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“International Orphans” — The Chinese in Thailand During World War II

E. BRUCE REYNOLDS
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Historians of Southeast Asia are quite familiar with the flexible “bamboo” diplomacy which permitted Thai politicians to avert national disaster during World War II, but have paid less attention to the equally pragmatic wartime survival strategy pursued by the leaders of Thailand’s Chinese community. This study examines Japanese efforts to win the cooperation of this intrinsically hostile, but economically vital, segment of Thailand’s population, the impact of the Japanese presence on the troubled relationship between the Chinese and the Thai authorities, and the ability of certain Chinese capitalists to turn adversity to advantage.¹

The “International Orphans”

While the intrusion of Japanese troops into Thailand on 8 December 1941 shocked the entire nation, Bangkok had enjoyed friendly relations with Tokyo prior to the war and Premier Phibun Songkhram and his ministers hoped for sympathetic treatment from the invaders. In contrast, because the Chinese in Thailand had actively supported a series of anti-Japanese boycotts in response to Japan’s aggressive actions in China, the immigrant community’s leaders could anticipate nothing but repression from the Japanese army. Their situation seemed all the more perilous because they could expect little protection from the Thai authorities. When the boycott movement had turned violent after the outbreak of full-scale war between China and Japan in 1937, the Thai government, eager for smooth relations with the Japanese, had suppressed it. Moreover, the military-dominated Phibun government, which had come to power at the end of 1938, initiated a nationalistic program designed to weaken Chinese links with their homeland and encourage assimilation. Phibun’s regime closed all Chinese schools and all but one Chinese-language newspaper, arrested and deported a number of politically active Chinese, and implemented various measures aimed at weakening the dominant

¹The number of Chinese residents in Thailand at the time is difficult to pinpoint. A Chinese estimate in 1934 was 2,500,000, while the Thai government issued a figure of 610,000 in 1937. The smaller number is a count of Chinese aliens, while the larger includes culturally Chinese individuals born in Thailand and thereby holding Thai citizenship. Because Chinese have emigrated to Thailand over a long period of time, if those with Chinese ancestry who had assimilated into Thai society were counted, the figure would be even larger. The British financial adviser to the Thai government, W.A.M. Doll estimated in the 1930s that the Chinese controlled 90 per cent of the commercial economy in Thailand. See “Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō” (The Circumstances and Activities of Overseas Chinese in Thailand), *Jōhō* (Intelligence): 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 84–85/A700 9–9–4, Japan Foreign Ministry Archives (hereafter, JFMA) and Kenneth P. Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand* (reprint edition; New York: Russell and Russell, 1973), p. 144.

role of non-citizen Chinese in the nation's economy. Also, from May 1941 the government had begun issuing a series of decrees barring non-citizens from militarily sensitive areas of the country.²

The Chinese in Thailand had nowhere to turn for assistance in seeking relief from the Thai government's measures. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's³ Chinese Nationalist government did not have formal diplomatic relations with Thailand because Bangkok had refused such connections. This stance reflected longstanding Thai concern that Chinese diplomats inevitably would interfere in domestic politics by attempting to protect and promote the interests of the resident Chinese nationals. Moreover, given the weak and war-beleaguered state of Chiang's government, Bangkok found it easy to ignore any complaints or entreaties emanating from that quarter. The Japanese, of course, were pleased by the Thai crackdown. The rival British, who were seeking to shore up their increasingly weak regional position by appeasing Phibun, raised no objections. Thus the Chinese in Thailand became, as a Japanese intelligence report would later describe them, "international orphans"⁴ who had to fend for themselves.

Under these circumstances the community's leaders, the successful businessmen who headed the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the associations representing various South Chinese linguistic groups, saw no alternative but to bow to the pressures applied by the Thai government. Overt anti-Japanese campaigns ended, although the Chinese quietly continued to raise relief funds and recruit young volunteers to help Nationalist China in its struggle for survival.⁵

Well aware of this, Japanese diplomats in Thailand searched for means to induce the Chinese to switch their loyalties from the Nationalist government in Chungking to the Tokyo-sponsored Wang Ching-wei regime in occupied Nanking. In light of the aggressive Japanese actions in China this was an uphill effort at best, and matters were not helped by the fact that credible pro-Nanking agents were hard to find. For instance, Consul-General Asada Shunsuke complained that three Cantonese sent in late 1940 had "made a very unfortunate impression by brandishing certificates endorsed by the military authorities in much the same attitude they would assume in travelling in Taiwan or Hainan". Moreover, the men lacked knowledge of Thailand and none spoke Teochiu (Mandarin transliteration: Ch'ao-chou), the dialect of Swatow, the home area of the largest Chinese group in Thailand. An American missionary, who worked in the Chinese

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²The Thai government's nationalist program is described in Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand* and G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp. 261-72.

³Generally I have followed Skinner's precedent in using the Wade-Giles transliteration of the Mandarin version of Chinese names. Chiang Kai-shek is an exception in that it is an aberrant, but commonly-used transliteration. In the case of names of Sino-Thai from South China, any commonly used alternative transliteration and/or Thai name follows in parentheses.

⁴"Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 84-85, A700 9-9-4, JFMA.

⁵A fine new study covering this era is Murashima Eiji, "Tai Kakyō no seiji katsudō: 5/30 undō kara Nitchū sensō made" (Political Activities of Overseas Chinese in Thailand from the May 30th Incident to the Sino-Japanese War), in *Tōnan Ajia kakyō to Chūgoku: Chūgoku kizoku ishiki kara kajin ishiki e* (Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and China: From Attachment to China to Consciousness as Local Residents) (Tokyo, 1994), pp. 264-364.

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community, reported that other Japanese agents were recognized as opium addicts previously deported from Thailand.⁶

In May 1941 Asada discerned little progress in the effort to sway Chinese sentiments. Judging it "premature" to send overt political representatives of the Wang Ching-wei government, he suggested instead the dispatch of business agents who might encourage economic intercourse with occupied regions of China.⁷ Asada's proposal reflected the common and persistent Japanese view that the lure of profit was the most promising "carrot" that could be dangled before the Chinese.

Ambassador Tsubokami Teiji, who arrived in September 1941, agreed with Asada, warning Tokyo that "under present circumstances no well-known person could hope to work well here" as a Nanking representative. He suggested sending some "efficient, yet inconspicuous fellow" disguised as a merchant. Tokyo agreed to Tsubokami's suggestion that a drug store be established to provide cover for the agent, on condition it be self-supporting financially. Tokyo ordered stock from a Chinese firm in Shanghai, advising in November that all was set and that 16,500 yen was being forwarded for start-up expenses.⁸

In the weeks prior to the arrival of Japanese troops, Tsubokami continued to report persistent Chinese hostility toward Japan. During the latter part of November he heard that a local Chinese leader had offered support for the Phibun government's announced policy of resistance against any aggressor, pledging in a letter to the cabinet that the Chinese would fight alongside the Thai if the Japanese army invaded. The letter also purportedly requested the provision of military instruction and drill for Chinese residents. Tsubokami understood that the Thai cabinet had discussed the matter on 10 November, although he had no evidence that action was taken on it.⁹

When the Japanese army actually entered the country, however, Thai forces resisted only briefly before Phibun accepted a ceasefire and agreed to permit Japanese passage. Fearing arrest, a number of prominent Chinese fled Bangkok, but their plans to escape from Thailand were complicated by the rapid advance of the Imperial Army. The Japanese sought to restore calm by issuing a statement declaring that citizens of China and British colonies in Asia would not be treated as enemy nationals "so long as they do not take action injurious to the Japanese". They were urged to "joyously carry on their respective occupation with peace of mind".¹⁰

The Japanese adopted this stance and eschewed heavyhanded actions like the mass executions of suspected Chinese political activists in Singapore in February 1942 for two main reasons. First, they wanted independent Thailand as a cooperative ally because the

⁶Asada to Canton, 17 Oct. 1940, SRDJ 7352, RG 457 and Interview G-981, 18 Dec. 1944, Folder 116, Box 9, Entry 105, RG 226, U. S. National Archives (hereafter, USNA). Record Group (RG) 457 contains translations of intercepted Japanese messages.

⁷Asada to Tokyo, 23 May 1941, Department of Defense, *The "Magic" Background to Pearl Harbor* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 2: A588.

⁸Tsubokami to Tokyo, 24 and 26 Sep. 1941; Toyoda to Bangkok, 4 Oct. 1941; and Tōgō to Bangkok, 6 Nov. 1941 in *ibid.*, 3: A650 and A658, and 4: A516.

⁹Tsubokami to Tokyo, 20 Nov. 1941, SRDJ 16935, RG 457, USNA.

¹⁰Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, p. 272; *Bangkok Times*, 9 Dec. 1941; and Murashima Eiji, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō" (The Thai-Japanese Alliance and the Overseas Chinese in Thailand), *Keisei Daigaku Ajia-Taiheiyō Kenkyū* (Keisei University Asian-Pacific Research) 19 (1996): 51.

Imperial Army planned to use its territory as a launching pad and supply base for assaults on British Malaya and Burma. Secondly, the Japanese Foreign Ministry had a much more significant presence in independent Thailand than elsewhere in Southeast Asia, giving diplomats a voice in policy formulation and a role in its implementation. The staff of the embassy in Bangkok understood very well that the Chinese thoroughly dominated Thailand's economy and that their cooperation would be necessary if Japan's goals were to be achieved.¹¹

Once Premier Phibun announced his intention to ally with Japan and it became clear that the Japanese were not going to launch a reign of terror, the initial panic began to subside. Within a week, most of the people who had fled Bangkok began to return. A few prominent Chinese did manage to escape from the country, but those who remained had little choice but to adapt to the new realities.¹²

Collaboration and Resistance Under the New Order

On Christmas Day 1942 a five-man Chinese delegation, accompanied by newly-appointed Deputy Finance Minister Wanit Pananon — a politician known for his pro-Japanese sentiments and his role as Phibun's chief "go-between" in negotiations with Japanese representatives — met the Premier. Construction magnate Chang Lan-ch'en (Tia Lan-chan/Sahat Mahakhun), chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce since 1940, had not yet re-surfaced, but other members of the organization acted in his absence. They expressed the group's willingness to cooperate with the "new order" and called a general meeting to showcase Chinese support for Japanese war aims. Held on 28 December at the Chamber of Commerce hall, it replicated similar assemblies held by Indian residents on the 23rd and the Burmese community on the 24th.¹³

According to the Japanese-controlled *Bangkok Times*, "several thousand" Chinese, as well as Japanese, Thai, Indian, and Burmese dignitaries, attended the Sunday afternoon meeting. Wanit represented the Thai government, while 40-year-old Iwata Reitetsu, information chief at the Japanese Embassy, headed the Japanese contingent. Iwata, a graduate of Shanghai's Tōa Dōbun Shoin, the chief training school for Japan's China experts, had arrived in Thailand as second secretary in August 1941. Because of his training and his past service in several posts in China, the embassy had made Iwata responsible for managing relations with the local Chinese community.¹⁴

¹¹Iwata Reitetsu, who headed the Japanese Embassy's propaganda effort, gave Doll's figure of 90 per cent Chinese control of the Thai economy (cited in note one) in emphasizing the extent of Chinese dominance. His chief aide in efforts to manipulate Chinese opinion, Fujishima Ken'ichi, upped the figure to 95 per cent. Iwata's comment appears on page "f" and Fujishima's on page 126 of Fujishima's memoir, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi* (A Little-Known Story from the War of Upheaval) (Bangkok: Koukusuai Insatsu Yūgen Koshi, 1977).

¹²Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, p. 272, and *Bangkok Times*, 15 Dec. 1941.

¹³*Bangkok Times*, 24–26 Dec. 1941; Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 51; and Suehiro Akira, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855–1985* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1989), p. 166.

¹⁴*Bangkok Times*, 29 Dec. 1941 and Gaimudaijin kambō ninjika [Personnel Section Foreign Minister's Secretariat], *Gaimushō nenkan* [Foreign Ministry Yearbook] (Tokyo: Gaimushō, 1953), p. 312. On Tōa Dōbun Shoin, see Douglas R. Reynolds, "Chinese Area Studies in Prewar China: Japan's Tōa Dōbun Shoin in Shanghai, 1900–1945", *Journal of Asian Studies* 95,5 (Nov. 1986): 945–66.

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Attributing the absence of Chamber of Commerce Chairman Chang to illness, the organization's secretary read an address pledging cooperation with Japan and the Wang Ching-wei government, and urging compliance with Thai government policy. The text included a welcome for Japanese troops and praise for the "very great mission of freeing the people of Asia on which they had embarked". When a call went forth for a show of hands in support of the "new order", the *Times* reported, "immediately a sea of hands was raised and there was great applause". Subsequently, the Chamber of Commerce endorsed Premier Phibun's appeal that Chiang Kai-shek abandon resistance to Japan, and declared in a public statement that the Chinese in Thailand would sever all ties with his government if Chiang failed to cooperate with the Japanese.¹⁵

The Japanese Embassy in Bangkok wasted little time in launching additional efforts to sway Chinese opinion. The city's lone Chinese-language newspaper, *Chung-yüan Pao*, had been seized as enemy property and, after some delay, the army gave the embassy responsibility for reviving it. The diplomats saw this as a golden opportunity to secure a valuable supplement to the Japanese-controlled Thai-language daily *Khao Phap*, which had been subsidized by the Taiwan Governor-General's office through the front organization Taiwan Zenrin Kyōkai (Taiwan Good Neighbour Association) even prior to the war.¹⁶

Iwata put the Chinese newspaper in the hands of a fellow Toa Dobun Shoin graduate, 37-year-old Fujishima Ken'ichi, who had served at various posts in China and had spent three years at the Japanese consulate in Portland Oregon. In addition to speaking Mandarin and English, Fujishima was one of only three Cantonese linguists then active in the Foreign Ministry. He had arrived in Bangkok on the last day of 1941.¹⁷

Chung-yüan Pao's owner, Yu Tzu-liang (U Chu-liang), a dedicated Chinese nationalist who made his fortune in the dye business, had fled the country, so the Japanese purchased the paper for a nominal sum after negotiations with his attorney. For window dressing the Japanese sought to make the chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce nominal head of the newspaper company, but it was Fujishima who really ran it, using the name T'eng Tao in print so his Japanese identity would not be too obvious to readers. Fujishima developed such good personal relations with leading Chinese figures that after the war he moved back to Thailand as an employee of the Japanese External Trade Organization (JETRO).¹⁸

Once *Chung-yüan Pao* resumed publication in January 1942 it became the chief instrument in Japanese efforts to manipulate Chinese opinion. With its subsidy from Taiwan and no direct competition, the paper soon moved into the black financially.

¹⁵*Bangkok Times*, 29 Dec. 1941 and 3 Jan. 1942.

¹⁶Tsubokami to Tokyo, 31 Dec. 1941, A700 6-9-3, JFMA and Bangkok to Tokyo, 26 Aug. 1945, SRDJ 110551-53, RG 457, USNA. Taiwan had long been a centre of activities promoting Japanese activities in the region. The Japanese navy had maintained a strong interest in the south and governors general of the colony traditionally were retired naval officers. One naval advocate of a southern strategy referred to Taiwan as "the stronghold of the southward advance". See Hatano Sumio, "The Japanese Navy and the Development of Southward Expansion", in *International Commercial Rivalry in Southeast Asian in the Interwar Period*, ed. Sugiyama Shinya and Milagros C. Guerrero (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1994), pp. 95-108.

¹⁷Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, unnumbered preface page with author's biographical data, and pp. 10-14.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 9 and 126-30.

Taiwanese, who played a critical role in the Japanese propaganda program because of their presumed loyalty as colonial subjects and their ability to communicate in the dialects of southern China as well as Japanese, filled several key staff positions.¹⁹ Chang Ying-tzu, an attractive young woman competent in Thai, Japanese, and Teochiu, became Fujishima's "Girl Friday". She not only translated Dōmei news dispatches, but also served as an interpreter at social gatherings involving Chinese leaders and Japanese dignitaries. Another Taiwanese, Chang Liang-piao became the paper's editor.²⁰

In May 1942 the Japanese Embassy projected its fiscal year 1942 budget for projects aimed at influencing the Chinese community in Thailand. It totalled 165,000 yen, of which approximately 112,000 yen was ticketed for political measures: the suppression of anti-Japanese activities, agent salaries, funds for agent surveillance, travel expenses, entertainment, etc. Other budget lines included: activities to encourage businesses (30,000 yen), propaganda supplies and transmission (12,000 yen), and research (12,000 yen). Not included in the budget was another 60,000 yen targeted for a Japanese language school which would serve 3,000 Chinese, and 20,000 yen "for the encouragement of friendly intercourse between Japanese and Chinese firms". The 1943 budget would increase to nearly 225,000 yen, while the final Japanese budget proposal, for fiscal 1945, would total 250,000 yen.²¹

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 130, 136. Bangkok to Taihoku (Taipei), 15 Dec. 1942, SRDJ 29290, RG 457, USNA stated: "We expect to need interpreters who can handle interpreting Thai into both Fukienese and Cantonese. As the people born in Formosa naturally speak Fukienese and Cantonese, we would like to have you make arrangements to send six of Fukien lineage and two of Canton lineage to act in this capacity." Likewise, Bangkok to Taihoku, 4 Mar. 1943, SRDJ 32436, RG 457, USNA requested 25 Taiwanese interpreters for the army. Despite their importance to the Japanese program, however, the Taiwanese in Thailand found much to complain about. Their hopes that they would enjoy special status in Thailand as Japanese subjects were dashed. Instead they found the Thai authorities and resident Chinese treated them with "contempt on the grounds that they are not really Japanese". One attempt to alleviate this problem was a move to drop the word "Taiwan" from the name of the local Taiwanese Association. Also, they were discriminated against by what Fujishima termed "narrow-minded" Japanese. Fujishima even had to make a personal appeal to the Japanese commander to gain Taiwanese businessmen the right to participate in Japan's military supply program. See Bangkok to Taihoku, 14 Jun. 1943, SRDJ 39718, RG 457, USNA and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 145–48.

²⁰Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 131–36. In a newspaper article, published 16 years after the war, Maki Kensuke, an operative of the Japanese army espionage school, the Nakano Gakko, who visited Thailand for two weeks, suggested that Chang Ying-tzu was a Chungking spy. Fujishima doubted this and speculated that Maki was using his imagination to make his story more interesting. Fujishima includes Maki's article in his book (pp. 224–34) and his comments on it are found on p. 223. Her picture appears on p. 227. Among other things, Fujishima notes that the writer had her name and the name of the newspaper they published wrong. The story is made more intriguing by the fact that after the war she married a Japanese named Andō, a second-generation Japanese resident of Singapore. He was employed by the postwar British occupation force in Thailand as an interpreter, and she also went to work for them, helping in the search for Japanese deserters. Decades later Fujishima had heard that her husband had died and she was living with their children in Vientiane, Laos where she had a small bookstore and restaurant (pp. 134–35).

²¹Bangkok to Tokyo, 10 May 1942, SRDJ 22408; Aoki to Bangkok, 25 May 1943, SRDJ 37328; and Tokyo to Bangkok, 18 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 103651–52, RG 457, USNA. By way of comparison, the 1945 budget for such machinations in Indochina was set at 200,000 yen. See Tokyo to Saigon, 20 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 103659, RG 457, USNA.

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Faced with the very real prospect of coercive action by the Japanese army if they did otherwise, the leaders of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce made all-out efforts to appease both the Japanese and the Phibun government during the early months of the war. For example, the organization assisted Japanese military forces by clearing and taking charge of freight stored in Borneo Company's warehouse so the army could utilize the building. It took responsibility for supplying, at bargain prices, a quantity of matches for the Japanese army in Malaya, and on 26 February 1942 the chamber's leaders visited Phibun to donate 131,128 baht to the Thai military. In May 1942 they donated 25,000 baht worth of comfort articles to the Japanese and Thai armies, additionally supplying a quantity of unspecified goods to the Japanese military.²²

When the Chamber of Commerce elected new officers in March, the Japanese succeeded in manoeuvring the man they favoured, Ch'en Shou-ming (Tan Siew-men), into the chairmanship. Ch'en's Teochiu family had resided in Thailand for three generations and had become, according to Suehiro Akira, "the largest private business group in Thailand" with interests in rice milling, trade, shipping, banking, and insurance. Ch'en had previously headed the chamber between 1932 and 1936. Ironically, during that earlier era Ch'en's faction had been loyal to Chiang Kai-shek, while the other prominent Teochiu group had backed a rival Nationalist Party faction centred around Hu Han-min and several southern Chinese warlords, but the Japanese believed they could work with Ch'en. He displayed an understandable reluctance to accept the job, but finally agreed when warned by Japanese army representatives that the entire Chinese community would pay the price if he declined and sufficient cooperation was then not forthcoming. As we shall see, Ch'en's success in organizing the Chinese cooperation with Japan did spare the community from severe repression, but his service would cost him his life.²³

In his effort to explain the behaviour of the Chinese who cooperated with Japan, Fujishima ascribed it to materialism and self-preservation. He wrote:

On the surface this was, without mistake, Overseas Chinese collaborating with the enemy, but this is the Japanese way of thinking. The materialistic Chinese merchants, however, saw it as business, so the Japanese had no need to worry. But also, because Thailand was in reality occupied by the Japanese army, we have to acknowledge that if they had not cooperated they probably would have lost their lives.²⁴

A missionary with 22 years of experience as a teacher in Thailand offered this perceptive analysis after returning to America by exchange ship in mid-1942:

The Chinese (like the Thai) reacted to the Japanese occupation of Thailand as they would to a natural disaster, to an earthquake or a tidal wave. Most of the Chinese are used to a hard life, to floods, fires, disease and hardships. They accepted the occupation as inevitable. They did not try to oppose the Japanese. In fact, they hastened to assure them personally of their goodwill, and raised a large fund which they presented to the invaders with protestations of loyalty. The Chinese felt no shame in doing this. To try

²²Bangkok Times, 28 Feb. 1942 and "Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 85, A700 9-9-4, JFMA.

²³Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", pp. 51, 53; Suehiro Akira, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855-1985*, pp. 111-12, 118, 122, 160; and Murashima, "Tai Kakyō no seiji katsudō: 5/30 undō kara Nitchū sensō made", p. 281.

²⁴Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, p. 150.

to buy off the Japanese was the only sensible course of action, they believed, when the aggressors were in control on the spot. But the feelings of the Chinese toward the Japanese were undoubtedly the same as those that prompted them (when the enemy was still far away) to boycott merchants who sold Japanese goods, and to kill some of those who persisted in dealing with the Japanese.²⁵

Underground opposition movements continued, though, as evidenced by the arrests on 17 January 1942 of Damri Pathamasiri, a journalist and former Publicity Bureau staff member, and several prominent Chinese. The Thai police later announced that in their sweep they had seized "documents and anonymous letters containing antagonistic remarks against the government" issued by various organizations, including the Free Thai Party, the Communist Party, and the Young Thai Party. Damri, two leaders of the Teochiu community — Ch'en-ch'uan (Chuan Tanthana) and Liao Kung-p'u (Khun Setthaphakdi) — and four other men received life sentences, while two defendants were sentenced to 16-year prison terms. All remained in prison for the duration of the war.²⁶

Other political activists opposed to both the Phibun regime and the Japanese managed to evade the authorities. The Communist Party was a small, but persistent, thorn in the Japanese side throughout the war. In early 1944 Japanese intelligence estimated that it had about 2,000 members, despite a recent crackdown that had resulted in 34 arrests. The Japanese believed that the Communist Party had been organized in 1939 by Chinese Communist agents who also operated in Malaya, but recent research by Murashima Eiji indicates that its existence in Thailand can be traced as far back as 1923. With its headquarters in Bangkok, the party had a strong foothold among the Chinese near the Malayan border and also operated in northeastern Thailand where there was a significant Vietnamese expatriate community. The party established anti-Japanese front organizations, periodically engaged in sabotage against Japanese army support facilities, and published underground newspapers in both Chinese and Thai. The Japanese estimated that the Thai-language paper had a circulation as high as 3,000 in 1944. Hainanese were thought to be particularly prominent in Communist ranks.²⁷

Like the Communists, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), had long experience operating underground in Thailand, and continued covert activities during the war. The young volunteers sent out of Thailand before the war comprised a large pool of potential undercover agents. One group of Thai-born agents, under the command of General Tai Li, head of the Nationalist secret police, had already infiltrated into Thailand

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²⁵Interview C-289, 18 Dec. 1944, File 116, Box 9, Entry 105, RG 226, USNA.

²⁶*Bangkok Times*, 8 Jun. 1942; Tsubokami to Tokyo, 11 Jun. 1942, A600 1-2-7, vol. 2, JFMA; *Bangkok Chronicle*, 27 Jan. 1943; Manot Wutthait Report, OSS XL14550, RG 226, USNA; and Murashima, "Tai kakyō no seiji katsudō: 5/30 undō kara Nitchū sensō made", p. 287 and "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 54. Murashima emphasizes that the Japanese were not involved in the arrests and that the defendants were prosecuted for their opposition to Phibun's regime. The release of these political prisoners on 9 September 1945 is reported in XL37114, RG 226, USNA.

²⁷Bangkok to Tokyo, 19 Feb. 1944, SRDJ 57649, RG 457, USNA and "Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 85-86, A700 9-9-4, JFMA; Murashima, "Tai kakyō no seiji katsudō: 5/30 undō kara Nitchū sensō made", p. 362; and Interview C-981, 18 Dec. 1944, Folder 116, Box 9, Entry 105, RG 226, USNA.

²⁸Richard J of Hong Kong Preston Good organization clandestine tra

²⁹Zenkoku seishi [The Tr 949-50, 954; 1958), pp. 115 n.d. but c. Dec Kind of War (

³⁰Tokyo to Peking, 16 Dec USNA.

via Singapore before the Japanese arrived and had established secret radio communication with Chungking.²⁸

The Kempeitai (Japan's military police) succeeded in uncovering some of these radio-equipped Nationalist agents in Bangkok. On 28 September 1942 a wireless detection unit caught a Chinese army officer and a female accomplice redhanded, capturing their radio and code books. Through "persuasion", the Kempeitai "turned" the Chinese officer and used him in efforts to mislead and extract information from Chungking. How long the Chinese were fooled by this ruse is not clear, but the Japanese believed that their highly valued double agent operated effectively into 1945. They tried unsuccessfully to protect him at the end of the war. Thai records indicate that a total of 14 Chinese suspected of spying for Chungking were arrested during 1942. Tai Li was aware of some of these arrests, and near the end of the year he revealed to the Americans that the Japanese had rounded up one cell of his agents in Bangkok.²⁹

Recognizing Nanking

Japan's stunning military successes in the early weeks of the war left the nation's policymakers scrambling to keep up with the new circumstances. Japanese diplomats in Nanking saw a golden opportunity to enhance the credibility of the Wang Ching-wei government because of the army's rapid advance into Southeast Asia. They wasted little time in calling for a strengthened Nanking propaganda programme in the region, including the dispatch of sympathetic Chinese journalists to Thailand. A key goal would be to win diplomatic recognition of the Nanking government by Thailand and French Indochina. Wang himself endorsed the scheme, and his ambassador in Tokyo specifically appealed for Japanese help in securing Thailand's recognition. Japan's Foreign Ministry responded positively, advising its diplomats in Bangkok: "do all in your power to influence Thailand to recognize the Nanking government at once".³⁰

Officials in Bangkok, keenly aware of Thai sensitivities, had a different perspective, however, which Ambassador Tsubokami made clear to Tokyo in early January 1942. He argued that rather than permitting Nanking a role in the management of Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Japanese should take sole responsibility in occupied areas. Local authorities would handle matters in independent Thailand and colonial Indochina, though with appropriate Japanese guidance. Tsubokami accepted the necessity of bolstering Wang's position, but he emphasized that recognition of Nanking would have to be handled

²⁸Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1960), pp. 156–57, 186; and Lusey to Donovan, 23 May 1942, Box 4, M. Preston Goodfellow Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California, which notes that Tai Li's organization had developed a device that enabled agents to convert a regular receiver into a clandestine transmitter.

²⁹Zenkoku Kenyūkairainakai [The Nationwide Alliance of Kempei Associations], *Nihon Kempei seishi* [The True History of the Japanese Kempei] (Tokyo: Kempei Kenyūkairainakai, 1976), pp. 949–50, 954; Nakamura Aketo, *Hotoke no shireikan* [The Buddha's Commander] (Tokyo: Shūhōsha, 1958), pp. 119–20; Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 53; Miles to Metzger and Leggett, n.d. but c. Dec. 1942, Box 2, Naval Group China, RG 38, USNA; and Milton E. Miles, *A Different Kind of War* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 180–81.

³⁰Tokyo to Bangkok relaying Nanking's message, 14 Dec. 1941, SRDJ 18285–86; Nanking to Peking, 16 Dec. 1941, SRDJ 17810; and Tokyo to Bangkok, 20 Dec. 1941, SRDJ 17939, RG 457, USNA.

carefully because of longstanding Thai opposition to diplomatic relations with any Chinese government.³¹

Acknowledging the importance of gaining Overseas Chinese participation in the war effort, Tsubokami went on to suggest that once diehard anti-Japanese elements were firmly suppressed, a propaganda campaign should be launched in Southeast Asia to build support for Japan's program. Tsubokami understood that the revival of trade and family monetary remittances from Overseas Chinese could help revive the flagging economy of Japanese-occupied southern China, but in urging that political and cultural linkages with the homeland be downplayed he echoed the Thai government's concern about the long-term unifying potential of Chinese nationalism. He argued that Chinese in Southeast Asia should be encouraged to believe that they were superior to their brethren in their long-troubled homeland. The lure of future profits could be used to encourage their participation in Japanese development efforts. The Japanese also should attempt to manipulate existing Chinese organizations, send "superior" young Chinese for education in Japan, and support and encourage Chinese involvement in multi-ethnic cultural advancement organizations. In addition to spelling out these ideas in a lengthy dispatch, Tsubokami also sent Iwata to Tokyo to promote his embassy's views.³²

The central authorities clearly did take these ideas into account. On 14 February 1942 Japan's highest policy-making body, the Liaison Conference, formalized a plan to break down Overseas Chinese loyalty to Chungking and to obtain their cooperation. As Tsubokami had suggested, a main goal would be to encourage the Chinese to steer clear of politics and concentrate on constructive economic activities. The plan permitted the Nanking government a role only in Thailand and French Indochina, but sharply circumscribed it in the former by emphasizing the need to "give consideration to the Chinese policy of the Thai government and cooperate with it". Measures in regard to the Chinese were to be carried out through the Thai government with Japanese guidance, but Japan reserved the right to act unilaterally "when necessary".³³

³¹Tokyo to Bangkok, 20 Dec. 1941, SRDJ 17939 and Bangkok to Tokyo, 9 Jan. 1942, SRDJ 18781-83, RG 457, USNA. An American missionary educator with long experience in Thailand told the Office of Strategic Services (Interview C-981, 18 Dec. 1944, File 116, Box 9, Entry 105, RG 226, USNA) after his repatriation that the Chinese residents "hope fervently that China will insist on having her own legation in Thailand" when in a sufficiently powerful position to do so. They were confident, he added, that: "Some day China will force Thailand to let Chinese government representatives be established in the country, to look after the interests of the Chinese nationals." Also see Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 134-35.

³²Tsubokami to Tokyo, 25 Dec. 1941, A700.9-6-3, JFMA; and Bangkok to Tokyo, 9 Jan. 1942, SRDJ 18781-83 and Bangkok to Tokyo, 23 Jan. 1942, SRDJ 19297, RG 457, USNA. On the matter of monetary remittances to China, a sore subject among Thai nationalists who viewed them as directly draining wealth from Thailand, the Bangkok Embassy later complained of difficulties in trying to determine whether the destinations of remittances were in fact in occupied areas. It was suggested that Tokyo control the remittances centrally, and determine the status of the destination point before the money was permitted to go through. See Bangkok to Tokyo, 19 Jun. 1943, SRDJ 39168, RG 457, USNA.

³³Tokyo to Bangkok, 14 Jan. 1942, SRDJ 18898, RG 457, USNA and "Kakyō taisaku yōryō" (Outline of Countermeasures Toward the Overseas Chinese), Nampōgun sakusen kankei shiryō (Operations-related Documents of the Southern Army), Nansei zempo 16-2-31, National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Tokyo.

Although several months after the fall of Northern Burma, which had ended the Japanese position in Thailand against a declaration of independence, had never for the first time since the fall of Chungking, the Japanese government of the Nanking government.

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³⁴Ishii to T 022819, RG 4

³⁵Tōgō to 024023, RG 4

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Although the Thai government managed to avoid recognizing the Nanking regime for several months, when Tokyo approved an offensive by Thai forces in the Shan States of Northern Burma in May 1942 this meant that clashes with Chiang Kai-shek's forces, which had entered that region to assist the British, were inevitable. Chargé d'Affaires Ishii Kō pointed out from Bangkok on 20 May that this presented an opportunity to turn Thailand against Chungking, and he asked why Tokyo did not seem to desire a Thai declaration of war on the Nationalist regime. The reply explained that Japan, which itself had never formally declared war on Chiang Kai-shek's government, did not recognize Chungking, nor did Japan's Axis allies. What Tokyo wanted was prompt Thai recognition of the Nanking government.³⁴

Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori emphasized this desire to Thai Ambassador Direk Chayanam (Jayanama) on 22 May, urging that Thailand abandon its traditional opposition to diplomatic relations with China. Despite resistance within the Thai cabinet, Premier Phibun responded to such Japanese promptings, and on 19 June Tōgō notified Nanking that Thailand would in fact extend recognition. The Thai asked, however, that Nanking make the first move by requesting recognition. Bangkok finally announced its decision on 7 July, the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War.³⁵

On 23 July 1942 Tōgō advised the embassy in Bangkok that army authorities desired an exchange of diplomats between the two countries and a settlement of "the Chinese problem in Thailand", through Japanese mediation if necessary. "We should guide the Thai government in the very urgent matter of reaching a fundamental policy regarding Chinese residing in Thailand", he suggested.³⁶

Ambassador Tsubokami advocated a more cautious approach. He feared that if Nanking and Bangkok exchanged diplomats it would enable the Chinese to see the real difficulties in relations between Japan and Thailand and thus exert a "bad influence on our policy for construction of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere". The two sides, he pointed out, might join together to resist common pressures from Japan. He suggested that the Japanese continue to guide the two governments individually and that any exchange of diplomats be put off.³⁷

Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki, who temporarily assumed the foreign minister's portfolio upon the resignation of Tōgō at the beginning of September, believed that the Japanese were in a sufficiently strong position to insure that the other governments within the Co-Prosperity Sphere could not collectively oppose Tokyo's policies. He agreed, however, that an exchange of envoys might well be avoided since that would both assuage Thai sensitivities and save money. Thus he approved a plan to give the two countries' ambassadors in Japan concurrent accreditation as representatives to each other's capitals. Hoping that a true exchange of diplomats would occur in due time, Wang agreed to this plan. In the end, however, the Chinese ambassador never reached Bangkok, nor did the Thai ambassador ever visit Nanking.³⁸

³⁴Ishii to Tokyo, 20 May 1942, SRDJ 022748 and Tokyo to Bangkok, 21 May 1942, SRDJ 022819, RG 457, USNA.

³⁵Tōgō to Bangkok, 22 May 1942, SRDJ 022845 and Tōgō to Nanking, 19 Jun. 1942, SRDJ 024023, RG 457, USNA; and Tsubokami to Tokyo, 22 Jun. 1942, A700 9-63, JFMA.

³⁶Tōgō to Bangkok, 23 Jul. 1942, SRDJ 025005, RG 457, USNA.

³⁷Tsubokami to Tokyo, 13 Aug. 1942, A700 9-6-3, JFMA.

³⁸Tōjō to Bangkok, 2 Sep. 1942, SRDJ 026175 and Tokyo to Bangkok relaying a message from Shigemitsu in Nanking, 30 Sep. 1942, SRDJ 026911, RG 457, USNA.

Working for the Japanese Army

The Japanese army established a new military command in Bangkok, the Thailand Garrison Army, headed by Lt. Gen. Nakamura Aketo, at the beginning of February 1943. The decimation of the Japanese merchant fleet by American submarines made regional self-sufficiency an ever-increasing necessity for the Japanese army, so General Nakamura's chief mission was to maintain public order in Thailand and maximize the country's utility as a supply base for Japanese forces in Burma. Consequently, he gave a high priority to improving relations with the Chinese community. As a goodwill gesture, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce turned over its Silom Road compound to Nakamura and his staff.³⁹

A key aspect of the heightened cooperation sought by the Japanese was Chinese involvement in building a supply railway across the mountainous, malaria-ridden border region to link supply depots in Thailand with the front-line troops in Burma. Construction had begun from both ends in mid-1942, but growing Japanese concerns about an Allied counter-attack made the project's completion an ever-higher priority. An accelerated construction effort relied on the labour of Allied prisoners of war, Asians imported from surrounding regions, and local hires.

In 1942 the Thai government had taken responsibility for clearing the right-of-way from Nong Pladuk to Kanchanaburi, a project that required the recruitment of a large number of Thai labourers. However, in the wake of complaints about Japanese treatment of the workers, a bloody fight which pitted Thai labourers and policemen against Japanese soldiers at Ban Pong in December, and other irritations, Premier Phibun grew increasingly dissatisfied about Thai involvement. Citing the necessity of maintaining agricultural production in the region surrounding the railway, he declined to undertake the recruitment of 13,000 additional labourers as requested by the Japanese in February 1943. He insisted that the Japanese instead enlist Chinese "coolies", the working class Chinese immigrants who made up the bulk of the urban labour force in Thailand.⁴⁰

Accordingly, on 28 March 1943, representatives of the Japanese army's railway unit requested that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce recruit some 10,000 Chinese labourers, including skilled workers, at wages ranging from 2.7 to 3.5 baht per day. Although not entirely satisfied with the conditions proposed, despite higher-than-usual wages, the Chinese agreed to set up a committee to formulate a recruitment plan. In reporting this development, Ambassador Tsubokami advised Tokyo: "While it is questionable whether this levy can be accomplished as planned, cooperation of this kind on the part of the Chamber of Commerce is out of the ordinary, so we are keeping our eyes on developments." On 3 April the Thai government added to the pressure on the chamber's leaders by sending officials to press for their cooperation. Ultimately the chamber leadership convinced the Japanese to make some slight improvements in their compensation package, including an increased minimum daily wage of 3.2 baht for labourers.⁴¹

³⁹Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 132–33, 141. Fujishima claims that on occasion General Nakamura intervened at his request to obtain the release of Chinese arrested by the Kempeitai.

⁴⁰Pance Bualak, "Botbat khong phokha bon sen thang say marana" [The Role of Merchants on the "Death Railway"], *Thammasat University Journal*, 21,2 (May–Aug. 1995): 44–49, and Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", pp. 57–58.

⁴¹Bangkok to Tokyo, 1 Apr. 1943, SRDJ 34729, RG 457, USNA and Pance, "Botbat khong phokha bon sen thang say marana", pp. 49–55.

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⁴²Pance, "Bot May 1943, SRDJ No doubt the mos in the work camp 28 Jul. 1943).

⁴³Pance, "Bot dōmei to Tai kaky

⁴⁴Ibid., Bangko genjō oyobi dō",

Chang Lan-ch'en, who had reappeared and resumed a leadership role as head of the Teochiu Association, headed the recruitment effort, with headquarters at the office of the Japanese-run *Chung-yüan Pao* newspaper. Advertisements made no mention of either the Chinese Chamber of Commerce or the Japanese army in touting high-paying jobs in Kanchanaburi. Tsubokami's pessimism notwithstanding, by the end of May the goal of 10,000 workers had been exceeded, despite complications posed "by enemy propaganda and rumors". The pool of available workers had been expanded by the addition of hard-pressed Chinese displaced by Phibun's January order expelling them from the northern provinces of Thailand for reasons of national security.⁴²

Faced with supply difficulties, work force attrition due to defections and epidemic disease, and the onset of the rainy season, the Japanese decided by early June that they would need an additional 23,000 local labourers, and appealed to the Thai government, which again shifted responsibility to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. By negotiating a private contract with the Japanese to provide gravel for the project, Chang Lan-ch'en convinced them to lower the recruitment target to 13,000 labourers. Still, word had spread about the horrific conditions along the "Death Railway", and recruiters had to expand the scope of their efforts to remote provinces in order to meet the quota. Citing the additional need for labour to build a military road connecting northern Thailand with Burma, Tsubokami noted that it had become necessary "to insist on the Chinese residents' cooperation to the limit". Despite the Ambassador's doubts about the recruitment campaign's prospects, almost 13,000 additional labourers were signed up in July and August 1943. However, more than half of them absconded before reaching their assigned work sites.⁴³

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce undertook to double the 500,000 baht fund raised earlier to support the railway project. The purposes of this fund included assistance in moving food supplies to the workers and the provision of medicines for the sick. Increasingly aware that they had helped sentence thousands of their less fortunate countrymen to a miserable fate under the merciless lash of the Japanese army, Bangkok's Chinese businessmen must have found in such philanthropy a means to assuage their guilty consciences. A subsequent Japanese dispatch credited the Chamber of Commerce with raising a total of 1,200,000 baht and providing 16,000 labourers — perhaps the number who actually reached work sites — for the railway project, which was completed in October 1943. This contribution deserved "special mention" in the view of the author of a Japanese intelligence report.⁴⁴

In 1944 the Japanese army again sought local and foreign workers — a total of 5,000 Chinese from Thailand were wanted by the end of the year — to maintain and improve the line, which by that time had come under Allied air bombardment. Another 1,800

⁴²Panee, "Botbat khong phokha bon sen thang say marana", pp. 49–55; Bangkok to Tokyo, 22 May 1943, SRDJ 37282, RG 457, USNA; and Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, pp. 274–75. No doubt the most problematic "rumors" concerned the outbreak of cholera which wrought havoc in the work camps along the railway and even reached Bangkok in late June (*Bangkok Chronicle*, 28 Jul. 1943).

⁴³Panee, "Botbat khong phokha bon sen thang say marana", pp. 55–56; Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 59; and Bangkok to Tokyo, 20 Aug. 1943, SRDJ 42607, RG 457, USNA.

⁴⁴Ibid.; Bangkok to Tokyo, 25 Oct. 1944, SRDJ 76479, RG 457, USNA; and "Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* (Intelligence) 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 85, A700 9-9-4, JFMA.

workers were due to be hired in January 1945. After long negotiations over the rate of pay, the two sides agreed on six baht per day, with 1.5 baht to be deducted for food. This final recruitment campaign fell far short of its goal, however, as only about 2,000 men were signed up and the majority of them absconded after accepting a ten baht advance.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, although Chinese businessmen had seen their normal commercial activities disrupted by the war, pressing Japanese needs had created new opportunities for profit. Not only were there railway construction contracts, such as those obtained by Chang Lan-ch'en, but Japan's armies in Southeast Asia had to find ways to manufacture necessary items locally as part of their push for self-sufficiency. They were willing to pay well, particularly in Thailand where the army simply borrowed the money it needed from the Thai government. The extent to which profit potential induced Chinese collusion is suggested in a bitter letter to the *Bangkok Post* after the war. The writer derided Chinese who "gave direct help, for a price, to the Japanese in their war against their own countrymen by keeping their workshops running night and day supplying war materials to the Japanese army".⁴⁶

The building of wooden ships to transport rice and other commodities within the Southeast Asian war zone soon became one major military-related enterprise in Bangkok, putting skilled carpenters and lumber much in demand. One well-placed supplier of the latter commodity was the young Chinese trader Tan Piak-chin (Chin Sophonpanit), who helped establish the Bangkok Bank in 1944. After the war he would mastermind the bank's development into the largest financial institution in Southeast Asia. When he died in 1988, the *Bangkok Post's* front-page obituary pointedly noted: "Although he said he worked with the anti-Japanese resistance, his business flourished during the Second World War."⁴⁷

A special avenue of cooperation between the leaders of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Japanese army opened in April 1944 with the organization of the Wan Feng Company (Manhō Yūgen Kōshi in Japanese), promoted by Fujishima and capitalized at 500,000 baht. Ch'en Shou-ming became the firm's president, with Fujishima as vice-president. At the urgent request of the military authorities in Malaya, the Wan Feng Company assembled a fleet of junks for shipping rice to the food-deficit regions of the Malayan Peninsula. Although rice was available in Thailand, bomb damage to bridges on the railway between Bangkok and Songkhla had made moving it to Malaya difficult. Wan Feng directors agreed to take on the task after Fujishima emphasized the need to alleviate Chinese suffering in that region.⁴⁸

During 1944 the Wan Feng Company supplied 9,000 tons of rice to Malaya and so few of its junks were attacked by enemy aircraft that the Japanese suspected a secret arrangement with the Allies. Still all did not go smoothly. The purchasing agency, the Japanese army in Malaya, sought to pay in kind or with military scrip which was worthless in Thailand. While Fujishima was in Tokyo in mid-1944 he received a telegram from Chang Lan-ch'en complaining about the payments problem. Surprised that the army had

⁴⁵Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", pp. 67-68.

⁴⁶*Bangkok Post*, 29 Jan. 1947.

⁴⁷*Bangkok Post*, 4 Jan. 1988, and Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand*, p. 158.

⁴⁸Bangkok to Tokyo, 23 Jun. and 4 Jul. 1944, SRDJ 63843 and 66538, RG 457, USNA; and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 148-53.

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failed to make adequate provisions for this in advance, Fujishima recalled that it made him "doubt Japan's capacity to win the war". He flew to Singapore and negotiated a settlement under which "valuables" taken from Singapore banks were used to settle the debt.⁴⁹

In light of these difficulties, Wan Feng's directors lacked enthusiasm for continuing the shipping project into 1945. There were also objections to Chinese participation from Mitsubishi Shōji, the company which previously had monopolized the rice shipments, which Fujishima considered yet "another example of Japanese narrow-mindedness and failure to see the bigger picture". Negotiations finally bore fruit in March 1945 when the Japanese army in Thailand guaranteed payment and Wan Feng and Mitsubishi agreed to divide evenly the planned transport of 30,000 tons of rice between April and October.⁵⁰

Toward Thai-Chinese Reconciliation

As a Japanese intelligence report acknowledged, in wartime Thailand "the Chinese were caught between Japanese pressure (that is, the demand for positive cooperation in the war) and Thai vigilance".⁵¹ An American missionary, who was repatriated in mid-1942, described the situation in similar terms:

Each of the three parties — Thai, Chinese, and Japanese — suspected and watched closely the activities of the other two. The Chinese, however, had to do their watching secretly, for they were in the power of both the Japanese and the Thai. The Thai's position was not much better, for the Japanese had the real power and could do much as they liked.⁵²

The Thai had kept an anxious eye out for any sign of collusion between the Japanese and Chinese since at least March 1942, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned Phibun that the Chinese were seeking Japanese protection.⁵³ In mid-1942 Thai officials complained to Naval Attaché Sakonjū Naomasa that:

The Japanese companies, with the military behind them, and overseas Chinese and Indians as tools, were engaged in economic aggression, and, in taking the necessary commodities of Thailand in the name of the alliance and for the sake of promoting victory, were disrupting the Thai economy.⁵⁴

In a similar vein, a Thai journalist who reached China on a secret mission in late 1944 reported that "some business men — mostly the Thailand-born Chinese [—] are making big profits out of the Japanese Co-Prosperity Sphere ... while many Chinese assert

⁴⁹Bangkok to Tokyo, 12 Mar. 1945, SRDJ 94064-65, RG 457, USNA and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 157-59.

⁵⁰Bangkok to Tokyo, 12 Mar. 1945, SRDJ 94064-65, RG 457, USNA and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 155-56. Fujishima states in his memoir that the compromise with Mitsubishi was worked out after he had appealed to Col. Tsuji Masanobu at military headquarters. However, this seems to have been a lapse of memory on Fujishima's part since the diplomatic message cited above indicates that a fifty-fifty division had been agreed on 9 March, almost three months before Tsuji transferred to Thailand.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵²Interview C-981, 18 Dec. 1944, File 116, Box 9, Entry 105, RG 226, USNA.

⁵³Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 55.

⁵⁴Tsubokami to Tokyo, 4 Aug. 1942, A799 9-6-3, JFMA.

themselves as Japanese agents". Further, a Chinese who had been in Thailand between November 1943 and February 1944 told the American Office of War Information (OWI) in Chungking that the Japanese "do not even try to make themselves popular with the Thais, but appear to do everything possible to draw the Chinese to their side".⁵⁵

In fact, the Chinese had hoped that cooperation with the Japanese might at least win them some relief from Thai government policies they considered oppressive, as illustrated by a partial American intercept of a Japanese message of 28 May 1943 about a meeting between a lieutenant general — almost certainly Nakamura — and local Chinese leaders. When the general hailed the Nanking government, a participant complained about restrictions placed upon Chinese residents by the Thai government and asked that a Nanking representative be sent to stand up for their interests. The general promised to inform Nanking of the need for such a representative.⁵⁶

Concern about Sino-Japanese collusion, however, had re-enforced strong Thai opposition to any official Nanking government presence. Two civilian officials from the Wang Ching-wei regime had visited Bangkok in March 1942, but apparently the best the Japanese could manage after that was a three-day visit to Bangkok by a general from the Nanking puppet army in February 1944. On that occasion, when the local Chinese requested that a diplomatic representative be despatched to help them, the visiting officer assured them of Nanking's awareness of their difficulties and of its efforts to ameliorate them. However, no permanent Nanking representative could be sent because, as a Japanese intelligence report noted a few months later, every time the subject came up it created "very troublesome friction with the Thai government".⁵⁷

Nonetheless, as early as 1943, Thai politicians recognized that the tide of the war was turning against Japan and the Axis and that an Allied victory was probable. In an effort to distance himself from the Japanese, Premier Phibun initiated secret contacts with Nationalist China through the Thai army in the Shan States and developed a scheme to transfer the capital to the northern town of Petchabun with the idea of ultimately turning against the Japanese and linking up militarily with Nationalist China. Accordingly, he began efforts to improve relations with the Chinese community. Naturalization procedures were simplified in April 1943, making it easier for Chinese to become citizens and thereby avoid restrictive regulations affecting aliens. Also, the government permitted a new Chinese language newspaper, *T'ai-hua Shang-pao*, to compete with the Japanese-run journal.⁵⁸

The Thai Commercial Company, which published three other papers — the English-language *Bangkok Chronicle* and the Thai-language *Thai Nikorn* and *Suphap Satri* —

⁵⁵Manot Wutthait report, October 1944, XL14550, RG 226 and "Political Conditions in Thailand", 22 Sep. 1944, 892.00/9-3044, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶Bangkok to Tokyo, 28 May 1943, SRDJ 37514, RG 457, USNA. This point is also made in "Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 86, A700-9-9-4, JFMA and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, p. 138.

⁵⁷*Bangkok Times*, 18 Mar. 1942; Bangkok to Nanking, 15 Feb. 1944, SRDJ 53348, RG 457, USNA; and "Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 85, A700-9-9-4, JFMA. The two officials who visited in 1942 were identified as Singapore-born Chong Yong-fook, an official of the Nanking government's Overseas Department, and his assistant Liu Choong-yuan. They stopped in Bangkok enroute from Saigon to Singapore.

⁵⁸Fujishima, *Gekidō suru Sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 84, 86.

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began circulating the new paper in October 1943. All the Thai Commercial organs strongly supported Phibun, so there is no question that the Premier approved of the new paper and encouraged its promotion of Thai-Chinese cooperation. In fact, the central figure of Thai Commercial was Phraya Prichanusat Panyarachun, one of whose sons, Rak, would soon marry Phibun's daughter, Chirawat.⁵⁹

The Japanese regarded this new paper warily, not least because they believed that Thai Police Chief Gen. Adun Adundetcharat, whom they distrusted, was connected with the project. Their suspicions further deepened when it became known that a key staff member of the paper was a man of known leftist inclinations who had been arrested during the sweep of anti-Japanese activists in early 1942, but was later released. Officers of the Kempeitai came to question him at the newspaper office on 14 October 1943, only to find that he had been tipped off, apparently by Phibun's radio propagandist Sang Pathanothai, and had fled.⁶⁰

In the wake of such suspicious actions by Thai officials and the granting of a royal decoration to Chamber of Commerce Chairman Ch'en in February 1944,⁶¹ a Japanese intelligence report concluded:

Through an attitude of wooing ours and other sides for the sake of convenience, the position of the overseas Chinese is gradually becoming advantageous. The overseas Chinese are becoming the object of the excellent propaganda of Great Britain, the United States and Chungking. Their merchant nature is very susceptible to [changes in] the international situation. Unlike the general overseas Chinese's war weariness, those of the upper class, according to their true inclination, are carefully keeping silent and fixing their eyes on the trends in the war situation.⁶²

After the fall of the Phibun government at the end of July 1944, Thai-Chinese relations continued to improve under the Khuang Aphaiwong government, which was directed from behind the scenes by Regent Pridi Phanomyong. The effort to oust Phibun had succeeded because of a widely shared sense that his continuance in office would be a stumbling block to Thai hopes for reconciliation with the Allies, not only because he had aligned Thailand with Japan, but also because, despite his recent manoeuvres, he was viewed in Chungking as the oppressor of the Chinese in Thailand. The shared perception

⁵⁹Phraya Prichanusat is one of the more interesting figures in wartime Thailand. A graduate of Manchester University in England and a former headmaster of Vajiravudh College, he was widely believed to have been influenced by Japan's military successes. One of his sons, Prasat, was sent, amid much fanfare in the Japanese press, to study in Japan in April 1942, along with the son of Prince Wan Waihayakon. Both, however, returned before the end of the war. Phraya Prichanusat himself made a tour of Japan in his capacity as President of the Thai Newspaper Association in mid-1943 in the company of Publicity Bureau Chief Phairot Chayanam. Another son, Kusa, was studying in the United States when the war broke out and participated in Free Thai operations with the American Office of Strategic Services. Kusa was captured by Thai police after being landed by submarine in southern Thailand in late 1944 and spent the rest of the war in detention. Yet another son of Phraya Prichanusat, Anan, has recently twice served as prime minister of Thailand.

⁶⁰Bangkok to Tokyo, 21 and 22 Oct. 1943, SRDJ 44911 and 45142, RG 457; Manot Wutthait Report, Oct. 1944, OSS XL14550, RG 226, USNA; and Sirin Phathanothai, *Dragon's Pearl* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 33–34.

⁶¹According to the *Bangkok Chronicle* of 26 Feb. 1944, Ch'en's decoration was the "third class of the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand".

⁶²"Taikoku kakyō genjō oyobi dō", *Jōhō* 27 (1 Jul. 1944): 87, A700 9-9-4, JFMA.

that a change in leadership was necessary for national survival made possible a temporary political coalition that included such diverse Thai groups as Pridi's followers, the police, the navy, conservative royalists, and even elements of the army.⁶³

Only a week after the formation of his cabinet, Khuang received the leaders of the various Chinese associations. Also, Fujishima visited Khuang on 31 October 1944 to discuss various complaints from the Chinese community. At that session Khuang revealed that he considered Phibun's proscription of Chinese from 27 occupations too severe and said that he was considering changes. While he defended the Thai policy of opposing expanded diplomatic connections with the Nanking regime, he indicated that he was considering the possibility of permitting Chinese-language schools to operate again.⁶⁴

Counsellor Ishii subsequently confirmed Khuang's firm stand on policy toward Nanking and reported that he had made no immediate move to lift the ban on Chinese schools. Yet there had been a relaxation of the vocational laws, authorization for new Thai-Chinese banks, suggestions for a joint trade association, etc., creating a sense among the Chinese "that there will be progress and cooperation" in relations with the government.⁶⁵

The banks, whose boards of directors melded Chinese capital and financial expertise with Thai political clout and social prestige, were the most significant aspect of the new Sino-Thai collaboration. Their promoters took advantage of the fact that the Japanese had closed down the previously dominant British-controlled banks at the beginning of the war. The long-term importance of the new banks is suggested by the fact that financial institutions opened in 1944/45 — Bangkok Bank, the Bank of Ayudhya, and the Thai Farmers Bank — were cited by Suehiro as the cornerstone institutions of three of Thailand's five main major conglomerates of the 1980s.⁶⁶

Ishii's November 1944 report also acknowledged the existence of "energetic anti-Japanese activities" by Chiang Kai-shek's agents, but observed that "apparently, no particular results have been achieved". What Ishii didn't know was that a month earlier Regent Pridi had dispatched a secret diplomatic mission to Chungking to establish positive relations with Nationalist China. A Pridi political ally, Assemblyman Thawin Udon, headed the group, which also included a retired army officer, Chalo Intaramban, Chalo's police officer son, Prayun, and journalist Manot Wutthatit. Thawin would remain in China as Pridi's representative until the end of the war.⁶⁷

In September 1944 the Japanese had sent a new ambassador to Bangkok, Yamamoto Kuma'ichi, who was previously the number two official in the Greater East Asia Ministry. Yamamoto, like Iwata and Fujishima, had graduated from Tōa Dōbun Shoin. By late

⁶³For more detailed treatment of the change of government, see E. Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance, 1940-1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), ch. 7.

⁶⁴*Bangkok Chronicle*, 10 Aug. 1944; Bangkok to Tokyo, 8 Nov. 1944, SRDJ 82395-96, RG 57, USNA; and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 139-44. According to Fujishima, the Chinese community credited his intervention with Khuang for a relaxation of the laws restricting various occupations to Thai nationals only.

⁶⁵Bangkok to Tokyo, 17 Nov. 1944, SRDJ 80009-14, RG 457, USNA.

⁶⁶Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand*, pp. 220, 412-17. Suehiro's own evidence seems to contradict his statement (p. 134) that during the wartime era collaboration between "Thai-national Chinese businessmen and political leaders... did not develop further after 1943...."

⁶⁷Bangkok to Tokyo, 17 Nov. 1944, SRDJ 80009-14, RG 457, USNA; Manot Wutthatit report, XL 14550, and various documents in folder 3382, Box 199, Entry 154, RG 226, USNA.

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⁶⁸Bangkok to T 113518-28; Bangk SRS 1753, 8 Aug. Zenkoku Kenyūka

⁶⁹Ishii to Taiho 1944, SRDJ 8880.

⁷⁰Bangkok to T RG 457, USNA; a his trip to Tokyo.

March 1945, he was expressing justified concern that members of the Chinese community were secretly supporting anti-Japanese activities as a means to protect their interests in the event of Japan's defeat. In early May, Yamamoto reported the development of an "uncooperative attitude of the Chinese residents toward Japan". By June this had become "more and more pronounced and fifth column activities [were] rampant". Included was a troublesome flow of Chungking currency into Thailand, where it was becoming the favoured medium of exchange among Chinese residents.⁶⁸

Japanese Countermeasures

Japanese efforts to counter the erosion of Chinese cooperation through propaganda were hampered by a shortage of newsprint, one of many commodities in short supply in wartime Thailand as a consequence of shipping difficulties. The effects had been felt as early as May 1943, and the three Japanese-run newspapers finally found it necessary to cut back. From January 1944 the Japanese-language *Bangkok Nippo*, which had begun publication in March 1942, reduced advertising space and started issuing two-page editions. *Chung-yüan Pao* also cut back to two pages in April 1944, issued a paper only every other day, and reduced print runs to 300 copies. The Thai-language *Khao Phap* cut back from eight to six pages and print runs were cut from 11,000 to 9,000 copies. Estimates in late April indicated that while the Japanese-language paper had sufficient newsprint to last a year and a half, *Khao Phap*'s supply would run out in nine months and *Chung-yüan Pao*'s by the end of June. While Japanese companies had agreed to subsidize the *Bangkok Nippo* by continuing to pay the same rates for smaller ads, *Khao Phap* reported losses of revenue of 4,500 baht in monthly sales and 1,500 baht in advertising revenue. The Japanese Embassy lamented both the loss of income and the fact that the cutbacks "might make it possible for the Thai to encroach on our influence which we have taken such pains to extend".⁶⁹

Because of the importance of the papers, Fujishima made repeated efforts to secure more newsprint. He travelled to Taihoku (Taipei) and Tokyo in mid-1944 primarily for this purpose. He also sought to find a means to transfer from Shanghai to Bangkok machinery to manufacture newsprint locally, but in the end this was deemed impractical. However, the Greater East Asia Ministry and the Army Ministry agreed to ship 350 rolls of newsprint — estimated to be a year's supply for all four companies — to Bangkok.⁷⁰

Four months later Bangkok was still petitioning Tokyo to ship this paper. In mid-September 1944 the sponsoring authorities in Taiwan agreed to supply about one-third of the amount promised by Tokyo, but a shortage of ships left the paper stranded in a warehouse. In late November the embassy reported "an alarming lack of newsprint", and

⁶⁸Bangkok to Tokyo, 31 Mar. 1945, SRDJ 96389-91; Bangkok to Tokyo, 6 May 1945, SRDJ 113518-28; Bangkok to Tokyo, 7 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 102527-35, and MAGIC Diplomatic Summary, SRS 1753, 8 Aug. 1945, RG 457, USNA. Also, Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, p. 277, and Zenkoku Kenyūkai renikai, *Nihon Kempei seishi*, p. 960.

⁶⁹Ishii to Taihoku, 10 May 1943, SRDJ 36238 and Bangkok to Taihoku, 27 Apr. and 3 May 1944, SRDJ 88802-04 and 60064, RG 457, USNA.

⁷⁰Bangkok to Tokyo, 12 Aug. 1944; Tokyo to Bangkok, 14 Aug. 1944, SRDJ 72113 and 70424, RG 457, USNA; and Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, pp. 154-55. Fujishima misdates his trip to Tokyo as 1943.

it warned in early December that the supply would run out by year's end, forcing the three newspapers to halt publication.⁷¹

The publishers kept the papers going by scrounging paper from every quarter, and in early April 1945 plans were finalized to push ahead with development of a paper-making facility in Bangkok. Before this scheme could be put into operation, however, Bangkok reported the arrival of sufficient newsprint from Singapore in mid-June to keep the three companies going for a year. Fujishima attributed this allocation to the army's gratitude for the newspaper company's role in facilitating the movement of rice to Malaya.⁷²

In the meantime, the newspapers had faced another crisis when yearly subsidies failed to arrive from Taiwan. After prompting from Tokyo, the Taiwan Governor-General's office explained in a message of 29 May 1945 that 50,000 yen allotted for the *Chung-yüan Pao* and 80,000 yen for *Khao Phap* had been used to buy newsprint. In the absence of a ship to transport it the paper had been sold to other agencies, so the funds would be sent as soon as payment had been received. Moreover, because it had been impossible to ship machinery for a new print shop for the *Bangkok Nippo* — a facility that could, in an emergency, serve the other two papers — the machinery would be sold.⁷³

At the end of May 1945 the Japanese Embassy had also found it necessary to fend off a scheme by the Southern Army Headquarters take control of the three newspaper companies in Thailand. With the Burma front collapsing, army staff officers now viewed Thailand as the front line and initiated talks with the authorities in Taiwan concerning a takeover of the papers. Bangkok promptly protested that such an action was "absolutely out of the question". It "would be a shock to the Thai authorities, whose nerves have been badly enough strained since our occupation of Indochina, and unpleasant results would be produced".⁷⁴ In response to this strong call for continued embassy control over the propaganda organs, Tokyo advised that military headquarters had not yet responded to the Southern Army's request and that in the interim the status quo should be maintained. Apparently the issue did not arise again until the last days of the war when Col. Tsuji Masanobu reacted to the printing of a Dōmei report about Japanese efforts to end the war by asserting military control over the press.⁷⁵

⁷¹Taihoku to Bangkok, 14 Sep. 1944, SRDJ 72594-95 and Bangkok to Tokyo, 21 Nov. 1944, SRDJ 79818-19, RG 457, USNA.

⁷²Bangkok to Tokyo, 8 and 19 Dec. 1944, SRDJ 82163-64 and 84661; Bangkok to Taihoku, 9 Apr. 1945, SRDJ 97817-18; and Bangkok to Tokyo, 14 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 104071, RG 457, USNA. Also, Fujishima, *Gekidō suru sensō no urabanashi*, p. 154. Bangkok to Tokyo, 26 Jul. 1945, SRDJ 107803-06, RG 457, USNA placed *Khao Phap*'s circulation at 5,500, far below the peak of 13,000 copies per day.

⁷³Taihoku to Bangkok, 13 Apr. and 18 Jul. 1944, SRDJ 57477 and 66114; and Taihoku to Tokyo, 29 May 1945, SRDJ 101953-54, RG 457, USNA.

⁷⁴Bangkok to Tokyo, 28 May 1945, SRDJ 102770-72, RG 457, USNA.

⁷⁵Tokyo to Bangkok, 23 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 103972, RG 457, USNA. Tsuji's intervention is described in Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*, p. 223. When the Japanese surrender came in mid-August, the embassy hastened to dispose of the newspaper companies (Bangkok to Tokyo, 26 Aug. 1945, SRDJ 110551-53, RG 457, USNA). Under a secret agreement, the Japanese president of *Khao Phap*, Uematsu Hideo, temporarily signed the company over to the Thai editor-in-chief and a Japanese with Thai citizenship, Kawakita Tomio. Meanwhile, Fujishima and other Japanese personnel withdrew from *Chung-yüan Pao*, turning it over to local Chinese management and distributing 65,000 baht of cash on hand to the employees. Finally, the Japanese sought to keep *Bangkok Nippo* publishing as long as possible as a means of communication with Japanese residents.

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⁷⁸Siren to Thai Comm. Institute, Carl Chiang Mai] (in *Teisen to g* ed. Etō Jun language news dated 22 Dec. shot during ar

Meanwhile, the Kempeitai had scored a major success its efforts to uncover subversives in the Chinese community on 27 August 1944 when a raid on a Thonburi house netted four people, including a radio operator who died of "fatigue" during interrogation. In the following days the Kempeitai rounded up a total 45 suspected Chinese spies, disrupting the operations of Tai Li's organization in Bangkok. The Chinese, though, could send in replacements from Yunnan Province across the thinly populated Lao region of French Indochina into northern Thailand, so their spy networks were never shut down despite such setbacks. Japanese officers heard at the end of the war that some 50 Chinese Nationalist agents had operated in Thailand, sending information back to Chungking from as many as ten radio transmitters.⁷⁶

In June 1945 Yamamoto reported accelerated efforts by the Khuang government to improve relations with the resident Chinese. He noted "a great change in the previous policy" in the granting of permission for a Chinese school to open in Ayutthaya, the hometown of Regent Pridi. He also indicated that the government would soon lift restrictions barring aliens from residing in various military zones and noted the formation of several joint Thai-Chinese banks and companies. Chinese, he pointed out, also had donated funds to leading candidates in a recent Bangkok by-election to fill a vacant National Assembly seat.⁷⁷

The Aftermath

The Thai greeted the Japanese decision to surrender in mid-August 1945 with a sigh of relief, but Bangkok's Chinese community openly celebrated it by exploding fireworks and waving Chinese flags. The Chinese felt that, in contrast to the Thai, their homeland had been on the winning side. They expected the entry of Nationalist troops into Thailand and anticipated relief, not only from the forced cooperation with the Japanese, but also from Thai government "oppression". Some score-settling occurred between rival Chinese factions, too, as on the day after the surrender a machine gun-wielding assassin struck down Chamber of Commerce Chairman Ch'en Shou-ming on a Bangkok street. The timing certainly suggests that the attack was a payback for Ch'en's cooperation with the Japanese.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Zenkoku Kenyūkairenaikai, *Nihon Kempei seishi*, p. 954; Nakamura, *Hotoke no shireikan*, pp. 119–21; Murashima, "Nittai dōmei to Tai kakyō", p. 68; and Military History Section, U.S. Far East Command, "Thailand Operations Record" (1953), in *War in the Pacific*, vol. 6, ed. Donald S. Detwiler and Charles B. Burdick (New York: Garland, 1980), p. 18.

⁷⁷Bangkok to Tokyo, 14 Jun. 1945, SRDJ 103351–54, RG 457, USNA. Khuang apparently was quite successful in ingratiating himself with the Chinese. An American political report of mid-July 1946 (Stanton to Washington, 892.007–1646, RG 59, USNA) reported that the Nationalist Chinese Embassy in Bangkok had expressed concern that the extensive financial backing wealthy Chinese were providing to Khuang (at that time Pridi was prime minister and Khuang was a leader of the opposition) might harm Thai-Chinese relations.

⁷⁸Siren to Opero, 16 Aug. 1945, Folder 802, Box 66, Entry 136, RG 226, USNA; Coughlin to Thai Comm., 17 Aug. 1945, William Donovan Microfilm, Reel 130, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; Fukino Kenshō, *Wasureenu Chenmai* [Unforgettable Chiang Mai] (Tokyo: Kōyō Shuppansha, 1983), pp. 143–44; and Yamamoto to Tokyo, 6 Sep. 1945 in *Teisen to gaikōken teishi* [The End of the War and Loss of the Right to Conduct Diplomacy], ed. Etō Jun and Hatano Sumio (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1986), p. 274. Quoting the Thai English-language newspaper *Democracy* of 22 Oct. 1945, an intelligence report compiled by Dwight Bulkley dated 22 Dec. 1945 (XL 37108, RG 226, USNA) suggests that Ch'en's killer (Ping) was himself shot during an unsuccessful escape attempt.

Despite the improved relations between Chinese and Thai leaders during the latter stages of the war, Chinese-Thai clashes soon developed in Bangkok. A Thai attempt to enforce a regulation that forbade flying a foreign flag except in the presence of the flag of Thailand caused friction, and in September false rumours of the impending arrival of as many as 10,000 of Chiang Kai-shek's troops encouraged Chinese agitators to adopt a confrontational attitude. On 20 September gun battles erupted between Chinese snipers and Thai policemen in Yaowarat, the Chinese section of Bangkok.⁷⁹

The Thai blamed the violence on Chinese gangs. A cabinet minister, Sanguan Tularak, suggested that Tai Li's agents had stirred up the trouble to give Chiang Kai-shek a pretext to put pressure on Thailand. Meanwhile, Sanguan's brother, Krachang, handed the Americans a document accusing Chang Lan-ch'en and other "war profiteers" of instigating the trouble to divert attention from their collaborationist activities. In a similar vein, a Thai Foreign Ministry memorandum sent to the American State Department via the Thai Legation in Washington sarcastically observed: "It surprises us that during the time when Japanese troops were in Siam the Chinese did not dare to instigate any rioting. On the contrary many of them cooperated with the Japanese in the economic field."⁸⁰

For their part, the Chinese accused Thai police of provoking incidents to provide a pretext for looting Chinese shops. On 24 September, Chinese-language stickers appeared on shop windows declaring: "Unite and fight the Thai burglars and thieves". A day later Chinese shops closed their doors in a general strike. On 26 September, when a delegation of Chinese met with officers of the British army, whose troops had arrived to disarm the Japanese, the Chinese cited fear of looting as the reason for the shutdown.⁸¹

The Thai government responded by threatening to evict striking Chinese merchants from government-owned buildings and to revoke the licenses of all shops that failed to reopen. An American intelligence officer, Robert Lawson, believed that well-established merchants wished to comply, but were fearful of inviting retaliation if they broke ranks. The strike lasted several days, creating a food shortage, but by 29 September shops were beginning to reopen.⁸²

Although some shops remained closed longer and incidents continued to occur until late October, the violence did gradually subside. On 27 October authorities revealed a

⁷⁹Dwight H. Bulkley, "Chinese-Thai Friction in Bangkok", 22 Dec. 1945, XL 37108 and Bulkley memorandum, 9 Dec. 1945, XL 37112, RG 226, USNA.

⁸⁰Ibid., and Thai Foreign Ministry to Washington Legation, 19 Oct. 1945 in Box 59, Records of the U.S. Legation in Bangkok, RG 54, National Records Centre, Suitland, MD. Ironically, Sanguan, who had been in China and the West as a Free Thai agent during the war, would later be sent to Nanking as the Thai ambassador to the Nationalist government. As two OSS officers have recalled, during this period Sanguan packed a .45 calibre revolver and a tommy gun in a bag for self-protection. Dillon Ripley, "Incident in Siam", *Yale Review* 36 (Winter, 1947): 272, and Alexander MacDonald Interview, Bangkok, 9 Nov. 1987. His brother Krachang had gone to China with him in 1943 and remained there when Sanguan was sent to the United States. Pridi sought, many years later — not long after he moved to Paris following a long period of exile in the People's Republic of China — to absolve the Communist Party of blame for the violence. He laid the blame on "Overseas Chinese chauvinists" of the right-wing variety. See Pridi Phanomyong, "The Underground Kingdom of Siam", *Bangkok Post*, 26 Nov. 1974.

⁸¹Dwight H. Bulkley, "Chinese-Thai Friction in Bangkok", 22 Dec. 1945, XL 37108, RG 226, USNA.

⁸²Ibid., and Robert W. Lawson, "General Impression of the Situation in Bangkok", 9 Oct. 1945, Folder 274, Box 24, Entry 110, RG 226, USNA.

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⁸⁴*Bangkok Post*, 22 to Dwight H. Bulkley USNA, at least nine

⁸⁵Kevin Hewison, Haven: Yale Universi

plan to establish a special, joint Sino-Thai police unit. The Chinese staged a parade advocating Sino-Thai cooperation and in favour of punishment for Thai politicians who had supported Japan.⁸³ The Thai government also moved ahead with plans to normalize relations with Nationalist China, a prerequisite for admission to the United Nations.

The arrival of Nationalist Chinese diplomats in late 1945 seemed to herald a new era for the Chinese in Thailand. When the Chinese Embassy sought compensation from the Thai government for the deaths of 27 Chinese and the injury of 182 others in the 1945 violence,⁸⁴ it seemed that the longstanding hopes of the Chinese community for protection were being realized at last. However, deliverance from "international orphan" status proved short-lived. By 1947 Chiang Kai-shek's government was losing its civil war with the Chinese Communists, and its ability to pressure the Thai government evaporated.

Moreover, the Thai army seized power in a coup d'état in November 1947. A few months later the old nemesis of the Chinese community, Phibun, returned as premier. His government soon adopted a strongly anti-communist, pro-American foreign policy that would preclude formal relations between Thailand and the People's Republic of China for nearly three decades. Under these circumstances the leaders of the Chinese community had to abandon their dream of enjoying diplomatic protection from a powerful Chinese government and revert to a strategy of accommodation and assimilation.

Conclusion

In his book *Bankers and Bureaucrats: Capital and the Role of the State in Thailand*, Kevin Hewison assesses the effects of the war on the position of the Chinese in Thailand, arguing that the Chinese emerged even more economically dominant than before, despite the various "anti-Chinese" restrictions imposed by the Thai government and the Japanese presence. Hewison contends that although governmental restrictions created some hardship for Chinese labourers and small businessmen, the major Chinese capitalists coped very effectively by diversifying their business activities and forming alliances with members of the new political elite. He suggests that this pattern actually predated the war, as key Chinese had assumed managerial roles in the new state-owned enterprises created by the Phibun regime at the end of the 1930s.⁸⁵ This symbiotic meshing of Chinese economic clout and Thai political power would reach full development after 1947 when the Chinese accommodated themselves to renewed Thai military rule through trading a share of their profits — by giving key military and police officers well-paid positions on their company boards — for political protection.

Suehiro Akira devotes surprisingly little space to the wartime period in his otherwise comprehensive study *Capital Accumulation in Thailand, 1855–1985*. Suehiro places more emphasis on the negative impact of Phibun's restrictions and the war on the Chinese community than does Hewison, but he too points out that mutually beneficial relationships between Chinese businessmen and Thai politicians began to develop in the late

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴*Bangkok Post*, 22 Sep. 1947. Presumably these figures only included Chinese victims. According to Dwight H. Bulkley, "Chinese-Thai Friction in Bangkok", 22 Dec. 1945, XL 37108, RG 226, USNA, at least nine Thai were killed.

⁸⁵Kevin Hewison, *Bankers and Bureaucrats: Capital and the Role of the State in Thailand* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 66–76.

1930s.⁸⁶ The two authors agree that the closure of western banks and trading companies in December 1941, and the inability of the Japanese to fill the resulting void, opened a door of opportunity for local Chinese capitalists.⁸⁷

Clearly the Chinese strategy in dealing with the Japanese during the war fits into the evolving pattern of accommodation that both Hewison and Suehiro discern. Under wartime circumstances, "diversification" by Chinese businessmen included supplying the Japanese army. Further, Phibun's pragmatic alleviation of his restrictive policies toward the Chinese during his last year of wartime rule, and the Khuang government's virtual abandonment of them, greatly facilitated Chinese efforts to seize the economic opportunities presented by the wartime circumstances. As a result, they were able to establish a number of enterprises, particularly banks, which would become key bases of economic power. In this way the most resourceful of the "international orphans" not only survived the challenges they faced during the war, but were able to lay the foundations for post-war business empires.

⁸⁶Suehiro, *Capital Accumulation in Thailand*, pp. 133-34, 154.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 154, and Hewison, *Bankers and Bureaucrats*, p. 88.

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