THE THALANG LETTERS, 1773-94: 
POLITICAL ASPECTS AND THE TRADE IN ARMS 

By E. H. S. Simmonds

Colonel Low mentioned the schemes of Francis Light and James Scott for a British occupation of Thalang or Salang (Junk Ceylon) in Logan’s Journal in 1849, and, since then, some attention has been paid to the official sources in English on this subject. Gerini comments on ‘the silence of the local annals about such land-grabbing schemes on the part of the British’. He points out that the only reference to Light in Siamese chronicles is that in the Annals of Ayuthaya for 1776 where Light, already described as governor of Ko Mak (Penang) because this, like most chronicles, was written up at a later date, is said to have sent 1,400 flint-lock muskets and certain presents to the King of Siam.

The forwarding in 1785 of a letter in Siamese from Pia Pimon (Phya Phimon), governor of the island of Thalang, to Lord George Macartney in Calcutta offers a hint that material in Siamese on the question existed. Examination of a set of letters written in Siamese by various persons on Thalang to Francis Light, preserved by Marsden, provides further information on matters of politics and trade in which the first governor of Penang was concerned both before and after his assumption of authority on that island.

Through the Thalang letters the development of various aspects of Light’s connexion with the island can be traced. Political affairs, trade, and personal relationships are referred to. The letters represent, of course, only one side of the correspondence and even this is probably incomplete. The history of Thalang at this period is not well documented, especially on the Siamese side,

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1 An account of the origin and progress of the British colonies in the Straits of Malacca, Journal of the Indian Archipelago, ed. Logan, III, 10, 1849, 600.
2 The most complete accounts are to be found in: Arnold Wright and Thomas Reid, The Malay Peninsula, London, 1912; and H. P. Clodd, Malaya’s first British pioneer: the life of Francis Light, London, Luzac, 1948, ch. iii, ‘Light on Junk Ceylon’, 24–42.
4 The passage quoted by Gerini occurs in Phongsawadan Phraratchakatlekha, Bangkok, 1952, IV, 143 (year c.s. 1138 = a.d. 1776). In this article reference is made to this work (PP) in preference to the original edition of the Ru’ang Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Kao (Annals of Ayuthaya) printed by Bradley in Bangkok, 1863, because of the rarity of the latter. PP differs mainly in the orthography which has been adjusted therein to suit modern Bangkok tastes. It contains a supplement for the years 1790–1809 compiled by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab.
5 See below p. 595, n. 1.
6 The Thalang letters. A set of 59 MS. letters in Siamese, Marsden Collection, 12157A, Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. While this article was in the press, the writer received ‘Siamese documents concerning Captain Francis Light’, by Kachorn Sukhabanij in K.G. Tregonning (ed.), Papers on Malayan history, Singapore, 1962, 1–9, in which reference is made to several of the Thalang letters. Mr. Kachorn Sukhabanij suggests that the title ‘Phyaratchakapitan’ (see below, letter no. 30) was conferred on Light by King Taksin in 1778.
and these letters by no means resolve all the uncertainties and ambiguities, but, taken in conjunction with the chronicles and other sources, they add materially to existing knowledge.

This article is mainly concerned with the information to be gleaned from the letters about Light's part in the political history of the island and with an important corollary, the provision of arms and ammunition both for use locally and for the royal government at Bangkok.

THE YEARS 1773–80

The early letters illustrate Light's role as a trader. The 12 dated letters between 1773 and 1780 are proposals or contracts for the purchase of rice and trade goods, loan agreements, bonds, and guarantees. Light had probably visited Thalang as early as 1771. In a letter to the Hon. John Macpherson, 23 January 1786, he makes the claim that he has traded among the Malays and Siamese for 16 years.

In 1772 Monckton reported that Light went to settle in Thalang in May 1772 as a private trader. This was after the failure of his early scheme to establish a settlement in Kedah. He was well received by the governor and people of the island but found himself in difficulties later that year when trouble broke out as a result of local resistance to a force sent by the King of Siam to depose the governor. This struggle may have centred round the appointment of Khang Seng, a man sent from the capital. As will be seen, the government of Thalang was very much a family business. Light said then, according to Monckton, that the British could have had the island on any terms if a force had been sent. Monckton merely sent a ship to take Light off the island if he felt it necessary to leave.

Thus it is clear that Light's trading activities had led him towards political involvement as early as 1772. Conditions in Siam were extremely unsettled at this time following the destruction of Ayuthaya by the Burmese in 1767 and the continuing threat from them to the provinces of the peninsula. When pressing the case for Company occupation Light was concerned about the

1 Thalang letters nos. 3, 10, 16, 20, 24, 26, 27, 32, 38–40, 49, and 14 undated, 25(?), 50(?).
2 Light to Lord Cornwallis, 18 June 1787, Council Minutes, 27 July 1787, India Office Library, Straits Settlements Consultations, II.
3 Light to Macpherson, 23 January 1786, postscript to letter from Governor-General to Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, 26 January 1786, India Office Library, Bengal Secret Letters, xxiv.
5 The Siamese chronicles record an expedition, presumably led by the King, against the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat, who claimed jurisdiction over Thalang, in 1768–70. PP, IV, 16–22. Thalang may have been affected by the aftermath of this campaign.
6 Phongsawadan Mu‘ang Thalang, ed. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, Prachum phongsawadan, II, Bangkok, 1914. This was compiled locally in 1841. Gerini had access to a similar text which he prints and translates, op. cit., 238–47. The Damrong text is better and fuller.
general threat of the Dutch in the area and also the possibility of French intrigue for trading rights with the Burmese who claimed jurisdiction over the coast as far south as Thalang.¹

Between 1773 and 1780 conditions were evidently settled enough for Light to carry on trading. On 22 September 1777 Light wrote to Calcutta that he had had conversations with the King of Siam who expressed a strong desire to cultivate a friendship with the Company.² Koenig (March 1779) confirms Light's connexion with the island at this time.³ He arrived there in Light's ship, the Bristol. Koenig does not state that Light resided on the island but the latter makes this claim for himself for 1780:

'I look upon part of this island to be my property, it was granted by their own free will, the ground cleared at my own expense, and tho' unjustly driven off I think myself at liberty to resume it whenever I have power.'⁴ It is interesting that there is a gap in the continuity of the letters at this point, from 1780 to 1784.⁵ The reasons for Light's apparent exclusion are not known but a hint of trouble brewing is given by Koenig in his diary entry for 26 June 1779:

'The atmosphere on land was rather unsafe for Europeans during the last days, on account of some quarrels between some English captains and the King. I was therefore called back to the ship.'⁶

Letter no. 31 may bear on this subject. The letter, written on 3 January 1788 by Phya Thukkharat, acting governor [of Thalang?], is an apology to Light in the name of the King (Rama I) for a swindle carried out when Phya Tak Sin was king (1768–82) by a royal representative, Phya Thammattrailok.⁷ The official said that the culprits had been punished and that the King wished to see Light on political matters.

On Thalang Light developed friendly relations with the governor, Phya Phimon. This is the Pee Pimont named by Forrest as being governor in 1784.⁸ He is mentioned in local records, and by Forrest, as a former governor of Kra.⁹

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¹ e.g. letter from Light to Andrew Ross, Fort St. George, 18 March 1784, Straits Settlements Consultations, i. For French intrigues at this period see D. G. E. Hall, Michael Symes: Journal of his second embassy to the Court of Ava in 1802, London, 1955, introduction, pp. xxix–xxxv.
² Clodd, op. cit., 29.
³ An English translation of Koenig's Danish MS (British Museum) is given in Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, No. 26, 1894, 59–201, and No. 27, 1894, 57–133; quoted by Gerini, op. cit., 152–61.
⁴ Clodd, op. cit., 31.
⁵ Light was captured and held by the French off the coast of India in 1782, and Scott by the Dutch in 1784; see Clodd, op. cit., 33–5.
⁶ Gerini, op. cit., 159.
⁷ Pee Tukkerat is mentioned by Thomas Forrest in A voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago, London, 1792, quoted by Gerini, op. cit., 159, also see below, p. 604. Phya Thammatrailok, see below, p. 602.
⁸ Gerini, op. cit., 159.
⁹ Phongsawadan Mu'ang Thalang, 57, translation by Gerini, op. cit., 239, and Forrest quoted by Gerini, 169.
It was his letter that Scott forwarded to Macartney in 1785. Gerini supposed, incorrectly, that he was transferred to Thalang soon after the accession of Rama I in 1782 and that he married the Lady Čhan of Thalang about 1786. Letter no. 3 (5 August 1777) shows that Phya Phimon was already governor during the reign of Tak Sin. The Phatthalung Chronicle supports this. It states that he was made governor of Phatthalung by the ruler of Nakhon Si Thammarat (the immediate overlord) before 1768. He governed Phatthalung for two years only and this was at a time when he was temporarily estranged from Lady Čhan. In 1768 he fled to Patani when Tak Sin removed his patron at Nakhon Si Thammarat. It is likely that his exile was merely temporary and that on or soon after his return he became governor of Thalang.

Letter no. 3, 5 August, 1777, makes it clear that Light was already engaged in the arms trade, as indicated by the chronicle entry for 1776:

\'From Than Phya Surintharacha and Phya Phimon Qya, given to Captain Bangken.\' With reference to Captain Bangken's carrying 490 guns, type chat turamat, for disposal at Thalang, at 6 guns per phara of tin, that is 81 phara, 5 phaen, 3½ bat—these 490 guns have been received. As for the tin, Captain Bangken said he was going to Malacca first and thereafter he would return for it. When he comes back I will send tin to the value of the guns according to this contract . . . . Sealed Tuesday, 2nd day waxing of the ninth moon, year of the cock, 9th of the decade, 1139 sakarat'.

Letter no. 26, 11 July 1777, provides the information that guns for Bangkok were entering through Thalang. At this time both Tavoy and Mergui, normally more important trading ports, were occupied by the Burmese and thus denied to the Siamese as ports of entry.

\'Letter given to Captain Mangku [Buncle?]. Captain Lek [Light] sent Captain Mangku to obtain tin—an advance of 100 phara against the value of 926 guns [?] and asked him to take these 926 guns to Bangkok.

Now Captain Mangku has kindly offered to take the guns and silk cloth which the governor and council have arranged to buy—900 chat čheramat and 926 chat sutan, together 1,826 guns, and 136 phan (bolts) of silk cloth.

1 James Scott to Lord George Macartney, 28 October 1785, Minutes of a Council at Fort William, 2 March 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II, fols. 1–29. Scott says that he attaches a translate [sic] but the matter and style of the alleged translation, which sets out detailed terms for establishing a settlement on Thalang, suggests rather a compilation by Scott. The letter itself has not been traced.
2 Gerini, op. cit., 182.
3 Phongsawadan Mu'ang Phatthalung, Prachum phongsawadan, xv, Bangkok, 1920, 19. The marriage probably took place between 1754 and 1766.
4 Probably Captain John Buncle mentioned as an associate of Light and Scott in a letter from Light to Calcutta, 3 April 1780. Phya Surintharacha may be the Pee Siring of Forrest, see Gerini, op. cit., 170.
5 Játuramat also čtteramat < čtjeti ‘kind, type’ + čhe Amat or čhe Ramat—a Malay name.
6 'A kind of musket in great esteem among the Siamese', S. J. Pellegoi, Dictionarium linguae Thai, Paris, 1854, 263. Sutan, also, may be a term of Malay origin. A variant of this type is used for sultan on the west coast of Sumatra, see below p. 612. The writer is indebted to his colleagues Mr. J. C. Bottoms and Mr. Kassim Ahmad for information on Malay terms in the letters.
He has in fact already taken them to Bangkok. The tin to the value of the guns and cloth which the governor and council have bought has been given to the owners of the guns and cloth at Thalang according to the value stated above. Dated Friday, 7th day waxing of the second 8th moon, year of the cock, 9th of the decade.'

Light's first attempt to create a Company settlement on Thalang was made in 1780. His optimism that the islanders would have welcomed a British settlement arose perhaps from his awareness of the feeling of isolation which the officials and people of Thalang and of the peninsular provinces generally must have had in the troubled years of Tak Sin's reign. There could have been little fear of or confidence in the central authority in the face of Burmese and Malay intrusions. In such circumstances the rulers of tributary states, or even provincial officials appointed by the central government, who at this time were often members of local families, might well have merited, sometimes, the traditional accusation made by Siamese kings that they were 'birds with two heads', that is, rulers who offered allegiance not only to the King but also elsewhere. The possibility of European intervention, especially if directed by men like Light and Scott, who were personally well known, could have seemed an insurance against the schemes of Asian neighbours. The desire for local autonomy was also a motive. This was the probable cause of the initial resistance to Tak Sin's attempt to reimpose central control.

At a date unspecified but probably early in Tak Sin's reign, Thalang had suffered a Malay invasion and the Laksamana of Kedah instituted an oppressive rule there for a short period. In a letter to Lord Cornwallis, Light described the skilfully organized revolt by which the local Siamese regained control of the island. He commented: 'The Laxamana constantly regretted the loss of this Island and offered me 8000 men when it was proposed to Mr. Hastings to establish a settlement there'. This refers to the proposals of 1780 which Light stated had been sanctioned by Warren Hastings. The funds were to be provided by subscription from interested merchants, and vessels and troops dispatched by the Company. The imminent outbreak of hostilities between the British and French prevented the execution of the design.

The Burmese Attack and Further Annexation Plans, 1785-7

In 1784 Forrest, who had been sent to survey the coast, said that Phya Phimon would willingly throw off his dependence on Siam if he could get support. The immediate cause of irritation was a tin duty of 25 per cent imposed

1 If the undated events in the Thalang annals are set down in chronological order, which is not necessarily always the case, this invasion occurred between the governorship of At, a son of a former local chief, who ruled after the official from Bangkok had come to the island, and the arrival there of Phya Phimon; Phongsawadan Mu'ang Thalang, 57 (translation Gerini, op. cit., 239).

2 In Light to Cornwallis, 18 June 1787, Council Minutes, 27 July 1787, Straits Settlements Consultations, ii.
by the central government. Forrest probably got his information from Scott who, he said, was at Tha Ru'a on Thalang at that time. Forrest adds significantly: 'How far his having associates in government might prevent such an attempt, I cannot say, possibly their appointment is with that very intention by the despots of Siam . . .'.

Light had reason for continued optimism for he 'still had the same influence with the Governor of Salong'. Scott had his eye firmly fixed on the profit to be obtained from a development of Thalang's tin and birds' nests industries. On 28 October 1785 he wrote at length to Lord George Macartney recommending the occupation of Thalang by February 1786. He thought that French aid would be given to Annam which would, in consequence, join with Burma in a concerted attack on Siam in the dry season of 1785–6. This would result in the entry of France upon the coast, a contingency to be avoided. On the other hand, if Phya Phimon were to allow the establishment of a Company settlement which, according to Scott, he was willing to do, a weakened Siam would not be able to respond immediately. Bangkok would not hear the news until April and then, since nothing could be done during the rains, it would be eight months before the King could send a force to the area. In setting out proposed terms for a political agreement with Phya Phimon, Scott said, somewhat unscrupulously:

'in order to enable him to put himself into a state of defence [against Bangkok] without suspicion I have improved the rumour of a Burmese War and Invasion against which he is now providing as I offered my aid to repel this invasion they mean to give me people to construct a fort which shall be sufficiently strong to serve as a place of arms and have Cajan lodging for 3–400 men. The Burman invasion is to continue the ostensible course of preparations until Febry or until a force arrives from Bengal'.

The Burmese invasion was no mere rumour. Scott himself reported that the van of their fleet appeared off Tha Ru'a on 8 February when he sailed for Tranquebar. He said that Phya Phimon had died at the beginning of December 1785. Light confirms this date and states that the attack was carried out by '3000 of the Barmar army in 80 large Prows'. The date and force total is confirmed by the Siamese chronicle for the year which puts the attack on Thalang in perspective. The main Burmese effort was made in the

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1 Gerini, op. cit., 173.
2 ibid., 175.
3 Light to Cornwallis, in Council Minutes, 27 July 1787 (referring to 1785), Straits Settlements Consultations, II.
4 Scott to Macartney, 28 October 1785, Council Minutes, 2 March 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II.
5 Scott to Governor-General, 31 March 1786, Council Minutes, 2 May 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II, fols. 95–7.
6 Light to Governor-General, 3 April 1786, Council Minutes, 6 April 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II, fols. 83–5.
7 PP, iv, 235–70.
north and towards Ayuthaya with a strong ancillary attack from Martaban across the Three Pagodas pass to Kan-chanaburi and Ratchaburi. Another land force moved across from Mergui and down the east coast of the peninsula, through Chaiya and Chumphon, to Nakhon Si Thammarat. The ruler of that place and his family fled because they believed a rumour that Bangkok had been captured. Nakhon Si Thammarat fell.

The force sent against Thalang came from Mergui. The Yewun, the Burmese naval commander, took Takua Pa and Takua Thung. The Kinwun Mingyi attacked Thalang, a few miles further south.¹ The widow of Phya Phimon and her sister, with the co-operation of the governor’s council, formed two strongholds (see Scott’s remarks above) and resisted the Burmese for a month. At the end of that time the invaders found themselves short of food supplies and retired without taking the place.² The heroism of these two women was duly rewarded by the King of Siam (Rama I) who granted them titles and elevated a daughter of the widow to be one of his palace ladies. She later bore him a girl-child.³

The dated Thalang letters for this period number 20.⁴ Letter no. 37, written on 6 December 1785 by Lady Chan, the wife of Phya Phimon, forecast the attack on Thalang:

‘Letter from Than Phu Ying [title of wife of high official] to Latok [for Dato’, a Malay title applied to Light in this correspondence]. I have received your letter and I would have taken it to the governor of Thalang to apprise him of its contents, but he is very ill. You say that your trading at Thalang has shown a great loss over a long period. I appreciate your difficulties and indeed it is because you have been so kind to me that you have extravagantly wasted all your profit and caused yourself this trouble. Now I have heard that you are making ready the ship to leave and we have received news that the Burmese are coming to attack Thalang and the governor is very ill. If the Burmese come I must depend on you as a post to cling to. As for the tin to the value of the cloth, the governor is still very ill and I have not yet consulted him. Once he is a little better I will call his attention to the matter ....

Also the men set to guard the town and the fort are short of opium. Please have Captain Iksakat [Scott] bring up nine or ten thaen.⁵ And if you can come yourself please do so. Dispatched Tuesday, 5th day waxing of the 1st moon, year of the small snake, seventh of the decade ‘.

¹ The Burmese title signifies ‘Minister of Customs’.
² PP, iv, 265–6.
³ See genealogical table, on p. 614.
⁴ Nos. 6, 11, 12, 17, 18, 21, 22, 28, 30, 31, 34, 35, 37, 43–47, 51, 55, and nos. 2, 7, 23 undated.
⁵ Probably a Southern Thai variant of Central Thai thaeng, see text, p. 616. This term is not a recognized weight or measure. It may mean a small cake of opium. Opium in bulk was broken down at Penang into cakes of approx. 3 lb. 5¼ oz.; Council Minutes, 6 November 1792, Straits Settlements Consultations, iv.
Letter no. 23 (undated) from Mae Prang, a daughter of the Than Phu Ying, was written about this time.

'... I shall depend on you as a protector. Now, with the Čhao Khun [term of reference for the governor] dead, I see nobody but you in his place...

Letters nos. 37 and 23 both refer to the impending departure of Light. Letter no. 51, dated 28 November 1785, from the Yokrabat, indicates that Light was sailing for Bengal. He was asked to obtain cloth of a special pattern for the King. Letter no. 45 states that Light was in Bengal when the Burmese attacked. This was indeed the case for he had gone there to confer with the Council on the question of establishing a settlement at Penang, or Thalang, or at both places.

Although Scott reported that the Burmese army appeared off Kra on 20 January 1786 some raiding forces seem to have been in the vicinity at an earlier date. Letter no. 46, dated Wednesday, 14th day waning of the 12th moon, year of the small snake, seventh of the decade (31 November 1785) from Phra Ratchikisongkhram, probably an official of Takua Pa, makes this clear:

'... When I was at Pak Phra a messenger from Takua Pa told me that the Burmese were there causing trouble, so I have gone back to Takua Pa. When I have organized the place I shall return to meet you'.

The writer wanted a cure for ear trouble which Light was getting for him. Since Light was in the district at that time, letters nos 23, 37, 46, and 51 were probably sent to his ship off Thalang.

Letter no. 21, dated Saturday, 2nd day waxing of the 1st moon (3 December 1785), from an official of Takua Thung Bang Khli, on the mainland near Thalang, is an urgent request for 5 hap (666 lb. avoirdupois) of gunpowder.

Letter no. 30 (12 April 1786) comments on the battle of Thalang. The writer is Čhao Phya Surintharacha, Controller of Thalang-Bang Khli, all eight districts (mu'ang). This high official, a superintendent-general specially appointed by Bangkok, was thus already at his post of duty early in 1786.

'The letter of Than Čhao Phya Surintharacha, Government Superintendent of Thalang-Bang Khli, all the eight districts, to the Phya Ratchakapitan [Light]. On the occasion of the recent attack on Thalang by the Burmese, because of the great merit and protective power of His

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1 See genealogical table, on p. 614, Lady Chan.
2 The Yokrabat, usually third in rank in the province, was an official specially appointed by the central government for control purposes; see H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Ancient Siamese government and administration*, London, 1934. The Yokrabat was occasionally, though not usually, a local man.
3 Takua Pa lies some 50 air miles north of Thalang. Pak Phra is between the two.
4 This official was possibly Phra Wichit the Deaf; *Phongsawadan Mu'ang Thalang*, 65; Gerini, op. cit., 242.
5 On the eight districts see Gerini, op. cit., 170, 186–92, 245.
6 This official may be the same man, raised in rank, as the Phya Surintharacha of letter no. 3 above, see below pp. 608–10.
Majesty the King, our soldiers of Thalang were enabled to fight and hold up the Burmese for a period of one month. The Burmese suffered between 300 and 400 casualties, killed and wounded. They broke off the action and retired on Monday, 14th day waxing of the 4th moon in the year of the small snake, seventh of the decade' [13 March 1786] ...

Light was in Calcutta during the battle of Thalang and for some months afterwards, while the Governor-General in Council was considering the question of whether to establish a settlement on the coast of the peninsula and, if so, where. The relevant meeting of the Council was that of 2 March 1786 at which the Hon. John Macpherson presided. Scott's letter of 28 October 1785 is recorded in these minutes. He wrote in a very prolix and hectoring fashion which may well have irritated the Council. He suggested a speedy reply:

'... because in all fairness the Governor [Phya Phimon of Thalang] ought to have the chance to provide elsewhere.... On the 15th Febry 1786 should no news arrive from Bengal I mean to proceed to the Coast of Coromandel 1 to attempt fulfilling a promise I have given the Governor to assist him in his final Establishment should the hopes he entertains from the English fail'.

Apart from such implied threats, Scott appeared to be willing to saddle the Company with what might turn out to be a heavy political and military burden:

'... If the English Company will take on them the sovreignty of the Island Jan Salong and its dependencies and send a force to resist any future attempts from Siam ... He [the governor] will deliver them the Peaceable Possession of the Island '.

Scott, despite his optimism about the weakness of Siam, asked for a strong naval and military force. He wanted two heavily armed snows together with armed long-boats and rowing galleys, big guns for two forts, 100 European artillerymen with field pieces, artificers, and 500 sepoys. It is not surprising that the Company hesitated.

In recommending the settlement of Penang in a letter written on 23 January, a few days after his arrival from the Straits, Light wrote more moderately of Thalang. 2 He expressed the opinion that it could be taken with the same force and expense that would be required to occupy Penang, and mentioned the potential value of the tin industry. He made an appeal on behalf of the inhabitants:

'... the Inhabitants have for many years strongly solicited me to relieve them from the cruel oppression of Siam, and as they are capable of defending themselves, they most want a chief in whom they can confide, and an assurance that they shall enjoy a reasonable portion of that liberty to which all men are by nature and reason entitled '.

1 Meaning Tranquebar which was a Danish settlement at that time.
2 Forwarded as a postscript to a letter from the Governor-General to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, 26 January 1786, Bengal Secret Letters, xxiv. In this letter Light is spoken of highly.
Light, perhaps with his importunate associate Scott in mind, sent a 'postscript' communication to the Council on 15 February in which he said that when recommending the settlement of Penang he did not mean that Thalang should not be taken also.

The Council had called for a report from Mr. Joseph Price who wrote, on 23 February, that he preferred Penang because it lay right in the China track while Thalang was too far to the north. The position of Thalang placed it under the influence of the heavy gales of the south-west monsoon which did not affect Penang. Light was aware of this and had emphasized the better geographical position of Penang in communications to the Council. Price, following Light, thought that since Thalang could be occupied by the same force that went to Penang the idea of taking it should be borne in mind.

The Council decided in favour of establishing a settlement on Penang and in the minuted decision of 2 March and the final instructions to Light of 2 May no mention whatever was made of Thalang.

However, in correspondence between the Governor-General and the Court of Directors in London the following passage occurs:

'...I shall propose possession to be taken of the Ports and Islands offered to us by the King of Cudda [Kedah] and especially of Junk Ceylon, which is occupied by a separate people to the number of 50,000. These have offered Captain Light the Sovereign Command among them'.

The Court of Directors had evidently left the Governor-General with considerable freedom of action in the matter. He would have had their concurrence in establishing a settlement at either Penang or Junk Ceylon or at both places.

The over-playing of his hand by Scott may have been a factor in the Council's decision. There were sound naval reasons for preferring Penang but the possibility of continuing involvement with Siam if Thalang were taken may have been an influence not openly acknowledged. Events soon showed that Scott's view of the condition of Siam, whether this was believed or not, was over-optimistic. The success and speed with which Rama I repulsed the formidable Burmese invasion of 1785–6 was remarkable by any standards. Light himself found it difficult to ascribe this success to Siamese arms alone:

'...On a sudden their army disappeared; but beat by the Siamese or occasioned by a dissension among the Generals is uncertain...'.

Light, Scott, and the Sultan of Kedah were all surprised by the speed of recovery. To the last-named this surprise must have been particularly painful as he had been supplying the Burmese army with arms and ammunition, very possibly bought from Scott.

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1 Letter from Governor-General to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, 26 January 1786, quoted by Clodd, op. cit., 39.  
2 loc. cit.  
3 Light to Governor-General, 12 September 1786, Council Minutes, 9 October 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, ii, fol. 131.  
4 Light to Macpherson, 12 September 1786, Council Minutes, 13 December 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, ii, fol. 317. Light wrote, 'Last year [1785] the preparations of the Burmans were so great that the King of Queda expected the total destruction of the Siamese'.

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The high point of the Burmese attack in the south was reached when Nakhon Si Thammarat fell in January or early February 1786. Once the threat to the flank at Ratchaburi was disposed of, Rama I dispatched an army to the south under the ‘Second King’. Chumphon, Chaiya, and Nakhon Si Thammarat were recaptured and the army had reached and subdued Patani by September. During October the royal armies, having pacified the country and meted out punishment, returned to Bangkok.¹

The aftermath of the Burmese attack on Thalang was famine. Letter no. 30 appealed for rice:²

‘... at present the people of Takua Thung, Bang Khli are scattered abroad because of the destruction of their villages. The whole region is in disorder. The Burmese burnt much rice and it is in very short supply. There is insufficient to provide for the settlements until rice is available again from the fields. Please think of [the problems of] the royal government [here] and have the captain bring up the trading ship with merchandise and rice so that the officials may be able to distribute enough for the people to go on cultivating their fields... Dispatched: Wednesday, 14th day waxing of the 5th moon, year of the horse, eighth of the decade’ [12 April 1786]’.

A further letter (no. 45) of late September or October from the widow of Phya Phimon describes conditions on Thalang:³

‘The letter of Than Phu Ying to Than Phya Ratchakapitan Lek [Light] for information. Whereas you sent a letter by the master of a Tenasserim ship saying that when you were in Bengal you had received news that the Burmese had attacked Thalang and that you did not know whether the Burmese had taken Thalang or if I and my family had left, but that later on, having arrived at Sai [Kedah] you discovered that Thalang had not been destroyed by the Burmese and that I and my family were safe and that you were very relieved—I thank you for everything you said, I cannot thank you enough.

Because of the Burmese attacks on Thalang the district is in confusion at the present time. We are in great dearth of food.

I have organized the digging of tin at Takua Pa³ and have obtained some which has been used to purchase all the rice available at a high price.

When the Burmese came, Phya Thammatrailok summoned me to Pak Phra.⁴ I returned home when they captured Pak Phra.⁵ Those who guarded the place had gone away and left it and everything there had been looted. Now I am destitute, without anything.

¹ The Siamese chronicles give a detailed account of the Burmese invasion in the south and its aftermath; PP, rv, 262–72. ² See above, p. 599. ³ Perhaps ‘in the forest’, see text, p. 617. ⁴ An official of this name or title was appointed at Pak Phra on the accession of King Tak Sin. He was killed during the Burmese attack; Phongsawadan Mu’ang Thalang, 59, see Gerini, op. cit., 241. ⁵ On 4 February 1786 according to Scott.
Now that I know you have settled at Pulao Pinang I am very pleased, especially because when the Burmese came on the previous occasion you were in Bengal which is so far from Thalang that you could not come to and fro. Now that you are established at Pulao Pinang near to Thalang and since you were an old friend of His Excellency who died, I suppose I can place my reliance upon the benefits of your merit and wisdom [if the Burmese attack again].

[The letter continues with a request for rice to be sent up by sloop from Penang or Kedah in exchange for tin.] Dispatched: Thursday in the eleventh month, year of the horse, eighth of the decade.

The bearer of the letter was Captain ‘Linsin’. This was Lindsay, one of the signatories of the document establishing the Penang settlement on 11 August 1786, who was master of Light’s ship Speedwell. He had remained in the Straits when Light went to Bengal.

Letter no. 12, 1 October 1786, makes a more precise request for rice:

‘Letter from Ok Phra Phakdisiphichaisongkhram to Than Phya Ratchakapitan informing him that the people at Thalang are starving from want of rice. If you are sympathetic towards me and the people, out of your goodness have Captain Salat [Scott?] bring up two or three thousand gunnies [sacks] of rice for distribution to the people to save them from death.

When Captain Liki [Lindsay?] was sent by you with a ship to trade at Thalang he did not know the people and the business was unsuccessful.1 Dated Sunday, 9th day waxing of the 11th moon, year of the horse, eighth of the decade.’

Light made some response to these appeals though apparently not on the scale requested. In a letter to the Governor-General dated 25 November 1786 he reported:

‘The people of Junk Ceylon after expelling the Burmese are distressed by famine, and expect another attack this season. I have sent to the people of Junk Salong 500 bags of rice, in order not to lose entirely the goodwill of the islanders’.2

Letter no. 45 may imply that the Burmese were still in the area though no actual attack is mentioned in Siamese sources. However, Light, in the letter to the Governor-General dated 25 November 1786, quoting a letter from the Sultan of Kedah of the same date, says that the Sultan has been ordered by the King of Siam to defend Thalang against an expected sea-borne attack by the Burmese.3

Letter no. 45, with its mention of Light’s friendship with Phya Phimon,

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1 This passage may mean that Lindsay dealt with the wrong people or officials from the point of view of the writer. Letter no. 18 (see below, p. 604) refers to Lindsay providing rice for the widow. Alternatively, ‘Liki’ may represent another, unknown, ship’s captain who was unfamiliar with Thalang and did not speak Thai.
3 ibid., 203.
emphasizes the importance of this official in the schemes of Light and Scott. Light himself refers to this in a letter of 1787.1

'...had he lived [I] would have secured a possession of the island. His death which happened in Dec. 1785 altered the certainty of success to a dubious point. His widow the only person of estimation would willingly have given up her power. Her sons and nephews beseeched me to take the Government of the Island, could I have had assurance of support from Government I should have embraced the offer and secured both these Islands. I requested that they would wait two months and if I did not return with troops to provide for themselves.'

Scott emphasizes the importance of Lady Chan.

'...Pia Pimon deriving his influence from his wife's family and they being the great promoters of the proposed Revolution his death made little difference.' 2

As a daughter of an old hereditary chief of Thalang, Lady Čhan certainly occupied a position of great importance.3 Her second husband, Phya Phimon, was an 'outsider' and Scott probably made a just appreciation of the situation. It is likely that Lady Čhan, even though she was given a title by the King, began to lose influence after the Burmese attack in which she had played a heroic role.

The presentation of her daughter to the King may be seen as an effort to maintain her power, but she was a woman and whatever the strength of her family influence she could not be governor herself. The increasing stability of the Bangkok régime from 1786 onwards resulted in the reimposition of full control by the central government. Changes in the administration were inevitable. Lady Čhan had taken Phya Phimon into the family by marrying him, and it is likely that her first marriage to Mqm Si Phakdi had its political aspect. She could not do this for a third time.

Letter no. 18 (1786) suggests, however, that Lady Čhan was still concerned with affairs. It was written by a close associate of hers, possibly a relative, but perhaps no more than a hanger-on.

'Letter from me, the Phya Thukkharat of Phuket [a district of the island] to the Phra Ratchakapitan. I cannot properly express our gratitude to you for sending Captain Lin [Lindsay] with some rice for Chao Khun Manda [the widow]. I have been to Songkhla [Singora] to the royal authority but at the time I had little to offer [as gifts?]. I had only one case of Arab gunpowder and eight sutan guns. I sent up to the royal authority the government funds held by the late Governor together with, as usual, the taxes 4 due from trading in tin. The royal authority has first

1 See above, p. 597, n. 3.
2 Scott to Council, 31 March 1786, Council Minutes, 2 May 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II.
3 See genealogical table, on p. 614.
4 Possibly 'profits'; see text, p. 617. The term is sometimes so used in Southern Thai.
of all appointed me Phya Thukkharat, and has said that later there would be an order making me Phya Thalang [governor]. The Nai Luang Wang Na ['Second King'] has been very kind to me.

In the waning of the 3rd moon [mid-February 1787] Chao Khun Manda and I will go to have audience in Bangkok. We shall go by way of Talipong island. Can you please send a ship to take Chao Khun Manda. I shall come to see you at Penang [about this]. Out of your goodness please get ready some guns and merchandise as gifts for His Majesty.

Hereafter I shall be a person of importance. At present the Chao Phya Thalang [governor of Thalang] and I are not on good terms. I am sending Nai Phet, Nai Thong Kaeo, and Nai Thit Phrom to let you know the details. Please send a small gun of good make for my own use.

If, on going to Bangkok this time, the King grants my wish, should you have need of tin I will provide you with as much as you require.

Dispatched: Monday in the year of the horse, eighth of the decade.'

This expedition may have been delayed for Lady Chan wrote to Light in July 1787 saying that she was going to Bangkok for an audience of the King (letter no. 28). She asked for 50 sultan guns and other gifts, and intended to send the Phya Thukkharat and Pho Chui, her son, to meet Light.

She wrote again early in 1788 saying that she was definitely going to Bangkok. She had started late in 1787 but was held up by a flood at Na Toei, on the mainland near Thalang. At that point she was recalled by the governor who wished to discuss with her certain matters relating to trading activities in tin carried out by the late governor, her husband (letter no. 33).

Light and Scott continued their campaign for the occupation of Thalang after the establishment of the colony at Penang on 11 August 1786. Andrew Ross, whose influence in the matter had been solicited by Light, had written from Madras in support of the Thalang project on 18 July.¹

Scott wrote to the Governor-General on 4 September congratulating the Council in somewhat patronizing terms for establishing the settlement at Penang.² Though writing favourably of Penang he strongly recommended the acquisition of Thalang. At a time when the Company was concerned about expenditure he pointed out, shrewdly, that profits at Thalang were more quickly to be gained and would be 'enough to defray the expenses of both' [settlements]. Lord Cornwallis, who had a reputation for caution, was indeed worried about Company finances generally and was anxious that there should be good hope of a return for expenditure on Penang.³ From this point of view the island was kept under close scrutiny for some time to come.

Light, as the new superintendent at Penang, could not easily write so

¹ Clodd, op. cit., 53, source not quoted.
² Scott to Governor-General, Council Minutes, 9 October 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II, fols. 139–43.
strongly in favour of Thalang. In a letter dated 12 September he fully accepted
the advantages offered by Penang from the naval point of view. This was an
opinion firmly held by the Council. But he also recommended the occupation
of Thalang to keep the French and Dutch off the coast. He mentioned the
valuable revenues to be obtained from tin and other commodities.

A further letter from Light in October mentioned a severe flood in Siam
and the return of the southern army to Bangkok, thus confirming statements
made in the chronicles. He said that the Burmese were expected to attack
early in 1787. Of Thalang, again more enthusiastic, he said that the island
could offer a little-known and easily fortified harbour suitable for men-of-war.
Mutton and beef could be raised in sufficient quantities to supply a fleet.
He sent a sample of tin.

Light and Scott had agreed, perhaps, on the timing of these letters. They
had jointly established a 'House of Trade' at Penang soon after the founding
of the colony in August. Kyd's report on Penang criticized Light and Scott
for monopolizing the trade in their own hands with the danger that private
rather than public interests would be furthered.

A final effort was made in 1787. In a report on Penang Light wrote:

'The present Governor, titled Choo Pia [Chao Phya] Salang, is one of
the greatest villains who has raised himself by ingratitude, deceit, murder
and rapine from a low and indigent state. He wrote me a letter expressing
great esteem and Friendship which I did not answer. A few days ago he
sent a Messenger to assure me that if I would next November send a vessel
with some Troops he would deliver the Island to the English and only
require a small allowance for himself, could this Island be obtained by
Treaty or with the unanimous consent of the Inhabitants for the King of
Siam is only the usurper of yesterday and may probably share the fate of
his master'.

Light suggested the possibility of acquiring Thalang by the more regular
means of treaty or by a grant from the King of Siam twice only, in the letter
quoted above and in a communication to Andrew Ross in 1784. Both in 1784
and in 1787 Light's influence at Thalang was not at its strongest. It may be
supposed that plans for a British occupation, with the connivance of at least
some of the members of the original ruling family, reached their most advanced
stage between these two dates.

1 Light to Macpherson, Council Minutes, 9 October 1786, Straits Settlements Consultations, II,
fols. 129–39.
2 Light to Macpherson, 5 October 1786, Council Minutes, 13 December 1786, Straits Settle-
ments Consultations, II, fols. 181a–89.
3 Kyd, 'Memoir of Prince of Wales Island', Council Minutes, 14 September 1787, Straits
Settlements Consultations, II.
4 Light to Cornwallis, 18 June 1787, Council Minutes, 27 July 1787. This is the most complete
of the contemporary descriptions of Thalang. The so-called 'usurper' was, of course, King
Rama I whose ninth lineal descendant sits on the throne in Bangkok in 1963.
5 Light to Andrew Ross, Fort St. George, 18 March 1784, Straits Settlements Consultations, I.
The letter of friendship mentioned by Light has not been traced. But letter no. 17, 11 November 1787, refers to friendly relations, though with an accompanying hint of menace.

Letter from the Chao Phya Thalang to the Phra Ratchakapitan. When the captain of the sloop brings merchandise to sell here, according to the customary practice the governor and council and the chief merchants will agree on prices. They undertake the selling of goods to the people and make a small profit. You were here formerly and so you know all about this. You sent Captain Wirasen [Wilson] with opium, husked rice, silver, and cloth to sell at Mu'ang Thalang recently and fixed a price for opium of 6 phara [of tin] per pip [container of medium size].

They arranged to buy the opium, silver, and cloth and then Captain Wirasen sold direct to the people at a lower price than that at which he sold to the officials and leading merchants, who had bought a large quantity and lost money on the deal. This is contrary to the rule and custom of the state. If we take legal action it may be, since you are far away, that you will misunderstand and think we are acting in a cavalier fashion, so we are sending this letter to inform you. We ought not to destroy our friendship. If you do not strictly control your captain and he does this again there will be a quarrel between the captain and the council. You will be angered and our friendly trading relations will be broken for the future . . . . [The letter continues with a request for 600 muskets for the king.] Dispatched: Sunday, 4th day waxing of the 1st moon, year of the goat, ninth of the decade.'

The letter, though justified and reasonable in tone, does indeed mention friendly relations but it is without warmth. It is the necessity for friendship rather than friendship itself that is implied. Light's own remarks indicate that he regarded the governor of that time with some suspicion, and a further suggestion that relations between Light and the governor were not good is contained in letter no. 47, though written by an interested party.

The period of Light's political influence was clearly coming to an end and letter no. 47 marks its conclusion in a touchingly human way. The writer was a minor official who was perhaps a member of the local family. He was possibly the same person as Khun Thit Phrom (letter no. 18) who appears to have been a close associate of Lady Chan, perhaps one of the nephews. The letter is undated but was probably written late in 1786 since Light is already established at Penang.

Letter from Khun Tha Phrom to the Phra Ratchakapitan with the greatest respect:

This is to let you know that I am undergoing the most extreme degree of hardship and difficulty. This trouble has come upon me because of my

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1 This was Captain Thomas Wilson who is recorded at this time as master of the Minerva snow and other small trading vessels plying between Penang and Thalang, in shipping reports which appear as appendixes to Light's letters to the Governor-General.

2 See above, p. 604.
love and loyalty for you. In the Burmese attack on Thalang many of my friends were lost to me, killed in the fighting. The Governor and Council do not trust me because I am your man. I have placed myself at your feet. That I have so far escaped death may be due to the merit gained through my loyalty to you, but what will happen now I cannot tell. I am in this great trouble because I have carried out our agreement to the limits of endurance. But now if you do not concern yourself with my life and with the agreement to govern Thalang I must take leave of you and of Thalang in death . . . . ’ [Then follows the reference to Light being in Penang.]

Among the Thalang letters dated after 1787 there are only two, apart from no. 33, which refer to Lady Čhan and her family. Letter no. 36 (4 January 1788) from Mae Prang, Lady Čhan’s daughter, seems to express genuine friendship but emphasizes that she has fallen on hard times. She sent Light ten melons and asked for two pieces of chintz and a little rose-water. She wrote:

‘... At present I am in great distress and I think of you night and day 1 for nobody troubles about me and my affairs. I still feel very grateful to you and because I am so poor I cannot repay you . . . ’.

In letter no. 53 (May 1792) Phya Phetsiri[s]ongkram, superintendent-general of the eight districts and governor of Thalang said:

‘Please spare a friendly thought for Khun Manda [Lady Čhan]. 2 She has aged very much lately and is not in such good health as she used to be. Mae Prang has died. Please send some white cloth for ceremonial use [mourning?] . . . ’.

The writer was probably not the man to whom Light referred as governor in letter no. 17 above. The governor was asking Light for guns and he had evidently included in the letter a request from Lady Čhan for some bowls and brass-ware. Perhaps old age as much as the turn of the wheel of political fortune accounted for Lady Čhan’s decline.

The later letters, 1788–94

The re-establishment of firm control by the central government took place after the defeat of the Burmese in 1786. A superintendent-general for all the eight districts, Čhao Phya Surintharacha, was appointed as early as 1786 (letter no. 30 above). 4 Earlier, in 1777, a Phya Surintharacha, the rank of Phya being one grade lower than that of Čhao Phya, appears in letter no. 3 (above) with Phya Phimon, the governor of Thalang. His name comes first
and this suggests seniority. This official, perhaps the ‘Pee Siring’ of Forrest, was probably the same man as the later Chao Phya and therefore was simply promoted in rank when the reorganization took place.

The new governor of Thalang who wrote letter no. 17 (above) in November 1787 is not known. Unfortunately, the letters do not provide clear evidence on this point. Confirming the statements made in letter no. 18 (above), the chronicle records that officials from Thalang waited upon the ‘Second King’ at Songkhla and also sent a report on the fighting to Bangkok. After the return of the ‘Second King’ to the capital, and therefore not before November 1786, a royal order was sent appointing an unnamed official‘ who had performed satisfactory service during the war ’ as governor of Thalang.1

The first named governor after 1786 is Phya Phetsirisiphichaisongkhram who was in charge in 1791. In the intervening period most of the letters were written by junior officials. One of these was the Yokrabat. This was probably Nai Chu mentioned in the Thalang annals as the Yokrabat who eventually became governor.2 He wrote as Qk Phra Phon Phakdisiphichaisongkhram on 1 October 1786 (letter no. 12) and as Qk Luang Phetphakdisiphichaisongkhram, Yokrabat, on 2 March 1788 (letter no. 59) and on 25 August 1789 (letter no. 56). Other letters came from a deputy-governor at this time. This official wrote as Phya Thukkharat, Phya Palat on 8 January 1788 (letter no. 31).3 There is a letter from a deputy-governor dated 25 August 1789 (letter no. 41). Possibly the royal order did not come from Bangkok as early as the chronicle entry suggests. In any case that entry is datable only by reference to the return of the ‘Second King’ in October 1786.

It seems likely that the hopes of Phya Thukkharat mentioned in letter no. 18 (above) were not fulfilled and the governorship fell eventually to Phya Phetsirisiphichaisongkhram. Phya Thukkharat may have acted as governor for a time and perhaps it is he to whom Light referred in such uncomplimentary terms. The one certain appointment made, or confirmed, in 1786 seems to have been that of Čhao Phya Surinthuracha as superintendent-general (letter no. 30 above). He may have acted also as governor in 1786 immediately after the battle and is perhaps the person mentioned by Phya Thukkharat in letter no. 18 above.

Čhao Phya Surinthuracha was the son of a high official of the reign of the last king of Ayuthaya. He served in the capital and later went to Nakhon Si Thammarat where he was made Uparat (vice-chief) by the ruler. When the latter was punished by Tak Sin, Čhao Phya Surinthuracha was given another post in the capital. He had married into the family of the rulers of Nakhon Si

1 PP, iv, 271–2.
2 Phongsawadan Mu'ang Thalang, 58; Gerini, op. cit., 240. He was already Yokrabat in November 1785 (letter no. 51). A son of Lady Chan, Chui, did however become Yokrabat but there is no mention of him as governor in the annals.
3 Thukkharat: dukkhardsdara, a curious term. This official was normally junior to the Yokrabat; see Phongsawadan Mu'ang Phatthalung, 47. Palat: deputy.

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Thammarat. He then went back to the provinces.\(^1\) Though long resident in the area he does not seem to have been connected with the old Thalang family. He appears as superintendent-general in 1777 (probably), 1786, early 1791, and mid-1792. In between these last two dates, however, another official took his place. This was Phya Phetsirisipichaisongkhram who was the writer of letter no. 53 in which he appealed for Light’s sympathy for Lady Čhan.

In letter no. 1 (late December 1790 or January 1791) he appears as governor of Thalang in the preamble but, in the body of the letter, he claims to have been given the supreme authority over the people of all the eight districts, in an audience of the King.

There is a story in the Thalang annals, also given by Prince Somnot, that Čhao Phya Surintharacha was summoned to Bangkok to take the post of Kalahom ‘Minister of War’ after the holder of that post had disappeared in battle at Tavoy. Surintharacha represented to the King that he was too aged to perform such onerous duties satisfactorily and also pleaded that he preferred life in the country. He was eventually allowed to return to Thalang.\(^2\)

Such events could provide the reason for the claim by Phya Phetsirisipichaisongkhram to what would have been the temporary charge of the eight districts. The two officials appear together as superintendent-general and governor respectively in letter no. 15 (17 April 1792). But, according to the chronicle, the death of the Kalahom did not take place until 1793.\(^3\)

It may be that Čhao Phya Surintharacha, of whom the chronicles make no mention at this time, was invited to take a position in Bangkok which was not that of Kalahom and left to do so in 1791. He might have visited Bangkok in that year because a letter from a junior official (mid-1791) stated that he was forwarding a letter from Čhao Phya Surin who appeared to be away from Thalang (letter no. 5).

Light continued his trading operations. They did not always go smoothly. Letters nos. 19 (1790) and 13 (1791) refer to violent incidents involving the Captain Wilson mentioned by the governor in letter no. 17 above.

Letter no. 42 (date partly defaced—25 June 1792) was written to Light by the Kalahom in Bangkok.

‘... Whereas His Majesty at Krung Thep Mahanakhon [Bangkok]... has been graciously pleased to declare that, on the 2nd day waning of the 4th moon in the year of the hog, 3rd of the decade,\(^4\) the ruler of Tavoy sent an ambassador with a letter on plates of gold, gold and silver flowers, and other royal tribute to His Majesty in order to come under the protection of Bangkok according to ancient royal custom, and that Mergui has not yet...'

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\(^1\) Prince Somnot Amoraphan, Ru'ang tang Čhao Phraya nai Krung Ratanakon, Bangkok, 1918, 2, 25. Čhao Phya Surintharacha’s son Ru’k wrote the Thalang annals referred to in this article, in 1841. Another son succeeded his father as superintendent-general according to Gerini, op. cit., 191.

\(^2\) Phongsawadan Mu'ang Thalang, 60-1, and Gerini, 188-9.

\(^3\) PP, iv, 352-3.

\(^4\) The chronicle date is one day later; PP, iv, 333.
acceded like Tavoy.\(^1\) In the eleventh month of the year of the rat, 4th of the era His Majesty will command the ‘Second King’ to lead an army against Mergui and he will send a naval force to attack Martaban, Bassein, and Rangoon, and go up as far as Ava. The royal army, the Lao army, and forces raised in the northern territories will attack the Shan states, Pegu, and Taungu as successive objectives. His Majesty himself will go by land route to attack Martaban and will then proceed to join forces to attack Ava. Therefore many troops will be required at this time. A naval force from Kedah will transport rice to Thalang.

You have engaged in friendly trading activities with Bangkok and now that a major attack is to be launched against Ava it is hoped that you will see your way to providing friendly assistance by hiring out a ship [or ships], buying and loading 400–500 kwian of rice\(^2\) and by arranging for the captain, crew, labourers, and officers together with guns big and small, ammunition, priming powder, and weapons to be sent to Thalang at the same time, as supplies for the royal army. If the ‘Second King’ issues operational instructions to such an effect, your ship’s master should move with the army. The cost of hiring the ship and payment to the labourers and officers will be provided from royal funds according to custom. Ships captured at Tavoy will be a royal gift to you.\(^3\) \ldots{} if you do not give friendly assistance to the government on this occasion \ldots{} 6th day waxing of the eighth moon \ldots{} .

Letter no. 42 was delivered at Penang by an ambassador on 22 September. Light reported that he made a cautious response by pointing out that he was not permitted to give aid to belligerents but that he would raise no objection if the ambassador succeeded in obtaining private assistance at Penang.\(^4\)

Letter no. 4 from Phya Phetsirisiphichaisongkhram, governor of Thalang (23 October 1792) refers to the projected attack on Mergui and asks for army supplies to be sent by the end of November. The plan for the attack, which never came fully into operation because of an unexpected initial set-back at Tavoy, is dated by the chronicle in November 1792.\(^5\) A force of 40,000 is mentioned and there are brief references to orders for mobilization in the north and to the naval forces of the ‘Second King’ whose first objective was Mergui. However, the letter from the Kalahom provides additional information and it is interesting that the plans should have been revealed so fully to a foreigner.

\(^1\) The ruler of Tavoy was shortly to repudiate this renewed allegiance to Bangkok.
\(^2\) Cartload; a weight, 3,375 lb. avoirdupois, according to Thomas Maccauly, *The Indian trader’s complete guide*, Calcutta, 1816.
\(^3\) Text defaced from this point.
\(^4\) Light to Cornwallis, 26 September 1792, Council Minutes, 9 November 1792, Straits Settlements Consultations, v. The minutes contain a rough translation of the letter, fols. 118–23. The date is given correctly as 25 June. It was understood by the translator that a ship at Tavoy would come under Light’s command, not that he would receive ships as prizes.
\(^5\) *PP*, iv, 347–8.
The Siamese were interested in two general categories of guns—cannon and small arms. The cannon were usually of 4 in. and 5 in. calibre. In one case (letter no. 15) bronze or copper cannon were specified in an order for the King. The term used for a cannon is bariam or barian. Pallegoix cites bariam simply as a kind of cannon.1 Bariam occurs frequently in the chronicles. Its history may be < meriam (Malay) a kind of cannon called Mary, < miriam (Arabic) < a European source-word? 2

One type of musket is merely described as flint-lock. French flint-locks were also asked for and these presumably came from French factories in India which were well known in the eighteenth century for small arms of good quality. Sutan and Cheramat are, however, the types most frequently specified. If these terms are of Malay origin it would be an indication that Siam was one of the regular outlets for the arms trade in which the sultans of the peninsula engaged.3

There is a total of 19 requests for guns in the letters. Quantities are specified in 17 cases. The total involved is considerable bearing in mind that the correspondence is incomplete and that arms may have been carried on speculation from time to time without firm orders being laid in advance. 50 cannon and 8,372 muskets were asked for in all. Most of these were wanted by the King but a total of 1,000 muskets is specified as being for local defence in the Thalang region and the actual proportion may have been higher.

It is important to ask how many of these guns actually arrived. The letters give only a limited answer. In 1777, 1,826 muskets arrived at Thalang and were sent on to Bangkok and in the same year 490 were received for local use. In addition, the item in the chronicles for 1776 states that 1,400 flint-lock muskets arrived in Bangkok. There is only one complaint about failure to deliver (letter no. 48, 1793). This concerns two muskets that were required as a present for the King.

A price in Spanish dollars can be quoted. A royal request of 1787 (letter no. 55) offers 1 phara of tin for 8 muskets. Ten years earlier the rate was 6 per phara. These rates give 6 and 8 $ Sp. per musket taking 13 dollars as the price of a picul of tin.4

In addition to guns, shot, black powder, priming powder, sulphur, and flints were requested. The largest order was from the governor of Takua Thung

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1 op. cit., 49.
2 See R. J. Wilkinson, Malay-English dictionary, 1932, 135; W. Marsden, A dictionary of the Malay language, 1812, 323.
3 A consignment of 2,200 muskets sent to Bangkok from Trengganu in 1770 is mentioned in Phongsawadan Krung Thanburi, Prachum phongsawadan, lxv, Bangkok, 1937, 33.
4 Forrest quotes tin on board at Junk Ceylon at 12–13 $ Sp. per picul (1784). Light’s price works out at 17 $ Sp. per picul of 133 lb. (1787). Scott (1785) claimed to be able to buy at 8½ but this low price was used when calculating the potential profitability of the island and enabled him to quote a high total figure. Even the Dutch were paying something over 10 $ Sp. per picul in Perak (Glass to Governor-General, 29 April 1787, Straits Settlements Consultations, i). Taking a mean figure of 13, the price of tin was 48 $ Sp. per phara. The Thalang bahar (Siamese: phara) varies but approx. 485 lb. avoir. is given by W. Milburn, Oriental commerce, London, 1825, 320.
in 1791 (letters nos. 54 and 9—the same order) which consisted of 15 piculs of black powder, 100 piculs of priming powder, 10 piculs of sulphur, and 5 phara in weight of 3 in., 4 in., and 5 in. cannon-balls. In 1787 the governor of Phatthalung asked for 5 piculs of sulphur and 5,000 flints. One price only is quoted (in 1787); 2 pip of black powder to 1 phara of tin.¹

When Light reverted, as he did in the later period, to his early role of trader he was fulfilling what, to official eyes in Bangkok, had always been his primary function, that of purveyor of arms and other commodities to the King of Siam. Colonel Low criticized Light and, particularly, Scott for their involvement in politics. He accepted Scott’s expert knowledge of local commerce but he implied that both men were not aware of the nature of the relationships between the central government and Thalang and the Malay states. This is not the case. In their correspondence with Calcutta both Light and Scott showed that they appreciated the difference between the tributary position of Kedah and the provincial situation of Thalang even though this was not then so marked as it became later. They were at fault because they underestimated the military genius of Rama I and perhaps exaggerated to themselves the stability of the political position of the local family and the probable degree of permanency in its desire for British intervention. Lady Chan was certainly a powerful figure behind the scene but she and her associates were in an impossible position. Political manoeuvres at Thalang, as in many small states, were motivated by the incompatible wishes for security and independence. It would be easy to say that security was the greater need and that it could be gained only by allegiance to Bangkok. Two factors stand in the way of making this easy assumption in respect of that time. The obvious one is the lack of certainty about the strength of Siam which must have been felt in the south. The other is the Malay connexion of the family. The Malay states further down the peninsula were a ready refuge in times of political trouble even for the rulers of so comparatively important a province as Songkhla. The local lords of nearby Phatthalung rejected Islam in favour of Buddhism only in 1772.² Lady Chan’s mother was a Malay.

The Malay connexion no doubt provided a strong psychological basis for secessionist feelings but there was little reflection of this in effective political terms, for one reason because the local family never succeeded in obtaining for themselves the most important political post, that of superintendent-general.³

In such circumstances the plans to establish a British settlement might well have miscarried. If they had succeeded the military costs of continuing an occupation must have been high. The response of the Siamese government would have been more determined and long-lasting than was the case with Penang, a mere jungle-covered island belonging to Kedah. At Thalang the

¹ A quantity or weight for the pip is not known.
² Phongsawadan Mu'ang Phatthalung, 20.
³ See Forrest’s remarks, above, p. 597.
**GENEALOGICAL TABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAN ĐÔN FAMILY ¹</th>
<th>BAN TAKHIAN FAMILY</th>
<th>BAN LIPHON FAMILY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chiang (1) = Chôm Thào = (2) Dam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiat Thung (governor of Thalang c. 1766 dismissed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ru'ang (became dep-gov. of Thalang)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom Si Phakdi (1) = Chan = (2) Phya Phimon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lady Chan, created Thao Thepkasatri)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(governor of Kra c. 1754 (Forrest), Phatthalung ² c. 1766–8, Thalang early 1770’s (but probably after 1772) to 1785, d. Dec.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muk (f.) (created Thao Sisunthon)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma (f.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aṭ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(became governor of Thalang c. 1772, killed by (Malay?) pirates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ru'ang (m.) (became a junior official at Thalang)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Prang (d. 1792)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thian (governor of Thalang c. 1768?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Thong = Rama I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(became Yokrabat, after 1792?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ubon (f.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chui</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Niam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(became a court page)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Kim (f.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Mu'ang (f.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compiled from: Annals of Thalang and Phatthalung, Thalang letters, Western documents.

¹ Chôm Thào and Chôm Rang were half-brothers by the same father but of different mothers. It is interesting that the ancient distinction between the territorial family groups maintained by the Thalang annals appears to be in terms of female lines.

² Phya Phimon was governor of Phatthalung when temporarily estranged from Lady Chan (Phatthalung annals).
security of a potentially rich province was threatened. Bangkok’s inevitable anxiety that a British settlement on Thalang might prove a focus for secessionist tendencies in the whole middle peninsula would have forced strong action upon her. The East India Company was wise not to have become involved.

The texts

Letter no. 3

In the late eighteenth century orthography was still unfixed. Variants from the modern convention are noted here only in cases of lexical confusion or of special interest. The writer, while accepting full responsibility for errors and inadequacies in the readings and translation, wishes to express his thanks to Mme Chalay Vudha for her valuable assistance in these matters and to Dr. Vichintana (Chantavibulya) Panupong for information on southern dialect.

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2 For ป

3 Southern Thai; cf. Central Thai: กระบวน.

4 For ฉ; the form ฉ also occurs in line 4.

5 The combination of archaic and modern forms is interesting.

6 For จ

7 For ฤ.

8 For ย (ผูก for ฤ) with implication of /p/ for /y/, a Southern Thai feature.
No. 23 (extract)

... ซื้อราคาโดยตรงทางแผ่นที่สิ้นไป และบัตรเงินหนังแดงแล้ว ซื้อใด้ ไทม์ทอเทนหน้าใคร
แทนแทนราคาโดยตรงเนื่องด้วยถ้าด้วยคุณ ... .

No. 46 (extract)

... ครับมาถึงปรากฏะแต่ชื่อมาแต่เมื่อสิ้นพบกับความซึ้งที่วิธีการที่ บุนยวอยู่จึง
กลับไปก็ถ้าเป็นเจ้าเจ้าชื่อแล้วแสดงให้แทนทานพบพานทรัพยากรที่บัดนั้น ...

No. 30 (extract)

หงสืบทานเจ้าถูกสุนัขกระหาย ผู้เผื่อเข้าทักษะเมื่อสิ้นแรกที่ปรากฏที่ บุนนำปุระยาวที่บัดนั้น
ตัดคำที่มีบุกกองที่แน่นอนต้องสุนัข เคยปรากฏอันวิทยุที่สิ้นคนสิ้นของการที่บัดนั้น
บัดนั้นแสดงแล้วปรากฏเมื่ออย่างไรทุกคนตัดคำที่บัดนักบุกกองที่บัดนั้น
ดังนั้นไม่ถูกดำเนินการบางประการ ๑๐๐๐ ดังนั้นที่บัดนักบุกกองไปเด่นเวียน ๓๙๔ ที่บัดนี้ถึงพวกหนึ่ง

No. 30 (extract continues to complete text of letter)

แต่ยินที่สิ้นพวกเมื่อสิ้นก้าวทุกบางที่สิ้นเมื่อสิ้นตรวจร้านบนเริ่มเริ่มที่สิ้น ทุกๆที่สิ้น...

๑ S Thai, cf. CT 172.
๒ For l.
๓ For ขว.
๔ ถูก l, see p. 615, n. 8; four examples in this letter.
๕ A ST variant.
๖ (For ผ) this spelling has the implication of glottal closure with vowel shortening, a ST
feature in this environment.
๗ A ST variant; Pallegoix has [v]: 'pastillus', op. cit., 806. See p. 598, n. 5.
๘ For ผ.
๙ For ภ.
๑๐ In certain letters there is some free variation in the use of v and w in relation
to function.
๑๑ For หว.
๑๒ For ผ.

E. H. S. SIMMONDS
No. 45 (major extract)

หนังสือทนายทูตฝ่ายปืนดีเมื่อมาถึงคุณทนายข้าราชการให้ตั้งเหว้นไว้ จึงมีหนังสือส่งไปถึงนายทนายข้าราชการในฝ่ายปืนดีนั้น ได้คุณมีหนังสือส่งไปถึงนายทนายข้าราชการในฝ่ายปืนดีในที่ที่มีการตั้งเหว้นไว้ในฝ่ายปืนดีและคุณมีหนังสือส่งไปถึงนายทนายข้าราชการในฝ่ายปืนดีในที่ที่มีการตั้งเหว้นไว้ในฝ่ายปืนดี

อันจะเป็นการบังคับกฎหมายที่อยู่ในฝ่ายปืนดีในที่ที่มีการตั้งเหว้นไว้ในฝ่ายปืนดี

No. 12

หนังสือทนายทูตฝ่ายปืนดีเมื่อมาถึงคุณทนายข้าราชการให้ตั้งเหว้นไว้ในที่ที่มีการตั้งเหว้นไว้

No. 18

หนังสือทนายทูตฝ่ายปืนดีเมื่อมาถึงคุณทนายข้าราชการให้ตั้งเหว้นไว้ในที่ที่มีการตั้งเหว้นไว้

---

1 For คุณป้า ? But see above p. 602, n. 3.
2 ST for CT ท่าน.
3 For หนังสือ สุ for ไก่ : three examples in this letter ; also ไก่ for ไก่ in letters 12 and 18.
4 For คุณ.
5 For ทนายนายนฤ.
6 For เบญ.
แล้วต่อเนื่องสามารถเข้า ซึ่งมีบางตัวมายี่จ่ายให้อาญาตผ่านผ่านวัยสุข แล้วไปทางแก่เฝ้าที่ใช้ใจ โรคหลอดอาหารข้างหนึ่งที่ ขอเรื่องของขุมพลังในรายติดที่ ใจโดยเจ้าหน้าตาด้วยไป แล้วตัว ซึ่งมีไปภายใน ครบน้ำโดยใดย้มอาหาร กรอบโดยได้จัดบ่น เล่นให้แก่ เล่นเห็นเครื่องกล้าหากขุนธุวิทยาวิจัย 1 หน่วยของใดย้มอาหาร ซึ่งค้นให้ไปใหม่ ใหญ่ติดไป เล่นหนังสือเมืองกลาง ทุกวันนี้ ซึ่งบ้าน เจ้าหน้าตา ถึงวัดคันน้ำที่กินกันในแกล แล้ว ซึ่งบ้านเล่นหนังเรื่องที่เก่า บางที่เพิ่มมาบนบาทใดกระบอกใช้เครื่องกล้าข้างบน ใจโดยความอาหารข้าวขัดปี้เนื้อหึงสด ซึ่งซ้ำใส่ยืนในใหม่ กล้าข้างบน แล้วว่า ซึ่งซ้ำไปเยี่ยมควรร่วมเข้า มาแน่นก็เวลา ได้ทำการต้องการตัดเลือมของกล้ามากที่สุดโดยใด ซึ่งๆ ใหญ่ชัดสิ่งปิ่นปรับตัวเจ้าน้ 2 ใน [?] คำมือเป็นสัตว์

No. 17 (major extract)

หนังสือเจ้าหน้าตา มาเล่งพยาบาลศูนย์ ด้วยเงินที่สิ้น เก่า หน้าสุดกับเป็นเส้นสามารถ ชนะจ่าหนาย ไทยเมืองกรืนการแกลการใหญ่จุกใจ ซึ่งขอไปยังหน้าเครื่องขยายถ้าจ่ายได้ พฤกษ์การบินตัวสูงก็ม่ลงลักษณะ 3 ขอให้ ข้อเล่าเรื่อง แล้วพยาบาลที่ภายนอกทำไมก็้ตัววิจัยสถาบันมีซึ่งกระรุกไปไม่ช้าหน้าดินเมื่อยที่ส้าง ครั้งนี้ วาระที่ย่อถึงเจ้าเจียรกรืนการบินอื่นก่อนการ เที่ยวอัจฉริยะกระรุกของของฝ่ายไข่เฝ้าเมื่อ ปัญหาว่าพยาบาลินนิยมแผนออกโทษการกระทำเจ้าเมื่อเรื่องการแลกแกลคุณ ไข่ชีวิตในภูมิภาคของทุกที่ท้ายเล่นหนังเก่าแผนไปช้าซึ่งเจ้าตรวจภูมิถือ สิ่ง[res. แปลเป็นความ [ไทย]พยาบาลศูนย์ใน] ซึ่งเจ้าเมืองกรืนการบินจ่าหนาย จึงหน้าชื่อนี้ได้ แจ้งครั้งหนึ่งคร่า ยายเสียหายไม่เคยเข้ากันเป็นไป ภายพยาบาลบินได้กู้ชีพกล้าแล้วเล่นกันใน ทำที่ไหนไปช่อนอก เล่นรับเป็นแก่นการจับวินาทีก่อนลงเรียงเรียงพยาบาลศูนย์ตัดเลือมทางไม่ตรอง ข้อเก็บกันสิ่งไปอย่างหนัก ...มาเร็ว 1 2 3 คำเป็นแผนพิทยา

No. 47 (major extract)

หนังสือเจ้าพญาจุฬาลงกรณ์ จำเบ็ดไปพร้อมปรับปิ่นปนเก่าในพยาบาลศูนย์ตัดท้ายขจรพราหมณ์ 4

ภายหลังกว่าใดควบคุมออกหลากหลายกล้าทดแทนของที่ชี้จ่ายได้มั่นคงในหน้า เด็ก ความสับปะรด เท้ารีหน้านั้น แล้วอธิบายเป็นมั่นคงด้วยจรื่นนี้ ใครทุ่งผุดวัยเพื่อนเสียความคิดเป็นหน้า เมื่อนี้ 1 ความชอบได้แต่ความด้านบาทพอ ทำวิทยาการก้าวเท่านองบานเจราไหน วางใบคำมีแก่นของงาน แต่ผู้ช่วยพยาบาลเจ้าหน้าเท่ากับอยู่ ได้ทำสิ่งของที่เก่าๆ มีที่ชี้จ่ายความ สับปะรดที่เท่านั้นแล้วจนใจเป็นการใดมีเรื่องหยาบ ได้ความสูญทหารไว้ว่าโปร่งๆหน้าความ(dec)ของงานจึงท้ายอยู่ จนแต่หน้าไม่ระดับอัตเหตุพยาบาลเจ้า พยาบาล เราขี้ดมันแผนเป็นอย่างอื่น

1 For เวลา.
2 The use of ย์ for อ is of interest.
3 For ดี.
4 Note provincial usage. The orthography represents ST pronunciation.
5 For ที่ไร ; note implication of tri syllabic pronunciation, a ST feature.
6 For ฉันรู้. ST pronunciation is tri syllabic; see no. 45, line 1.
7 For ดี.
No. 36 (extract)

... และเจ้าพระเจ้าทุกวันในความทุกขยากอยู่มาก และเจ้าพระเจ้าเมื่อพระองค์ทำนองอยู่ก็เราราดซึ่งเสียชีวิตเสียหายครั้งหนึ่งครั้งใด พ่อเทนทรราชก็ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ เสดิมสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินให้ทรงยกมาและเฝ้าพระบาทเพื่อทรงสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ทรงอยู่อย่างเป็นพระพุทธเจ้าอยู่ในสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดิน

No. 53 (extract)

... และเจ้าพระเจ้าทุกวันในความทุกขยากอยู่มาก และเจ้าพระเจ้าเมื่อพระองค์ทำนองอยู่ก็เราราดซึ่งเสียชีวิตเสียหายครั้งหนึ่งครั้งใด พ่อเทนทรราชก็ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ เสดิมสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินให้ทรงยกมาและเฝ้าพระบาทเพื่อทรงสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ทรงอยู่อย่างเป็นพระพุทธเจ้าอยู่ในสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดิน

No. 42

... และเจ้าพระเจ้าทุกวันในความทุกขยากอยู่มาก และเจ้าพระเจ้าเมื่อพระองค์ทำนองอยู่ก็เราราดซึ่งเสียชีวิตเสียหายครั้งหนึ่งครั้งใด พ่อเทนทรราชก็ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ เสดิมสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินให้ทรงยกมาและเฝ้าพระบาทเพื่อทรงสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดินทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้าฯ ให้ทรงอยู่อย่างเป็นพระพุทธเจ้าอยู่ในสมเด็จพระเจ้าแผ่นดิน

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