CHAPTER VII
THE TAI POLITY
SUKHOTHAI POLITY:

The Tai in their own homeland, muang or country, had a distinct political and social system. Since the society was purely patriarchal in character, the father was primarily considered as the supreme head of the family (Paw Kruna). It is presumed that the first Tai political institution was the father, the head of the family (Paw Kruna) on the way of the Tai Kingship institution. The smallest administrative unit was the family. The number of families were bound together and formed into a bigger administrative unit known as village or ban. The existence of village led to the evolution of the village head or father of the village (Paw ban). The final form of administrative unit was muang or realm formed by a number of village. The head of the realms or muang was Paw-munge.

E.K. Hyatt observes, "family was the base line of both social and political units of the Thais or Taüs". The Tai village was headed by the elders and muang or principality was ruled by a lord respectively.¹ According to W.V. Stiffin "the pre-Ayudhyan King was almost similar with tribal patriarchs-leaders justified both by tradition and by the possession of immediate power. Ideally, they were paternal and
the legend of father-like ancient kings".2

The Tai transplanted their readymade traditional political system to the newly established secondary Tai state at Sukhothai. The leader of the band of warriors became the lord or king of the muang or principality. Hence, the institution of the kingship was considered as the first form of Tai political institution. The newly born muang or kingdom comprised of lower but political units like family (kruna) and village (ban) which had their respective elders virtually responsible to the king.

The king was paternally benevolent. Primarily patriarchal feudal form of government was the basic character of the Sukhothai kingdom. King Ramakamhaeng undoubtedly became the master of a vast empire but his administration was not beyond the inherited muang continued on the paternalistic feudal line. All his subjugated kingdoms' right of governing were retained to their own respective rulers. According to Quarritch Waley, "these tributary or brahyamahanagara had full loyalty to king Ramakamhaeng and they were readily obliged to send levies of man at the demand of this powerful king".3

Rigg Fred W. suggests that "the basic pattern of
Sukhothai government was really a benevolent paternalism". And he further interpreted it as a highly decentralized confederation of feudalistic or tribal-type polity with minimal differentiation of function, the linkages between levels being provided by hierarchically structured relationships between the all-purpose rulers or father at each level. 4

The king alone could not properly administer the whole kingdom. He needed assistance to administer the kingdom smoothly. The institution of the nobility was an outcome of the king's necessity of assistance for the administration. According to Wuaritch Wales, during the Sukhothai period and the early part of Ayudhya, the kingdom's administration was directly run by both the king and a number of feudal nobles. 5

AYUDHYA POLITY:

Frequent warfare became a basic nature of young Sukhothai kingdom. The success in the power struggle and warfare would transform the small Sukhothai kingdom into a bigger one. Therefore, the king organized manpower for warfare. The Tais succeeded in many successive warfare against the neighbours with the help of such organized manpower. However, with the shifting of their centre from Sukhothai to Ayudhya
the central plain of the Chao Phraya river, they set up bigger or more powerful kingdom. The appearance or emergence of the bureaucratic elements in Tai politics became a new dimension in administrative structure. Direct relationship between the ruler (father) and ruled (son) was loosened as the bureaucratic elements began to act as an intermediary between the two. The possession of larger territory became a fatal force to transform the nature of the government. Then, the monarchical form of government was installed in lieu of paternalistic feudal system of Sukhothai.

By the middle of the fourteenth century A.D., during the reign of Ramatibodi (1350–1369), for the first time four administrative officers of the four Great Office of kingdom were created. These are the following: Khun Huang (Minister of Local Government), Khun Wang (Minister of Royal Household), Khun Klang (Minister of Finance) and Khun Na (Minister of Agriculture). These courts were headed by separate officers called 'Sanabodi'.

King Ramatibodi codified a number of Tai laws and customs to govern the kingdom properly. These laws are the law of Evidence (A.D.1350), the law on offences against the Government (A.D.1351), The Law of Husband and Wife (A.D.1351),
the law on Receiving Plaints (A.D. 1355), the law on Abduction (A.D. 1356), the law on offences against the people (A.D. 1357), the law concerning Robbers (A.D. 1350 and 1366) and the law on Miscellaneous Matters (A.D. 1359). M.B. Hooker states that "his laws provided basic principles of Siamese law for centuries".

Besides these ministers or chamberlain, the King appointed personal scribes, court brahmanas, jurists, accountants, physicians, astrologers who helped his administrative work. King, however, appointed territorial bureaucratic officers like mun nai to control over manpower. The mun nai was responsible for the organization of manpower. They acted as an intermediary between king and subject. Such system became a complete contrast to the traditional Sukhothai pattern of freeman rendering compulsory service to the king.

During his reign, the appointment of blood relation i.e. princes became customary to rule over the provincial towns particularly Phitsanulok, Lopburi and Suphanburi. These princes ruled over the towns as the tributary rulers over their own domains. These princes assumed the key role in the succession disputes at Ayudhya throne after the death of the reigning king.
After defeating the Khmer King and the sack of Angkor Thom in 1431 A.D. by King Boromoraja II, Khmer idea of divine monarch and administrative elements were exported to Ayudhya. But the Khmer system of administration was only adopted during the reign of Trailok (1448-88). He set up more centralised form of government in which functional specialization replaced at in part, the territorial basis of feudal rule.

According to James Mosel, "Trailok established a centralised and functionally specialised administrative organization and he further states that the basic kroms (department) tended to have both territorial and functional responsibilities".12

King Boromtrailokanat or Trailok definitely reorganised Ayudhyan bureaucratic administration with the help of Khmer officials and literati. He tried to develop the divine power of monarchical form of government. His major task was to make efficient the administration by undertaking certain major steps. He formulated two important legislations namely, the Law of Civil Heirarchy and the Law of the Military and Provincial Heirarchy.13

To achieve his centralization of the state's affair, Trailok separately organised the civil and military administrations of the kingdom. The civil administration headed by
the minister or co-prime minister for civil affairs, had five great officers, each under a minister or Senabodi namely, (1) the ministry of the Interior which was created during the reign of Trailok, (2) the Krom Hwag or Ministry of Local Government in charge of the affairs of the Province of Ayudhya or Capital, (3) the Krom Klang or Minister of Finance dealt with both royal treasury and foreign trade, (4) the Krom Hwang or Minister of the Royal Household, in charge of palace affairs and the administration of justice and (5) the Krom Na or Minister of Agriculture in charge of cultivation, food supplies and matters related to the tenure of land. The Military administration was put under 'separate Prime Minister or Kalaom'.

Since the population was put separately under these both civil and military Kroms, various smaller kroms also came to exist separately. These separated two groups of population were known as righter or southern side (military) and leftter or northern side (civil). For the greater convenience of provincial administration, King Boromtrailokenet divided the towns into four classes, first, second, third and fourth. Each town was headed by the governor. King brought these four provinces under the direct control of the capital. These provincial heads or governors were responsible
directly to the great Senapati resident in the capital. 17
King Trailok laid down the remarkable Palace Law in 1450 A.D.
which formulated the customs, ceremonies, rules and regulations, connected with the court and the royal family. The
office of the Maha Uparat had been introduced during his
reign. 18

During the reign of Trailok, the famous Lakdina (Lak-din means right and na, paddy field) was introduced in Siam.
According to Kong Syamananda, "King Trailok created as many
as seven nobility grades i.e. (1) Phya, (2) Pra, (3) Luang,
(4) Khun, (5) Muen, (6) Kun, (7) Tanai. The Chao Phya grade
was introduced afterwards. 19

However, the law carefully specified the place and
position of every individual by assigning amounts of land
(Lakdina). Certainly 400 Lakdina rank became the beginning,
rank of the bureaucratic nobility. The highest ministers of
state enjoyed a rank of 10,000. Slaves were given lowest
Lakdina rank of 5. 20 The Siamese feudal lord class was en-
titled as Phudi and its members were nai. These feudal lord
class was composed of royal family or Chao and Khunnang or
nobility. Titles of Siamese nobility were not hereditary but
they had the right to enjoy lifelong tenure of office. The
nobility class was important feudalist state machinery of Siam. All the political institutions of kingdom were held by this group of class. Hence, the distinct feature of feudalism had been laid down during the reign of Trailok.\textsuperscript{21}

Of course, the feudal system was transformed into personal basis. The retainers (Phrai) were given the right to choose their nai or patrons which resulted in weakening the power of feudal lorus. On the other hand, the involvement of the capital's direct control over the provinces increased the number of the army. By forming the professional army, the kingdom's army was strengthened. Both civil and military divisions continued to fight in war.\textsuperscript{22}

Having concentrated his centralization bureaucratic administration Trailok sufficiently strengthened his suzerainty over the tributary states, but he only could gain nominal allegiance from these domains and king received formal tributes of gold, silver etc. from these tributary states.\textsuperscript{23}

King Ramatibodi II's reign (1451-1529) witnessed many innovations and developments. The kingdom's military undertook a grand registration and enrolment of able bodied men between 18 and 60 years for compulsory military service.
In 1518 A.D., a book on military tactics was issued. King reorganized the procedures and institutions for controlling the manpower.²⁴ According to Kong Syamananda, army were divided into two classes like probationary retainers (Phrai som) and permanent retainers (Phrai Luang).²⁵ Another remarkable feature was the opening of intercourse between Siam and Portugal.

After the unification of Burma under King Tabangshwet or Labinshwehti (1531-1550), the Burmese started a constant threat to Siam by making a series of invasion. In 1569 A.D., Ayudhya had fallen in the hands of the Burmese for the first time. But its sovereignty was recovered by King Naresuan the Great. King Naresuan paid attention to bring certain changes in centre provincial ruling houses, by holding direct control over the provincial manpower, he tried to improve the military weakness and defect. Apparently, the Cau-pha princes the ruler of provinces and whose power was most probably dangerous to the succession were brought under the supervision of the high officials appointed by the king. King abolished the Brahymahasanagara or tributary states. These provinces were brought to constitute, outside the Vanrajadhani (capital province), in three classes known as moan ek, moan do and moan tri (first, second and third class provinces respectively).²⁶
Thus, he reorganised the kingdom’s provinces into three classes. King Narai recruited as many as five hundred Japanese soldiers and they were included in his army. 27

In order to achieve his centralisation programme, the princes were no longer considered for appointment as a ruler of provincial towns. Palaces were built for them inside the capital city. Aigg Fred W. comments that “there were two prime sets of four i.e. the former Kalahom (right south palace) and the former Mahadthai (left or north palace) were responsible for higher administrative duties and newly established the Wang Na (front or east palace) and the Wang Lang (rear or west palace) became specialised for the honouring of the highest princes. The original four courts usually continued to discharge their older duties. 28 King Rama-totsarot employed the Japanese as the royal body guards. 29

King Prasattong (1630–1655) issued certain laws namely the law of Appeal (1633), the Law of Inheritance (1635), the Law on slavery and the Law of Debts (1648). 30

During the reign of King Narai, the governors of the provinces were all responsible to the Mahadthai who was virtual incharge of internal affairs of the civil administration, while the Kalahom was regarded as a supreme commander
of the kingdom's army and incharge of the kingdom's military division. The central government through Kram Wang or Van (The Royal Palace department or regiment) appointed a legal official known as Yokkrabat to each province where he was serving as a chief judge and a spy for the central government. He also appointed the Silvan Wang (Van) officer incharge of each governor's household. From his reign onwards, many princes' Krom had been created for a sister and daughter and other princes.

King Pra Petraja (1688-1703) planned to divide the whole administration between two great ministers such as Kalahom and Mahadthai. With this aim, all the provinces of the north of Ayudhya, consisting the fourth-class ones immediately dependent upon the capital, were brought under supervision of Mahadthai whereas the southern provinces were also put under the jurisdiction of the Kalahom. Thus, in theory absolute centralization was attained; but the kingdom's administration suffered from certain loss of efficiency due to the over burdensome responsibilities of the two great ministers.

After the reign of king PrasatTong, Siam was thrown into the confused state of internecine war for the throne
amongst the members of royal family, so, the kingdom suffered from weak political power and draw back of political development due to death in both sides i.e. lose of manpower, banishment, imprisonment and deprivation of property. Consequently, the Burmese took great advantages and occupied Ayutthaya in 1767 A.D. for the second time. But the Siamese independence was soon restored by King Taksin.

POLITY UNDER THE CHAKRI DYNASTY:

The establishment of Chakri dynasty in Bangkok by King Rama I brought a certain improvement in administrative aspects. By issuing an important Royal Decree of 1802, it was declared to deprive the right and power of the Cao Kuang (town governor) to appoint the important provincial officials. The royal princes were debarred from appointing Cao Kuang or Princial Governor. Instead of appointing them as provincial governor, the prince were kept in Bangkok under the direct supervision of central government. Therefore, many princes were appointed as supervisors of the ministries. 34

Rama I appointed one officer named Rattanaphiphit (son of Sonthirat) to head the provinces of north and east (responsible to Mahadthai). 35 He appointed Chaophraya Mahasena (Fli)
as a Chief Minister of Kalahom to govern the south. The Pra-
klang (or Krom Klang) had its official i.e. Chao Praya Phra
Khlang (son) as the minister of Khlang (Finance Minister). 36

The Krom Muang took the responsibility of the affairs of the
capital and its environs and was placed under the supervision
of Chaophraya Yommarat (Thong in). The other ministers were
Krom Na (the Minister of Lands) controlled by Chaophraya
Phonlattep (Pin Singhaseni) and the Krom Wang (Minister of
the Palace) incharge of the court administration, was put
under the control of Chao Phraya Thamma (Sunrot Bunyaratta-
phen). 37 Thus, Rama I's government was based on six great
ministers. The pattern of appointment of the minister to share
power showed that out of these six ministers, four had direct
territorial responsibilities within which their officers ex-
ercised all official functions.

King Rama I appointed eleven of his relatives to
different Krom ranks. There were distinctively mentioned about
the appointment of two Krom phra for his sisters, five Krom
lung for his son, nephews and nieces, two Krom Khun for an-
other son and daughter and one Krom mun for the husband of his
half sister. 38

King himself realized that his reorganization of an effi-
cient government required well established and arrange laws.
Therefore, he set up a commission of legal experts to revise the laws in 1805. Consequently, the Laws of Three Seals (Lion, Elephant, Tiger and Glass Lotus Flower) or the Law Code of 1805-1808. 39

The outstanding feature of Rama I's kingdom was the concentration of more power at the centre. The pattern of administration was so remarkable and essentially such governing pattern was studied differently. The outer or first layer of the kingdom was the circle of semi-independent rulers who did little more than pay tribute to Bangkok on a regular basis and who frequently paid tribute to other states. In such circle, there were a group of states like Kedah, Trengganu, Kelatan, Cambodia and Luang Prabang. The second circle of states were more properly integrated into the Siamese. This tier comprised of a group of states i.e. Chiang Rai, Vientiane, Champassak and Pattani. They paid large amount of tribute and provided manpower to the Siamese kingdom. It is reported that sometimes their daughters were given in marriage to the Siamese king and happened to interfere in their internal affairs. The third circle was included of Longkha, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Battambang, Siem Reap and perhaps Nakhon Ratchasima. These were recognized as quasi-independent provinces ruled by Chaophraya. The fourth tier
was largely the Khorat Plateau. They accepted Siamese suzerainty and got protection from the Siamese king. In return of its protection, they provided tribute as well as manpower when required. Lastly, the inner tier covered the proper provinces of the kingdom governed by the officials appointed by the king. They were responsible to the central government through the Chief Ministers of the state. 40

Rama II rearranged almost all of his father's ministers. His main object was to make appointments of his maternal and affinal relatives for special preferment. Considerably, king himself thought to check the growing power of the nobles. Therefore, he began to appoint the princes to supervise the affairs of the ministers and departments of the central administration. 41

King Rama III appointed neither a son nor a younger brother as the post of Upparat. But he selected his uncle the Upparat. In order to monitor the upparat's power, king neglected to provide the prince with men and official. 42 He also made an appointment of the second highest post like Krom Somdet Pra Sisulatei for queen mother. 43

The succession of king Mongkut (king Nagn Klaa or
Rama IV) on the Siamese throne, marked the commencement of the process of modernization in the Tai bureaucracy. Mongkut who realised the western supremacy, instead of reacting against the influx of western idea and thought and system was always ready to welcome. By borrowing western system and adjusting these to the existing one, Mongkut's period witnessed the structural changes in many aspects. However, king reorganized the Tai polity according to the pattern of colonial administration, whereas the Tai economy was largely integrated into the international capitalist system. 44

The basic task of King Mongkut was to strengthen royal power by appointing his two sons to the responsible state posts like Kalahom and Phrakhlang and also electing younger Sunnags to fill with the king's personal staff. Such appointment from the single family provided a favourable chance to the rise of the Sunnags family in central administration. At the same time it helped the kingdom to be relieved of immediate domestic competition. 45

Thailand under King Mongkut played an important role in international political arena, with the idea of protecting her political fortune. Thailand entered a treaty popularly known as Bowring Treaty of 1855 with Great Britain. The treaty
introduced open door policy on trade, provided for the first time the extra-territoriality, abolished Siamese control over customs duties and effected to transform the traditional financial base of the royal government. But in 1868, King Mongkut signed eight such treaties with other Europeans and the U.S.A. Such series of treaties considerably brought a profound impact on the developments and transformation of Tai polity. Apparently his modernization experiment caused to loosen traditional Tai political norms; but never did deliberately to violate the existing systems.  

King employed foreign advisors for specialised, technical works. Vella reported that “some eighty four Europeans were employed to the government service in Siam at the time of Mongkut, among these were military officers, a tutor in the royal palace, a harbour master, a customhouse director and a head of the police office”. He established for the first time Siamese standing army in European fashion.  

King Chulalongkorn following the footstep of his father continued to reform the Tai polity. According to John J. Giri-linç, Chulalongkorn associated the Tai elite in making certain practices primarily to escape from colonialism. He further remarks that the young king’s first attempt at reforms, which was affecting to slavery, judiciary, finance and the political
process was to attack on the old orders, including the vested interests that thrived on traditional ways of administration and judicial corruption”. 49

Chulalongkorn who acknowledged contemporary international politics and accepted the European domination i.e. progress and civilized nations in many aspects, began to make a series of reforms. Chulalongkorn realised that reform was a virtual step to bring progress, civilization and prosperity and to maintain nation’s independence. At the beginning of his reform programme, King introduced Privy Council consisting of 13 princes and 36 high officials and Council of state included 12 members. 50 King established a series of departments like Revenue Development Office in 1875 which was directly responsible to create the Ministry of Finance in 1892, a Royal Telegraph Department in 1875, a Department of survey, a Department of Foreign Relations in 1885, a Department of Instruction in 1887, a Ministry of Education in 1889, the Ministry of Public Works in 1875, a Post and Telegraph Department in 1881, a Forest Department in 1826, the Irrigation Department in 1899, a National Police service in 1897 etc. The Mines Department was created. Both Forest and Mines Departments were put together under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Interior. The Royal Audit Office was also created. 51 From time to time with
the further development, King re-established the Department of agriculture. As a expansion of it, new departments like Land Registry Department and Canal Departments were created which were put under the control of Ministry of Agriculture. The Department of Cultivation was renamed as a Silk Production. Under the royal proclamation of 1892 April 1, the new Minister of Agriculture and Commerce was set up. 52

Following his reformation programmes Chulalongkorn carefully undertook to strengthen his position in the palace. The western educated royal princes were employed in their respective suitable field and thus, they were utilized in dealing with both foreign and domestic correspondence in order to make success of his reform programmes and most probably to strengthen his kingly position. Rong Syamananda, states that "on April 1, 1892 the administrative establishment was substituted by twelve ministers, each with the ministers as its head and being directly responsible to the King as prime minister i.e. (1) Defence (2) Foreign Affairs (3) Interior (4) Public Instruction (5) Public work (6) Local Government (7) Royal Household (8) Finance (9) Agriculture (10) Justice (11) War and (12) Privy Seal. He further mentions that the number of these ministers were reduced to ten after abolition of Privy Seal and War and these ministerial functions were re-adjusted". In a greater extent King's
reform programmes also effected to the kingdom's provincial administration. King divided the kingdom into monlon (circle) changwat (province) and emphoe (district). Each emphoe was again divided into tambons (communes) each of which comprised of a number of villages and their heads were elected by local people. The new administrative system was centralized under the Ministry of the Interior and gradually the system was expanded throughout the kingdom.53

King Chulalongkorn was extremely careful to save his country from any external aggression. He followed the policy of defense against the French aggression. Though his defensive policy against the French led to the loss of a portion of Siamese territory, property and prestige, on other side Siam could gain Britain's intervention. Thus, in 1904, both Britain and France signed a treaty and Siam was recognized as a buffer state by both parties.

Hence, He Shengda remarks that "Chulalongkorn's reform made Thailand as an unified country". He goes on to say that his reform programmes became a fruitful to safeguard Thailand's independence and brought to transform from age old feudal system into the modern western administrative system".54
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