

Chinese “Secret Societies” in Siam in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

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Abstract

This article examines the activities of Chinese “secret societies,” which were often called *tua h̄a* and *angyī*, in Siam and the Siamese authorities’ reactions to them from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.

Thai archival records reveal that incidents of revolt by the Chinese started to appear in the mid-nineteenth century, and became more frequent and widespread toward the end of the nineteenth century. After the large scale clash among *angyī* in Bangkok in 1889, the government started to adopt more strict administrative measures to control them, which culminated in the Secret Society Act of 1897. However, the government’s efforts to control their activities proved ineffective. Many of the members were foreign subjects and Western powers did not consider that forming such societies would be a criminal act to be punished or prohibited. Sensitivity

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of the issue of foreign subjects is also reflected in historiography, such as Prince Damrong's writings, which have downplayed foreign factors.

Keywords: Siam, the Chinese, secret societies, foreign subjects, historiography

I . Introduction

Siam enjoyed a long and close relationship with China under the tribute system until the mid-nineteenth century. As the thriving junk trade that Siam carried out with China reached its peak in the early nineteenth century, the Chinese-immigrant population came to assume important roles in various aspects of socio-economic life in Siam, not only as court officials in charge of tributary trade and diplomacy with China but also as tax farmers to furnish revenues to the court and officials and as producers of important export products such as sugar, rice, and tin. Along with the growth of Chinese population, incidents of riot by the Chinese started to appear in Thai records from the mid-nineteenth century, and became increasingly frequent and widespread toward the end of the nineteenth century (Suppharat 1981; Masuda 2008).

Until recently, studies on the Chinese in Thailand often emphasized the assimilatory nature of the Chinese in general, and did not regard Chinese secret societies as something important. Standard works of Thai history in English, such as *Thailand: A Short History* by David Wyatt, did not mention Chinese secret societies at all (Wyatt 2003);

others just gave a few words in passing (*e.g.* Baker and Pasuk 2005, 48, 66, 95).

In fact, the post-WWII scholarship on the Chinese in Thailand, or even in Southeast Asia in general, has been strongly influenced by “the Skinner assimilation paradigm” (Cushman 1989, 222). In the late 1950s, G. William Skinner expected a rapid assimilation of the entire Chinese community into Thai society within a few generations (Skinner 1957).

Skinner’s argument of the assimilatory nature of the Chinese in Thailand was based on their historical experiences, in particular during the period before the early twentieth century. According to his understanding, in that time, the Siamese government adopted a policy to encourage upward mobility of the Chinese to assimilate them into the Siamese/Thai elite class. However, Skinner’s descriptions of the lives of the lower class Chinese in Siam/Thailand remained rather general and limited, and his argument on Chinese secret societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was primarily presented as an evidence of the vertically divided nature of, and therefore the lack of community-wide leadership in, the Chinese population in Siam (Skinner 1957, 134-145). Moreover, compared with scholarship on British Malaya and the Straits Settlements, the general lack of interest in the Chinese community in Thailand was apparent during the Cold War period (Nevadomsky and Li 1973; Koizumi 2013), and it has seemingly not changed much in the post-Cold War era of globalization, when transnational aspects of cross-border migration have become a focus of scholarly attention

(Ownby and Somers Heidhues 1993). An example of recent publications specifically about Thailand's Chinese community, *A History of the Thai-Chinese* (2015), on the other hand, devotes several pages to Chinese secret societies in some detail (Sng and Pimpraphai 2015). Yet the main point of emphasis is on the importance of contribution of the elite Thai-Chinese population to the Siamese/Thai state and society throughout history, and its narrative primarily supports Skinner's argument.

Chinese laborers and the activities of what were called "secret societies" for the case of the Chinese in Siam/Thailand, have remained an unpopular topic of research. To my knowledge, there are only a few monograph-length scholarly works specifically on the Chinese secret societies in Siam/Thailand. One example is an MA thesis, "Triad Societies in Thailand 1824-1910" by Suppharat Lœtphā nitchakun (Suppharat 1981). Unlike Skinner's work, which did not use Thai-language archival materials, this voluminous piece extensively cites Thai archival sources and examines by geographical region the development of activities, roles, and characteristics of Chinese secret societies in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Siam. Yet its conclusion is somewhat similar to Skinner's, claiming that contrary to the general understanding that those secret societies posed a serious problem to Siam's domestic security under the threat of Western colonial powers, those societies did not become a severe threat to the Siamese government due to their divided nature, and that, as a result of this nature, the Siamese government succeeded in their abolishment in the early twentieth century.

“Kongsī System: Origin and Life of Wage Laborers Class in Thailand During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” by Phannī Būalek, on the other hand, examines the rise and demise of Chinese secret societies within the context of the development of capitalism and a wage laborer class in Siam in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Phannī 2006). It highlights the transformation of Chinese organizations from a horizontal *kongsī* structure to a vertical hierarchical *triad* structure along with the changes in the relationship between Chinese elite and laborer classes from a close, intimate brotherhood to an exploitive relationship. She also argues that secret societies were gradually subdued toward the end of Chulalongkorn’s reign, and new organizations for the wealthy Chinese merchant class such as chambers of commerce emerged.

It should also be noted that behind studies on Chinese secret societies by Thai scholars including the above two, there are well-known classic works by Prince Damrong Rachanuphap (Damrong Rajanubhab), the father of Thai history, which have come to provide a general framework for many of the studies that followed without much critical re-examination: i.e. a section titled “About Secret Societies” in the *Royal Chronicle of the Rattanakosin Era, the Fifth Reign* (Damrong 1950) and an essay also titled “About Secret Societies” included in the collection of his essays *Historical Anecdotes* (Damrong 1974). In these works, Prince Damrong gives detailed accounts of origins, developments, and demises of Chinese secret societies in Siam by portraying various Chinese riots, and organizational aspects of societies such as leadership and membership, as well as

government policies toward them. Nevertheless, Damrong's attention is mainly on the period before the 1870s, and his description of the situations in King Chulalongkorn's reign is focused on particular aspects such as the positive role played by Somdet Čhaophrayā Bō rommahā Sīsuriyawong (hereafter abbreviated as Somdet Čhaophrayā Sīsuriyawong), one of the most influential officials, who assumed regency for King Chulalongkorn before his coming of age, in 'nurturing' secret societies and the downfall of secret societies after the large scale clash suppressed by the government in 1889 and the promulgation of the Chinese secret society Act of 1897.

Given the scant scholarly literature on this topic, this article is an attempt to fill the gap by examining the activities of Chinese "secret societies," often called *tūa hīa* (the term derived from *da xiong*, meaning a big brother) and increasingly designated as *angyī* [洪字 or 紅字] from the 1880s, and the Siamese authorities' reactions to them from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Incidents of revolt by the Chinese became more frequent and widespread toward the end of the nineteenth century. After the large scale clash among *angyī* in Bangkok in 1889, the government started to adopt more strict administrative measures to control them, which culminated in the Secret Society Act of 1897. However, even though the existing studies generally agree on the decline of Chinese secret societies after this act, the government's efforts to control their activities proved ineffective. Siamese records also reveal that factors behind the Siamese authorities' ineffectiveness in suppressing these societies were economic and diplomatic, and that this may in turn challenge

the existing historical narratives, especially Prince Damrong's, which have downplayed foreign factors.

II. Administration of the Chinese Community

Before going into any of those details, a few words on the general situation of the administration of the Chinese population in Siam during the period under examination may be useful. It is rather difficult to give an accurate figure for Siam's Chinese population in Siam during King Chulalongkorn's reign despite various attempts to determine its size.

Siamese historical sources, before the introduction of the country-wide census in 1911 only recorded the number of Chinese who had paid the triennial poll tax called *phūk pī*. Special caution is needed in evaluating figures for the Chinese and the taxed Chinese populations, as the definitions of the Chinese, as well as of Siamese subjects liable for tax, changed from time to time in the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, definitions of the Chinese and the demarcations between foreign and Siamese subjects became a highly complicated issue for the Siamese government as an increasing number of Chinese and other Asian populations in Siam sought the status of 'foreign subjects' under the Western powers to gain protection by extraterritoriality and tax exemptions guaranteed by treaty arrangements. Western powers also pressured the Siamese government by allowing Asiatic populations, including those who had not been born in their colonial

territories, to register at their consulates as their subjects. The number of Chinese under foreign protection increased rapidly in the late nineteenth century along with the growth of Chinese immigrants to Siam and development of mills, factories, and other enterprises by European companies. To cope with the problem, the Siamese government negotiated with the Western powers for treaty revisions to place those Chinese and other Asian populations registered with the consulates under the Siamese jurisdiction and taxation system, while avoiding a treaty with China, which would in turn make Chinese population in Siam Chinese subjects (Koizumi 2009).

According to the provisions in the Chinese Poll Tax Act, issued in 1900, the Chinese in Siam from the first to third generations with pigtailed, aged between 18 to 60, except those who were foreign subjects, were subject to the payment of 4 *baht* and 24 *at* every three years (PKPS 17, 330-337), a much lower rate than the maximum annual capitation tax imposed on Siamese able-bodied men of 6 *baht* per person. Following this stipulation, the universal poll tax for the Siamese introduced in 1902 excluded Chinese of the first to third generations from the population liable for this tax (PKPS 18, 225-227); the partial census introduced in 1904, on the other hand, defined the Chinese by appearance and outfit: those with pigtailed (male) or who wore Chinese-style clothes (female) were counted as Chinese (NA.R.5.M.2.19/4). However, in response to the revision of the definition of persons of Asiatic origin who were entitled to French protection by Article 11 of the Franco-Siamese Convention, signed on February 13, 1904, which excluded grandchildren of French Asiatic

persons from French protection, the stipulation of universal military conscription introduced in 1905 changed the status of the third-generation Chinese to Siamese subjects who were liable for military service (*PKPS* 20, 302-314). Following the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907, which agreed that Asiatic French subjects and *protégés* shall be subject to the ordinary taxes and dues except military services, the Anglo-Siamese treaty of March 1909 also agreed that British subjects and their property shall be subject to all taxes and services imposed by law on Siamese subjects except military services. Concomitantly, under increasing pressure from the Qing government to conclude a treaty, the Siamese government abolished the Chinese poll tax (*PKPS* 22, 601-604; *PKPS* 23, 2-5, 242-243), a symbol of a special position that the Chinese could enjoy. The census in 1909 also included third-generation Chinese with or without pigtailed in the Thai population (NA.R.6.N.27/1).

The resulting figures of those who paid the *phūk pī* tax in the eight circles (*monthon*)¹⁾ and Bangkok in 1903/4, 1906/7, and 1907/8, for instance, were 186,743 (101,336), 201,244 (126,028), and 215,118 (125,446), respectively (NA.R.5.M.28.2/43).²⁾ The marked presence of Chinese is obvious in Bangkok and certain provinces where production of important resources for export, such as tin, were concentrated. The unpublished figures from the 1909 census reveal the striking fact that the male Chinese population in 25 inner districts

1) Krung Kao (Ayutthayā), Pāchīnburī, Rāṭchaburī, Nakhōn Chaisī, Nakhōn Sawan, Phisanulōk, Nakhōn Rāṭchashimā, and Čanthaburī were included.

2) Figures in parentheses are the breakdown for Bangkok.

in Bangkok, 160,818, exceeded the male Thai population, which totalled 142,512 (NA.R.5.N.30/9). The same census also recorded almost 200,000 Chinese in total in provinces, among which *Monthon Rāṭṭhaburī* had the largest number (38,767), followed by *Prāṭṭhīnburī* (35,912), *Nakhōn Chaisī* (33,992), *Phūket* (32,408), *Krung Kao (Ayutthayā)* (18,215), and *Chanthaburī* (10,170) (NA.R.5.M.2.19/4).

In the early Rattanakosin period, the Chinese population in Bangkok was placed under the authority of *Krom Thā Sāi* (the Left Port Affairs Department) and its chief official, *Phrayā Chōḍu krāṭchasēthī* (hereafter abbreviated as *Phrayā Chōḍuk*), responsible for trade and diplomatic relations with China and other places east of the Gulf of Siam. In the provinces, they were governed by *chao mīrang* (local lords), or in cases involving commercial activities related to farmed-out taxes, the tax farmer concerned, who typically was Chinese, would also act as an arbitrator. In the mid-1840s, in the midst of increasing troubles concerning illegal opium trade, local officials called *nāi amphāē chhīn* (the Chinese district chiefs), responsible for preventing illicit trade, keeping law and order, and arbitrating court cases, were introduced, by appointing one for each dialect group from the locality's existing tax farmers.³⁾ In the case of a grave offense or an appeal case, the provincial officials would sit in judgment on the case, but they were also requested to be present in court.

After concluding treaties with several Western powers in the mid- and late-1850s, the Siamese government started to appoint influential Chinese in the locality to new administrative positions called *palat*

3) See, for instance, NL. CMH.R.3.C.S.1204, No.18.

čhīn and *konsun čhīn* (the term *konsun* was derived from the English term consul) for court cases concerning the Chinese population. *Palat čhīn* was placed under a local official called *yokkrabat*, and was responsible for registering the Chinese population in the locality, maintaining law and order in the local Chinese community (NL.CMH.R.4.C.S.1218, No.20), and providing advice and admonishment to resolve disputes among the Chinese, whereas *konsun čhīn*, who was placed under Phrayā Chōḍuk, acted as judges for court cases between the Chinese.⁴⁾ Each of these officials was given a rank and official title as well as a *sakdina* numeric grade from 400 to 1,000, and *palat čhīn* were obliged to participate in a water of allegiance ceremony (NL.CMH.R.4. C.S.1218, No.20; NL.CMH.R.4. C.S.1219, No.203).

However, such a measure was perhaps insufficient to deal with a growing number of Chinese immigrants and troubles concerning them. At the very beginning of Chulalongkon’s reign, on October 23, 1868, a special court for trials concerning Chinese population was set up under Phrayā Chōḍuk and two other officials in the department. Phrayā Chōḍuk was given the power to appoint judges or arbitrators for court cases in which both parties were Chinese or in which the plaintiff was Chinese and the defendant was Thai, Khmer, Mon, Lao, or Yuan (Vietnamese) under the Siamese jurisdiction.⁵⁾

4) See, for instance, NL.CMH.R.4.C.S.1219, No.203 and NL.CMH.R.4. C.S.1230, Nos. 69, 72, and 77.

5) “Wā dūai sǎn chamra khwām čhīn,” *RKB* 1, 289-9.

Ⅲ. Chinese “Secret Societies” in the Early Years of King Chulalongkorn’s Reign

In 1867, just before the introduction of the aforementioned special court for the Chinese, large-scale clashes between Ngī Hin and Pun Tao Kong societies, involving more than seven thousand Chinese laborers working at tin mines, occurred in Phūket. As the local authorities could not suppress the riots, the government in Bangkok dispatched two officials as royal commissioners to subdue the rioters. In the end, eight leaders from each society were captured and sent to Bangkok for trial. However, even though the judges decided to punish them severely, King Mongkut, seeing that the Chinese laborers were indispensable for the tin business, an important revenue source for the king and elites in Bangkok, overturned the decision and let all the leaders return to Phūket after they made an official oath not to commit the offense again.⁶⁾

However, this could not stop the dispute between the two groups in Phūket⁷⁾ and prompted even more conflicts among Chinese groups in other provinces. According to a report submitted in 1881 by Phrayā Phison Sombatbōribūn (*čhao sūa* Yim, abbreviated as Phrayā Phison), a rich Chinese opium farmer, many Chinese in Bangkok and the provinces, seeing that no punishment was imposed on the leaders

6) NA. R.4. RL-KH 33, No. 69, pp.236-237; NA. R.5. RL-KH.1, pp. 192-193; and Suppharat (1981, 155-7). There is another version of the incident, which emphasizes the role of Somdet Čhaophrayā Sīsuriyawong. See Phrayā Phison Sombatbōribūn to Chulalongkorn, May 12, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.12.

7) NA. R.4. RL-KH.37, pp.147-151.

in Phūket, again formed *angyī*. In Bangkok, it was reported that *angyī* were established in at least twenty districts (*tambon*). Phrayā Phison then advised Somdet Čhaophrayā Sīsuriyawong to suppress *angyī* by obliging the principal members of various *angyī* to vow never to hold banquets or meetings to recruit new members. Following this suggestion, Somdet Čhaophrayā Sīsuriyawong compelled *angyī* leaders to make vows at Kanlayanamit Temple, a temple built by a wealthy Chinese descendent, Čhaophrayā Nikṓnbṓdin, in the mid-1820s, if they wished to be appointed as government officials, such as tax farmers. This measure calmed *angyī* activity until the mid-1870s. In 1877, another conflict occurred in Nakhṓn Chaisī, a sugar production center since the early nineteenth century. A local Chinese official, Lūang Sākhṓnrāchāyut, got into trouble with a Catholic priest as he gathered over three hundred Chinese who had converted to Catholicism to establish an *angyī*. The officials in Bangkok, when they heard the case in Bangkok, compelled Lūang Sākhṓn to make an oath at Kanlayanamit Temple; however, as they did not prohibit holding banquets and meetings, *angyī* started to increase again.⁸⁾

Around the same time, 1876-8, a series of large-scale violent conflicts among the Chinese and local officials in southern Siam occurred again. The first case was between a Hokkien group and a Macao group joined by Hailam and Teochiu peoples in tin mining areas in Nakhṓn Sī Thammarāt. This incident was followed by riots

8) Phrayā Phison Sombatṓribūn to Chulalonkorn, received on May 12, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.12.

involving Pun Tao Kong society in Ranōng and large scale violence by Pun Tao Kong, which attacked local officials, in Phūket. The government again dispatched royal commissioners on warships to settle the situations in each case.⁹⁾ Ordinary laborers who just joined the riots were allowed to return to work after swearing an oath not to repeat the offense again, but the leaders of Chinese groups involved in the incidents were given punishment, including the death penalty for the leaders who killed local officials in Ranōng.

In fact, threat of Chinese riots affected not only Siamese domestic administrations, in particular its revenues and security, but foreign relations. In the early 1860s, when officials in Canton sent a request to Siam to resume tributary missions and Siamese leading officials discussed how to respond to the request, the officials feared the possibility of Chinese residents becoming more aggressive and causing violence if they refused the request.¹⁰⁾ Similarly, in the mid-1870s, when Siamese officials again consulted about how to deal with China's renewed request for resumption of tribute, some recalled the past incidents of Chinese riots in places such as Chachēngsao and Nakhōn Chaisī and mentioned the difficulty of refusing tribute because Siam had less economic power and no unity even though such riots might happen regardless of whether they sent tribute (Krom Sinlapākōn 1978, 220-237). The Siamese authorities faced a dilemma: they could neither refuse nor accept China's request, fearing on the one hand that a complete refusal of tribute might incite

9) For details, see NA. R.5.RL-KH. 61 and NA.R.5.RL-KH.62.

10) NA. KT (L) 1, pp. 57-8.

a riot against the Siamese government among the Chinese and that a treaty with China, on the other hand, would make the Chinese population in Siam foreign subjects (Koizumi 2009). The idea of exercising stricter control over the Chinese *angyī* emerged in the early 1880s, which was perhaps prompted by the stronger attitude of the Chinese envoys who came to Siam to request the resumption tribute missions. Yet, violent suppression that might give the Chinese government a reason to intervene or provoke violent reactions among the Chinese in Siam would still be avoided.

On February 5, 1881, Henry Alabaster, former British diplomat, and later private advisor to King Chulalongkorn from 1873, wrote to the king with a strong warning that the Chinese in Siam might resort to a *tūa hīa* rebellion backed by the Chinese government as there was no treaty with China, and therefore, no Chinese consulate to protect the Chinese population in Siam. According to Alabaster, the present situation in which “some powerful Siamese protected the chiefs of *tūa hīa* and kept them as friends” seemed to be “like rearing tigers that might turn and eat their keepers,” and Phrayā Chōḍuk and Chinese district chiefs in the provinces were of little use. He suggested instead “the appointment of high Siamese, or if possible foreigners, as protectors of [the] Chinese with authority like Consuls and direct access to the Foreign Minister and the king” while arresting and executing all the *tūa hīa* chiefs, thus forcibly putting down all Chinese organizations.¹¹⁾

This suggestion was followed by a proposal from Phrayā Phison,

11) Alabaster to Chulalongkorn, Feb. 5, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.11.

dated May 12, 1881, that decisive measures, like the one enforced by law and force in Singapore, should be adopted at an early stage of *angyi* development to prevent a further increase in their activities. He was also afraid that if *angyi* were allowed among the Chinese under Siamese jurisdiction, Chinese under foreign jurisdictions would follow their example and establish *angyi*, resulting in their further proliferation.¹²⁾

IV. The Introduction of the Code of Thirteen Articles

It seems the apprehension was not groundless, as this letter was followed by a report on *tūa hā* leaders in Chachōngsao, a major sugar production area located east of Bangkok, inducing over three hundred Chinese to attend an initiation ceremony in 1881.¹³⁾ The Bangkok authorities ordered the local officials in Chachōngsao, to send *tūa hā* leaders to Bangkok for trial.¹⁴⁾

In the same year, another incident occurred in Bangkok. A Chinese man named Čhīn Tit, the leader of Ngī Hōk society, filed an accusation against Čhīn Lēng Īam, the leader of Ngī Hēng society and six *angyi* groups in Bangkok for bullying members of his *angyi* group and beating and injuring his brother in front of a gambling den late at night on August 23, 1881. Čhīn Tang Hēng, Čhīn Īam, Čhīn Mōng

12) Phrayā Phison Sombathōribūn to Chulalongkorn, received on May 12, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.12.

13) Kham hai kām by Čhīn Pō Čhāi, NA.R.5.NK.13.

14) Kham hai kām by Čhīn Hūa, NA.R.5.NK.13.

Mēng, and Čhīn Yi, on the other hand, also submitted an accusation against Čhīn Tit and Čhīn Chīao to a Thai official, Čhamūn Wai Wōranāt for beating their *angyī* members.¹⁵⁾

According to Čhīn Tang Hēng and three other fellows, all leaders of Chinese communities in the ninth lunar month of 1880, a time when an epidemic was spreading, made offerings to gods at Chinese shrines and prayed for the epidemic to end as soon as possible. In the ninth month of this year (1881), seeing that the epidemic had ended, all the leaders then collected contributions from the Chinese communities and offered a *thing krachat* merit-making ceremony to all the Chinese shrines. However, Čhīn Tit and Čhīn Chīao ordered their followers to collect 2 to 5 baht from each of these Chinese shrines. If any shrine refused to pay them, they obstructed Vietnamese monks from offering services at the shrine. From August 20, 1881, Čhīn Tang Hēng and his associates sponsored two troops of Chinese opera performers in front of the Sān Čhao Kao shrine. On the night of August 22, 1883, after the opera performance, Čhīn Tit and his associates attacked Čhīn Tang Hēng and his group.

After an investigation, leaders of six *angyī* societies for five speech groups, i.e. Hokkien, Teochiu, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese, as well as leaders of the *but Čhīn* (second-generation Chinese) of the Malacca group, integrated under Ngī Hin, were arrested, and confessed their guilt in forming *angyī* to ask for pardon.¹⁶⁾

15) Dīkā Čhīn Tit to Somdet Čhaofā Mahāmālā and two other princes, Sept. 16, 1881, and an accusation by Čhīn Tang Hēng and three other Chinese submitted to Čhamūn Wai Wōranāt, Aug. 31, 1881, NA. R.5.NK.13.

16) Phrayā Phison to Chulalongkorn, received on Sept. 27, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.13.

Phrayā Phison, who judged the case, proposed a code of twelve articles for the leaders of the Ngī Hin society to observe. The stipulations, which defined *angyī* as a grave offence to the kingdom, included that each leader should drink the water of allegiance to the king twice a year and that he must oblige the members of his *angyī* to observe fair and just behavior and not bully other people. The leader was also obliged to cooperate in investigations of crimes involving penal offenses and tax payments. If any fights with other *angyī* broke out, leaders of the concerned *angyī* on both sides should be arrested and punished. The leader of an *angyī* should keep a list of its members and submit it to the official in charge. Whenever a banquet to recruit new members or a Chinese opera performance for an annual event would take place, the leader sponsoring the event had to receive permission in advance from the Siamese official in charge.¹⁷⁾ By the end of November 1881, the proposed code was revised and an additional article, which obliged *angyī* leaders to hand members over to the International Court if a member was to be sued by any foreign subject, was inserted. All the leaders of these five speech groups in the Ngī Hin then made oaths to observe the code of thirteen articles (NA.R.5.N.33/12).

Following this agreement, in March 1882, Phrayā Chōḍuk rāthasēthī submitted to the king a report on the situation of *angyī* administration.¹⁸⁾ He reported that on the first day of the waxing moon of the eleventh month of the lesser year 1243 (September 24,

17) Phrayā Phison to Chulalongkorn, received on Sept. 27, 1881, NA.R.5.NK.13.

18) Phrayā Chōḍuk to Chulalongkorn, received on Mar. 11, 1882, NA.R.5.NK.16.

1881), he and his officials had taken the leaders of the *angyi* of five speech groups to Kanlayanamit Temple for the ceremony of drinking the water of allegiance. The leader of each *angyi* then submitted a list of its members, in which the number of members of each *angyi* was provided as follows: Teochiu, 1,356; Hakka, 1,401; Hokkien, 820; and Hainanese, 10,900. No figure was available for the Cantonese *angyi* members.

However, there still was a conflict between two Teochiu *angyi* groups in the Talāt Phlū (literally meaning betel leaf market) district, with one to two hundred members in arms ready to fight on each side. Phrayā Chōḍuk tried to admonish the *angyi* leaders to stop the fighting, but friction remained as many *angyi* members were under the consular jurisdiction of European treaty countries and therefore could not be tried in court. Phrayā Chōḍuk proposed to the king that he and his officials would take the *angyi* leaders of the five speech groups to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and also take members of all *angyi* accompanied by Chinese tax farmers and officials to Uphairāṭchabamrung Temple in the Talāt Nōi district for the ceremony of drinking water of allegiance on the third day of the waxing moon of the fifth month.¹⁹⁾

However, this did not settle the situation. In August of 1882, following another fight between the Ngī Hēng and Ngī Hōk *angyi* in the Talāt Phlū areas, the king ordered another official, Čhaophrayā Mahithōṇsakthamrong (hereafter abbreviated as Čhaophrayā Mahithōṇ), to make a law for controlling *angyi* activities in a more

19) Phrayā Chōḍuk to Chulalongkorn, received on Mar. 11, 1882, NA.R.5.NK.16.

decisive manner.²⁰⁾ Čhaophrayā Mahithōn observed that the Chinese, who had long resided in the Siamese Kingdom, were generally well in order when they were small in number. However, once they grew in number and became powerful, they would become rowdy, as they possessed mischievous natures. He also noted that leaders of *angyī* were seeking personal profit by collecting money from those who became *angyī* members. To prevent innocent Chinese who made a living by honest toil from being forcefully recruited into *angyī* membership for fear of being harassed by a powerful *angyī* leader, Čhaophrayā Mahithōn presented a draft of law and asserted the necessity for severe punishment of *angyī* leaders if they violated the law.

The general purpose of the draft law was twofold: to keep *angyī* activities and membership under the government officials' close surveillance and to place all the *angyī* members under Siamese jurisdiction. *Angyī* leaders were requested to submit a list of members, and any Chinese who planned to recruit new *angyī* members without permission from government officials was to be punished. Those who were listed as *angyī* members could not claim the status of foreign subjects, and all the court cases were to be tried in a Siamese court, prohibiting the Chinese from judging cases among themselves.²¹⁾ It seems, however, that the proposal was shelved.

20) Čhaophrayā Mahithōn to Chulalongkorn, Aug. 14, 1882, NA.R.5.NK.18.

21) R. Thī 616, submitted with the letter from Čhaophrayā Mahithōn to Chulalongkorn, Aug. 14, 1882, NA.R.5. NK.18.

V. The 1889 Riot in Bangkok

One of the largest *angyī* clashes in Bangkok occurred along Charoen Krung Road, at the center of the Chinese community, in mid-June of 1889. It started with a small incident, but escalated into bloody riots that lasted for two days. Because the police could not suppress the riot, military forces were called in. Approximately twenty people were killed, and more than a hundred were injured. Altogether, 905 people were arrested. While 505 did not admit to being *angyī* members and were released after interrogation, 400 were found to be members of the three following *angyī*: Siu Lī Kō, Ngī Ēng, and Tang Kongsī. The Chinese who joined the riots were laborers at rice mills of various companies and merchants, such as the Borneo Company, Windsor and Co., Mā Kuan [Markwold and Co.], Phrayā Phisānphonphānit, Phrayā Anukunsayāmkit [Tan Kim Čheng 陳金鐘], and Hōng Lī, as well as a gambling den in the Bāng Khwāng district.²²⁾

According to testimony given by *Amdēng* [Mrs.] Lō, the *yī kō* (leader) of the Ngī Ēng society, the riot started from as follows. On June 14, 1889, a Chinese man named Dīeo Hī and his brother Sun Sēng, both members of the Ngī Ēng society, put 12 dollars (*rīan*) into a pocket and went out to remit the money to their father in China. They rented a boat and came to the foot of the Plāsot Bridge located at the edge of the house of a rich Chinese, Čhe Sūa Tit. However,

22) Report of Committee of Krom Phranakhōnbān submitted to Chulalongkorn, June 30, 1889, NA.R.5.N.33/1.

when they approached the bridge, some members of the Siu Lī Kō society put out their boats and blocked Čhīn Dīeo Hī and Sun Sēng from approaching the bridge. The Siu Lī Kō members then hit Čhīn Dīeo Hī threw him into the water; and he drowned. Čhīn Sun Sēng was also beaten on the head and had to run away.²³⁾

Several days after, on June 19, 1889, *Amdāng* Lō heard from some Chinese that Čhīn Yāem, *sā hīa* (literally “the third brother”, referring to the third highest position in the society) of the Siu Lī Kō society, with his fully armed followers, visited an opium shop under the Ngī Ēng society and gave a warning that they would attack the Ngī Ēng society at 11:00 o’clock that night. Following the attack by the Siu Lī Kō society as announced, a clash started and turned into a shooting riot involving a large number of laborers at various rice mills. The clash lasted for two days until military forces arrived to suppress the riot on June 22, 1889.²⁴⁾

Immediately after the incident, an investigation committee was set up. It collected testimony from nearly 400 Chinese and examined who had been involved and in what ways by cross-examining witnesses. As a result, the committee decided to impose severe punishment on all nine leaders of the Ngī Ēng, Siu Lī Kō, and Tūa Kongsī, including Čhīn Yong Ēng and three other leaders who denied the charges by claiming that they did not go to the scene of the riot. Their punishments included confiscation of all properties, including wives and children, 90 strokes of the lash, and the death penalty. In

23) Consultation, Committee of Krom Phranakhōnbān, June 25, 1889, NA. R.5.N.33/2.

24) Consultation, Committee of Krom Phranakhōnbān, June 25, 1889, NA. R.5.N.33/2.

addition, altogether 165 members of the three *angyī* societies who had taken up arms during the uprising were given 60 lashes and sentenced to indefinite imprisonment, and 93 individuals who joined the riot unarmed received 50 lashes and three years of penal servitude.²⁵⁾ Moreover, 105 *angyī* members who lived near the premises where fighting occurred and were present at the rice mills where fighting occurred and were detained by officials were subject to 30 lashes and one year of penal servitude. Even those who were just visiting the area to give *angyī* members temporary help and were detained at the scene were received six months of penal servitude.

The committee declared the rationale behind such severe and thorough punishments: the Chinese had come to reside in Bangkok to seek royal graces, therefore, they should do good and earn their living in an honest and faithful manner without offending the king. However, those three groups of Chinese were mischievous and wicked and did not fear royal power and punishment.²⁶⁾

However, in the end, the king intervened and decided that punishment should be mitigated according to the rank of each individual in the *angyī* and the role that each played in the riot. The *yī hīa* and *sā hīa* who were the leaders of the riot were given 90 lashes and a life sentence instead of the death penalty and confiscation of all properties, while the leaders of lower ranks who had taken up arms and joined the riot were given 60 lashes and a life sentence, and the

25) It was later found that 35 of them died and four had escaped after two years of imprisonment. NA.R.5.N.33/3.

26) Consultation, Committee of Krom Phranakhōnbān, June 25, 1889, NA. R.5.N.33/2.

lower-ranked leaders who had not been at the scene of the riot were subject to 15 years of imprisonment. As for ordinary members of the *angyī* societies who had taken up arms during the uprising, they were exempt from whipping and received seven years of imprisonment, and those who had joined the riot unarmed were only subject to two years in jail. In addition, those who resided in the premises where the riot occurred and those who had been just visiting the area when the riot occurred received exemptions from whipping. The former were to receive one year imprisonment, while the latter received three months.²⁷⁾

VI. Reorganization of *Angyī* in the 1890s

It seems that such punishment was not very effective in putting an end to *angyī* activities. *Angyī* riots still occurred in Bangkok and the provinces in the 1890s. For instance, on the night of June 18, 1894, in the Talāt Phlū area on the Thonburī side, scuffles involving over a hundred Chinese broke out in front of two theaters for Chinese opera performances.²⁸⁾ When a patrol was sent to suppress the fight, the mobs started to attack the patrol with knives and sticks. One guard at a nearby temple was killed, and over ten patrol officers were injured. It was found that the culprits were Chinese, some were members of

27) Prince Narēs Narariddhi (hereafter Prince Narēt) to Chulalongkorn, Dec. 8, 1895, NA.R.5.N.33/2.

28) The description of this incident is based on the documents filed in NA.R.5. N.33/17, in particular a letter from Prince Narēt to Prince Sommot, dated June 25, 1894.

the Ngī Hēng society at rice mills, and others were from the Talāt Phlū district. After the incident, many of them were observed escaping into the large rice mills owned by Mā Hūa, a rich Chinese merchant, and Phrayā Sawatwāmdit, a high-ranking official in the Krom Thā Sāi Department and the head of a group of tax farmers. Prince Narēt, the Minister of Local Government, demanded that Phrayā Sawatwāmdit and Mā Hūa hand over the Chinese who had escaped into their rice mills. However, no record shows that this demand was ever met.

Six months later in the same year, the Tūa Kongsī and Siu Lī Kō societies fought in the Yaowarāt (Chinatown) area in Bangkok. It happened on October 10, 1894, the day of an annual *hǎe chao* festival at a Chinese shrine. After the parade of palanquins was over, a quarrel started between the members of the Tūa Kongsī and Siu Lī Kō at their meeting places near Phlap Phlāchai Temple. When police intervened, they attacked the police with weapons. Twelve Chinese were arrested. Even though no one was killed or seriously injured, Prince Narēt expressed strong apprehension that Chinese *angyī* would continue to cause trouble because it seemed very difficult to punish their leaders behind the scenes.²⁹⁾

In mid-November of the following year, 1895, another clash—a much larger one—between the members of the Ngī Hēng and the Ngī Hōk societies occurred again in the Talāt Phlū areas on the Thonburī side.³⁰⁾ Both the Ngī Hēng and Ngī Hōk were Teochiu *angyī*. Most of

29) Prince Narēt to Prince Sommot, Nov. 1, 1894, NA.R.5.N.33/17. See also NA.R.5.N.33/19.

the Ngī Hēng members were laborers at large-scale steam rice mills along the Bangkok Yai Canal, many of which were owned by European companies, and some of them were also engaged in *phlū* (betel leaf) cultivation and sales. The members of the Ngī Hōk society, on the other hand, were mostly agricultural laborers cultivating and selling *phlū* leaves in the Talāt Phlū and Bāng Namchon areas.

The trouble between the two groups started when the Ngī Hōk built a house for their members working in *phlū* fields in the Bāng Yī Rūa district, where some Ngī Hēng members were also working in *phlū* cultivation and sales. On November 23, 1895, some members of the Ngī Hēng destroyed this house, as they believed it would obstruct their sales of *phlū*. Approximately a hundred members from both sides were mobilized in the fight. Some of them were armed with guns and when they saw the arriving patrol, they started shooting at them. The patrol then decided to request the dispatch of military troops. Three companies, altogether 320 troops and more than 600 naval soldiers, were sent in and stationed along the feeders of the Bangkok Yai Canal to arrest rioters and to prevent the mobs from taking refuge in those large-scale steam-powered rice mills. They feared that if the mobs ran into the rice mills, the clash between the mobs and troops chasing them would spread into those mills. Further trouble involving foreign subjects, including the Chinese coolies

30) The following description of this incident is based on documents, such as the reports from Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn dated Nov. 24, 1895, Nov. 26, 1895, Nov. 27, 1895 and Nov. 28, 1895, filed in NA.R.5.N.33/17.

working at rice mills owned by the Europeans, was to be avoided. It was also reported that due to the riot, the market price of betel leaves in Bangkok increased sharply within a few days from the normal price of 1.5 baht per 1,000 leaves to 8 baht per 1,000 on November 25 and then gradually decreased after Chinese laborers returned to work.³¹⁾

In the end, 106 Chinese and 4 Thais were arrested: 36 were members of the Ngī Hēng; 9 were of the Ngī Hōk; and 9 were of the Mēng Sūn, a Hakka group supporting Ngī Hēng; and no clear evidence of *angyī* membership was found among the remaining 56 arrestees. Understanding that the riot this time was smaller and less serious than the previous case in 1889, Prince Narēt, the Minister of the Local Government, suggested the punishment this time should be less severe: 28 of them, who had allegedly joined the riot with arms in hand, were to receive 60 strokes and imprisonment for correction (no term was specified); 17, who had not directly participated in the riot but who had called for other members of the same *angyī* to join the riot were to receive 50 strokes and imprisonment for correction (no term was specified); and 24 who despite the fact that no clear evidence proved they were *angyī* members, but resided in the area where the riot broke out and were suspected of helping the *angyī* members during the riot, were to receive 20 strokes and be detained for correction.³²⁾

According to the observations of a Thai official, the leaders of *angyī* groups were making profits from their members through

31) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Nov. 27, 1895, NA.R.5.N.33/17.

32) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Dec. 8, 1895, NA.R.5.N.33/17.

various means: the collection of a certificate fee, a contribution collected for Chinese opera performances, and arbitration or compensation fees charged to members involved in any cases of trouble or fights.³³⁾ Therefore, as long as many *angyi* groups existed and leaders could profit from the arbitration of fights or disputes between *angyi* members or groups, similar riots would most likely continue to break out. Therefore, after the riots in Talāt Phlū and Bangyī Rūa in Thonburī in November 1895, Prince Narēt, the Minister of Local Government, consulted with Phra Phakdīphattharākṇ, an influential opium tax farmer from whom all the *angyi* leaders purchased opium, and requested Phra Phakdī to persuade the *angyi* leaders to become integrated into one *kongsī* under him. In February 1896, they agreed and unified. As a result, the number of fights decreased.³⁴⁾

However, while negotiations for the unification were in progress, some sub-leaders of *angyi* societies asked Fanny Preecha, a daughter of Sir Thomas George Knox, the former British Consul General in Siam, and Knox's Thai wife, Prang, to establish a new company called the Workmen's Association (*Sap samākhom samōsṇ* in Thai, 高陞館) to bring Chinese laborers, some under British or French protection, together. According to Prince Narēt, those Chinese were discontent with the unification plan, as they thought it would negatively affect their profits.³⁵⁾ Fanny, on the other hand, in her

33) Phrayā Intrāthibḍīstharātrṇgmūang to Prince Narēt, Nov. 4, 1894, NA.R.5.N.33/19.

34) Prince Narēt to Queen Regent, May 16, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/17.

35) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Feb. 9, 1896 and Prince Narēt to Queen Regent, May

letter to Prince Narēt dated February 14, 1896, explained that she had had to resign from the Siu Lī Kō society, as she criticized the way its leader, *Amdāng* Choe (?), managed the society. She also criticized Čhīn Hong, the leader of the Ngī Hēng society, for always inciting “his people to fight and make disturbances so that he and his friend Yi Hīa Xai may collect money.” Upon her resignation, according to Fanny, “some other Chinese came to me brought by British subjects and asked me to form a new association.” The purpose of the association as described by Fanny, was “to provide mutual protection and advancement as it is done in Europe.” The bylaws prescribed a membership fee of 0.5 baht per month, and “in order to prevent captains from inciting disturbances,” salaries were to be paid to the managers and captains.³⁶⁾

However, Prince Narēt claimed that he had suspected that the new association Fanny founded would be another *angyī*, as it intended to hold meetings at night. The prince, in the end, did not give permission to establish this association on the grounds that Fanny could not provide him the name of the association, the venue for meetings, the details of its members, and the by-laws as requested.³⁷⁾

Moreover, at that time, Prince Narēt was quite alarmed by the fact that as many as 14 other groups were being established not only by the Chinese but also by the *khāek* (the Malay or Indian) and Thai, and many Chinese and *khāek* leaders were under British or French

16, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/17. Certificate of Nai Cham issued by the Workmen’s Association, NA.R.5.N.33/31. Minney (1962, 373-4) gives a different story.

36) Fanny Preecha to Prince Narēt, dated Feb. 14, 1896, NA.R.5.N.33/31.

37) Prince Narēt to Queen Regent, May 16, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/17.

protection.³⁸⁾

Along with these problems in Bangkok, a serious fight involving several hundred Chinese occurred in 1896 in Čhanthaburī, a particularly sensitive place that had been under French occupation to guarantee the full execution by the Siamese government of the French demands made following the Pāk Nam Incident of 1893 (NA.R.5.N.33/20). The Siamese authorities intended to prevent any incident in the area that might provoke further French intervention. This effort posed great difficulty to the Siamese authorities, as many Chinese who were *angyī* members sought French protection under the jurisdiction of the French consulate, and the Siamese government had to seek help from the French naval force to suppress the riot. Further measures to suppress *angyī* were deemed necessary.

VII. The Secret Society Act of 1897

The Siamese government turned to the example of the legal measures taken in the Straits Settlements. Writing about *angyī* to Prince Narēt, on February 17, 1896, Chulalongkorn pointed out the need for a law and proposed the idea of suppressing secret societies as had been done in the Straits Settlements. The king also reminded the prince that the prince himself had once proposed to examine various laws in different countries and urged him to share the results

38) Prince Narēt to Queen Regent, May 16, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/17.

of such an examination. The king also expressed strong apprehension that a set of laws alone would not be sufficient and emphasized the importance of real administrative power and institutional arrangements to enforce the laws effectively to cope with a situation in which, at least among the Chinese, their bosses were exercising more power than the king was.³⁹⁾

Prince Narēt and other officials consulted several ordinances concerning “secret societies” issued in the Straits Settlements, including the Dangerous Societies Suppression Ordinance of 1869, and translated them into Thai. The result was the Secret Society Act, which was issued during King Chulalongkorn’s absence while he was on a European tour on October 1, 1897 (*RKB* 14, 379-383).

Following the example of the Straits Settlements, which introduced a registration system for secret societies, this act required that all societies except companies that had already been lawfully registered as commercial entities or as any other lawful associations should apply for registration with an official designated by the government (Article 3). The application should be accompanied with “the copy of the statutes of the society showing its purpose, a list of members and the names and places of the abodes of the persons who were to act as managers of the society, its subdivisions, and locations of meetings and clubs” (Article 3). Any society that had not registered, or whose former registration had been withdrawn, or that did not apply for registration within one month of the issuance of the act, would be regarded as unlawful (Articles 7 and 8). The manager or anyone

39) Chulalongkorn to Prince Narēt, Feb. 17, 1896, NA.R.5.N.33/27.

assisting the manager of an unlawful society was to be imprisoned for five years at maximum or subject to a fine not exceeding 2,000 baht or both, and any member of an unlawful society or anyone attending an unlawful assembly was subject to imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding 1,000 baht or was liable to both. The same punishment would be applied to anyone who contributed money to a society or coerced anybody by intimidation to become a member of such a society or assembly (Articles 12 and 13). The act also gave the Registering Officer the power to summon or examine “all managers and office bearers and members of any society registered or to be registered,” and anyone disobeying this provision would be “liable to a penalty not exceeding 500 baht or to imprisonment for any period not exceeding one year or to both” (Article 4).

Following its enactment on October 1, 1897, the act was published in the *Royal Gazette* on October 10, which was distributed on October 13. The name of the Registration Officer, endorsed by the king on October 16, 1897, was also announced in the *Royal Gazette* on October 19. However, no groups had registered as of October 24. The government started to feel apprehensive about the effectiveness of the law, but decided to maintain the original deadline, as they were afraid that any hint of lenience might provide *angyī* with an excuse to further delay their registration.⁴⁰⁾

Another problem that impacted the effectiveness of the act was the

40) Prince Narēt to Queen Regent, Oct.15, 1897, and Queen Regent to Prince Narēt, Oct. 24, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/27.

question of foreign subjects: many members of secret societies, including leaders and office bearers, were or claimed to be foreign subjects.⁴¹⁾ According to stipulations for court cases concerning British subjects set by the Bowring Treaty (1855) and its supplementary agreement (1856), all cases, criminal and civil, between them or involving them as defendants should be tried and determined by the British consul alone. More than ten other countries that concluded treaties with Siam basically followed the British example. Many of the Chinese obtained the status of subjects of those treaty powers, as those treaty powers, such as the French after 1893, provided such status to the Chinese regardless of their birthplace in order to pressure the Siamese government for their own ends.

To cope with this problem, on November 3, 1897, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent out a copy of the Secret Society Act with an English translation to the representatives of all thirteen countries that had had treaties with Siam and requested that they promulgate the act among persons under their jurisdiction and instruct them to comply with the provisions.⁴²⁾

However, the *angyī* reacted to this legal measure by reporting to the registration officer that their leaders had gone back to China and had not returned yet or declaring that they had abolished rather than registered their societies or claimed their societies had legitimate

41) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Feb. 7, 1898, NA.R.5.N.33/27. For instance, the *Times* (May 13, 1896) reported that "the warring Chinese secret societies at Bangkok have been formally reconciled through the French Minister. The head men are mostly French subjects." NA.R.5.T. 41/8.

42) Copy: Prince Devawongse to Monsieur le Ministre, Nov.3, 1897, NA.R.5.N.33/31.

purposes therefore not *angyī*. By the beginning of November, the government received many letters from members of *angyī* societies explaining their reasons for not coming for registration (NA.R.5.N.33/27).

A few months later, at the beginning of February 1898, it was reported that all the managers and office holders of the following societies had declared withdrawal from the *angyī*: the Ngī Hōk (Teochiu), the Ngī Hēng (Hakka), the Ngī Hēng (Hainan), the Mēng Sun (Hakka), and the Kattanyū (Thai). As for the Teochiu group in the Ngī Hēng, Čhīn Hong, its leader and other office holders had been imprisoned, and Čhīn Tian of the Siu Lī Kō was reported as being on the run. The leaders and office holders of two Cantonese groups, namely Boi Kak and Yot Tung Kok, and leaders of other smaller groups, on the other hand, were foreign subjects and therefore had not reported to the official in charge.⁴³⁾

Even though most of the leaders of *angyī* societies declared their resignation and withdrawal from all activities associated with *angyī*, the general situation was basically the same as before, at least from the police perspective. *The Report on the Police Administration of Bangkok, Suburbs and Railway Divisions for 1898-99* (p.41) still pointed out that:

Nearly every Chinaman belongs to some Secret Society—and there are daily feuds and rows between these societies; the passing of the Secret Society Act has had some effect, that is, it has frightened the

43) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Feb. 7, 1898, NA.R.5.N.33/27.

principal Societies to such an extent that public riots and open fights in the streets are not so common, but cold-blooded murders are frequent and hard to detect or put a stop to. The Secret Society Act has, for many reasons, not been [sic] worked, and very little has been done to enforce it. The Chinese are under very little control, have practically no master, there is no regulation, no census, and no restrictions; they are lighter taxed [sic] than the people of the country, and in most cases, when employed in large numbers, are a terror to their employers—and have only to demand to get what they want: in the large mills and factories, where the laborers are principally Chinese, they belong to Secret Societies, harbour criminals, plan serious crimes and live generally in a state of utter lawlessness. The police are generally helpless to deal with these men, as nearly all the mills are under Foreign Protection [sic] and to enter them without a warrant is illegal and almost impossible, while the owners dare not help the police.

The effectiveness of the act in reality depended on how to cope with these foreign subjects, which was regarded as the gravest problem. In October 1910, in a report by Eric Lawson, Superintendent of Police attached to a letter of A.J.A. Jardine, the Inspector General of Police in Bangkok, to Prince Narēṭ, it was stated that "the only real difficulty" that the police in Bangkok had to face in dealing with secret societies was "the fact that so many have either headmen or *sā hīas* who are foreign subjects." Jardine then requested of Prince Narēṭ that an inquiry be made to the British legation through the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In fact, the British authorities had no official cognizance of the Secret Society Act of Siam, and the home government made no effort to enforce the law among British subjects

despite the fact that the law had been sent to the legation immediately after its promulgation.⁴⁴⁾

In early 1907, Phra Athikōṇprakāt, Assistant Superintendent of Police, gave a lengthy report on the rise and demise of various Chinese secret societies in Bangkok, in which he mentioned a rapid regrowth of societies after a short-lived and ostensible quietness that had followed the promulgation of the Secret Society Act of 1897.⁴⁵⁾ According to his observation, at least thirty secret societies were overtly active in Bangkok, i.e. 13 Teochiu, 2 Hakka, 8 Canton, and 7 Hailam, and many more were in hiding. He also pointed out that the major obstacle in eradicating these societies was that the courts did not regard their activities, such as holding a ceremony of oath for a new member or a failure to make a proper registration as a society, as criminal acts that should be punished. A few months prior to this report, a group of Hailam Chinese was arrested by the police for *angyī* activities, but the case was dismissed by the court for insufficient evidence.⁴⁶⁾ Similarly, another case of a Chinese person who was a French subject was also dropped by the French Consular Court, which claimed there were no applicable French laws.⁴⁷⁾

Regarding the question of extraterritoriality of foreign subjects, the French authorities agreed to place all Asiatic French subjects and

44) Report by Lawson and Jardine to Prince Narēt, Oct. 12, 1901, NA.R.5.N.33/31.

45) Report by Phra Athikōṇprakāt, Feb. 4, 1907, NA.R.5.N.33/71.

46) J. Stewart Black to Lawson, Jan. 26, 1907, and Lawson to Prince Narēt, Feb. 5, 1907, NA.R.5.N.33/71.

47) Lawson to Prince Narēt, Nov. 12, 1906, J. Baudour to Lawson, Dec. 25?, 1906, and Lawson to Prince Narēt, Feb. 8, 1907, NA.R.5.N.33/71.

protégés registered at the French consulates under the jurisdiction of Siamese courts through the Franco-Siamese Treaty signed on March 23, 1907. After the promulgation of the Penal Code, which included stipulations concerning secret societies, in 1908, the British also agreed to place their subjects under Siamese jurisdiction through a treaty in 1909. However, when the Siamese government increased the tax on Chinese population by replacing the triennial Chinese poll tax with an annual poll tax in 1909, the Chinese, including members of secret societies, staged a large-scale strike against the increase in Bangkok, in the beginning of June 1909, thereby paralyzing business activities in Bangkok.⁴⁸⁾

Soon after this strike, King Chulalongkorn, in response to increasing pressure from the Qing government to conclude a treaty,⁴⁹⁾ requested three major officials to propose ideas about Siam’s future relationship with China. Prince Damrong, one of the three officials, presented a lengthy memorandum, in which he mentioned secret societies composed of lower-class Chinese who would easily be deceived by powerful leaders as an internal source of trouble that might invite intervention from Western powers or the Qing government or might sow seeds of discord between China and Siam.⁵⁰⁾

48) Čhaophrayā Yomarāt to Chulalongkorn, June 10, 1910, NA.R.5.T.21/21.

49) In the end of 1907, a Chinese mission led by Yang Shiqi visited Siam (Koizumi 2009, 58-65).

50) Prince Damrong, “Banthuk rūang chīn,” Sept. 6, 1910, NA.R.5.T.6.2/2.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

Although it is difficult to delve in depth into the social, political, and economic relations among *angyi* and their members from the internal perspectives of the Chinese, what has been outlined above would suggest that the existence of *angyi* was a widespread phenomenon among the Chinese immigrants (though not necessarily exclusive to them) who were involved in various activities such as rice milling, tin mining, vegetable production, ferry services, opium and liquor sales, gambling, and prostitution. As all of these activities were basically lawful at that time in Siam, provided important goods for export or services of daily necessity, and were a lucrative source of revenue for the government and the Chinese, the Siamese government could not or did not really intend to eradicate these Chinese societies completely.

In fact, those who became *angyi* members by going through the blood-drinking initiation ceremonies and swearing oaths of secrecy were mostly marginalized migrant Chinese laborers, who needed a means of living and protection from the more powerful for their survival. Chinese owners of large rice mills tried to prevent poor coolie laborers who were members of *angyi* from fighting each other by providing them with means of living and nurturing them.⁵¹⁾ The British consulate in Bangkok also recognized them as ordinary laborers and described their paradoxical position as follows:

51) Prince Narēt to Chulalongkorn, Dec. 30, 1903, NA.R.5.N.33/63.

...A [Chinese] coolie is engaged by the day. Each man is a member of one or other of the secret societies. Should other coolies of a rival faction be engaged in the same work, he will refuse to work with them. Should the majority of the coolie class demand increased wages, they have no hesitation in striking work altogether and boycotting those who continue at the old rate of wages. A strike of this kind happened during the year, lasting for several days, and causing an entire cessation of business. Some steamers were even obliged to leave the port for want of hands to load the cargo... He is therefore indispensable in the rice business. (British Foreign Office 1890, 18-19)

At the same time, *angyi* leaders of were often tax farmers serving the Siamese government. The well-known example of Yī Kō Hong, who was an influential tax farmer for gambling dens, opium, and liquor in Bangkok, also indicates the difficulty in drawing a clear line between what was legal and illegal, official and private, and secret and open. Born in Siam to Teochiu parents, yet a French subject, Yī Kō Hong later became one of the founding investors of the first private Thai steamship company, the Sino-Siam Steam Navigation Co., Ltd. (1909), and he was one of the founding members of the Franco-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (1910).

Under such circumstances, one of the most difficult problems that the Siamese authorities faced was the large number of Chinese who claimed to be foreign subjects. The status of China as a non-treaty country and the status of the Chinese as non-treaty people also made the situation complex. If any policy that would go against the interest of the Chinese were introduced, Chinese residents in Siam would request that the Qing government protest or provide protection by

concluding a treaty and establishing a consulate, which would result in making the Chinese population foreign subjects.

Sensitivity of the issue of foreign subjects is also reflected in historiography. Prince Damrong, in the *Royal Chronicle of the Fifth Reign*, mentioned *tūa hīa* and Chinese foreign subjects as two major difficulties which the Siamese administration faced. Yet, Damrong, on the other hand, pointed out that the Chinese under foreign protections were small in number and limited to particular groups, such as those working at rice mills and engaged in commercial activities, and he denied the involvement of foreign consulates in encouraging *tūa hīa* activities (Damrong 1950, 75-78). Moreover, as Damrong cited King Chulalongkorn's letter to one of his officials in the chronicle, which expressed the king's discontent with Sīsurīyawong's lenient policies toward *tūa hīa* leaders, he omitted part of the original letter that mentioned the possibility of intervention by Chinese gunboats along with the king's expression of fear of the influence of Chinese population from his draft (Damrong 1950, 79; NA. SB. 2. 57/6). Such examples, which would downplay the involvement of foreign elements in *angyī* activities and the Chinese population in general, indicate that to understand Chinese riots and "secret societies," we need to go beyond the assimilation framework by also encompassing a historiographical perspective.

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NA.: Archival documents at the National Archives of Thailand are cited with the abbreviation, NA., followed by the abbreviations for the reign, the ministry or department or other classification, and the file number.

KT (L): Ēkkasān yep lem Krasūang kām tāngprathēt (Bound Volumes, Series for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

M.: Krasūang Mahāthai (the Ministry of Interior).

N. : Krasūang Nakhōnbān (the Ministry of Local Government).

NK.: Nangsū krāp bangkhomthūn.

RL-KL.: Ēkkasān yep lem Krasūang Kalāhōm (Bound Volumes, Series for the Ministry of Kalāhōm).

T.: Krasūang kām tāngprathēt (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

SB. 2.:Ēkkasān sūan phraong Somdet Krom Phrayā Damrong Rāchānuphāp (Prince Damrong Documents).

NL.: Administrative archival documents (*ċhotmāihēt*) at the National Library of Thailand are cited as NL.CMH., followed by the reign number (R.), and the catalog number classified by the *Chunlasakkarat* calendar year (abbreviated as C.S.).

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요약

19세기 후반에서 20세기 초반의 시암의 중국인 “비밀 사회”

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본 논문은 19세기 후반에서 20세기 초반 시암 지역의 ‘tua hīa’ 과 ‘angyi’로 불리는 중국인과 시암 당국의 대응 상황을 중국인 “비밀 사회”의 활동을 통해 논의한다. 태국 기록 보관소의 기록에 의하면 중국인에 의한 반란사건은 19세기 중반에 시작되었으며, 19세기 말에 그 빈도는 더욱 늘어났다. 1889년 방콕에서 ‘angyi’의 대규모 충돌 이후, 정부는 1897년 비밀 사회법을 통해 보다 엄격한 행정 조치를 채택하였다.

그럼에도 정부의 통제 노력은 크게 효과를 보지 못하였다. 중국인은 외국인 집단으로 분류되었고, 서구의 힘에 의한 이들의 활동은 범죄로 규정하여 벌하거나 금지하기 어려웠다. 외부 요인을 경시한 담롱 왕자의 글처럼 외국인 집단 문제의 민감도는 역사기록에도 반영되었다.

주제어: 시암, 중국인, 비밀 사회, 외국인 집단, 역사기록,