

KHWANMUANG CHANTAROCHANEE : ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCES DURING THE EARLY RATANAKOSIN PERIOD (1782-1851). THESIS ADVISOR : DR.DHIRAVAT NA POMBEJRA, Ph.D. 388 PP.

This thesis studies economic change in the northern provinces during the early Ratanakosin Period (1782-1851) concentrating on the provinces of Phitsanulok, Phichai, Sukhothai, Sawankhalok, Phichit, Phetchabun, Tak, Kamphaengphet, and Nakhon Sawan. Emphasis is placed on the trading policies of the central government which affected economic change in the northern provinces during this period, both in the suai collection system and the tax farming system.

Economic change in the northern provinces was influenced by the government's trading activities, notably the trade in forest produce which flourished from the reign of King Rama I till the early part of King Rama III's reign (1782-1836). This trade affected the way the government collected suai at a time when tax farming became more important as the state began to use Chinese to collect taxes. The growing role of the Chinese in the taxfarming system affected the interests of the local elites, especially as goods previously collected as suai were now taxed instead. The local elites reacted in two different ways : resistance and adaptation.

At the same time the collection of suai in kind changed increasingly to collection of suai in cash, which in turn offered opportunities for the phrai to work for a living independently. Thus some of them sought to break free from government control, especially after 1839 when Siam began to export more agricultural products, rather than forest produce. More and more phrai therefore became employees in the agricultural sector in the lower Chao Phraya River basin. In 1845 the state tried to stem the exodus to phrai by allowing suai to be paid in silver cash a move which gave phrai a chance to accumulate economic wealth from rice farming, tobacco, sugarcane and cotton growing, and from selling forest produce. The phrai thus began to break free from the control of their superiors in the corvée system.

Economic change in the northern provinces in the early Ratanakosin Period can be said therefore to present a different picture from the view that the Thai economy only began to change after the signing of the Bowring treaty.