

## A Modern Siam with Constitutional Monarchy - King Prajatibok<sup>1</sup>, The Siamese “Honourary Diplomat” in Europe 1934

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### Abstract

The visit to Europe by King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni in 1934 took place in a time of problems and drastic change brought on by the first massive global economic and financial crisis in 1929. Europe and Asia were affected by new factors that they both shared: the gradual decline of the absolute monarchies, and scientific and technological progress. Furthermore, both continents had to deal with the influence and the expansion of new political ideologies; namely, Marxism/communism and Fascism. In Siam, the revolution in June 1932 during the reign of King Prajatibok (Rama VII) replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional one. It was in these turbulent times that King Prajatibok, who was considering abdication (which finally happened in 1935), undertook his 1934 trip to Europe.

The presentation analyzes the visit to Europe and the complex preparation for the King's trip - which lasted several months - from the Siamese and the European perspective. The “semi-official” and “incognito” visits to nine European countries in 1934, allowed King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni to successfully promote the new democratic and “modern Siam” in Europe.

**Keywords:** King Prajadhipok, King Prajatibok, Queen Rambai Barni, King Rama VII., King Prajadhipok’s Visit to Europe 1934/2476-2477, Thailand/Siam-Europe relations, economic project, Luang Pradit Manutham, King Prajatibok and President Roosevelt, King Prajatibok and Fascism

<sup>1</sup> The name of His Majesty is written as it was by His Majesty himself at the French Military Academy, “Ecole de Guerre”: “Prince Prajatibok, Lieut Col<sup>el</sup> (Siam)”. In: Research work, *Research Project of the French-Thai-Studies*, Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, Nakorn Pathom, Thailand: *French Primary Literature and the Regime of King Rama VII.*, 31

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## 1. Introduction

This research study is part of the series of new research projects on King Prajatibok by the *King Prajadhipok Museum, King Prajadhipok's Institute*, to commemorate the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013 of His Majesty's trip and received an award from UNSECO. The series of new research projects is different from previous ones by not primarily focusing on democracy and on the 1932 revolution during the reign of Prajatibok (Rama VII).<sup>3</sup>

The research topic *King Prajatibok's Visit to Europe in 1934* has not been studied in an academic fashion before. This article deals mostly with the trip to Europe starting from 12 January 1934 to His Majesty's Abdication on 2 March 1935.

The visit to Europe in 1934 took place in a period of change and problems after the First World War, a result of the first massive global economic and financial crisis. Europe and Asia were affected by new factors that they both shared: the gradual decline of the absolute monarchies, and scientific and technological progress. Furthermore, both continents had to deal with the influence and the expansion of the new political ideologies of Marxism/communism and Fascism. This study is based on primary and secondary sources from Thailand and documents from seven European countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, the Vatican, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland, which have been systematically analyzed for the first time. The Siamese King and Queen Rambai Barni visited nine European countries in 1934: France, Italy, the Vatican, England, Denmark, the Weimar Republic (Germany), Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Switzerland.

## 2. The Reasons for the Visit to Europe and the planned Visit to the United States in 1934 – the Trip to Europe and Siamese Domestic Policy

The main reason for King Prajatibok's visit to Europe in 1934 was definitely health. His Majesty urgently needed a second eye operation. He had

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<sup>3</sup> These are for example Yazukiji Yatabe (author), Eiji Murashima and Nakarin Mektrairat (translator) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2004. *Revolution and Change in Siam*; Walwipa Charunrot (M.L.), 2005. *The Political Plans of King Prajatibok: A Historical Analysis*. Bangkok: King Prajadhipok Museum; Preeda Vacharangkul, 1977. *Prapokklao and Democracy, The Complete Biography of King Prapokklao Chaoyuhua*; etc.



undergone eye surgery by the American Dr. Wieler in the US in 1931, who had recommended a second operation after two years. Documents about the preparations for the trip reveal that there was supposed to be additional tooth surgery as well.

Queen Rambai Barni wrote:

“... at that time, the government didn't want this trip to Europe and the USA, but His Majesty is really very ill. According to the doctor, his other eye is almost blind. An urgent treatment would be necessary, hence this decision.”<sup>4</sup>

At first, the Siamese government approved the trip to Europe and the United States (the trip to the US did not happen in the end). Then, however, the government tried to prevent the tour. This has to do with domestic politics in Siam after the revolution of 1932, right after the establishment of the first constitution by King Prajatibok on 10 December 1932. The preparations by the Siamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflect both the conflicts within the Siamese government, especially among the members of the “revolutionary group” *Khana Ratsadon*, after the 1932 revolution, and the radical differences in opinions between the King and the government. The conflict was even worse especially after the “Bavorndej uprising” on 11 October 1933.

The preparations involved the secretary of the royal court and foreign minister Phraya Apibal Rajamaitri contacting the Europeans and Americans to find suitable dates and places, which would also allow for medical treatment, both for eye and tooth operations, for Their Majesties and all the hosts. Unbeknownst to the public, the question was if the Siamese government would allow this trip to happen or not. The above-mentioned conflicts led to a gradual delegitimization of the Seventh King of the Chakri dynasty, as many European emissaries in Bangkok confirmed, including those from Germany, Italy, and France.

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<sup>4</sup> In: *Diary of Her Majesty Rambai Barni, Wife of King Prajatibok*, 2002. King Prajadhipok's Institute. Bangkok: A.P. Graphic Design and Publication, 17



After the enactment of the constitution on 10 December 1932, rumors about preparations for a new coup started to spread. It was said that the originators of this coup would be groups of royalists, that is, members of the “Kana Chat” (คณะชาติ), whose organization as a political party had been prohibited by the government. Only the revolutionary group was allowed to found a political party. Moreover, Prime Minister Manopakorn Nititada severely clashed with Major Phraya Songsuradej, one of the protagonists of the 1932 revolution, because many of the revolutionaries, having despised the King back then, disliked the idea of having to perform an official act of apology. Now, they – led by Major Phraya Songsuradej – wanted to curb the powers of the King even further by proposing to the cabinet to abolish the holiday commemorating the foundation of the Chakri dynasty (Chakri day). In its place, there were supposed to be three continuous days of celebration of the 1932 revolution instituted as new national holidays. This proposal resulted in severe verbal clashes between the two sides, and since then, the factions have been permanently in conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Another scandal had to do with the order by the government to free almost all of the court elephants (with the exception of two white elephants) into the woods of Uttaradit so that they would have to fend for themselves, as a measure to save money. There was harsh criticism of the government, and all newspapers commented so angrily on the incident and gave it so much space that the government allowed the oldest female elephant, “Mae Pen”, to return to the palace. The joy of all Siamese about this was greater than at the revolution or at the enactment of the first constitution in 1932. From a European perspective, freeing an elephant does not seem to be a significant act, but in fact, the elephant scandal had an enormous negative effect on the government and hurt its reputation more than other incidents. Many Siamese now opposed the government more than ever.

In March 1933, the government asked Luang Praditmanutham to present the parliament with an economic project. This act led to disagreements among the members of government and also to differences in opinion between the

<sup>5</sup> Preeda Vatcharangkul, 1977. *Prapokglao and the Democracy*. Bangkok: Pra Nakorn Publishing, 138-139. See also ROUX, Henri. [Bruits à propos d'un nouveau coup d'État], 43, A, 22 février 1933, 4 p. SHAT. 7 N 3341. In: *Research work, Research Project of the French-Thai-Studies*, Silpakorn University, (footnote 1), 185-222



King and the government. On 12 March, Prime Minister Manopakorn Nititada informed parliament of King Prajatibok's opinions on Luang Praditmanutham's economic project, which was said to include communist elements. Some members of parliament who supported Luang Pradit brought their guns to the parliamentary sessions on 30, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1933, preventing the parliament from carrying out its governmental function. The military took control of parliament. On 1 April 1933, a “2476 law (1933) against communists” was announced. As a reaction, the government dismissed several ministers that were suspected to be communists and appointed a new cabinet. Finally, on 2 April, the parliament was dissolved.

The Siamese government used the opportunity to drive Luang Praditmanutham out of the country. Apparently, several members of the government (Major Phraya Songsuradej and Mr. Prayun Pamornmontri – หัวหน้าคือ พันเอก พระยาทรงสุรเดช และนายประยูร ภมรมนตรี) used King Prajatibok, who was not agreed with Luang Pradit's economic plan, to achieve their political goals and dispose Luang Pradit politically. In a published document, the King criticized Luang Pradit's economic plan heavily, saying it closely resembled Stalin's Russian plan. Siam, he wrote, Siam would not profit from such a project, which would only cause confusion in the country.<sup>6</sup> The Dutch emissary in Bangkok expressed similar opinions: although Luang Pradit was no communist, there was no doubt that his economic plan contained communist elements.<sup>7</sup> Also the American emissary took the same view: “...there has been a growth of communist activities in Siam since the change in government last June (1932: the author), but this is the first serious attempt on the part of a member of the government to introduce communistic or socialistic ideas...” (Sombat Chantarawong, Nakarin Mektrairat, Prajak Kongkiet, 2007: 86)

<sup>6</sup> Chai-Anan Samuttawanich and Kattiya Kannasut, 1975. *Documents on Politics and Government in Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai Social Science Association, 278, 354, 356

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in: Sombat Chantarawong, Nakarin Mektrairat, Prajak Kongkiet, 2007. *The World and the Reign of King Prajatibok*, 92. The English original reads: “Recently the cooperation in Parliament to contemplate on Government policy was lost, because Luang Pradit Manudham submitted a plan for economic development based completely on communist principles... Luang Pradit is no communist but a fanatical idealist who wants to serve his country. He has studied in Europe and now thinks he can implement communism on Siam. ...”



**The four companions, graduated from Germany,** (from left to right) Colonel Phraya Songsuradej People's Party, พ.ท. Phra Prasat Pittayayut, Colonel Phraya Pahol Polpayuhasena, Colonel Phraya Rittiakkani  
[https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/พระยาทรงสุรเดช\\_\(เทพ\\_พันธุมนเสน\)](https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/พระยาทรงสุรเดช_(เทพ_พันธุมนเสน))  
(Images for พระยาทรงสุรเดช) M.L. Chainimitr Navarat Facebook.com (15.2.2021)



**Phraya Song Suradej**  
[https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/พระยาทรงสุรเดช\\_\(เทพ\\_พันธุมนเสน\)](https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/พระยาทรงสุรเดช_(เทพ_พันธุมนเสน))



**Pridi Banomyong**  
(Luang Praditmanutham) in 1947  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pridi\\_Banomyong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pridi_Banomyong) (15.2.2021)

Another military coup of the government followed on 20 June 1933, initiated by the four leaders of *Khana Ratsadon* with the military support from Major Luang Pibunsongkhram (พันโท หลวงพิบูลสงคราม). Prime Minister Praya Manopakorn Nititada was dismissed and Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena (พระยาพหลพลพยุหเสนา) was appointed as the new Prime Minister.<sup>8</sup> The military coup was the beginning of the political career of Major Luang Pibunsongkhram in Siamese politics until the reign of King Bhumibol.

<sup>8</sup> ROUX, Henri. [Bruits à propos d'un nouveau coup d'État], 43, A, 22 février 1933, 4 p. SHAT. 7 N 3341, On the topic of the military coup on 20 June 1933, Document No. 47A, 8 April 1933, 7 pages. In: *Research study of the project by the Research Institute for French-Thai Studies*, (footnote 1), 189-206, this passage, 189





Phraya Pahol Polpayuhasena (left),  
Phraya Manopakorn Nititada (right)  
[www.google.com/](http://www.google.com/) /พระยามโนปกรณนิติธาดา (15.2.2021)



Pan To Luang Pibulsongkram

All these incidents caused the “Bavorndej uprising” on 11 October 1933. And after this uprising, the government under Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena made a new decision concerning the King's visit to Europe. Members of the government abandoned their previous stance that the trip could establish international relations with the West and instead demanded that the King should get medical treatment in his home country, as the timing was bad for an overseas trip, due to the Bavorndej uprising. There was still unrest in country, they said, and the King's presence in Siam would calm the Siamese people down.

The researcher believes that this reason was only a pretense to allow the government to consolidate its power by seeking the King's protection without considering his bad health. Besides, the government showed little appreciation for the preparations for the trip in cooperation with the western countries, not knowing that these could hurt international relations and lead to financial damage, as it had happened with the trip to Java in 1929.

With the Bavorndej uprising, we can see the King's serious efforts to stay neutral and independent to free himself from the influences of any political group in order to show his status as King within a constitutional monarchy. The King's exile to Songkhla on the royal boat “Sorn Varun” was meant to demonstrate the firm determination of His Majesty to leave the area of conflict to prevent any group from exploiting the King or holding him hostage for a political goal that he did not agree with, also to counter the accusations that he was a supporter of Prince Bavorndej, who after all was a member of the royal court.

After the Bavorndej uprising, the government was strict and inconsiderate to all members of the royal family. It eliminated part of the coronation ceremony

and three days commemorating the King's birthday. The King informed the government the “Phra Pipatsattaya-ceremony” (the ceremony affirming one's loyalty to the King) was to be eliminated as well, as it was not necessary any more. At this time, many rumors were spread. The German envoy wrote in a report that the King was planning to abdicate the throne and make Prince Chula Chakrabongse his successor.<sup>9</sup>

The rumors even involve a French torpedo boat coming to Siam at King Prajatibok's behest to protect His Majesty.<sup>10</sup>

Prime Minister Phraya Phahon showed his obvious dislike of the King several times in public, including at receptions with foreign diplomats. The government approved King Prajatibok's trip to Europe only after long hesitation, and only under the condition that His Majesty would not return to Siam.<sup>11</sup>

In January 1934, the royal fortune teller announced an auspicious date for the trip to Europe to King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni: 12 January 1934. His Majesty rejected the order by the Siamese government to move the visit three months into the future, i.e., to the time after March.

<sup>9</sup> See: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86066, Report of the German envoy in Bangkok (Dr. Nord) to the Foreign Ministry, Berlin, 27 April 1933, J. No. 595/33, sent by air mail on 29 April, received on 13 May 1933, page 4: “...Die Gerüchte beginnen sich zu mehren, wonach seine Abdankung nur eine Frage der Zeit sei [...] ...angebliche Rücktrittsabsicht des Königs und Thronpräention des Prinzen Chula Chakkrabongs...”.

<sup>10</sup> In: *Research study of the project by the Research Institute for French-Thai Studies* (footnote 2), The arrival of General Berthelot of the French Navy, ROUX Henri. *Visite que vient de faire à Bangkok le Vice-Amiral Berthelot, Commandant en chef des troupes navales françaises en Extrême-Orient, sur l' aviso 'Dumont-d'Urville', 18 mars 1933 + 4 p.+ programme (du 11 au 14 mars 1933).* SHAT. 7 N3341, 189

<sup>11</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86066, Report of the German envoy Nord, from Bangkok, 8 January 1934, J. No. 36/34 (4 pages). This is the final passage: “...Dies fiel mir umso mehr auf, als mir erst kürzlich von sonst zuverlässiger siamesischer Seite die Mitteilung zugetragen worden war, dass die Regierung den König nach seinem Eintreffen in Bangkok scharf in die Mache genommen habe. Sie hätte von ihm unter Vorhalt seiner ihm nachgewiesenen Beteiligung erzwungen, den durch die Revolution entstandenen Schaden in Höhe von 3 1/2 Millionen Ticals aus eigener Tasche bezahlen zu lassen. Die Regierung habe ferner die Reise des Königs nach Europa erst nach langem Zögern bewilligt, aber auch nur unter der Bedingung, dass er von dort nicht wieder zurückkehre.”



### 3. *The Itinerary of the Visit to Europe in 1934*

Many changes were made to the itinerary, both in terms of the time and the places. The trips to the US and Austria were cancelled. King Prajatibok did not travel to America for his eye and tooth operations, because those were to take place in the London Clinic and Nursing Home in May and at the beginning of June. The invitations from Canada and Portugal were not feasible. The visit to the Netherlands was scrapped as well, due to the sudden death of the Royal Consort of Queen Wilhelmina and the request to cancel the visit came from the Queen.<sup>12</sup>, while it was King Prajatibok himself who decided to forgo the trip to Austria, as the Austrian Prime Minister, Dollfuß, had been murdered by the Austrian Nazis when His Majesty was in Hungary. The King of Siam had made acquaintance with Dollfuß in Italy in March 1934. His Majesty instead went to Switzerland, a country that had not been part of the original plan.

In 1934 King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni were accompanied on their travel to Europe by only a small entourage, 9 “official suite” and 5 “unofficial suite”. The Danish government provided the ship *Meonia* for the voyage, free of charge. The route went from Bangkok to Medan in Indonesia. In his report to Berlin, the German envoy commented that this was because His Majesty wanted to visit his brother, Prince Nakorn Sawan Vorapinit, who had been living with his family in exile in Bandung (Java) since the 1932 revolution. Thus, the trip to the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, which was a Dutch protectorate, was seen as unproblematic.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. *On the Preparation for the Visit to Europe in 1934*

The preparations for the visit to Europe had to be carried out by Phraya Apibal Ratchmaitri, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Siam, Siamese envoy in London, Phraya Subarn Sombati (พระยาสุพรรณธมมขัติ- ตัน บุนนาค), and the envoy in

<sup>12</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7.3.3/20, Letter from the Siamese legation, Phraya Subarn Sombati from Berlin to Phraya Apibal Ratchmaitri, 5 July 1934 with a copy of the French letter from 4 July 1934 from Limburg Stirum, Dutch envoy in Berlin, Ministre des Pays-Bas. Also, Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, letter 28/7542 from Foreign Minister Phraya Apibal Ratchmaitri, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saranrom Palace, 9 August 1934 to the personal secretary of the King

<sup>13</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86066, 10 January 1934

Paris, Prince A-monthat, who took responsibility for seven Siamese legations in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning, King Prajatibok wanted to make official state visits to European nations and the US,<sup>15</sup> in order to strengthen the relations between Siam and western countries.

However, the voyage turned into a “semi-official” one, and the King and Queen partly even traveled “incognito” under the names “Prince of Sukhodaya and Princess of Sukhodaya“. This was probably due to an incident with King George V. The semi-official parts were restricted to the visits to heads of state.

Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the National Archive in Bangkok reveal how complex the preparations by the Ministry were. The most interesting ones are those for the visit to England, beginning with the delaying tactics of British officials as far as arranging a specific date for the reception of the King of Siam. The excuse was that there would still be enough time. Actually, the British envoy in Bangkok knew about the potential delay of King Prajatibok's trip by the Siamese government and therefore did not keep his word to prepare the itinerary for the visit to England before the departure of the Siamese King on 12 January 1934. The Siamese envoy in London, Phraya Subarn Sombati<sup>16</sup> was reminded to finish this crucial task by the foreign minister, Phraya Abibal Ratchmaitri.<sup>17</sup> In other countries, preparations had already been made by the Siamese envoy in Paris, who was responsible for seven European countries.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Those are France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland.

<sup>15</sup> See: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, J. Nr. 595/33 R. 86066, letter from 3 May 1933, with reference to the letter from 27 April 1933 J. Nr. 595/33 from the German Delegation in Bangkok to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin.

<sup>16</sup> The Siamese envoy in London, Phraya Subarn Sombati (พระยาสุพรรณสมบัติ), was responsible for the preparation of the visit of King Prajatibok in Britain. He was reminded of this important task, and finally given a written warning by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Phraya Abibal Ratchmaitri, telegrams from 3 and 23 January 1934).

<sup>17</sup> Phraya Subarn Sombati (พระยาสุพรรณสมบัติ-ตัน บุนนาค), Siamese Envoy in London is the elder brother of the Siamese Foreign Minister, Phraya Apibal Ratchmaitri (ต่อม บุนนาค).

<sup>18</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, letter No. 81/2298 from the royal secretary of King Prajatibok to Phraya Apibal Ratchmaitri, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2 January 1934, signed by Phraya Barihannithitham by the order of the royal secretary.



Other interesting incidents were reported by the German and Italian envoys, who were informed of King Prajatibok's trip before the official message by the Siamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Siamese delegation in London on 29 April 1933. Within the report by the German envoy, Dr. Nord, the following excerpt of a discussion between Dr. Nord and the Italian envoy is significant:

“...my Italian colleague added to this narrative the strictly confidential information, ...that the British government told the government here (Siamese government) that the British King did not wish to receive the King of Siam ... As far as the reasons for this negative attitude from the British are concerned, my Italian colleague was not able to find any reliable reason...”. It can be assumed that this report was due to the bad situation in the region. The secret information was for the German envoy's eyes only, and was not supposed to be sent to Berlin.<sup>19</sup>

Visiting England, King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni were shown reverence, but were welcomed strictly according to the “incognito” protocol by the Duke of York at London's Victoria Station. The British government was not authorized to do anything more to receive the King of Siam, as a “semi-official” visit is not a part of British protocol.<sup>20</sup> On the first day after their arrival, Their Majesties were invited to lunch at Winsor Palace by King George V, together with Queen Mary, Duke of York and his wife. The second meeting was the British King's invitation to participate in the “Trooping of the Colour” on 4 June 1934, after the dental and eye operations, on the occasion of His Majesty's birthday. On 21 June 1934, their Majesties the King and Queen of Siam were again invited to lunch with British royals, with King Prajatibok meeting the Duke of

<sup>19</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin. R 86066. Report from 27 April 1933 by the German Envoy in Bangkok to the Foreign Ministry Berlin. Underlines are the same as in the original.

In German: “...mein italienischer Kollege fügte dieser Erzählung die streng vertrauliche Mitteilung hinzu, ...dass die englische Regierung der hiesigen Regierung auf ihre Anfrage zu verstehen gegeben habe, der englische König hege nicht den Wunsch, den König von Siam zu empfangen... Über die Gründe dieser ablehnenden Haltung Englands hat mein italienischer Kollege Sicheres nicht in Erfahrung bringen können, ...”

<sup>20</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7.3.3/15, letter from 7 June 1933 and letter from 27 January 1934



York, the British Crown Prince and his wife, Duke Connaught, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands, and several emissaries with their wives, German emissaries among them.<sup>21</sup>

One could say that all European states involved received the Siamese King “officially” with great honours. Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary invited the King of Siam to an official state visit, meeting the head of state. The Czech government insisted on covering all expenses of the official and incognito visit.<sup>22</sup> Italy under Mussolini, Denmark and Belgium welcomed Their Majesties officially and with great pomp. President Roosevelt, representing US that was already a global superpower at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, invited King Prajatibok to the White House. The two heads of state had already known each other since 1931, when the Siamese King underwent eye surgery for the first time, and Roosevelt was mayor of New York City.

The complex nature of the overseas voyage in 1934 does not only reflect the troubled relationship between the King and the government of the revolutionary group. It also shows how King Prajatibok was under strict control by the government, which decided what His Majesty was allowed and not allowed to do. We also learn about the work of Siamese civil servants abroad and about the relations between European courts/governments and Siam or the Siamese King. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the 1934 trip to Europe took place two years after the 1932 revolution, which had turned the country from an absolute into a constitutional monarchy. The fact that King Prajatibok was extremely humiliated by Siamese government and some groups of people in his own country was well known abroad.

<sup>21</sup> General Phraya Vichitwong Wuttikrai (M.R. Sitt Suthat, secretary of the delegation to Europe in 1934), *Diary of the Visit to Europe by King Prajatibok 1934/B.E. 2476-2477*, 1983. The diary was published with permission from King Bhumibol on the occasion of the cremation of General Pracha Sirivorasan, Thepsirintarawas Temple, 12 November 1983, 137-138, 155, 164

<sup>22</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, the Czech Republic, hand-written letter by the Czech ambassador in London, Jan Masaryk, with reference to the letter from 25 Juli 1933. Translated by Ph. Dr. Zdena Michálková, received 20 April 2015, translator and interpreter at the Royal Thai Embassy in Prague



### 5. *The Idea of a “Modern Siam” – King Prajatibok as a Siamese “Honourary Diplomat” in Europe*

The reasons for the overseas trips of King Prajatibok 1931 and 1934 were similar to each other in some ways. The voyages were made for health reasons. But in 1934, King Prajatibok has a new status, not being the King of an absolute monarchy, but of a constitutional one. Since the 1932 revolution, King Prajatibok's dignity was undermined to a great extent by anti-royalists jostling for political power in Siam.

Queen Rambai Barni played an important role during the visit to Europe in 1934 as far as the promotion of the image of Siam abroad was concerned, as many European newspapers, especially Danish ones, noted:

“...Their Majesties are very small... They come across as simple, polite, graceful, with a special charisma...”<sup>23</sup>

“...The Queen of Siam is rather small and sporty; she likes to smile and does so often”<sup>24</sup>

A Czech newspaper wrote:

“King Prajatibok had been described, amongst other, as a very progressive monarch and a reformer...”, and about Queen Rambai Barni's dress:

“...many of the onlookers were not a little surprised, when they saw the King in a dark suit, and the Queen in a tasteful gray dress with fur boa, instead of fancy colourful Asian costumes, and a top hat and a small gray hat with a ribbon respectively, instead of royal crown on their heads.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> In: Danish newspaper *Dagens Nyheder*, 25 June 1934, press bureau, document of the Foreign Ministry, Copenhagen, Denmark.

<sup>24</sup> In: First page of Belgian newspaper, *L' independence Belge*, julliet 1934, topic: The arrival of Their Majesties the King and Queen at the Northern Station in Brussels, with a photograph of Their Majesties and King Leopold III of Belgium in uniform.

<sup>25</sup> In: Boussard, Pierre A., Šitler, Jiří, Dr. u.a. (eds.), 2004. *Siam Undiscovered, Czech-Thai encounters between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: rare documents, old photographs, royal visits*, With the compliments of the Czech Embassy to the Kingdom of Thailand. In cooperation with the Czech Embassy in Bangkok, the Institute of International Relations in Prague, the Náprstek Museum in Prague and the Ministry of Culture of the Kingdom of Thailand, 64-65.

The Hungarian newspapers thought that “...His Majesty’s wife is an extraordinary Beauty”<sup>26</sup>

The fact that King Prajatibok had only one wife was known everywhere abroad. His Majesty's attitude was praised in many Danish newspapers as model behavior for the Siamese.

Polygamy, they commented, was going to become more and more difficult in the middle class, like in Europe.<sup>27</sup>



In: *Aften Berlingske Tidende*, 23 Juni 1934, Copenhagen  
(Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Copenhagen, Denmark)



*Hotel d' Angel Terre*, photo taken by the author, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2015

<sup>26</sup> In: *Nyíróvidék* (Newspaper from northeastern Hungary), 13 March 1934, documents from Hungarian newspapers with the support of the Royal Thai Embassy in Budapest, Hungary.

<sup>27</sup> In: *Berlingske Tidende*, 24 June 1934. Document from U.M.'S. press bureau (Blad Uddrag), Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Copenhagen, Denmark, Ref. 2.F.79 Thailand (Siam) Pahhe I afsl pr 31/12–1958. All newspaper articles were collected by the Foreign Ministry without page numbers.



## 6. *The Friendship Between Siam and European Nations*

During the reign of King Prajatibok the closest friendship the Siamese royals had was with Denmark, with Belgium and the Netherlands in second place. Starting with Rama V or King Chulalongkorn, the members of the Siamese and Danish royal families had been visiting each other. The Danish company East Indies offered the ship *Meonia* to King Prajatibok as a means of transport for the trip to Europe, free of charge. Even in the difficult time when King Prajatibok was on a boat to his exile in Songkhla during the Bavorndej uprising, by chance, the Danish ship *Walai* had saved the Siamese King and his entourage from a storm. The crew was brought to safety in Songkhla by the Danes.



King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni with King of Belgium, King Leopold III. in Brussel, 26 July 1934 at Noordstation (In: *L'indépendance Belge*, Julliet 1934, Archive of the Foreign Ministry. Brussel, Belgium



Their Majesty's visit to H.N. Andersen, former adviser of the Siamese Court at his home in Vennerslund, 25 June 1934, in: *Børsen*, 25 June 1934, (Doument from the Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Pressbureau, Copenhagen, Denmark)



King Prajaitibok and King of Denmark, Christian X. of Denmark (Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Pressbureau, Copenhagen, Denmark)

### *Great Britain*

The diplomatic friendship between Siam and Britain began with Rama IV (King Mongkut). In 1897, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) met Queen Victoria at a reception at Her Majesty Summer palace, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, during His Majesty's first tour of Europe. The political relations between Siam and Britain, or between the Siamese and British royals, remained distanced. This was partly due to colonial policy of the rivals Britain and France, which competed for Siam. Despite its distanced attitude towards Siam, Britain as a global superpower at the time, had a good reputation in Siam, since many members of the Siamese royal family and high-ranking civil servants had received their education in the United Kingdom. King Vajiravudh's (Rama VI) declaration of war against Germany to support the Allies was unambiguous. Both King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) and King Prajaitibok (Rama VII) studied in England. There were cultural reasons as well. King Prajaitibok chose the London Clinic for his operation primarily due to his trust in Britain. His Majesty clearly stated his refusal to be treated by French doctors.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7.3.3/12, Memorandum of H.S.H Prince Amaratadt, Siam Minister in Paris, from 5 July 1933



After King Prajatibok's ascension to the throne, in 1926-1928, the threats that France and England posed were not over.<sup>29</sup> France was not going to tolerate it if Siam built up a stronger Army right next to French Indochina.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of the 1930s, the danger coming from Britain was still present as well, according to a report by the Italian envoy in Bangkok, Goffredo Bovo. Rumours were circulated about plans by the newly assembled British colonial army at the military base in Singapore to attack Siam. There were confrontations between five Japanese and eighteen British submarines near Malacca. Siam bought ammunition from Belgium in 1933.<sup>31</sup> Siam bought ammunition from Belgium in 1933 and, after 1934, more torpedo boats and ammunition from Italy,<sup>32</sup> to modernize the Navy and Army. Those incidents might help explain why Siam sought a new friendship with Japan in the 1930s. King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni visited Japan on the way to the United States in 1931.

Another interesting facet related to the British stance is the telegram by the British court to greet King Prajatibok at the Hotel d'Angleterre in Denmark, which came together with the telegram from the Danish royals from Jylland<sup>33</sup> and was allegedly sent after the British Foreign Office had learned about the great welcomes for Their Majesties in Italy and Denmark. The British government even wrote to the Hungarian government that the King of Siam should be received with all honours.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> A German newspaper from 8 November 1927. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin. R 86031. The name of the newspaper is not visible. See also the report by the German envoy in Bangkok, Dr. Asmis (19 pages) to Berlin on the behaviour of Britain and the new British envoy in Bangkok and the British governour in Singapore, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86031, Dr. Asmis points to the previous report No. 380, 27 February 1928

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Fernand, "Le nouveau traité franco-siamois" *Revue du Pacifique*.t.2, N<sup>o</sup> 7, juillet 1925, 713-724. DOCUMENTS IMPRIMÉS. In: *Research study of the project by the Research Institute for French-Thai Studies*, (footnote 2), 152-153

<sup>31</sup> Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Brussels, Belgium, letter from the Belgian Embassy in Bangkok, No. 376/229, 14 December 1933

<sup>32</sup> Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Rome, Italy. In: Report by the Italian envoy Bovo from Bangkok, 27 March 1934, No. 246/68 Pos. A.I./VII (12<sup>th</sup> year of Fascism), 7 pages

<sup>33</sup> Report from a Danish newspaper (name unknown), press bureau, document of the Foreign Ministry, Copenhagen, Denmark. When Their Majesties of Siam arrived, the King and Queen of Denmark were still in Jylland.

<sup>34</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86066, letter of German envoy in Budapest, Hungary, 13. August 1934

### *The French Republic*

In my opinion, the success of the visit to France in 1934 was based on the success of the state visit in Indochina in 1930, which was under French protectorate. Despite a number of unpleasant incidents in Vietnam, among them heavy accidents that endangered the life of the Siamese King, Siam accepted the King of Cambodia and King Prajatibok managed to restore the friendship with France and “France in the East.” The French reported that the Siamese King was a great friend of France, not only because of the eight years that he had studied there, but also because His Majesty understood the country, its people, and its culture. Siam was expected to play a large role in the defense of Indochina against communism.<sup>35</sup>

Ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Siam had been of interest as a colony for France. Apart from being rivals in terms of trade with Britain and Germany, France during the time of King Prajatibok was also very keen on spreading French culture in Siam. This was centered around the work of the Alliance Française, scholarships to learn French, and establishing French as a second foreign language in the curriculum for Siamese high schools. Anthropological studies were financed, contributions to the National Museum and the National Library were made, and the theater was supported.

King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni were received with great honours in Paris in 1934. President Albert Lebrun and his wife invited Their Majesties and many other luminaries to lunch and an official reception in the Elysée Palace. Their Majesties visited many sights in Paris, had cultural activities, and went to the military academy *Ecole de Guerre*, where the King had received his higher military education, after having attended Eton College in England.

An unexplained negative incident regarding the relations with France involved the meeting of King Prajatibok with the French envoy in Prague. The Siamese King turned his back on the French envoy during the official reception in Prague Castle, the reason for which is unknown.<sup>36</sup> Further research is necessary.

<sup>35</sup> Report in *French newspaper: L' écho de Paris*, 12 February 1934, *The Siamese King's Visit to France - The King is the True Friend of Our Country*, source unknown.

<sup>36</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin. R 86066, Report by the German envoy in Prague, Dr. Koch A.III.1.6.3, Prague, 6 August 1934



### *Italy and the Weimar Republic (Germany) and Austria*

One could describe the relations with Italy, Germany, and Austria as very positive and without problems right from the start, not least because of the personal meetings between King Chulalongkorn and members of the Italian, German and Austrian courts during His Majesty's visits to Europe in 1897 and 1907. The ties to Emperor Wilhelm II and Emperor Franz Joseph II were especially close, also to some German princes from Mecklenburg-Schwerin after the European trip of 1897. Many sons of King Chulalongkorn were educated in Berlin, Flensburg, Heidelberg or Tübingen.

The relations between Siam and Italy and Germany changed with World War I. Siam's declaration of war against Germany apparently had little effect on the good relations between the two nations. King Prajatibok had very friendly ties with the Weimar Republic's head of state, President von Hindenburg, who wrote to His Majesty several times and enquired about the state of his health after the first eye operation in 1931 in the United States.<sup>37</sup>



Their Majesty arrival at Lehrter Station, Berlin. Left of the Queen, State Secretary Lammers and right of the King, Reichforeignminister, Freiherr von Neurath, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1934 (Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany)

<sup>37</sup> Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Office of the Reichpräsident, Ref.: *Empfänge von ausländischen Staatsoberhaupten*, Topic: The visit of the Siamese King Prajatibok and the Queen of Siam, in: Ref. B II.5.5, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, ref. B II.5.5, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Berlin, see also ref. RP 2740/34, B II 9.8 under "s".

On their arrival in Berlin, Their Majesties were welcomed by Baron von Neurath, Reichsminister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Graf von Bassewitz. The two of them introduced Reichkanzler Adolf Hitler to the Siamese King. King Prajatibok also met other members of government, among them Herrmann Göring, Reichsminister of the Luftwaffe, who invited Their Majesties to dinner.<sup>38</sup> In Germany, the Reichspräsident received the Siamese King in his mansion in Neudeck, due to the bad state of his health.<sup>39</sup> After the visit to Germany, they corresponded in friendly letters. King Prajatibok provided the President with signed pictures of himself and the Queen.<sup>40</sup>



Reichkanzler, Adolf Hitler greeted King Prajatibok of Siam (National Library, Prague, Czech Republic)

<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, no photographs and pictures of visits to the organisational structure of fascism in Germany with Nazi personalities from all the Federal Archives are available to the researcher.

<sup>39</sup> The reception of President Hindenburg in Neudeck was filmed by the Deutsche Fox Film A.G. In: Dankbrief von dem Permanent Sekretär des Auswärtigen Amtes, Baron von Hoyningen Huene vom Büro des Reichspräsidenten, Nr. 176/34 III, 20. Juli 1934, an die Deutsche Fox Film A.G., Berlin SW 68, Friedrichstr. 225, document from Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Berlin

<sup>40</sup> Copy of the telegrams by King Prajatibok from Aachen to General Field Marshal von Hindenburg, the Reichspräsident, c 53 1340, 26.7.1934, document from the office of the Reichspräsident, ref.: Empfänge von ausländischen Staatsoberhaupten, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Berlin, Ko 90/34 III, z.d.A. B II 5.5, to the German Foreign Ministry, 30.7.34





President Hindenburg waiting for the arrival of the Siamese Monarch in front of his villa in Neudeck. King Prajatibok and Queen Rambai Barni on the arrival in Neudeck, The Weimar Republic Germany, Berlin 2 July 1934 (Bundesarchiv, Lichterfelde, Büro des Reichspräsidenten, B II.5.5, Akt RP2740-34 B II 9.8)



Their Majesty in Eberswald, 7 July 1934. Opposite of King Prajatibok is the highranking soldier, Gauleiter Wilhelm Kube who was greeting the King of Siam. He is rather famous. Behind Herr Kube is Lord Meyer of Eberswalde, Dr. Führ. (Museum Eberswalde, Germany, with compliment of Herr Martin Hoeck, Eberswald)

In Italy and Germany, King Pajatibok visited many cities. His Majesty also examined the organizational structure of Fascism with great interest. The King of Siam had studied fascist principles and read translations of Hitler's biography and *Mein Kampf* even before his trip to Europe.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, R 86066, report of the German envoy in London to the Foreign Ministry Berlin, Germany, 10 May 1934. Document No.14.1453 on the Siamese King before his visit to Germany. The German envoy, Hoesch, reported that he had had a long talk with King Prajatibok.



The visit of the Siamese Monarch at the Vatican library, In the newspaper: *Corriere Della Sera*, 23 March 1934, The newspaper belongs to Duce Mussolini. (from: Central Archive, Rom, Italy)



Their Majesty at the orphanage, Italy. In: *Il POPOLO d'Italia*, 18 March 1934. The newspaper belongs to Duce Mussolini (Central Archive, Rom, Italy)



Under Prime Minister Dollfuß's leadership, Austria presented the Siamese King with two programs in German and English to choose, including a lot of sightseeing. King Prajatibok was very satisfied with the second program. His Majesty was looking forward to spending time in a beautiful country like Austria. The cancellation of the visit to Austria by the Siamese King came after the murder of Prime Minister Dollfuß by the Austrian Nazis. The fact is that the Austrian government was already under the influence of Berlin and had almost no freedom in terms of foreign affairs any more. The German envoy in Vienna was notified by Berlin of all contacts and correspondences with Siam.<sup>42</sup>



The Prime Minister Dollfuß of the Republic of Austria in Rom, Italy in March 1934. In: *Il POPOLO d'Italia*, date not known

<sup>42</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, report 7.3.3/12, No. 1333/76 by the Siamese Legation in London from 12 June 1933 to H.E. Georg Frankenstein, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria. The report was also given to the German Ambassador, Herr von Fries, who would visit the Siamese envoy after the talk on 30 June 1933 with the German and Austrian ambassadors.

### *Czechoslovakia and Hungary*

King Prajatibok expressed clearly that he wanted to rest in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.<sup>43</sup> Like the official reception of the Siamese King in Germany, which had been initiated by the German side, the proposal for an official visit to the head of state came from the Czech envoy in London, Jan Masaryk, a son of Czechoslovakia's first President Tomas Masaryk. Governor Horthy also made the same offer for Hungary.<sup>44</sup> In Prague and Budapest, the governments organized grand receptions for Their Majesties of Siam.



President Tomas Masaryk, the First President of the Czechoslovakia. Picture taken by the author at the Archive of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic, Prague, The Czech Republic, 2015

<sup>43</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7.3.3/11, No. n.23/1570, letter from 29 April 1933 by the Foreign Minister to the Siamese envoy in London

<sup>44</sup> Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Prague, The Czech Republic, ref.: Ministerstvozahraniěnich sean, No. 006 věci R.Č.S., copy of the letter from the Foreign Ministry of Czechoslovakia on 26. August 1933 ref. "PRO DOMO", Opis Spis c. 989.65/P/33



King Prajatibok was able to regain his energy in the two beautiful countries, just like he had wished. Their Majesties visited numerous sights in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, including factories, and agricultural, technological operations, art, crafts, folk music and farms in Hungary which are all strengths of the “Magyars”. Many companies in both countries requested to be visited by the Siamese King; many were disappointed. Even regular citizens wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague that the route of the Siamese King had to be changed due to the bad state of the roads. Some sent gifts to His Majesty via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>45</sup>



Official reception for the King and Queen of Siam in Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1934 (Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Prague, the Czech Republic)

<sup>45</sup> Document of the Foreign Ministry, Prague, The Czech Republic, ref.: hlavi Návštěvy podřadne Siam věc, undated.

In Czechoslovakia, His Majesty also visited the sights that his father, King Chulalongkorn, had seen in 1897. During his brief second stays in (16-18 August 1934), His Majesty stayed at a spa to improve his health.<sup>46</sup>

All this contributed to establishing relationships between Siam and the newly formed nations of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.



Hotel Alcron, where the Siamese Monarch stayed in Prague in 1934, now Hotel Radissonblu  
Photo taken by the author in Prague, 2015



Visit at the Museum of Agriculture, Budapest, Hungary, one of the visiting site of King Rama VII.  
in 1934 (photo taken by the author, 2015)

<sup>46</sup> This second stays in Czechoslovakia (16-18 August 1934) was not mentioned in the Siamese diary maintained by Major Praya Vichitwong Vuttikrai. For their second stay in Czechoslovakia, Their Majesties were at Château Lany, as President Masaryk had suggested.





The author at the Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Budapest, Hungary

### *Switzerland*

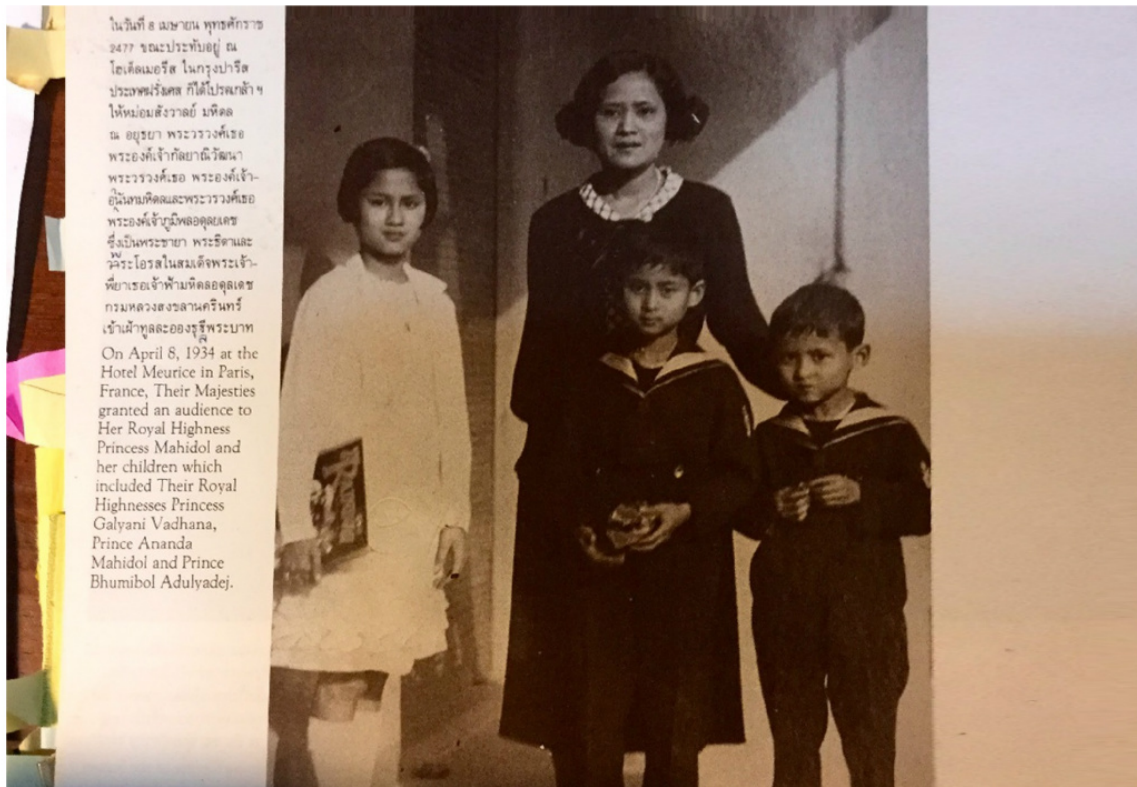
Originally, Switzerland had not been on King Prajatibok's itinerary for the trip to Europe.

Only after he decided not to return to Bangkok and visit London for the second time, he did travel to Switzerland. It was an “absolutely private visit”,<sup>47</sup> and Their Majesties wanted to keep the trip absolutely secret.<sup>48</sup> At that time, Mom Sangwala Mahidol was in Lausanne with her three children. In the Siamese diary, there is no mention of any meeting between King Prajatibok and the Mahidol family, but such an encounter may have happened.

Switzerland was a safe haven for the Siamese royal family and two future Kings of Siam, Rama VIII (King Ananda) and Rama IX (King Bhumibol), thanks to the wise decision of the mother of the future kings, Mom Sangwala Mahidol.

<sup>47</sup> Archive of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 7.3.3/20, copy of the telegram No. 26/7886 by The Charge d' Affaires, Paris, 15 August 1934 at 1.15 p.m. to The Royal Counsellor Foreign Office, Bangkok, 15 August 1934 at 11.10 p.m.

<sup>48</sup> Copy of documents of the Bundesarchiv, Bern, Switzerland. Letter by the Siamese envoy in Paris, 16 August 1934 to Minister M. Paul Denichert, Head of Foreign Affairs, Political Department, Bern, received on 17. August 1934, with reference to the phone call from the previous day, Copies went to the customs office, and the flight station.



ในหนังสือ ๕ เมษายน พุทธศักราช ๒๔๗๗ ขณะประทับอยู่ที่ ณ โฮเต็ลเมอริซ ในกรุงปารีส ประพจน์ฝรั่งเศส ก็ได้ไปพบฝ่าย ให้หม่อมสังวาลย์ มหิดล ณ อยุธยา พระวรวงศ์เธอ พระองค์เจ้ากัญญาณโณ พระวรวงศ์เธอ พระองค์เจ้าอุบลรัตนนาคะ พระองค์เจ้าบุษิณีพลอดุลยเดช ซึ่งเป็นพระชายา พระธิดาและ พระโอรสในสมเด็จพระเจ้าพี่ยาเธอ เจ้าฟ้ามหิตลอดุลยเดช กรมหลวงสงขลานครินทร์ เจ้าฟ้าทุลละของสุริยพระบาท

On April 8, 1934 at the Hotel Meurice in Paris, France, Their Majesties granted an audience to Her Royal Highness Princess Mahidol and her children which included Their Royal Highnesses Princess Galyani Vadhana, Prince Ananda Mahidol and Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Mahidol family in Paris at the Hotel Meurice, April 8 1934 (Source unknown)

### 7. *The Visit to Europe in 1934 and King Prajatibok's Abdication*<sup>49</sup>

King Prajatibok's remarkable activities and sightseeing visits to numerous places in many European countries lead to the hypothesis that King Prajatibok actually did, at this time, not plan to abdicate in 1935.<sup>50</sup> His Majesty came to this decision only once the situation was hopeless and the negotiations with the Siamese government had failed without any compromise.

<sup>49</sup> On the abdication of King Prajatibok, see also the annual report from 1935 by the German envoy in Bangkok, Stoller, to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, 31 January 1936, Bb. No. 136/36. In: BA, R 901/65770. See also the political report by the German envoy Nord to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, 31 Oktober 1935, J. No. 1299-34 and from 7 November 1934, No. 1332/34. In: R 86066, Politik 11, No.1, Siam. Quoted in: Volker Grabowsky, Universität Münster, revised essay for the seminar "King Rama VII and the World", Thammasat University, 15 January 2007, in: Sombat Chantarawong, Nakarin Mektrairat, Prajak Kongkirati, 2008. *The World and the Reign of King Prajatibok*, (footnote 7), 293

<sup>50</sup> Another scholar, Theera Nutchpiem, claims that King Prajatibok had always had the firm intention to abdicate. See: Theera Nutchpiem, 2015. Siamese Politics after the 1932 Revolution from the Perspective of the West. In: *Journal of the Historical Society*, Issue 37, 160



King Prajatibok commented on the topic of abdication four time. The first time was five days after the revolution of 1932. The reason was His Majesty's bad health.<sup>51</sup>

The second time was on 30 June 1932 during the drafting of the constitution. King Prajatibok answered Prime Minister Phraya Phahonphonphayuhasena that if some group forced him to act against his will, his only choice would be to abdicate. After the Bavorndej uprising, too, His Majesty told Mr. James Baxter, the British advisor, that he wanted to keep as far away from conflict as possible. His best weapon would be the threat of abdication. Such a threat would be most effective if there was a chance to put it into practice.<sup>52</sup>

The last comment came during the visit to Europe in 1934. King Prajatibok always read all documents and correspondence from Bangkok.<sup>53</sup> According to Prince Narissara Nuwattiwong, the Regent in Bangkok, His Majesty had no doubts about the stance of the Siamese government and expressed it thusly: His Majesty had the impression that the parliament and the government of Siam had no interest in a compromise with him, no matter what subject.<sup>54</sup>

The abdication of King Prajatibok should be seen in a context that takes the following factors into account: (i) the situation in Siam between May and September 1934 while His Majesty was staying in Europe, (ii) the negotiations with the Siamese government

### 7.1 *The Situation in Siam from May to September 1934*

Between May and September 1934, the situation in Siam was not normal, which had a great effect on domestic politics. There were, for example, several

<sup>51</sup> In: Secret report No. 109/1922 from Secretary Office of the Palace, dated 2 July 1932, signed by Phraya Mahithorn, to Maha Ammat To Phraya Manopakorn Nitithada, Head of the "Khana Ratsadon" (Revolutionary Group), quoted in: *Diary of Her Majesty Rambai Barni, Wife of King Prajatipok* (1<sup>st</sup> edition 2002), footnote 4, page 24

<sup>52</sup> Prudtisan Jumbala, M.R. "Opening of the Parliament and the Visit to Europe by King Rama VII." (kw57). Website project of the King Prajadhipok's Institute on the topic of Prapokkklao and Democracy, A Complete Biography of King Prapokkklao-Chaoyuhua, page 7

<sup>53</sup> Prudtisan Jumbala, M.R., *Website project of the Prapokkklao Institute on the topic of Prapokkklao and Democracy*, (kw20 essay by Pornsan Watanangura und kw57)

<sup>54</sup> In the letter by the Regent in Bangkok, Prince Narissaranuwattiwong, to Prime Minister Phraya Pahol Polpayuhasena, 14 October 1934. Quoted in: *Diary of Her Majesty Rambai Barni, Wife of King Prajatipok* (1<sup>st</sup> edition 2002), footnote 4, page 22-23

natural disasters with consequences for agriculture, and changes in the new cabinet which involved the dismissal of two ministers. One of them was Phraya Apibal Ratchamaitri, the Foreign Minister, who had always been loyal to the King. According to the report of the Italian envoy Goffredo Bovo on the new foreign policy of the Siamese government, Siam did not want to accept disadvantageous treaties with foreign countries and was to withdraw from all treaties that were not economically or politically beneficial for the nation. Furthermore, there was the plan to pull out of all legal agreements with France and England until all the laws were revised.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, there was talk again about an imminent coup that was said to be prepared by members of the royal family in exile. The consequence of these events was the creation of the new cabinet.

Even more crucial were the differences in opinion between the King and the government. Apart from many other issues, the King focused on what he thought were *undemocratic* elements in the constitution: (i) These were related to the exclusive right of the revolutionary group *Khana Ratsadon*, which wanted to stay in power for at least ten years, whereas other political parties were forbidden. (ii) Another point was the appointment of senators without taking their skills into account. This meant only people from their own circle were considered. (iii) There were also special laws to reduce freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, especially via courts that were operating in secret, or run by military or civilian people appointed by the revolutionary group. (iv) The last decisive aspect was the abolition of the King's veto in cases involving political prisoners.<sup>56</sup> This last issue was even mentioned in Hungarian newspapers as a major reason for King Prajatibok's abdication from the throne.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Archive of the Foreign Ministry, Rome, Italy, letter of the Italian envoy in Bangkok, No. 660/176/Pos. A.I/VII. Bangkok, 17 September 1934. And letter from 26 September 1934, No. 679/181/Pos. A. I./VIII, 12<sup>th</sup> year of fascism, Topic: *Crisis of the Siamese Cabinet*

<sup>56</sup> Parliamentary office of the Secretary General, 1993, 5-14. King Prajatibok Prapokklao Chaoyuhua abdicates. Bangkok: Amrin Printing & Publishing. Quoted in: Pruedtisan Jumbala, M.R., Website project of the King Prajadhipok's Institute on the topic of *Prapokklao and Democracy*, (kw58), footnote. 53. See also copy of the royal letter to the government, 20 December 1934, in: Preeda Vatcharangkul, 1977. *Prapokklao and Democracy*, (footnote 5), 330-334

<sup>57</sup> Documents compiled from Hungarian newspapers by the Royal Thai Embassy in Budapest, Hungary. News translated by the wife of the Hungarian Ambassador in Thailand (2015-2018), H.E. Dr. Peter Jakab.



On 3 October 1934, a letter by the Siamese delegation to the Foreign Minister in Bangkok reported on a cable from a secretary of King Prajatibok's delegation from 17 September 1934, stated that the King and Her Majesty the Queen were undertaking a second trip to London. The Siamese delegation in London had reserved rooms in the Claridge Hotel. The Siamese envoy in London pointed out that there was no fixed end for this trip, which was unusual.

This was the beginning of the final negotiation between King Prajatibok and the Siamese government. We all know that he would stay in England indefinitely.

On 7 March 1935 at 1:45 p.m., the Siamese people heard about King Prajatibok's abdication on the radio. None of them had learned about it beforehand.

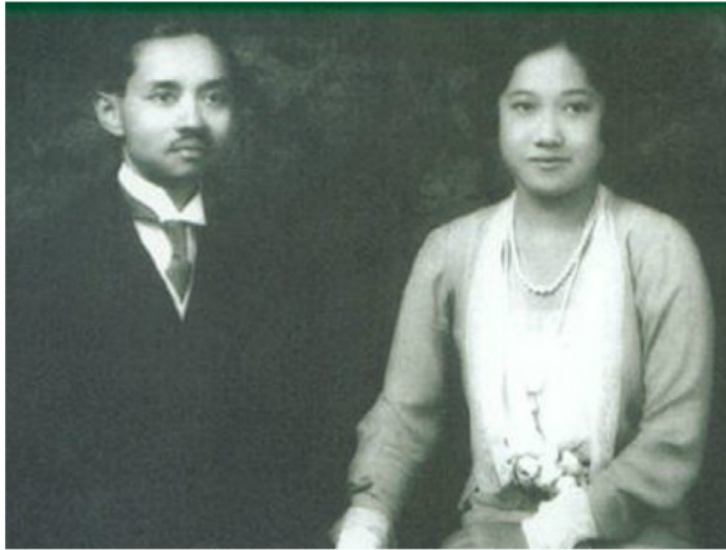
Three months later came the official announcement by the Siamese government.



King Prajatibok made His trip to Europe in 1934 possible for Siam to prefigure Siamese international relations with European nations. For the first time in the history of Thailand, the Siamese King was abroad with his wife, Her Majesty Queen Rambai Barni. Their Majesties both succeeded in presenting the new democratic and “modern” Siam and contribute to its acceptance in the world after the revolution of 1932 as “Honourary Diplomat”. The tour strengthened the preexisting links between the Siamese court and western countries, while paving the way for new official relations with European nations, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, that had emerged after the First World War.

The activities by King Prajatibok, namely his visiting many places in Europe, show his serious attempts at emulating his father King Chulalongkorn and pushing the modernization of Siam - a mission that he had already started when accessing the throne in 1926.





King Prajaitibok and Queen Rambai Barni

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