the new geo-body of Siam: this was a state that would pursue social homogenization through educational practices as dictated by Bangkok. To the regime in Bangkok, local educational practices which were not beholden to a sanctioned rigor were equated with the potential for resistance. This issue dovetails with similar practices which diminished the importance of local variants in language and knowledge within provincial Siam that occurred at the behest of the central Siamese regime based in Bangkok, as discussed in the sixth chapter.

Before Siam’s geo-body was physically articulated on a map, the Siamese monarchy based in Bangkok had rather fluctuating, irregular relationships with other regional elite lords in the various regions of Mainland Southeast Asia. These hereditary lords may have been called upon by Bangkok to supply corvee labor and soldiers, if need be. But, by and large, the relationship between the Siamese capital and the regional elites was tenuous at best. Quoting Prince Damrong, Michael Vickery states that the prince “points out, the main purpose of the old system was to keep things quiet. The Provinces wished to avoid central government interference, and the capital only concerned itself with provincial affairs when there was serious trouble.”\textsuperscript{73} This lax relationship was

\textsuperscript{72} A History of Thai Education, 22.
potentially explosive as there remained a substantial fear that France would make demands for Siam to cede regions which Bangkok felt rightly belonged to its sphere of influence, and King Chulalongkorn feared that regional elites might easily slip from one sphere of influence (Bangkok) to another, given the unreliable nature of the relationship between center and periphery.  

Thus, in 1892 King Chulalongkorn asked Prince Damrong to assume the position of Minister of the Interior and tasked him with reforming the provincial administration within the geo-body of Siam in order to tighten Bangkok’s control on, what King Chulalongkorn viewed as, internal affairs within the kingdom. Though the details of the provincial administration reform are complex, and the process of the reforms was not immediate and even-handed, the results of Prince Damrong’s far-reaching provincial administration reforms totally altered (and created) the political landscape within Siam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Influenced by tours of colonized Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Malaya in order to gauge the processes and effectiveness of British colonial practices, Prince Damrong effectively instituted an unprecedented degree of central control emanating from the royal government in Bangkok as influenced by these tours to European colonies in Asia. The system which Prince Damrong instituted was called the *Thesapiban* system, a system that organized the former tributary principalities into administrative units called *monthon*. Though the former hereditary rulers remained, their positions had been usurped as they became salaried civil servants.

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74 Ibid.  
76 Ibid., 101.
within the Siamese bureaucracy. In their place, royal commissioners were sent from Bangkok to the provinces to act as the representatives of the Ministry of Interior, whose head was, as mentioned, Prince Damrong. The Prince chose these royal commissioners for their loyalty to the central government based in Bangkok; their authority was pervasive and broad. Tej Bunnag states further that

Prince Damrong himself had defined the primary role of the superintendent [royal] commissioner as being an intermediary, through whom the Ministry of the Interior conveyed directives to the governors and obtained information regarding the provincial administration.

This gave Prince Damrong nearly unfettered access and communication to all reaches within the geo-body of Siam, something which would eventually have great repercussions on the development on the Royal Library for the Capital. Moreover, the effects of Bangkok’s official colonization over the provinces in its new geo-body ensured that tax revenues bypassed the former hereditary rulers, which greatly increased the royal treasury in Bangkok, and the process eventually paved the way for all central ministries to be present in all parts of Siam.

The last colonial-inspired project initiated by Siamese regime based in Bangkok concerns the attempts to create of a national, homogenized Siamese Buddhist church within the geo-body of Siam. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, regional variants and practices of Theravada Buddhism caused much consternation to King Chulalongkorn. According to Charles Keyes

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77 Vickery, 875.; see also: Batson, 11.
78 Ibid., 875.
79 Tej., 104.
80 Vickery, 876-877.
Buddhism as traditionally practiced outside of the core area of traditional Siam represented a potential threat to national integration because its local manifestations were articulated with autonomous polities [which had only recently been brought under official, colonial administration of Bangkok via the Thesaphiban system]⁸¹

These practices involved monks and phu mi bun (men of merit) who claimed divine, supernatural powers.⁸² Historically, across the region of mainland Southeast Asia, these variant forms of Buddhism evinced the influence of local religious leaders on regional populations. Oftentimes, in claiming supernatural powers, members of local sects would lead millenarian missions against existing political authorities. The central authority in Bangkok was concerned that revolutionary zeal could lead to interregional warfare and instability of the state. In response to potential threats against royal authority, King Chulalongkorn promulgated the Sangha Administration Act of 1902.⁸³ According to Keyes, the most salient parts of the act stipulated that all monks within Siam were to be incorporated into a nationalized structure; hierarchical authority was to be established whereby monks who were higher in the structure could mete out punishments upon or countermand decisions of those lower in the hierarchy; and a national system of clerical education was to be established.⁸⁴ It should be noted, and it certainly should be no surprise, that the supreme Buddhist patriarch during this time was Prince Wachirayan, King Chulalongkorn’s half-brother.

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⁸³ Ibid., 555. The term Sangha refers to the Buddhist monkhood community.
⁸⁴ Ibid.
Though Prince Damrong is absent from this example of the establishment of central Siamese hegemony over religious practices, it is evident that this age of King Chulalongkorn – this *modernizing* period during the creation of the Siamese geo-body – involved the imposition of colonial regimens as dictated by Chakri overlords in Bangkok. Though these cases may seem to diverge from the subject of this research – an examination of the early history the Royal Library for the Capital – understanding the true nature of Siamese absolutism during this period, and its continuation into the reign of King Vajiravudh, contributes to an enriched and more probing history of the Royal Library of the Capital.
CHAPTER 5

EARLY LIBRARIES, PRE-COLONIAL LITERARY CULTURE, MONASTIC EDUCATION, AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PRINTING PRESS IN SIAM

Concerning early libraries and print culture in Siam, it would be incorrect to suggest that the content within this chapter involves, essentially, only Thai developments within the aforementioned subjects. Across mainland Southeast Asia for centuries, one of the main modes of transmission of both religious and secular knowledge was the palm leaf folio manuscript. These accordion-style bundles represented a print technology which, to this day, remains emblematic of an ancient mainland Southeast Asian literary heritage, particularly of Theravada Buddhist cultures.

David Wyatt states that, “Certainly up to about 90 percent of the manuscripts are religious, but that still leaves 10 percent that covered just about all other subjects, from poetry and other literature to law and medicine and history and veterinary science.”85 Thus, the overarching concern for the use of this print technology was for religious purposes, but preserving essential, secular knowledge warranted the use of these manuscripts, as well. Typically, these manuscripts were housed in structures called ho trai (hall of the Tripitaka; one portion of the Buddhist canon) which were attached to Buddhist monasteries (wat). Though information regarding the use of these libraries (ho trai) is scant within historical scholarship of libraries in pre-modern mainland Southeast Asia, some evidence suggests that certain monasteries restricted the circulation of their precious manuscripts,86 while others were part of a “network” of Buddhist religious

85 Wyatt, Siam in Mind, 73.
86 Ibid., 75.
campuses and lending libraries which often operated independently of the “machinations of political leaders and borders.” 87 This last comment is especially salient when considering how manuscripts that were discovered in the geo-body of Siam were essentially hoarded by Prince Damrong for inclusion at the Royal Library for the Capital, as discussed in the sixth chapter. Construction of both ho trai and the copying of manuscripts were considered meritorious acts which propitiated the Dhamma of the Buddhist faith. 88 Moreover, great care was taken in the design and location of ho trai, as one finds evidence of certain ho trai built over ponds to protect the manuscripts against destructive agents, such as fires or insects.

What is remarkable about the religious aspects of the manuscripts, especially in the present discussion of the development of the nation-state of Siam, is that, “No two collections [of manuscripts] are the same and the orthography and the colophons confirm the lack of a regionally unified approach to the study of Buddhism.” 89 Furthermore, Gesick argues that, regarding her investigation into the meaning of religious manuscripts from southern Thailand, these manuscripts, their content, language and scripts all denoted localization and local idiosyncrasies which spoke towards a more local (i.e., not national) cultural statement of the region. 90 These manuscripts were not simply objects inscribed with a variety of information on a variety of sources: these manuscripts, according to Gesick, were imbued with authority and sanctity. Oftentimes, manuscripts were accompanied with texts that would curse those who did not treat the manuscripts with due

89 Ibid., 135.
90 Gesick, 10.
reverence or who would utter the incantations incorrectly. For Gesick, this denotes an outgrowth of an intellectual tradition imbedded within the manuscripts.91

The introduction of the Siamese language type and the printing press in the 19th century articulated a definite and permanent shift in the dominant format of the print culture in Siam, and, arguably, the meaning of written texts. In 1828, the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta produced the first type in Thai for the purpose of editing Captain J. Low’s “Grammar of the Thai or Siamese Language.”92 However, the first printing press and Thai language sheet tract did not arrive in Siam until 1836.93 Throughout the mid-19th century, American missionaries who arrived in Siam began to print Thai language religious tracts to proselytize Christianity, though their proselytizing efforts had a marginal effect on the devoutly Buddhist Siamese populace. The greater effect by this diffusion of print technology was its adaptation of the printing press by the Siamese authorities, particularly King Mongkut (the father of King Chulalongkorn), who, in his position as a monk before his accession to kingship, established the first royal printing press at one of the main royal Buddhist temples in Bangkok, Wat Bovornivet.94 This enabled the Siamese government to begin printing proclamations and edicts with speed and efficacy. Benedict Anderson has argued that the development of print capitalism and the speed at which books could be printed and disseminated eventually sparked major shifts in the political discourse and propagation of modern of nationalism.95 George Coedes, who was employed as the second Chief Librarian of the Royal Library for the Capital, buttressed this argument by stating, “Nowadays [1924], as regards correctness,

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91 Ibid., 35.
92 Coedes, 33.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 34.
95 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 37.

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elegance and promptitude [emphasis added], the principal Presses of Bangkok have reached a high standard."96 This fact had great ramifications on the operations of the Royal Library for the Capital, as discussed in the next chapter.

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96 Coedes, 34.
CHAPTER 6

THE BIRTH AND EVOLUTION OF THE ROYAL LIBRARY FOR THE CAPITAL

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Siam’s colonial pursuits, in the guise of nation building, had become quite apparent. Far from being merely the only non-colonized state in Southeast Asia, as the traditional historiography of Siam has articulated, the new geo-body of Siam began to emulate colonial processes that it gleaned from its intimate contact with global colonization practices in order to secure what it viewed as Siam’s own sovereignty and to promote a homogenizing nationalism under the auspices of the Chakri monarch, as discussed in the fourth chapter. Political hegemony over its new provinces and homogeneity in religion and education, pursued by Siamese agents based at the metropole in Bangkok, clearly provided evidence that the Kingdom of Siam – as embodied in the Chakri Dynasty – operated by colonial designs as the nation-state developed. It is within this political milieu that the Royal Library for the Capital emerged.

King Chulalongkorn promulgated the new Royal Wachirayan Library for the Capital in October 12, 1905 as an official organ within the Ministry or Religious Affairs of the Siamese bureaucracy.97 It was established on the grounds of the Grand Palace at the center of Bangkok, but it moved later in 1916 to a larger building near the Palace.98 According to Prawat Ho Samut haeng Chat (History of the National Library), published by the Thai Ministry of Fine Arts, King Chulalongkorn established this Library as a public library to honor the centenary of his father, the late King Mongkut, whose

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98 Damrong, 43.
monastic name during his many years as a monk (before assuming the throne) was
Wachirayan. The Royal Library for the Capital was an amalgamation of three
predecessor libraries in Bangkok, as previously stated in the introduction. One of the
libraries, whose name was also the Royal Wachirayan Library (note the absence of the
word “Capital” by comparison with its successor), acted as a sort of elite literary club for
Siamese aristocracy whose goal it was to “help collect and compile information for
completing the current Royal Biography of the Royal Dynasty.” King Chulalongkorn
acted as its official patron, and he directed funds from the Siamese Privy Purse in its
establishment and for the purchase of its interior decorations; most of the books collected
in this library were donated from the Siamese princes’ own collections. The elite
members of this group published their own literary magazine, known as the Wachirayan
Wiset (Wachirayan Journal), in which the members would compose various articles
concerning their elite conceptions of Siamese history and literature. Utilizing the
relatively new technology of book printing, the members printed books in the Thai
language; often their original sources were older Thai manuscripts or foreign language
books. This was a subscription-based literary club, and membership was subject to
official sanction by the members. The vast majority of the members of this club came
from the Chakri family and palace officials of mid- to high rank. The other libraries
which were part of the amalgamation forming the Royal Library for the Capital, as
mentioned in the introduction, were two royal, religious libraries (ho trai) which

99 Maenmat, 2.
100 Jory, Ibid.; Maenmat, 10.
101 Maenmat, 10.; see also, Benedict Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, ed. and trans., In The Mirror:
102 Ibid.
contained both religious and secular manuscript collections that were, for the most part, all combined into the new Royal Library for the Capital.

King Chulalongkorn established the administration of this library largely on lines which he established for the antecedent Royal Wachirayan Library. Originally, he enacted a bylaw that created a Library Committee, with an annually-rotating Committee Chairman and rotating Committee members, all of whom would come from the Chakri family (the so-called prince-savants, the term suggested by Gesick\textsuperscript{103} and would rotate after a three year stint in the Committee.\textsuperscript{104} However, King Chulalongkorn eventually felt that having such a configuration with a continuous rotation in and out of library administration would have slowed down any progress that the Library would have made in its development. King Chulalongkorn also required that an annual report should be compiled by the Committee for presentation to the King on library activities; this was, however, abandoned due to the difficulties that the Library had in carrying out its general operations of material collection and classification.\textsuperscript{105} In fact, Prince Damrong stated himself that his \textit{Tamnan Ho Phrasamut} (History of the Royal Libraries), which was published in 1916, should really be considered the first official report on the activities of the Royal Library for the Capital, eleven years after the promulgation of the Library and its bylaws by King Chulalongkorn.\textsuperscript{106}

During the years 1905-1925, the Royal Library for the Capital had three Committee Presidents: Crown Prince Vajiravudh, who rescinded his position upon his ascension to the throne; Prince Sommot, who died in 1915; and Prince Damrong, who

\textsuperscript{103} Gesick, 13.
\textsuperscript{104} Damrong, 49.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 53
\textsuperscript{106} Damrong, 65.
remained in the powerful capacity of the Committee Chairman until the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932 and his subsequent removal from the bureaucracy. Though Prince Damrong was not chosen to act as Committee Chairman until ten years after the establishment of the Royal Library for the Capital, he had been a Committee member since the Library’s inception, and thus his observations of the early years of the Library’s history provide a rare look into the actions of the body, especially in light of the fact that the Committee had produced no report on its functions and progress, as requested annually by King Chulalongkorn in 1905.  

Regarding the regular employees, the new Royal Library for the Capital continued the tradition of employing contractual laborers for lower positions who had no other positions within the royal bureaucracy; this was a precedent that had been established with the antecedent Royal Wachirayan Library. The managers at the all antecedent libraries usually came from other government ministries; thus they remained under the jurisdiction of those ministries, but they continued to receive certain salaries and bonuses from the Royal Library for the Capital. Damrong stated that the original employees of all the antecedent libraries were chosen based on what they could do. When considering these three libraries which came together to form the Royal Library for the Capital, the Library Committee conferred and agreed that if all of these aforementioned employees worked together in the same library, then there would be too many people than needed. However, if they were chosen according to their real abilities, there would be very few employees with capabilities to work in the Royal Library for the Capital. The reason

\[107\] Damrong, 49.
\[108\] Ibid., 43.
\[109\] Ibid.
being, concerning the original employees of the library, there were many theology scholars [given the fact that two of the three antecedent libraries had been monastic libraries]…but there were very few well-read members, and a lot of them were very old….Anyone who was highly qualified hardly applied for work; these people most likely would desire work within the royal bureaucracy and would like to obtain positions to high promotions. But, there was absolutely no way to secure any prestigious promotions through library employment. Hence, the antecedent libraries only found employees who had little chance for promotion in other departments, and they therefore applied for work at those libraries [and remained to work in the new Royal Library for the Capital]…The Royal Library for the Capital should thus let them continue to work until their contracts expired, and this would allow for reorganization.110

Prince Damrong obviously bemoaned the lack of professionalism within, what appeared, to be a bloated and somewhat inept bureaucracy; and this was written by the Prince more than ten years after the new Library had been established. Replete with too many religious scholars, the Library Committee was forced to look beyond local employee stock as so many qualified people worked within other ministries.

This issue was partially countered by the tradition of employing a foreign advisor within the library administration, and for the first twelve years of the Library’s existence, German national Dr. Oskar Frankfurter acted as the Chief Librarian for the Royal Library for the Capital. Dr. Frankfurter, who was a noted scholar of Thai and Pali philology, had originally been employed with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, between 1905 and 1917, when he was forced to leave Siam as an enemy alien (Siam sided with the Allies

110 Ibid., 44.
against Imperial Germany in the First World War in 1917\textsuperscript{111}, he proved invaluable as an assistant to Prince Damrong and as a foreign scholar and investigator during his tenure as Chief Librarian at the Royal Library for the Capital.\textsuperscript{112}

Concerning the scope of the Library’s operations, Dr. Frankfurter stated the following, quoting King Chulalongkorn,

…in 1904, the king [Chulalongkorn] was desirous of commemorating the hundredth birthday [of his late father King Mongkut] ‘by an institution of public utility which would rebound to his glory,’ he decreed, with the unanimous consent of the other members of the royal family as founders of the Vajiranana [Wachirayan] Library, ‘that it should be established as the [de facto] National Library.’ The library was thus made accessible ‘to all persons interested in researches the benefit of which can be derived from books’…After mature consideration the committee decided, owing to limited means at their disposal, to give their whole attention to the acquisition of the Thai literature, rightly thinking that printed books in foreign languages could be acquired at a future date, whilst any delay in the acquisition of Thai MSS [manuscripts] might prove fatal…\textsuperscript{113}

Dr. Frankfurter’s description of the Library’s desire to acquire Thai manuscripts was certainly accurate, but it did not suggest to what lengths the King, using the Committee of the Royal Library for the Capital, would go to in order to amass Thai (and other) language manuscripts scattered throughout the geo-body of Siam.

\textsuperscript{111} Greene, 105.
\textsuperscript{112} W. A. Graham, “A Former President,” \textit{The Journal of the Siam Society} vol. 16 part 2 (December 1922): 155-156.
Commanded by royal proclamation of King Chulalongkorn, members of the Library embarked on a mission to travel to all areas of Siam in order to procure said manuscripts. According to Damrong,

The [Library] Committee agreed that the Royal Library for the Capital should find works in the provinces before looking for any other sort of works. Since the Committee had the King’s wishes known to everyone in the country [that the Library should be the repository of any works], there has been a continuous number of works donated to the Library. Donors have been willing to donate their books to the Library, or lend their books in order to make copies…Library officials, who were organized by the Library Committee, would then go fetch these good, ancient works. Furthermore, there were those who would bring a continuous amount of works to sell to the library. Because of these reasons, the Royal Library for the Capital received a lot of ancient works [manuscripts], many more than had been anticipated. There were a lot of supporters of the library who donated various works; of every rank, there were people starting with the King, down to the princes and princess, royal bureaucrats large and small, and even foreigners and commoners; they were all forthcoming in donating works to the Library…114

Prince Damrong must certainly have been pleased by the pace that the Royal Library of the Capital procured these works, but it should have been no surprise that so many were forthcoming with manuscripts: the absolute monarch willed it so. Considering the provincial administration reforms instituted by Prince Damrong himself, at the behest of King Chulalongkorn, it did not take long for the King’s wish for manuscripts (or at least copies of manuscripts) to be known throughout the kingdom through the channels of the pervasive royal bureaucracy in the provinces. As previously mentioned, the royal

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114 Damrong, 55-56.
commissioners in the provinces were the mediators between the desires of the capital and
the administered provinces. Thus, the desire of amassing as many manuscripts at the
Royal Library for the Capital was fulfilled.

The search for manuscripts in all regions of the new geo-body of Siam was not
the sole concern for the Library. As the notoriety of the Library’s project grew, rare
works (either books or manuscripts) dealers frequented the Library to hawk their goods.
Prince Damrong found the content of many of these works intriguing and strange; these
were works that certainly needed to be centralized and inspected by Library scholars
(Prince Damrong being the *primus inter pares* of the princely library-scholars).\(^\text{115}\)

Moreover, the Library Committee requested that the ministries of the royal bureaucracy
generate procurement lists of foreign works on Thailand (such as ancient traveler’s
accounts and diplomatic histories) from Europe and the United States. Damrong was
especially keen on collecting European books on modern bureaucracies and statecraft to
assist the Siamese government in emulating modern bureaucratic practices of “civilized”
 nations. Ironically, this process came to a halt due to the outbreak of war between the
“civilized” European powers in 1914.\(^\text{116}\)

By the time Prince Damrong penned his *Tamnan Ho Phrasamut* (History of the
Royal Libraries) in 1916, the Royal Library for the Capital had been operating for over a
decade. According to Damrong, the Library was inundated with a massive amount of
literature, primarily in the form of manuscripts.\(^\text{117}\) According to George Coedes, French
national and the second Chief Librarian (after Dr. Oskar Frankfurter had been expelled

\(^{115}\) Ibid, 62.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Damrong, 74.
from Siam), the project of amassing such an amazing amount of literary material was so successful that the vast number of works acquired delayed the creation of a complete catalog of works for nearly twenty years. The Royal Library for the Capital could only publish a (partial) catalog of Pali language manuscripts and Sanskrit books by 1924. According to Prince Damrong, another problem affecting the creation of a complete catalog stemmed from inaccurate catalogs kept at the antecedent three libraries; these catalogs eventually went to Library Committee of the Royal Library for the Capital. Using the information provided on the colophon of the palm leaf folio manuscripts, Library officials attempted to construct titles out of the existing content. However, often they would find similar works with different titles, or varied works with the same titles. Thus, inspection and cross-examination of nearly each work by the prince-savants (and particularly Prince Damrong) became some of the main duties within the Library.

Damrong’s intentions were eventually to prepare these manuscripts for publication in book-form as Royal Wachirayan Library editions. However, the process of rectifying the inconsistencies within the hoarded manuscripts and books, so far as Prince Damrong understood them, affected the Prince’s reputation greatly within the field of Thai history. Prince Damrong has been labeled with the moniker of the “father of Thai history” since his tenure at the Royal Library for the Capital. This, however, has been a double-edged sword with regards to Thai historiography, as the historiography which he influenced has come under scrutiny in recent scholarship.

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118 Coedes, 9.
119 Damrong, 75.
120 Damrong, 84.
121 These versions were technically known as the “Royal Wachirayan Library” versions (“for the Capital” was omitted).
122 Jory, “Problems in Contemporary Thai Nationalist Historiography.”
Library for the Capital was his charge, Prince Damrong and his fellow prince-savants painstakingly examined and inspected thousands of manuscripts which the Library had acquired by royal command of King Chulalongkorn, a process which continued under King Vajiravudh. There were a number of different genres and languages within the manuscripts, and their content was often bewildering. Citing Gesick’s argument, as stated in the fifth chapter, the manuscripts often displayed localized systems of intellectual history, localized languages and beliefs which were alien to the central Siamese of Bangkok. Therefore, some of the content within these manuscripts came across to Prince Damrong as abnormal or queer (blaek blaek). He spelled out the process of official interpretation and (potential) revision when encountering such works within his Tamnan Ho Phrasamut (History of the Royal Libraries) as follows:

As for revising the works, the aims of the Royal Library for the Capital have not only been to search for each and every work to create a complete collection. There was also another desire, and that was to ensure that each work in the Royal Library for the Capital was the most correct version for publishing for the citizens; the Library would thus print only correct or the best versions…Supposing that the works had certain characteristics, the following two actions had to be performed: Revising the content of the work, or revising the words…Regarding the revision of content, these were basically works from antiquity that were to be printed. Any story was cross-examined with other works, which were the aforementioned [official] royal editions, and would be printed with a summary with an explanation in the printed work which would improve the reader’s understanding of the work…As for the revision of the words, this refers to ancient works with abnormal [blaek blaek] words or expressions that are

123 Maenmat, 27-29.
124 Damrong, 58.
incorrect due to many duplications that been made, or because there were those who corrected the works but allowed the original mistakes to remain…\textsuperscript{125}

The term Prince Darmong employed to discuss the revision is the Thai word \textit{chamra}. One may certainly interpret this as “revise” or “edit” in English, but the word \textit{chamra} also denoted a sense of cleansing, purifying or clearing up by investigation. Though the semantic differences may seem negligible, the consequences of this project for Prince Damrong (and other Library officials) had long-lasting ramifications on the scholarship he produced, historical or otherwise, as influenced by his own revisions on works which appeared to be “abnormal” or whose content appeared to be “incorrect.” Kennon Breazeale states that

\begin{quote}
Damrong developed his own unique notions about recording history [when coming into contact with strange works]. \textit{He was not concerned that every work be complete or entirely accurate} [emphasis added], but was concerned basically with preserving everything that he could of Thai knowledge.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

This statement is telling, as many of Damrong’s works, published as the Royal Wachirayan Library editions, became known as official editions of scholarship. Damrong stated that

\begin{quote}
Concerning the selection of only titles which are the essence of knowledge, we would not just print any books that people would like to buy, for examples fantasies [fairy tales], whose titles had already flooded our markets…[In publishing manuscripts in book form] only works which have been edited until we felt that they are the correct versions, or at least
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.}, 84-85.  
\textsuperscript{126} Breazeale, 48.
versions with the least amount of abnormalities [are published in book form], and we would provide an explanation to the reader [articulating the official discourse].

Thus, competing sources of local knowledge, or any information which fell beyond the purview of officially sanctioned knowledge by the prince-savants, required an official correction by library authorities.

Due to budget constraints, the Royal Library for the Capital would often permit outsourcing of the printing of official Library editions, as the Library received twenty percent of all printed works, and these could be sold to increase Library revenues. However, the same procedures with regards to “editing” or “cleansing” (chamra) the manuscripts before being published in book format remained, as “the managers of the Royal Library for the Capital were charged with cross-examining the manuscripts to ensure that it was the best version available to print,” even when outsourcing the printing of books.

Considering this evidence, the operations of the Royal Library for the Capital come clearly into focus. It can be equated to a colonial enterprise operated by functionaries, like Prince Damrong, who produced knowledge constructs of familiar and unfamiliar subjects within the colonized geo-body of Siam – knowledge that never challenged or called into question the legitimacy of the regime.

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127 Damrong, 86.  
128 Ibid., 88.  
129 Breazeal, 30.
Following Benedict Anderson’s argument behind the advent of the census, modern mapmaking technology and the museum, he has argued

…[these processes] illuminate the late colonial state’s style of thinking about its domain. The ‘warp’ of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; that it belonged here, not there.\(^\text{130}\)

His argument certainly applies to the processes instituted by librarian-scholars in Siam. After amassing as many literary works as possible, colonial administrators could then construct their voiceless subjects just as they had demarcated their nation-states’ geographic borders to establish (their) sovereignty. Unwittingly or not, Darmong and the Royal Library for the Capital became prime agents in this process.

As a final note within this chapter concerning the operations of the Royal Library for the Capital, Damrong concludes his *Tamnan Ho Phrasamut* (History of the Royal Libraries) by stating that the Royal Library for the Capital would continue to flourish and grow, and that it would become something of a showpiece for Siam with which to impress foreign royalty and nobility (of other colonizing powers), as the Library was an institution whose functions were “quite appropriate” and on par with other civilized nations.\(^\text{131}\) However, Damrong’s statement belied the true nature of the institution: It was an agent of official knowledge centralization, production and dissemination whose

\(^\text{130}\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 184.
\(^\text{131}\) Damrong, 101.
processes reflected more the operations of a colonial apparatus than a liberal, literary institution as embodied in an idealized definition of a national library.
CHAPTER 7

SIAM’S ‘NATIONAL LIBRARY’: A POSTSCRIPT

This research proffers that The Royal Library for the Capital is more accurately understood as a colonial enterprise which pursued national and intellectual integration as dictated by the ruling Chakri Dynasty. According to Chakri absolutism, the Siamese “nation,” territorially, socially, politically, and religiously (as articulated by both Kings Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh) could have only existed if the machinations of their politics reigned supreme. This argument is buttressed by Eiji Murashima, who has stated that King Chulalongkorn “adhere[d] to his convictions of the irreplaceable value of Thai political traditions,” such as the paternalistic regime as the sole political scheme to ensure stability of the newly-constructed geo-body of the nation.132 Chulalongkorn’s son, King Vajiravudh, further articulated this view by saying that the idea of [political] freedom brought about national disunity, and warned his compatriots against blindly following the propagators of liberal political views, accusing them of straying from the right path and destroying the nation. He said that only those loyal to the king and who followed him were true members of the Thai Nation.133

According to Anderson, Vajiravudh moved all the policy levers of official nationalism: compulsory state-controlled primary education, state-organized propaganda, official rewriting of

133 Ibid., 89-90., quoting King Vajiravudh’s article entitled “The True Meaning of a Nation” in King Vajiravudh (Asvabhu), Khwamhen 10 ruang khong Asvabhu (Ten Views of Asvabahu) (Bangkok: 1915/16): 33-52.
history…and endless affirmations of identity of the [Chakri] dynasty and nation.\textsuperscript{134}

Thus, the concept of the Siamese nation was intimately beholden to the continuity of the dynasty.

The royal library’s operations, particularly with regards to the construction of knowledge which diminished, devalued or entirely removed local traditions from preexisting sources, were also beholden to direction and political continuity of the royal Chakri regime: the former (the institution of the library) effectively mirrored larger colonial processes instigated by the latter (the hegemon). This characterization – that the concept of the Siamese nation was embedded in the figure of the monarch, and not in the concept of the Siamese populace – is proved by the fact that with the overthrow of this absolutist regime, the library, once formally known in Thai as the Royal Wachirayan Library for the Capital, finally became known, literally, as the National Library (Ho Samut haeng Chat).\textsuperscript{135} The argument which states that the historiography of the Royal Library for the Capital is far from accurate is evinced by the official Thai explanation concerning the evolving nature of the Library:

At this time [the overthrow of the monarchy in 1932], the name changed from the Royal Library for the Capital, to the National Library, because the meaning of the term “Capital” [implying royal capital] at the time was narrow and only referred to the province of the [Royal] Capital [Bangkok]; it did not refer to the Kingdom or the nation as before.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{134} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 101.
\textsuperscript{135} Maenmat, 50.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
Although this official rendering of history amounts to a half-hearted attempt to come to terms with the true nature of the Royal Library for the Capital, it is still somewhat incomplete. This statement argues that the primacy of the metropole (Bangkok) was reflected in the previous name under the absolute monarchy; the subsequent shift in the name to the National Library reified the intimated metropole-colonial relationship between Bangkok and the provinces.

At the Royal Library for the Capital, scholarship, and scholarship regarding the production of history in particular, was something to be constructed and applied by Siamese elites onto Siam. Discrepancies and misunderstandings within this produced knowledge were matters solely for elites to sort out through the official process of *chamra*, literally, editing, cleansing or purifying the words and/or content. Elite-produced knowledge, regardless of how erroneous it may have actually been, trumped strange (*blaek blaek*) sources and their content – it was this matter which required official cross-examination, annotation, correction, and eventually, sanction, particularly in the guise of the “most popular Royal Wachirayan Library editions,” according to Prince Damrong. This "national" library, conceived as an interlocutrix instilling *siwilai* within Siam and promoting “civilization” to the West, could only be maintained by Siamese elites. A surface comparison between Carnegie’s amazing public library projects in the United States and the founding of the Royal Library for the Capital must have spoken to the regime that it was steering Siam down the correct path towards “civilization.” Therefore, the library's duties, its produced knowledge and its progress could not be

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137 Damrong, 84-86.
138 Damrong, 88.
co-opted by political/intellectual inferiors (i.e., the non-elite Siamese populace), lest abnormalities (without official “cleansing”) in information and knowledge arise. In this regard, the library's moniker as the Royal Library for the Capital was justified (in Thai or any other language, for that matter); it was a royalist construct which produced and promoted royally-sanctioned knowledge, and it was produced, namely, for the ruling Siamese classes.139

The works collected, produced, and reproduced by the authorities of the Royal Library for the Capital amounted to items harvested for inclusion at a museum or colonial spectacle, where the public, particularly the residents of the capital (the metropole), could examine them with explanations as provided by those who now controlled the objects and their meanings.140 Abnormalities in content and language were decoded and explained by royal authorities, and a "corrected" version of interpretation was provided for each work, denoting "how" to understand the object (after the laborious process of cross-examining each work amassed by Library officialdom). Like museum pieces, these “national treasures” (or “patrimony,” according to Damrong,141) of the Library could not be removed from their location as the constructed relationship of the object vis-à-vis the observer (the metropolitan Siamese subject or foreign visitor) might unravel. This control contrasts sharply with the vibrant and mobile exchange of palm leaf manuscripts and their multifaceted representations, as discussed in the fifth chapter. This tradition represented a potential challenge to the project of the newly-minted Royal Library for the Capital. Established as a locus of knowledge centralization, (de-)construction, and

139 Breazeale, 45.
140 Thongchai, “The quest for ‘Siwilai,’” 544.
141 Damrong, 47.
dissemination, the Library became more proof that the Chakri Dynasty sought to enforce hegemony over diverse and competing sources of knowledge in the new geo-body of Siam.

To what extent this discriminated, (de-)constructed and re-constructed knowledge affected larger processes of intellectual development in Siam during this era is an important question; also, a more probing analysis of the minutiae regarding the *chamra* (editing) processes of manuscripts in creating the Royal Wachirayan Library editions would be a welcome addition in constructing a larger history of the Royal Library for the Capital. These are certainly topics which would give the history of the Library and its objectives greater depth. Nonetheless, by understanding the historical milieu late 19th and early 20th centuries in Siam and unveiling the basic operations of the Royal Library for the Capital and its administrators, as discussed in this research, a more robust history of the institution begins to appear. Far from being on the periphery of Thai history, the institution was an active agent in aggrandizing Chakri rule within the geo-body of Siam.
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