

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICE DETECTIVE UNIT IN SIAM DURING THE KING CHULALONGKORN'S REIGN TO THE END OF 1932

การพัฒนาการของกองนักสืบของกรมตำรวจในสยามตั้งแต่
รัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวถึงสิ้นปี พ.ศ. 2475

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the development of the detective unit of the police in Siam during the reign of King Chulalongkorn up to the end of 1932. Using archival sources and relevant secondary source material, this paper argues that police detectives, who were initially employed by the government to investigate incidents of banditry and other 'ordinary' crime during the 1880s, quickly became a political intelligence unit essential to the centralization efforts of the governments of both King Chulalongkorn and King Vajiravudh. This transformation took place in large part because of the threat of uncontrolled information, including especially rumors, which proliferated throughout the kingdom during that period. In this light, it is therefore possible to think of the government's centralization efforts under Kings Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh through the lens of knowledge creation and control in addition to the more conventional lenses of modernization and westernization.

KEYWORDS : Political intelligence, Investigation, Detective, Rumor

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่ออธิบายการจัดตั้งและความเปลี่ยนแปลงใน "กองนักสืบ" ของกรมตำรวจ ตั้งแต่รัชสมัยพระบาทสมเด็จพระจุลจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัวถึงประมาณสิ้นปี พ.ศ. 2475 โดยใช้ข้อมูลจดหมายเหตุที่เก็บไว้ ณ หอจดหมายเหตุแห่งชาติ ตลอดจนบทความ หนังสือ ซึ่งตีพิมพ์แล้ว และวิทยานิพนธ์ต่างๆ บทความนี้เสนอว่ารัฐบาลตั้งกองนักสืบเพื่อควบคุมอาชญากรรมธรรมดาเช่นโจรกรรมและอื่นๆ ในช่วงทศวรรษพ.ศ. 2430 แต่ต่อมากองนักสืบเหล่านี้ได้กลายเป็นหน่วยงานสืบความเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง ซึ่งพูด

ได้ว่าการจัดตั้งหน่วยงานด้านการสืบสวนนี้เป็นสิ่งหนึ่งที่สำคัญมากในการปรับปรุงระบบการปกครองในรัชกาลที่ 5 และ รัชกาลที่ 6 การเปลี่ยนแปลงหน้าที่ของกองนักสืบนี้เกิดขึ้นเพราะความอันตรายจากความรู้และข่าวลือต่างๆ ซึ่งมีอยู่แพร่หลายอยู่ที่ราชอาณาจักรในสมัยนั้น เพราะฉะนั้นการปรับปรุงระบบการปกครองในรัชกาลที่ 5 และ รัชกาลที่ 6 เข้าใจได้ในทางด้านการสร้างและควบคุมความรู้เท่าที่ใช่ ความคิดทางด้าน modernization และ westernization

คำสำคัญ : ความเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมือง การสืบสวน นักสืบ ข่าวลือ

Purpose

This paper outlines the development of the investigative arm of the Thai police force to demonstrate how information about crime and criminals changed from an oral to paper-based mode of production between the reign of King Chulalongkorn and the 1930s. In doing so, this paper aims to recast the discussion of the administrative reforms that began in the later part of the nineteenth century in terms of 'knowledge production.'

To date, most studies of the administrative reforms initiated during King Chulalongkorn's reign have been framed in terms of modernization or as a strategy against the threat of colonialization from Britain and France.¹ Rather than simply a question of externally driven westernization, modernization, or even auto-colonialization, however, the administrative changes that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may also be viewed as having domestic

¹ Books as diverse as David Wyatt's classic *Thailand: A Short History* and more recent critical histories such as Maurizio Pellegi's *Lords of Things*, among others, follow an unspoken 'master narrative' of Thai historical development which inevitably frame the period as one of modernization or a quest for 'modernity.' Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped*, is the only historical study to date that examines changes in the form of 'knowledge' (of geography) during the period. The spur to epistemological change in his account is an external threat (that of the French). This study, however, emphasizes internal factors for epistemological change.

determinants, namely high crime rates and uncontrolled, unsanctioned information such as rumors and gossip.

In fact, from a reading of archival documents it becomes clear that the issues of crime detection and intelligence gathering were not only 'discursively' connected, they were viewed as grave threats to Bangkok's rule by government officials. So while external pressure was indeed a critical factor in spurring change, this paper aims to broaden discussions of Thai history by focusing attention on changes in the way state agents sought to control information and produce knowledge.

Methodology

This is a historical study based on data collected from primary source documents located at the National Archives of Thailand. It also uses data from relevant secondary sources including unpublished master's degree theses from universities in Bangkok and articles and books in both Thai and English. The period of study covered in this paper begins in the late nineteenth century and ends just after the revolution of 1932.

In analyzing these documents, this paper draws on ideas about information dissemination and intelligence gathering from Christopher Bayly's *Empire and Information* (2000) and Foucault's ideas about knowledge, power, and discourse (see for example *Order of Things*: 2001). However, this is not a 'discursive study' per se. It is a description of how knowledge production in Thai society has changed over time and an analysis of the strategies of state agents for controlling

information. The focus of the analysis is on everyday practices — what people actually do when they are said to produce knowledge.² The questions this paper asks include: “What were police detectives actually doing as they investigated crimes,” “What did it mean for the police, in practice, to modernize,” and “What effects did these practices have on the way state agents thought about crime?”

Background: Crime and Rumors

Siamese society in the late nineteenth century may be characterized broadly as one dominated by two things — rumors (about politics, local affairs, economics, wars, etc.) and crime.

Informal Networks of Information³

Siam in the middle of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was a place in which public information was created and circulated primarily through informal networks such as those that materialized at market places, temple fairs, drinking houses, gambling parlors, and brothels. The people creating and passing on information in these locations were ‘ordinary’ people including traders and merchants, fortunetellers, wandering ascetics, laborers, prostitutes, and gangsters as well as government officials and local leaders. Information in informal networks like these generally took shape as gossip, rumor, ‘urban legend’, or other forms of unwritten, unpublished chatter. This situation,

² See Bruno Latour’s *Science in Action* (1988), in which he demystifies the scientific fact making process by focusing on what scientists actually do on a day- to-day basis. Annelise Riles’ introduction in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (2006) provides a good overview of what an approach focused on ‘epistemological practices’ entails. Epistemological practice here refers to the actions carried out by various professionals as they work such as taking photos, writing reports, and compiling statistical tables.

of course, was atypical for the time; information in most societies in the region was created and transmitted by informal networks partly because the technological means for a formal, centralized communications apparatus was not available.

The point here is that for a state in the process of centralization uncontrolled information posed a serious problem that had to be addressed. Historian Chalong Soontravanich, for example, notes that a number of royal decrees were issued as early as the fourth reign that urged people to disregard unverified stories circulating the kingdom about issues as varied as impending natural disasters, market crashes, revolts, and wars with neighboring countries (Chalong, 1988: 49-50). The decrees indicate that not only were rumors prevalent, they were indeed seen as dangerous enough for officials to take them very seriously.

Crime

The other dominant aspect of life at that time was crime. Newspapers and government documents indicate that daily life throughout the kingdom, both in Bangkok and in the provinces, was rife with banditry, robbery, assaults, illegal gambling, and murder. Statistics on crime, which the government kept beginning in the late 19th century, show extremely high numbers of armed robberies and murders around the end of King Chulalongkorn’s reign. A police report from the time shows a sharp increase in the number of criminal cases between 1910 and 1916. Of these, the number of murders increased twice as fast as other crimes. There were, for example, 496 murders in 1910 and 1,124 in 1916. The total for the six-year period was 6,280 (NA R6 N 4.1/125). One

³ The term ‘informal network of information’ is derived from Christopher Bayly’s *Empire and Information* (2000). It refers to the creation of information by non-official actors including merchants, traders, prostitutes, soothsayers, and others and its transmission through ad-hoc networks.

police officer working in Bangkok in 1906 described the period by saying: "Rarely a night passed in which we (the police) had not to turn out to keep order. The floor of the Bangkok (Police) Station was often covered with blood. People carried knives and swords as a matter of course..." (Forty, 1967: 6). Newspapers, including Siam Ratsadon, Sri Krung, Bangkok Times, Krungthep Daily Mail, and others, also attest to the high level of crime in the kingdom, as each day their pages were filled with reports about dacoity, brawls, and other violence.⁴

Intelligence Gathering before Reform

In response to these two interrelated threats, the government in Bangkok began in the 1880s to look for new ways to control public information and suppress crime. As indicated earlier, the government of King Mongkut attempted to do this by issuing decrees explaining the 'truth' behind false and potentially damaging information (see Chalong: 2538 [1988], above). These decrees, however, often did little good as rumors and other forms of informal, unsanctioned information continued to float freely throughout the kingdom.

Alternatively, governments under various reigns since ancient times have tried to tap into various informal networks and the information they contained. To do this, they relied

⁴ There causes of high crime rates are outside the scope of this short paper. However, several contributing factors have been suggested elsewhere. First, the gradual end of both the slave and corvee labor systems under King Chulalongkorn has been cited as having sent a flood of unemployed men into a rapidly changing economic situation for which they were unprepared. Second, significant increases in Chinese immigration led to an increase in the activity of secret societies, which then fomented unrest among the Chinese population throughout the kingdom. Third, it has been suggested that a 'culture of banditry' existed in rural areas. Dacoity in this culture was not viewed as a crime, but as a natural part of society. There is evidence that village leaders even supported bandits or participated in robberies in some areas.

primarily on semi-organized bodies of secret informants who could fan out into the kingdom to gather 'intelligence' from locals. These informants were sometimes agents of the state and sometimes locals acting as spies for the government. In Thai the term used for these people was sai lap (สายลับ).

The use of secret informants, despite being employed throughout much of history, was never really standardized and depended on the prowess and cooperation of local leaders such as kamnan (District Head / กำนัน) and phuyaiban (Village Head / ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน). These local leaders in turn relied on their connections with people living within their areas of responsibility including merchants, patrons of bars and opium dens, bandits, and nakleng (Local Tough / นักเลง). In other words, informants were often part of the informal networks that the government sought to gain control over. The kingdom's police, including both the kong trawaen (Police in Bangkok / กองตระเวน), established in 1860, and the tamruat phuthon (Provincial Gendarmerie / ตำรวจภูธร), established in 1897, also relied on civilian informants including nakleng and known criminals. Since the time of King Mongkut, for example, civilian informants and quasi-professional tamruat mut (Secret Police / ตำรวจมืด) were employed in Bangkok and some key provincial towns to gather information about Chinese secret societies and to infiltrate the numerous bandit gangs roaming the countryside, both of which were growing in number and in ambition. Unfortunately for government officials and later the police, the use of civilian informants proved was often unreliable and local leaders, sometimes cooperating with bandits, could become a threat to central power if their following, and thus information base, grew too large.

When trying to get information about neighboring countries, the government also employed secret informants. One example of this is the kong Mon (Mon Intelligence Unit / กองมอญ), whose primary purpose was to monitor the activities of the Burmese army in the border regions between the two countries. The use of a particular ethnic group, such as the

Mon, as informants began as early as the reign of King Narai. The Mon, whose population was relatively large in border areas, were enlisted specifically because they could travel to and from Burma and tap into existing networks of information there without attracting undue attention from the Burmese authorities (Thawisak, 2520 [1987]: 26).

The kong Mon was eventually disbanded under King Chulalongkorn because the threat of war with the Burmese was relatively low by the 1880s. In addition, the costs of keeping the unit operational became too expensive. As such, the kong Mon was dissolved and the Mon informants were transferred to regular police posts in the kong trawaen after 1892 (NA R5-6 (PL): 20-21).

Administrative Reform and Detection

The use of secret informants, as suggested above, was not intended to eliminate or control the problem of rumors. In fact, secret informants were part of the informal networks that created rumors in the first place. The government was itself, then, just one part of a larger network of information. As the kingdom moved towards the turn of the nineteenth century, however, incidents of crime increased dramatically, making the task of gathering information even more critical. The central government, frustrated with the inability of local officials to ensure peace and safety, thus began to look for alternative methods for collecting intelligence. One strategy was to create an organized 'detective' unit with the sole responsibility of collecting information about crime. The following subsections outline the development of this unit.

Kong Sort Naem (Detective Unit / กองสืบตแนม)

In the 1890s, an effort was made to standardize and increase the efficacy of the government's information gathering abilities through the creation of a formal police detective unit called the kong sort naem. This unit was proposed by A.J.A. Jardine, the British Inspector General of

Police on loan to Siam from British Burma, in 1890 as part of the general restructuring of the kong trawaen under King Chulalongkorn. The purpose of establishing a kong sort naem was to create a more reliable source of information than local village heads and district level officials, who were often in cahoots with local bandits (see Phirasak, 2551 [2008]). It was also an effort to free the state from relying on gangsters and criminals for information.

In the beginning, Jardine wanted one or two officers from the kong sort naem located in each tambon (District / ตำบล) to act as a local informant. For this unit, officers who showed a good understanding of the rules and regulations of the police and who were believed to be trustworthy and reliable were chosen from the kong trawaen to work in the kong sort naem, which was put under the command of the krom kong tai suan thot luang (Major Crime Investigation Department / กรมกองใต้สวนโทษหลวง) (NA R5 N 8.1/1). The officer would report to either the local nai amphur (District Leader / นายอำเภอ) or phon trawaen (Policeman / พลตระเวน) and would receive a salary of between 15-20 baht per month (NA R5 N 8.1/1). The unit started off small, as Jardine's plan was implemented only on a trial basis and in a few tambon in Bangkok. Over time, the program was expanded to other tambon in Bangkok and became its own department. Because it was difficult to tell who was an authorized informant of the government and who was a criminal, officers carrying out undercover duties were issued a document with an official state seal and the signature of the chief officer of the kong trawaen to prove their identity if necessary (NA R5 N 8.1/47).

In 1899, Jardine asked for permission to expand the kong sort naem and have it placed under his direct control. This suggestion was not approved because it was felt that the unit was not showing any positive results (NA R5 N 8.2 ก/6). The main problem in setting up an investigative police unit was the difficulty in finding trustworthy and capable

men. Despite the problems faced by the detective unit, the kong sort naem did continue to operate. However, they did less investigative work as their duties shifted to include the registration of Chinese secret society members, prostitutes, and pawnshops (Thawisak, 2521 (1987): 267).

Kong Phiset (Special Branch / กองพิเศษ)

In 1902, after Jardine returned to India at the end of his term in Siam, Eric St. John Lawson, another British police officer from British Burma, took over as the head of the kong trawaen. Lawson held the post for twelve years, “during which time many improvements, extensions, and changes were made. Among the more important of them was founding of the Special Branch, an institution very much of the nature of the London Criminal Investigation Department, the introduction of the system of identification by finger prints, and the opening of schools for the training of both officers and men. He also published a police manual in Siamese and English, which filled a long-felt want” (Forty, 1967: 34).

Lawson felt that this new Special Branch, a detective unit along the lines of that found at New Scotland Yard in England, was critical to fighting crime because it was necessary to have good information. To get it the police had to be able to tap into the informal networks of information that ran throughout the kingdom.

Lawson’s proposal for the kong phiset was approved on 10 May 1902. The unit’s responsibilities included investigation, especially in complex or mysterious cases beyond the ability of local civil officials (e.g. the nai amphur) or police to solve. The unit could also investigate and compile reports for sending a case to trial. In 1903, Lawson reported that the Special Branch was composed of one assistant superintendent of police, one chief inspector, six inspectors, four head constables, eighteen sergeants, and ninety-one constables. In addition to the investigation of complicated criminal cases, the Special Branch supervised the operations

of the pawn-shops, the enforcement of the Pawn-brokers law, and the arrest of professional criminals (NA NR5 N/102: 19).

Tamruat Phuban (Criminal Investigation Division / ตำรวจภูบาล)

While the Special Branch was part of the metropolitan police and operated mainly in Bangkok, a similar detective unit was proposed for the provinces, where banditry posed an increasingly difficult and dangerous problem. In 1904, at a meeting of superintendent commissioners (ข้าหลวงเทศาภิบาล) under the Ministry of Interior, a proposal to create a ‘secret police’ throughout the provinces was suggested “which would strengthen the commune and village elders’ efforts to maintain law and order in the countryside” (Tej, 1968: 224). This suggestion was rejected on the grounds that men recruited to be secret police would themselves likely become thugs and bandits (Tej, 1968: 224).⁵ Two years later, Prince Damrong, then Minister of Interior, authorized plain-clothes policemen that he called yokrabat tamruat phuthon (provincial police detective / ยกกระบัตตำรวจภูธร) to secretly collect information on ‘thugs, bandits, and receivers of stolen goods’ in monthon Nakhon Chaisi (Thesaphiban Journal, 4.22 (1908): 143).

This unit proved a success, leading Prince Damrong to expand the reach of the unit by setting up the tamruat phuban as a sort of criminal investigative unit (CID) or krom nak sup (กรมนักสืบ) in September 1913 (Damrong, 2002: 62). This unit was placed within the krom tamruat phuthon, which was then still separate from the metropolitan constabulary operating in Bangkok under the Ministry of Local Government (กระทรวงนครบาล).⁶

The tamruat phuban was intended at first to help the tamruat phuthon investigate crime through the use of new, ‘scientific’ methods. This unit operated for two years

⁵ This fear may have stemmed from the fact that local leaders including kamnan, phuyaiaban, and police often cooperated with bandits to perpetrate crimes. See Phirasak (2008).

before it was disbanded in October of 1915 as part of the reorganization of the police under the Ministry of Local Government. Damrong noted that part of the unit's failure was because there were no qualified teachers to instruct officers (Damrong, 2002: 62).

Despite being disbanded, talk of setting up a permanent undercover police unit continued. In 1918, for example, the idea of setting up a secret police within the *krom tamruat phuthon* and procedures for a reforming the police investigation unit were mooted in the department and within the Ministry of Local Administration. In a letter to the Minister of Local Government dated 13 February 1919, Lawson, who was exploring the possibility of creating a new secret police unit in Siam, described the workings of the British secret police as a possible model (NA R6 N 4.1/2).

Nothing happened immediately and the old *kong phiset* continued to operate. Then, in the late 1920s, talk of setting up a new secret police unit gained steam. On 16 May 1928, a letter from Prince Boriphat (สมเด็จพระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ เจ้าฟ้าบริพัตรสุขุมพันธุ์), then the Minister of Interior, to King Prajadiphok asked for approval to set up a *kong tamruat phuthon klang* (central investigative unit of provincial police /กองตำรวจภูธรกลาง) to help catch bandits in locations throughout the country (NA R7 MT 11/5). The reason put forth was that crime during the period was extremely high and was not limited to district boundaries. A report dated 15 May 1928 by Luang Phraya Phetinthara (หลวงพระยาเพชรอินทรา), for example, showed that the number of murders and armed robberies in the five years before 1928 was 6,734 or 1,347 per year. The total population at that time, he noted, was about 10,000,000, making the murder rate 134 per 1,000,000 persons.

⁶ This ministry was established in 1892 as a way to facilitate the administration of Bangkok. It included the Port Health Department, the Bangkok Revenue Department, the Department of Bangkok Police, and the Sanitation Department. It was merged with the Ministry of Interior under King Vajiravudh.

By comparison, Burma in 1924 had a population of 13 million and only 817 cases of murder and armed robbery, or about 56 cases per one million persons. The prince thus asked for a special unit, a sort of Siamese 'FBI', to be established to tackle these high crime rates (NA R7 M 11/5).

Tamruat Phuban II

Behind the increased interest in fighting crime, the government was also concerned about the number of rumors with clear political implications circulating Bangkok. In the years leading up to the revolution of 1932, the kingdom was awash with news of potential coups and other disasters (Somphong, 2551 [2008]: 124). The local papers, which had mushroomed in number over the 1920s, were filled with editorials and news reports critical of the government's handling of crime and were also often critical of the monarchy (see for example Copeland: 1993). Rumors and a vocal press coupled with the global economic crisis of the time created a real sense of impending doom. As such, the *tamruat phuban* was resuscitated by Prince Damrong, this time under King Prajadiphok, so that in 1928, two new investigative units of police, the aforementioned *tamruat phuthon klang* and a new *tamruat phuban*, were created. The *tamruat phuthon klang*, as mentioned above, had the power to investigate criminal cases in and outside of Bangkok, including issuing warrants and making searches and seizures.

The new *tamruat phuban*, on the other hand, had a mandate that extended beyond fighting 'ordinary' crimes. It was a unit designed especially to gather, keep, and disseminate information with political import for the government. The *tamruat phuban* was organized into six divisions: the *kong withiyakan* (กองวิทยาการ) or the science section, the *phanaek prathutsakam* (แผนกประทุษกรรม) or criminal records division, the *kong prap pram* (กองปราบปราม) or the crime suppression division, the *kong ekasan kan muang* (กองเอกสารการเมือง) or the political documents section,

the kong ekasan nangsu phim (กองเอกสารหนังสือพิมพ์) or newspaper section, and the kong thabian phim lai niu mu (กองทะเบียนพิมพ์ลายนิ้วมือ) or fingerprint division (Somphong, 2008: 125). The kong ekasan kan muang, which investigated political matters and communists, and the kong ekasan nangsu phim, which sifted through newspapers and other documents for political news, were the first divisions of the police dedicated solely to the detection of political crimes, signaling a clear change in the mission of the state's new detectives.

In one of its first, and perhaps most critical, missions, the reestablished tamruat phuban, under the leadership of French-trained criminologist Mom Chao Wongnirachon Thewakun (หม่อมเจ้า วงศ์นิรชร เทวกุล), sent out a mole to investigate rumors about a possible coup. This mole was successful in obtaining information on the identity of the plot's leaders. Mom Chao Wongnirachon Thewakun and the director-general of the tamruat phuthon at the time, Phraya Athikonprakat (พระยา อธิกรณ์ประกาศ), then notified the Prince Boriphat, who reportedly did not believe that the coup makers could successfully pull off their plans. He subsequently asked that the investigation be stopped (Somphong, 2008: 125-6). On 24 June 1932, the rumors proved quite true.

Tamruat Santiban (Special Branch | ตำรวจสันติบาล)

Soon after the revolution, the old police force was purged of its former leaders and restructured under the name krom tamruat (police department | กรมตำรวจ) with one director-general in command. The krom tamruat was divided into four main divisions: the kong kam kap (central command | กองกำกับ) or the central command division, the tamruat nakhonban (metropolitan police | ตำรวจนครบาล) or 'metropolitan police,' the tamruat phuthon, and the tamruat santiban. The tamruat santiban had the duty to help both the tamruat nakhonban and the tamruat phuthon. The new krom tamruat was put under the control of the Ministry of Interior.

The tamruat santiban was the new investigative unit created to take over from the tamruat phuthon klang and the tamruat phuban, both of which were dissolved after the revolution and replaced by the new tamruat santiban. The tamruat santiban, located at Tha Tien along the Chao Phraya River, consisted of four units: the kong sup suan prap pram (crime investigation and prevention division | กองสืบสวนปราบปราม), which was in charge of crime prevention and investigation both in and outside of Bangkok, the kong sup ratchakan lap (secret investigation division | กองสืบราชการลับ), which kept tabs on political matters, the kong withiyakan (science department | กองวิทยาการ), which was responsible for dealing with fingerprints, criminal records, checking evidence, describing missing items, and issuing notices related to criminal suspects, and the kong tamruat saphasamit (excise tax police | กองตำรวจสรรพสามิต) (Somphong, 2008: 127). Like the tamruat phuban that came before it, the tamruat santiban was thus a political as well as a criminal investigation unit. Its purpose, like that of various detective units before it, was to tap into the informal networks of information throughout the kingdom in an attempt to harness and control the power of the rumor and gossip.

Reform and Knowledge

What was different between older detective units such as the kong Mon and kong phiset and the more recent tamruat phuban and tamruat santiban? The preceding outline of responsibilities and organization of the respective detective units hint at several key differences. First, in addition to the expansion of their mission from fighting ordinary crime to monitoring political intelligence, several procedural and conceptual changes took place. Namely, police detectives began in the early twentieth century to move away from solely relying on spies and local informants to focusing on paper-based, documentary and 'science-centered' methods of investigation.

Transplanting techniques for criminal detection from Europe and America to Siam, top police officers and government officials in the Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Interior saw the potential, as did much the rest of the world, in these new, 'modern' investigative methods including chemical analysis, ballistics studies, and medical autopsies of dead bodies on the one hand and documentation and records-based techniques for generating information about crime and criminals on the other. In the reigns of Kings Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh, however, scientific methods of crime investigation were hardly common place. In fact, the police at the time lacked trained officers and proper equipment (Damrong, 2002: 62). Many officers could not even read or write, let alone conduct a chemical analysis (NA R6 N 4.1/56). And while a fingerprint division was set up in the police department as early as 1902, the first use of fingerprint identification at a crime scene reportedly did not occur until 1931 (Luang Wisitwithayakan | หลวงพิสิฐวิทยาการ 1931: 235).⁷ Photographers and cameras were also hard to come by, as the police did not have trained photographers or equipment until 1932, when a photography unit was set up in the tamruat santiban (NA R6 N 4.1/2).

Despite these shortcomings, the practices of the police were indeed changing, albeit in a different way than might be expected. That is, they began to put information on paper. Intelligence they collected from talking to locals (and later by reading newspapers) became 'modern' knowledge by the simple act of writing (and later typing) it out in daily record books or on standardized police forms. Prince Damrong, for example, was constantly reminding officials in the Ministry of Interior to record and report their activities when he was head of that ministry. He published crime reports with statistics in the Ministry of Interior's journal, *Thesaphiban* (เทศภิบาล),

⁷ A fingerprint identification section had been set up prior to 1902 in the prisons department to keep records of prisoners' fingerprints.

as an example to provincial governors (*Thesaphiban Journal*, 10:56 (1910): 89-90, 92, 118). He was also keen to standardize these reports and thus published official forms for use by civil servants (*Thesaphiban Journal*, 26:139 (1922): 67).

For the police and the government, then, the problem of rumors could be bypassed (in theory at least) by getting them out of uncontrolled, informal networks and turning them into controllable documents. This new paper-based knowledge could then be kept in a central police archive in Bangkok accessible by agents of the state. It is no coincidence, then, that the Criminal Records Office (CRO) was first created and placed under the control of the tamruat phuban and later the tamruat santiban since not only did a central archive of criminal records help the police fight ordinary crime, it was essential for controlling unsanctioned information, the chosen weapon of political threats. This 'formalization' of knowledge can be seen, therefore, as a key strategy of the government in its drive to reform the administration of the kingdom and centralize its authority over a physically and epistemologically diverse country.

The process of 'formalization' of knowledge was, of course, not smooth. Police at the time were often conscripts, sometimes poorly trained, and usually underpaid. Thus, they did not always fill out forms or record events properly. Sometimes they would not record a complaint at all to avoid having to do work. Some critics may argue this remains the case today. The point here, however, is that the administrative reforms of the late nineteenth century included a number of new knowledge practices that despite problems in implementation, did add a new dimension to what knowledge actually was and how it could be created and controlled.

Conclusion

From the discussion outlined above, it can be seen that the role of police detectives and other investigative agents of the state was to infiltrate and control informal

networks of information, first to fight crime, then to fight political opponents. The formalization of the detective process and of information networks that emerged as part of the centralization efforts of King Chulalongkorn transformed into a method of political importance in the run up to the revolution of 1932. Today the tamruat santiban is well established. The information they gather is integral to the operation of the bureaucratic polity whose power derives from its ability to successfully ride the waves of information that it could never truly stamp out. The ability to gather and use information, and thus 'knowledge,' can therefore be seen as critical in efforts to consolidate central power over the provinces and can be said to be an important framework through which to understand the history of Siam at the time.

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