

## Conference Paper

# The Chakri Dynasty's "Open Door" Policy in Nineteenth Century: The Background of International Intergration of the Modern Thailand

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## Abstract

In order to protect Thailand's independence and sovereignty under the strong pressures of the western powerful nations, Kings of the early Chakri dynasty had the determination to conduct a change from "close door" policy to "open door" policy. It was conducted under the reigns of King Rama IV and Rama V in the middle of nineteenth century. This was not only a new policy but it also became its pioneer in Asia. This "open door" policy was not only to protect Thailand's independence but also to develop its economy and society. On the basis of economy and society reforms, Thailand government had implemented the reforms on the politics: turning absolute monarchy into constitutional monarchy. All this helped Thailand to hold a new position in the international relations. Thailand became a nation which had equal position with other nations. It allowed Thailand to integrate with international community, and became a nation which had the first position in the Southeast Asia in the first half of the twentieth.

**Keywords:** "open door" policy, "close door" policy, Chakri dynasty, independence, reform, diplomat, Thailand

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. International Background

The tendency exchanges, international integration had opened after the first geographic Discovery of Portugal and Spain in the late fifteenth century early sixteenth century. Since then, world trade center shifted from the Mediterranean to the North Sea coast of the Atlantic Ocean. The changing geo-economic nature led to the tremendous changes in the trade between the West and the East. World markets extended also led to the formation of colonialism and accelerate the primitive capital accumulation in European countries.

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The bourgeois revolution erupted respectively in Europe and North America from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century to establish a new mode of production, capitalism has regularity in the world at that time. Been launched by the Dutch revolution, to mid seventeenth century, England Revolution erupted. The war for independence in North America and French bourgeois revolution took place in the second half of the eighteenth century almost simultaneously created synergy attacks on theocratic feudal, backward, conservative, by the first half of nineteenth century, almost all European countries and North America established the system of capitalism across the world.

The social revolution and technology-science revolution promoted the economy of capitalist European countries and the United States from the end of eighteenth century the early to the early of nineteenth century. This situation posed new requirements for the West: market and raw materials to meet the needs of production and development of the capitalist economy. From there, the colonial capitalist Western countries promoted invasion across continents Asia, Africa, Latin America. It was a challenge for peace, independence of the countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America at that time.

## 1.2. Southeast Asia Background

Up to the first half of the nineteenth century, the Maritime Southeast Asia countries had become colonies of the Western countries, such as Malacca (Malaysia) was a Portuguese colony, the Philippines was colonized by Spain. And the continental Southeast Asian countries still had national sovereign but were in the weakened, chronic crisis period of the feudal system. Southeast Asian countries often had internal contradictory, division, as well as conflicts and wars between neighboring countries together [1]. This was a common characteristic of the Southeast Asian countries during this period. This was an evident of weakness in many fields of these countries compared with the West at the time and was a challenge to the survival of these countries.

Besides, to 1842, "Big" China, the "protection" of the continental Southeast Asian countries had been defeated in the Opium War with Britain, and had to sign the unequal treaty with other powers and turned China into the "pie" divided between big countries. This alerted the continental Southeast Asian countries, which still were remaining independent, could not rely on one source of power to protect their independence. This was an important historical moment for the continental Southeast Asian countries affected by China to adjust, to change the external perspective of his country to suit the political changes in the region and the world.

### 1.3. Background of Thailand

A lot of international and regional changes posed many challenges for Thailand's independence. Thailand had to give up the "Close door" policy, which already existed more than 100 years (1689), to move to "Open door" policy to satisfy the needs of the Western countries commerce and missionary. Rama III was considered a tough Viking, but had also learned how to establish relations with Britain. Britain - Thailand treaty [11], which was signed in 1826, transformed Britain from a nearly aggression to an ally to cooperate in the field of trade and diplomacy.

However, Britain, America and other Western powers, which based on military strength advantage and ambitions of colonial markets, requested constantly increasing overbearing claims for Thailand [11]. Under these circumstances, the Thailand's court could not solve. At that time, the Rama III died [10] and his half-brother ascended the throne, took the title Rama IV. Rama IV was famous understanding of Western language, culture, politics, more than any predecessors [11].

Rama IV was completely different from the other kings in Southeast Asia countries when he accepted to sign the unequal treaty of political and economic policy as well as implementation of exchanging land for peace to protect the Thailand's rights and maintain its independence. The thought of Rama IV represented the wisdom, acumen of Thailand's ruling class at that time. The main innovation of the ideological nature of "open" is the foundation for Thailand to change the domestic policies in many fields and to apply the multilateral, multidimensional foreign policies.

## 2. Method

1. Collect and synthesize many different sources information of Thailand and many other countries around the world about the history and diplomacy of Thailand.
2. Analyze and compare to draw the features of the Thailand foreign policy in each period.
3. Use Historical and logical methods.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The "Open door" policy of diplomatic and innovation of politics - military - economy and culture-society are open from Rama III to Rama V. In the situation of a lot of changes in region, unlike other contemporary kings in Southeast Asia countries at that time, The kings of Thailand, particularly from Rama III to Rama V, had actively grasped the situation and seek to "adapt" to the West to avoid the threat to the country.

Thailand also made a change in the internal and external policy following the trend of capitalism at the time, convert form "Close Door" to "Open door".

### 3.1. Politics – Military

\* Build, strengthen and reform politics in the model of monarchy.

There were two classes of officials: royal officials (including the princes) and aristocratic officials in Thailand under Rama III [10]. Only the prince was appointed to be head of the departments. Aristocratic officials also ordained deprivation. Aristocratic officials, who accounted a large part of the administrative work of the government, really enforced the policy of the State [11].

In 1830, Rama III paid special attention to the three most important ministries to reforming: Ministry of Interior (Mahatthai), Ministry of War (Kralahom) and the Ministry of Finance (Phraklang), which in charge of the Foreign Trade. As time goes on, he tended to concentrate more and more power in his hands and royal [11]. Under the reign of Rama IV (1851 - 1868) and Rama V [4], many reforming policies were continuous offered to complete the state apparatus and strengthen of national politics. Until the reign of King Rama V, facing difficulties in terms of administrative management in local as well as the struggle for the rights of different classes of people, King Rama V had to reform the administrative system from the central to local.

Rama V issued a decree to reform the State: The king headed the kingdom with the highest authority, and the administrative offices, including 12 ministries [4], to assist the king. The Ministry of Diplomatic had the most important role. Rama V also conducted the establishment of the Legislative Council. The local government was also reformed totally and applied the directly management policies. Besides, King Rama V was also aware of the need to eliminate bad customs of outdated feudalism and an obstacle to the development of the country. Reforming the structure of state apparatuses to Western-style increased the effects of social management. The political reforming policy become completed and obtained positive results.

Besides enhancing the efficiency of the State management apparatuses, King Rama III also very focused on the military field. He invited European military experts to Thailand to advise and start building defense forces of Western-style. By the end of reign Rama III, Thailand had a force of 10,000 troops including infantry and artillery, 500 warships, 12 naval battle ship by Western style [10]. Modernizing army by Western-style tendencies continued under the next king's reign.

*Under the reign of Rama III, Thailand still pursued equality perspective of interests between Thailand with the Western countries, but under the time of Rama IV and Rama V, Thailand had to signed the unequal treaty with Western countries such as Thailand - Britain (1855), Thailand - France (1856), Thailand - US (1856), Thailand - Netherlands (1860) ...*

*the Thai authorities had to accept consular jurisdiction of other countries, this meant losing part of their sovereignty.*

### 3.2. Economy

Economy of Thailand from Rama I to Rama V had significantly change. Firstly, economy transferred from the purely agricultural economy into a agricultural economy, modern industry and foreign trade expanded. Secondly, tax collection by grain transferred to in cash in King Rama III's reign [10]. Some tax had been collected by state employees now were collected by tender privatization (many Chinese won the contract). This has created an opportunity for increased state budget. Thirdly, Thailand expanded trade with China and the neighboring countries.

Under to period of Rama IV, he advocated expanding commodity economy in the country, by deleting a portion exclusive of the feudal lords. He also carried out for the construction of irrigation works, traffic, roads to open up people's transportation. In 1852, the king issued a decree abolished the former ban on export of rice and sugar monopsony of feudal state [6]. Rama IV also advocated financial and monetary development by establishing a new mint. These economic policies had an effect of raising people's living standards, many private production facilities appeared and lead the country towards a new development.

During the reign of King Rama V, he focused on development of agriculture in the production of goods intensive and export-oriented strength. Many new techniques and machine of Western countries were purchased and imported in Thailand. The construction of the railway systems from Bangkok to all parts of the country, including in southern Malaysia was accelerated. Financial reformed, taxes increased to the state budget, foreign investment were encouraged to focus in the industrial, transportation.

*\* In the period of Rama IV of Siam Rama V, Thailand accepted to sign unequal treaty with the Western countries with only 3% commodity tax, which was less than taxing by the length and width of the boat as before. This made Thailand government lost a major source of finance but the Thailand society received a variety of modern advanced goods of Western countries.*

### 3.3. Culture - Society

The process of emancipation of the slaves was launched under Rama I and basically completed under Rama V [1]. It had liberated widespread social workers to serve the work of industrialization and modernization Thailand country, directly meet the needs of labor hiring of companies, domestic and foreign enterprises. This was also consistent with the trend of eliminating slavery around the world.

King Rama III not only allowed the missionaries freely evangelicals, but also encouraged them to participate in society charity activities and transmit modern knowledge in science - engineering, medicine.

In education, King Rama III had focused on carry out these changes from old-style way of learning the oral study to the new type of curriculum of specific subjects. In addition, he also gives the common historical and cultural knowledge widely by the unique mural paintings in the temple walls. The printing industry developed, the printing plant was built and the first newspaper was published in English. The open mind of the king was also reflected by the king's positive reception of new science and technology knowledge. He invited the physician as well as the European missionaries to heal and give health guidance for people. He also allowed widely vaccines used in preventing infection.

King Rama IV had advocated building multiple printers, publishers, and encouraged the development of the press in order to raise the people's knowledge. Especially he filled up the education of the royal family to expand their knowledge and facilitate the communication, receipt and exchange of knowledge with the West. Although a Buddhist worship, but for other religions he was also very open. He allowed the missionaries opened the seminary in Bangkok in 1852.

By the time of King Rama V, he also paid attention on studying the West comprehensively to be the motivation, the way to get effective national renewal. Education reformed on a large scale in the model of Western education. Implementation of compulsory education was applied and opened schools. The education system has three levels: primary, intermediate and universities. Intended to strengthening the countries by sending students to study abroad for specialist training, building reformers team.

From the reign of King Rama III to Rama V, Thailand had development by Western model, which was a basis to help maintain national peace. Moreover, the "open door" policy also had an important role as the foundation for the development of Thailand in the twentieth century, even in the current period with a model of modern Thailand.

### 3.4. Effects

Thailand opened in the early nineteenth century demonstrate the agility to grasp the movement rule of the world to escape the invasion of Western colonial power, to maintain national independence and transfer country from the feudalism to the capitalist mode. The Thailand's foreign policy towards the West, "look direction", "lean on big countries" [3] helped Thailand skillful take part in the First World War to become a member of the winners (The First world War Treaty).

This favorable conditions combined with the inner strength and the skillful diplomat policy, Thailand achieved the first equal treaty with USA in 1920 [2]. Thereby, it

paved the way for the signing equal treaties with the Western countries (UK, France). These treaties have contributed Thailand to become an independent nation in politics, judiciary and economic and to empower country position to help Thailand become a developed country, equality and integration regional and international in the early twentieth century.

#### 4. Conclusions and Suggestions

The global challenges in the nineteenth century, it was the invasion of the West, promoted Thai government policy to convert from the "close door" policy to the "open door" policy in the nineteenth century. Thailand's openness, which means to follow the development way of Western countries in the capitalist model, was aimed to strengthen the country position and international integration. Thailand had to accept to sign unequal treaties, which seemed to be the prerequisite condition to protect their independence. But Thailand also knew how to erase the unequal treaties in the years 1920-1930 to become an independent country like other countries in the world. Thanks to "his bending, soft as water" policy with internal power, Thailand not only maintained independence but also developed country following the capitalism to become a powerful country at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Thailand and other Southeast Asia countries had the same background of politics, economic, history in the early nineteenth century. Why did Thailand success in apply the "open door" policy and maintain national independence, while the others didn't not?

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