

Military Study Abroad as Thailand's Foreign Policy Between the 1930s–1940s

Thep Boontanondha | ORCID: 0009-0003-6416-8638

Lecturer, Division of General Education, Faculty of Liberal Arts,
Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
thep.boo@mahidol.edu

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Abstract

The need to modernize the armed forces motivated the Thai government to send a large number of soldiers to Europe to learn military during the absolute monarchy. Sending soldiers to study abroad, on the other hand, had become a part of national diplomacy seeking to balance power between the powerhouse states. After the Revolution of 1932, the new government likewise made an effort to preserve its stability by dismissing many royalist soldiers. As a result, it demanded many sophisticated soldiers, who relied on the new government. Hence, many soldiers had dispatched to observe and study military tactics abroad. On the one hand, the anti-imperialist policy forced the Thai government to favor the Japanese Empire and to rely on its support; many Thai cadets and soldiers were sent to study in Japan. On the other hand, the Japanese diplomacy, Pan-Asianism, made it very evident that Japan demanded to expand its influence over Asia, including Thailand. So, the Thai government seeking to achieve a balance of power among the influences of strong countries decided to send numerous soldiers, including the sons of Phibunsongkhram, to study military tactics in Europe and the United States. This pursuit of a balance of power received a positive response from European nations and the US, who were also concerned about Japan's influence over their colonies in Asia. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Second World War shattered Thailand's hopes of attaining a balance of power among the powerful countries.

Keywords

military study abroad – Thailand – Revolution of 1932 – foreign policy

1 Introduction

Sending soldiers abroad to study military tactics was a key component of modernizing and strengthening the Thai armed forces. Indeed, Thailand's modern military forces have undergone development since the late 19th century when King Chulalongkorn had the intention to swiftly modernize the armed forces. In the early stages of modernization, the armed forces acquired a large number of weapons and recruited foreign soldiers to serve alongside and train Thai soldiers. However, this policy was unable to guarantee the nation's sovereignty because it relied on foreign troops rather than its own. As such, Prince Chirapravati, King Chulalongkorn's son, was sent abroad to study military tactics. He was sent to Denmark in 1891 to study military science following an invitation from King Christian VI of Denmark (La-ortong 1979, 61). Prince Abhakara Kiartivongse, Prince Chakrabongse, Prince Paribatra Sukhumbandhu, and other sons of Chulalongkorn were subsequently sent to various powerful nations to receive military training. The purpose of sending these princes was for them to acquire military knowledge that would benefit the Thai armed forces. As a result, they were sent to countries from which the Thai armed forces had purchased weapons. For instance, Siam purchased aircrafts from France. To train as pilots, the first group of Siamese soldiers was dispatched to France in 1912 (Young 1994, 3).

The intent behind sending royal offspring to study in powerful countries was to preserve the relationship between Siam and these countries as well as to maintain the balance of power among the powerhouse nations. To pursue this diplomacy successfully, Chulalongkorn did not want to rely on the military support of any single strong nation. Therefore, the King made the decision to send his sons to several powerful nations for military education.

One notable case was Prince Chakrabongse's military study in the Page Corps in Russia. In 1898, Chakrabongse was sent to Russia, even though the capability and military technology of the Russian armed forces were considered less advanced than those of other superpowers such as Britain, Germany, and France. The amicable relationship between Chulalongkorn and Tsar Nicholas II of Romanov was the primary reason why the Siamese King chose to send one of his most beloved sons to Russia instead of a European superpower. In Russia, Chakrabongse was well-taken care of not only by the

Tsar but also by other members of the Romanov family. He was frequently invited to participate in royal ceremonies and was further appointed as a guard of Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, the empress consort of Russia (Narisara and Phaisan 2017, 248). Chakrabongse quickly established himself as a bridge between the two dynasties, thereby strengthening their bond.

It was not only the princes but also the common people who had the opportunity to study military tactics abroad. The descendants of noble clans could be sent to study in Europe with the support of the King or with their own funds. The King granted scholarships to the descendants of noble clans who had close connections to him in order to maintain his position of power. Receiving a scholarship was the sole means for regular people to study military tactics abroad. The government, however, restricted the number of scholarships available to ordinary people. Consequently, not many commoners managed to be awarded scholarships (La-ortong 1979, 61).

Following the 1932 revolution, the new government under Khana Ratsadorn considered sending soldiers abroad for military education as an important policy to maintain its internal political and military stability. Additionally, the new government employed this policy as a means to achieve a balance of power between Thailand and powerful countries. After dismissing many royalist commanders, Khana Ratsadorn needed reliable soldiers to fill their vacant positions. The armed forces then made the decision to dispatch numerous soldiers to study or observe military practices abroad. However, this policy differed significantly from the previous government's approach, as it provided the opportunity for many commoners to study abroad, in contrast to the elite who were frequently sent to study abroad during the absolute monarchy regime.

2 Observation of Military Practices as Military Diplomacy after the Revolution of 1932

Immediately following the revolution of Khana Ratsadorn, King Prajadhipok retained political and military power, even though the revolutionary group aimed to eliminate the King's authority. During the period of reconciliation between the royalists and Khana Ratsadorn, the King refused to promulgate the constitution drafted by Khana Ratsadorn. Instead, he requested them to draft a new constitution, allowing him to intervene in the process by providing suggestions to prominent members of Khana Ratsadorn, such as Pridi Banomyong and Phraya Phahon. Khana Ratsadorn decommissioned many soldiers, including those who were loyal to the King, especially members

of the royal family, and abolished the regiments of the royal guard. However, Prajadhipok managed to maintain one of his personal armed forces, the Royal Palace Guard, which would serve as the final defense between the King and Khana Ratsadorn (NA. [2] SR.0201.4.1.1/2).

The silent coup of Manopakhon (April 1933)¹ and the Boworadet Rebellion (October 1933) completely changed the situation after the Revolution of 1932. The royalists' attempt to restore power to the King was thwarted when the government soldiers suppressed the rebel led by Prince Boworadet. After the rebellion, the King vehemently denied supporting the uprising. However, the government received reports that the King's intimate had provided approximately 200,000 Baht to support Prince Boworadet to overthrow the Phahon government (Natthapol 2016, 37). Furthermore, before the Boworadet Rebellion, the King wrote a letter to James Baxter, a British man who served as his personal advisor. In the letter, he expressed his opinion that Khana Ratsadorn was apprehensive about European intervention. Consequently, the King requested his advisors take any necessary actions to intimidate Khana Ratsadorn and safeguard his political power. The King, thereby, felt as though he could negotiate with the revolutionary government to secure a role in the military and in politics for himself (NA. FO. 371/17176). This lead Phibunsongkhram, one of the prominent commanders in the army at that time, to express his intention to reduce the King's political and military power. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Phahon² aimed to cease the conflict between the royalists and the members of Khana Ratsadorn (NA. [2] SR.0201.4.1.1/4).

During the tense period between Khana Ratsadorn, the King, and his royalists, Phahon and the army made efforts to reconcile with neighboring countries. After Phahon suppressed Manopakhon's attempt to diminish the political power of Khana Ratsadorn, the government then sent soldiers who were members of Khana Ratsadorn, namely Saraphaisrisadikan and Hiamchaihan, to observe the French Indochina armed forces in September 1933 (NA. KT.44.4/71). At the same time, the government sent Phraya Songsuradet and Phra Prasatphithayayut, the leaders of Khana Ratsadorn, to observe the armed forces in France and Britain (NA. KT.44.4/73).

Following the Boworadet Rebellion, the government sent three soldiers; Prachonpatnuek, Seriroengrit, and Yotawut, to observe the military in French

1 Phraya Manopakhon was the first Prime Minister of the constitutional regime. He was in office from 1932-33 before abruptly dissolving the parliament in an attempt to undermine Khana Ratsadorn's plan to further limit the monarch's political influence.

2 Phraya Phahon, who was also the leader of Khana Ratsadorn in the revolution of 1932, replaced Manopakhon as Prime Minister following his attempt at a silent coup in 1933. Phahon remained in office as Prime Minister until 1938.

Indochina in March 1934. The military observation took place approximately five months after the Boworadet Rebellion, when the rebel leader, Prince Boworadet, fled to Cambodia seeking asylum (NA. KT.44.4/73). Subsequently, in May 1934, the government decided to send the soldiers Phraya Aphaisongkhram, Phra Boriphanyutkit, Luang Wichitsongkhram, Luang Wirayotha, and M.L. Khap Kunchon, to observe the British armed forces in Singapore, Burma, and India (NA. KT.44.4/20). Phibunsongkhram, who was the Minister of Defense, clearly stated that the government had two objectives for sending soldiers to observe the armed forces in India, Burma and British Malaya. Firstly, the Thai government wanted to observe the military advancement in the British colonies in Southeast Asia. The other objective was diplomatic in nature, as the Thai government intended to use the soldiers as mediators to foster reconciliation between Siam and Britain (NA. KT.44.4/20).

In Singapore, the Thai soldiers were warmly welcomed by the British government, which not only allowed them to visit its military bases but also permitted them to visit the HMS Eagle, a British aircraft carrier (NA. KT.44.4/20). However, before these soldiers visited Singapore, the British government had informed the Thai government that Moriya, the Japanese military attaché in Bangkok, had requested a visa to enter Singapore. Moreover, he had also booked the Raffles Hotel, where the Thai soldiers were staying, on the same day. Therefore, the British diplomatic minister in Bangkok was concerned that the British government might misunderstand the purpose of the Thai soldiers' military observation and that Siam might collaborate with Japan to spy on the British armed forces. Phibunsongkhram responded by ordering all Thai soldiers not to engage in any contact with the Japanese military attaché during their visit to Singapore (NA. KT.44.4/20). This military visit was significant for the Thai government in terms of maintaining stability. They expected that this military observation could strengthen the friendship between both countries and potentially persuade the British government to support Khana Ratsadorn.

The Thai soldiers who visited French Indochina and the British colonies were the first to have visited their neighbors since Khana Ratsadorn assumed complete governance of the nation. The groups of Thai soldiers were warmly received by their neighbors. In French Indochina, Colonel Henri Roux, the French military attaché to Siam, played a key role in persuading the French government to allow the Thai soldiers to visit French Indochina, which was a colony of France (NA. KT.44.4/71).

These visits occurred at the peak of tension between Prajadhipok and Khana Ratsadorn. It was a vital policy of Khana Ratsadorn to send these prominent officers to observe the armed forces of superpower nations, especially those

with dependencies bordering Siam. The new government aimed to convince these nations not to support the royalists. Not only Boworadet, but also other royalists, had to seek asylum in the colonies of the superpowers. For example, after the revolution of 1932, Paribatra Sukhumbandhu was forced to seek asylum in Bandung, while Manopakorn had to escape to Penang in 1933 after his failed attempt to eliminate Khana Ratsadorn from politics. Furthermore, after the defeat of the Boworadet Rebellion, there were rumors that the rebels would escape to British Malaya, where they could and seek help from the foreigners living there (NA. [2] SR.0201.1.3.1/4).

Thus, military observation was not only a military mission but also a valuable opportunity for reconciliation between the new government and the superpowers. Phahon and Khana Ratsadorn were concerned that their neighbors might be used as a stronghold by the royalists who wanted to resist the government. Since it was vital for the stability of the government that these antagonists would not receive support from neighboring nations, Khana Ratsadorn had to be recognized by European nations if they wanted to withstand the monarch who sought to overthrow the revolution.

Despite the government suppressing the Boworadet Rebellion, the leaders of Khana Ratsadorn had no confidence because they realized that the monarch would go to any lengths to maintain his power. Furthermore, Prajadhipok still believed that he could pressure the government into capitulating to his desire to maintain political and military power by threatening to abdicate if the government did not comply with his demands (Ferrara 2012, 22). Ultimately, the government firmly denied all of Prajadhipok's requests. Therefore, the King had to keep his word and abdicated in 1935 (Wyatt 2013, 448). The throne was subsequently bestowed upon Prince Ananda Mahidol, a young prince who lacked power and charismatic authority. This situation presented a golden opportunity for Khana Ratsadorn to strengthen its military power. Sending soldiers or cadets to observe or study military practices was consistently used as part of Khana Ratsadorn's foreign policy.

3 Overseas Scholarships and the Building of the New Armed Forces

Although Khana Ratsadorn managed to limit military power of the royalists, the government still needed to strengthen the capabilities of the armed forces. Besides, the revolutionary regime needed soldiers who relied on them to assume important positions in the armed forces instead of royalist soldiers who had been dismissed after the revolution of 1932. Therefore, the

government and the armed forces began dispatching soldiers and cadets for military education abroad.

During the Ancien Régime, the criteria for government scholarships specified that it would give an extra point for the student, whose parents had helped the country in some way. (NA. KT.43.1/14). Regarding this regulation, children of commoners were at a disadvantage compared to children of government officials or soldiers because it was very rare for any commoners to be recognized by the government as benefiting the nation. Hence, most soldiers who received overseas scholarships during the Ancien Régime were members of the royal family or noble families, including the leaders of Khana Ratsadron, i.e., Phahon, Songsuradech and Prasartpitthayayuth.

Additionally, the armed forces could directly bestow a scholarship to soldiers. Thereby, many officers, who had close ties to the palace through their families, were chosen to receive a scholarship. For example, in 1930, the army decided to send Prince Prasopsirichiraprawat Chiraprawat, who was the son of Prince Chiraprawati Voradej, to attend the École Supérieure de Guerre, a staff college of the French army. Another soldier sent for military education in 1930 was Prince Khachonchopkittikhun Kitiyakon, the son of Prince Kitiyakara Voralaksana, who had attended the Mechanized Artillery Unit and the Army Service Corps in the British Armed forces. Later on, the Prince continued his study at the École Supérieure de Guerre. However, the Revolution of 1932 occurred before he could complete the course (NA. KT.44.4/70). This policy was used for maintaining the King's power in the armed forces and politics because the monarch's government wanted to reserve significant positions in the armed forces for soldiers who were trusted by the King. It, furthermore, allowed them to secure significant positions that required military sagacity after graduating from abroad.

In contrast, Khana Ratsadorn provided an opportunity for any soldier and cadet to receive military education and training abroad. After discharging many skilled soldiers, the new government needed soldiers who were not only well-trained but also compelled to rely on Khana Ratsadorn to assume important positions in the armed forces, such as replacing the royalist soldiers. Therefore, many young soldiers were offered overseas scholarships to study or observe military operations abroad. One of them was Chit Mansin Sinatyotharak, who was not a member of Khana Ratsadorn. After the revolution of 1932, he was nevertheless appointed as the commander of the artillery regiment, which was one of the core regiments of the army (Cremation volumes 1989, 2). As the army had plans to establish an anti-aircraft regiment, Chit, who was the first in his class at the artillery school in 1916, received an overseas scholarship to study and observe anti-aircraft warfare in Europe (NA. KT.44.4/79). Between

1934 and 1936, Chit observed the air defense system in Britain, Belgium, and France (NA. KT.44.4/79). Eventually, Chit finished his military observations in 1936, and became a prominent figure who laid the foundation for modern air defense warfare. Chit also became a cornerstone of the army in the government of Phibunsongkhram (Cremation volumes 1989, 2).

In June 1934, the army sent officers – Phra Sitthirueangdetphon, Luang Wirayotha, Luang Chamnanyutsin, and Luang Ruapratsapatphon – to observe the Japanese army (NA. KT.44.4/74). From the Japanese government's perspective, Japan wanted to establish friendly relations with Khana Ratsadorn. As a result, the Thai soldiers were granted permission to observe various military facilities, including barracks, factories, and schools, such as the Military Academy, Military Science Research Institute, the Yokosuka Naval Station, Tokyo Aircraft Works of Mitsubishi Heavy Industry, and Tokorozawa Military Flying School (NA. KT.44.4/74). These were highly unusual circumstances for the Japanese armed forces, which typically did not allow anyone to observe their military operations.

In July 1935, the Thai government sent six sailors to observe the Japanese navy, led by Luang Sinthu Songkhramchai, a prominent member of Khana Ratsadorn and the commander-in-chief of the navy. The Thai government kept the visits of the sailors to Japan a secret operation, especially from Britain. The Minister of Foreign Affairs asked the navy and the Thai minister to Tokyo to request that the Japanese government refrain from holding any welcoming ceremony for these sailors (NA. KT.44.4/80). The government was indeed concerned about Britain's diplomacy toward Siam, especially since it had only been three years since the revolution of 1932. Despite Prajadhipok's abdication in March 1935, he resided in Britain and had many influential British friends. Khana Ratsadorn, therefore, had to convince the British government not to support Prajadhipok and the royalists. Therefore, the government had to ensure that the interests of Britain and the British people in Siam were not negatively impacted by Khana Ratsadorn, who governed the nation, replacing the Ancien Régime. However, relying on the support of Japan could potentially displease the British government. The situation grew tense after the British government learned that the Thai navy planned to send marines to visit Japan. As a result, British intelligence officers were dispatched to meet with the Thai consul in Singapore to inquire about the purpose of sending the soldiers to Japan. Britain expressed its concern, fearing that Siam and Japan might have a hidden agenda that could impact Britain. To reassure the British that the government had no hidden motives, the Thai government had to invite British commanders and diplomats to welcome these sailors upon their arrival in Singapore (NA. KT.44.4/80).

On the contrary, the Japanese government gave high priority to the visit of the Thai sailors. The Thai minister to Tokyo informed the Thai government that the Japanese government enthusiastically prepared to welcome the group of Thai sailors. Once these sailors arrived in Japan, the national radio station of Japan publicly reported their visit. Additionally, the Ministry of the Navy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Japanese merchants collaborated to organize a welcoming ceremony for the Thai sailors (NA. KT.44.4/80). Evidently, the Japanese government also aimed to utilize this opportunity to strengthen the special friendship between Thailand and Japan.

After assuming the position of prime minister in 1938, Phibunsongkhram clearly expressed his intention to strengthen the military. Consequently, the armed forces provided numerous scholarships for soldiers and cadets to pursue studies abroad. Many of those who were awarded scholarships were commoners who had the opportunity to attend military academy in overseas and possessed exceptional academic records. In contrast to the Ancien Régime, which typically sent soldiers or cadets with connections to the monarch for overseas studies, this military policy was notably different. For instance, in 1937, the armed forces dispatched 10 cadets to study in France, Belgium, Italy, and Britain. Most of them enrolled in the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, and Accademia Militare di Modena for their military education (NA. KT.43.10/261). Some of them also pursued university studies in mechanical engineering or chemical engineering, fields that represented the advanced technologies required for the future (NA. KT.43.10/261).

In 1937, due to the advancement of aviation, the armed forces sent Chamrun Ninprathap and Prince Rangsiyakon Aphakon to observe seaplanes being manufactured by Japan (NA. KT.44.4/99). Additionally, in the same year, Luang Athikthewadet and M.R. Suksom Kasemsan were sent to observe aviation in Japan (NA. KT.44.4/100). The following year, the government made the decision to send pilots and mechanics, including Siddhi Savetsila (NA. KT.43.8/164) and Dawee Chullasapya (NA. KT.43.10/300), to study aviation in Britain and the US. Interestingly, these soldiers, including Boonlue Dishpunya and Pitch Achonboon, who were sent to study in Europe, had no affiliation with the members of Khana Ratsadorn (NA. KT.43.10/261).

Thai soldiers and cadets from the army continued to receive military education in the US, France, Belgium and Britain during the Second World War. In the case of the air force, its cadets and soldiers studied in the US, Italy, Germany and Britain. The navy had their sailors and cadets study in Denmark, Italy, Britain, France, and Sweden (NA. KT.43.4/36). Therefore, sending soldiers to observe and receive military education abroad was an important policy that the government intended to use in order to develop Thai soldiers. Subsequently,

many of them would become prominent commanders in the armed forces upon their return to Thailand. Some of them would even reach ministerial positions. Furthermore, these soldiers also played a role in diplomacy, acting as intermediaries in fostering friendly relations between Thailand and superpowers around the world. When Phibunsongkhram became the Prime Minister in 1938, this policy would be consistently implemented, utilizing these soldiers as part of the diplomatic efforts.

4 Military Study as a Policy for Balancing Power

In 1938, Phibunsongkhram became the Prime Minister after the resignation of Phahon. Because Thailand was in a dictatorial stage during the first regime of Phibunsongkhram (1938–1944) where nationalism and militarism were employed to govern the nation, the armed forces also became the backbone of the government. To strengthen the armed forces so that they could be the gladiators for Phibunsongkhram in the event of a future unrest, many soldiers received overseas scholarships to study abroad. One of the main nations to which the armed forces sent soldiers to obtain knowledge about the military was Japan. The Japanese government warmly welcomed these Thai soldiers to study at in its military academy, possibly due to its desire to have more influence over the Thai military (NA. KT.44.4/80).

However, Phibunsongkhram had been aware that the Japanese government's ultimate objective was to create a Pan-Asian sphere. Hence, he believed that Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, including Thailand and Singapore, would be the next targets of Japan after it had invaded China. In 1936 when Phibunsongkhram was the minister of defense, he addressed the military, emphasizing the need for the country to be prepared to resist the invasion of Japan (NA. [2] SR.0201.4/18).

On the other hand, the military policy of Japan in Asia might have caused the British government to be concerned about the influence of Japan over Asian nations, including Thailand. In 1938, the British military thus offered four seats for Thai soldiers to study at the Defence Services Staff College in India and the Staff College at Camberley (NA.43.10/301). This action was considered remarkable because the British armed forces had never permitted any Thai soldier to attend these colleges, despite royal member. The Staff College is a higher level of military education offering soldiers an overall comprehension of military strategy, that the nation could employ in times of conflict. The Thai government and Phibunsongkhram gladly accepted this military policy of the British government and made the decision to send two soldiers, namely

Thonchai Chotigasathien and ML. Khab Kungchon, to attend the Staff College at Camberley (NA.43.10/301).

Regarding the policy of balancing power, it was apparent that the Thai government did not rely solely on one nation. In order to take advantage of the assistance of other powerful countries, particularly in the armed forces, Phibunsonkhram took the decision to send his sons to study military science in Britain and the United States. Concerned about Japan's ambition to expand its influence throughout East and Southeast Asia, the British and American governments responded positively to Phibunsonkhram's plan.

4.1 *Sending Prasong Phibunsonkhram to Britain for Military Education*

Due to the camaraderie between Thailand and Japan, Prasong Phibunsonkhram³ would have been well cared for by Japan and could have gained insight into classified knowledge that was only provided to Japanese citizens had he chosen to go there for military education. However, Thai cadets and midshipmen receiving military education in Europe had never been allowed to attend classes reserved for their citizens. Hence, sending Prasong to study in Britain instead of Japan was for more than just the quality of the military education, but rather a political motive of Phibunsonkhram who wanted to balance power between the superpowers.

The British government was willing to accept Prasong to study in its naval academy with the requirement that Prasong must pass the examination akin to that of a British citizen. In 1936 Prasong traveled to Britain for his naval education and was privately funded by Phibunsonkhram. In the same year, Phibunsonkhram's other son, Anant Phibunsonkhram, was sent for military education in the US, financed by His Majesty's personal funds. The Prime Minister then sent a letter to ask permission from the Minister of Defense, who was Phibunsonkhram himself, requesting that half of Anant's scholarship be shared with Prasong. This request was, not surprisingly, approved without incident (NA. KT.43.10/312).

Prasong could not immediately attend the British naval academy because his English language skills remained unsatisfactory. In fact, before arriving in Britain, he could barely speak English. Hence, Phraya Ratwangsan, the Thai minister to London, decided to send Prasong to study English in Plymouth and suggested to Phibunsonkhram that Prasong should study finance instead of attending the naval academy. On September 8th, 1936, Phibunsonkhram

3 Prasong Phibunsonkhram was the second of Field Marshal Phibunsonkhram's six children. Anant Phibunsonkhram was his elder brother and Phibunsonkhram's firstborn.

sent a telegram to the minister indicating that he agreed to change Prasong's program of study (NA. KT.43.10/312). The Premier changed his mind again in December 1936, and as a result, Prasong was eventually sent to study at the Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC) (NA. KT.43.10/312).

Seemingly, Prasong had been studying smoothly at the BRNC until September 1939 when the eruption of the Second World War in Europe disrupted his life. At the beginning of the War, he was unaffected. In one of Prasong's letters to Phibunsongkhram, he told his father that the supply of consumer goods was enough and the schooling could be continued (Phibunsongkhram 2003, 58). However, in August 1940, the situation in Britain became dire when Germany began to bomb Britain. Phibunsongkhram, therefore, wanted to transfer Prasong for naval training at L'Accademia Navale di Livorno, the Italian Naval Academy (NA. KT.43.10/312). Prasong was accepted by the Italian government to study at their naval academy (NA. KT.43.10/312).

Nevertheless, Phra Manuwetwimonnat, who was the new Thai minister in London, opposed the Prime Minister's demand. He suggested to Phibunsongkhram that his son should not withdraw from the BRNC and that he should not pursue a military career at the naval academy in Italy because it would impact the relationship between Thailand and Britain (NA. KT.43.10/312) since Italy was a member of the Axis. Phra Manuwetwimonnat felt transferring Prasong to Italy could be construed by the British government as Phibunsongkhram showing sympathy towards the Axis.

As a result, Phibunsongkhram devised another plan, which was to send Prasong for naval education in the US. However, due to the dangers associated with crossing the Pacific Ocean, Manuwetwimonnat suggested Phibunsongkhram allow his son to continue studying at the BRNC (NA. KT.43.10/312). Eventually, the Prime Minister recalled all Thai students studying in Britain, including Prasong, to return to Thailand during the war. However, the order to recall the premier's son was too late and the Thai minister to London could not secure a ticket for him in time. Therefore, since Prasong was unable to return to Thailand, he decided to continue his studies at the BRNC and graduated from the academy in 1941 (NA. KT.43.10/312).

While Prasong was studying at the academy, Britain declared war on Germany and Italy but not Japan since its relationship with Japan was not hostile. Nevertheless, Britain was aware of the goodwill between Thailand and Japan due to Phibunsongkhram's close alliance with Hideki Tojo, Prime Minister of Japan. Interestingly, it appeared that the British gave special treatment to Prasong after declaring war against the Axis powers. As a son of the premier, Prasong would seem a suitable intermediary between the two states. Hence, the British government sought to appease Phibunsongkhram

because it expected that good friendship could help maintain the security of its colonies in Southeast Asia. Hence, in accordance with Phibunsongkhram's demands, the British armed forces allowed Prasong to attend any military course, including artillery, torpedo, and underwater mine (NA. KT.43.10/312). After graduating from the Royal Navy Academy in December 1940, Prasong had to remain in Britain because it was impossible to safely return to Thailand. With the assistance of Sir Josiah Crosby, the British minister to Thailand (1934–1941), and Edward Wood, the British Foreign Secretary (1938–1940), Prasong was offered the opportunity to study as a pilot after his graduation. Nevertheless, Phibunsongkhram decided to humbly reject this proposal because he felt anxious about the safety of his son during the training (NA. KT.43.10/312).

In May 1941, Richard Austen Butler, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, invited Prasong and Manuwetwimonnat to have lunch at the Savoy Hotel in London with Walter Guinness, who was the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and other civil servants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the report sent by Manuwetwimonnat to Phibunsongkhram, he commented that the conversation between both sides was amiable and Richard A. Butler was very pleased to meet Prasong (NA. KT.43.10/312). Later on, Prasong became a diplomat when Phibunsongkhram appointed him as an honorary attaché on August 22nd, 1941 (NA. KT.43.10/312), hoping that he would have a role in international affairs and sustain friendship between the two countries during the War. Prasong held this role until January 1942 when Thailand officially declared war on Britain after Japan invaded Thailand. Eventually, Prasong was sent back to Thailand in 1942, as both governments had reached an agreement on exchanging prisoners of war (Phibunsongkhram 2003, 63).

4.2 *Anant Phibunsonngkhram and the Expectation to Study at West Point*

In February 1936, the government intended to send Anant Phibunsongkhram to the US to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point and study military engineering there. However, the Thai government misunderstood that there was a new law promulgated by the US government prohibiting foreigners from applying to the military academy (NA. KT.43.8/78). Indeed, the Thai embassy in Washington later clarified to the Thai government that the US government had never enacted such a law, but anyone desiring to study military tactics at the academy must be approved by the US Congress. However, the embassy's clarification arrived late as Phibunsongkhram had already decided to send Anant to study in France at the École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr instead. Once he graduated from the military academy, the army also planned to send Anant to study at the Ecole de Guerre, an army war college

that trains senior army officers (NA. KT.43.8/78). Phibunsongkhram initially expected that Anant could enter the École Polytechnique. Nonetheless, the premier subsequently changed his mind and ordered Anant to study at the French military academy (NA. KT.43.8/78). Sending Anant to study in France was not the first option. However, it was suitable for the new policy of the army, which had modeled its organization after that of France and Belgium. Hence, the armed forces needed many officers who were familiar with the French and Belgian system to serve within the army. Sending Anant to France was part of Phibunsongkhram's plan to maintain his military power because it was certain that Anant would be appointed to a significant position after graduating from his studies in France, and that he could be one of the Phibunsongkhram's main supporters in the army.

While Anant was studying the French language, the Ministry of Defense decided in August 1937 to move him to Belgium, with the expectation that he would enroll in the École Royale Militaire, the Belgian military academy, after completing high school (NA. KT.43.8/78). In 1939, Anant passed the entrance examination for the military academy. Nevertheless, the Belgian government could not allow Anant to enroll in the academy due to the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe. Anant had to enroll in the École Polytechnique de Bruxelles instead (NA. KT.43.8/78). Seven months after Anant had been studying at the École Polytechnique, the situation became more brutal when Germany invaded Belgium. The government issued an order to immediately relocate all Thai students studying in Belgium, including Anant, to France. Afterward, in November 1940, Phibunsongkhram ordered the Thai minister to Paris to send Anant and his sister, Chirawat Phibunsongkhram, who had also been studying in France, to the US, where the Prime Minister intended to have Anant receive military education at West Point. (NA. KT.43.8/171).

Attending the Military Academy in the US was not a simple matter since the Americans had to reserve all seats in West Point for citizens in times of war. Moreover, according to the US constitution, any foreigner seeking to be educated at West Point must be endorsed by the US Congress (NA. KT.43.8/171). Hence, Phibunsongkhram ordered Seni Pramroj, the Thai minister to Washington D.C., to request special permission for Anant's acceptance to West Point from the US government (NA. KT.43.8/171).

Seni commented that Anant was not ready to attend the Military Academy because his proficiency in English was below average. Furthermore, the Thai minister was not certain whether Congress would permit Anant to study at West Point. Thus, Seni suggested that Phibunsongkhram have Anant study at Purdue University in preparation for future training at West Point. The Premier

agreed, but he stipulated that Anant must study mechanical engineering (NA. KT.43.8/171).

Phibunsongkhram suggested that Seni contact Cordell Hull, the US Secretary of State, to request further support in attaining Anant's admission to West Point (NA. KT.43.8/171). Accordingly, Seni contacted Hull, knowing that he had helped many Thai students to enroll in the Military Academy (NA. KT.43.8/171). As the United States government wanted to reconcile with Thailand, the Department of State agreed to help Seni (NA. KT.43.8/171). Andrew J. May, who was the Chairman of the Military Committee, also supported this idea because he thought it would reinforce the friendship between the two nations (NA. KT.43.8/171).

The US politicians and government, wanting to maintain friendship with Thailand and Phibunsongkhram, expected that the House of Representatives would also support Anant's admission to West Point. On December 2nd, 1941, US newspapers reported that a senator would introduce the bill to Congress soon (NA. KT.43.8/171). However, all efforts would prove to be futile when Japan invaded Thailand on December 8th, 1941. Premier Phibunsongkhram decided to enter into a formal alliance with Japan and declared war on the Allied Powers. Anant was recalled to Thailand and ended up studying military engineering at the Technical Military Academy in Thailand instead.

5 Conclusion

Acquiring modern military education from more technologically advanced world powers was necessary for a newly emerging nation-state like Siam to survive trials and tribulations of the late colonial era of the late-19th and early-20th century. The ruling regimes of Siam, both the absolutist regime and the post-1932 revolutionary regime, were known to rely heavily on foreign superpowers for cutting-edge military knowledge and training. Yet, the practice of sending officers for military education abroad was executed very differently under the two regimes. The major differences in the acquisition of foreign military education were closely related to the two regimes' different stance towards western imperialism as well as their different conceptualization of Siam as a modern nation-state.

Under the absolute monarchy, the Siamese ruling class were not opposed to western imperialism. They managed to compromise and accommodate imperialist powers – especially the British Empire – in their pursuit of free trade and the wealth, influence, and resources that were expected to rise from it in the backwaters of South and Southeast Asia. The Siamese royal government

from Chulalongkorn onwards to the collapse of the absolutist regime in 1932, would mimic the structure and operations of neighboring colonial regimes so as to be able to accommodate free trade for the western powers to the fullest extent. This allowed Siam to survive as the only polity in Southeast Asia not to be colonized through the 19th century and up to the conclusion of the Second World War. The royalist absolutist regime was inadvertently supported by western imperialist powers wanting to assure political stability and a free and prosperous trade environment on mainland Southeast Asia. Under such circumstances, the practice of acquiring advanced military education in the west was done mostly to enhance the kingdom's already cordial relations with western powers. Only princes and sons of the top echelons of the nobility were sent for military education abroad. Some of the highest ranking princes, including the future kings Vajiravudh and Prachathipok were sent to Britain, which was considered Siam's greatest imperialist patron in the colonial era. Prince Chakrabongse, son of Chulalongkorn and Queen Saovabha, was also sent to Russia as a tribute to the special relationship between the Royal Houses of Chakri and Romanov. Other high ranking princes, including Prince Paribatra and Prince Mahidol were sent to Germany as that nation was perceived, at the time, to be among the most advanced in military technology. Other smaller European powers, such as Belgium and Denmark, also provided military training and education for the absolutist regime as a way to balance relations, influence, and reliance upon the great powers.

Circumstances were very different under the Khana Ratsadorn revolutionary regime. First of all, the new regime was fiercely anti-imperialist and was fully aware that such a stance would make them less favorable than the *Ancien Régime*. It was, therefore, of greatest importance to use the acquisition of military training and education to convince the great powers not to lend support to the defunct absolutist regime at the cost of the revolutionary regime. Secondly, since Khana Ratsadorn was devoted to creating a more egalitarian and democratic nation, state-sponsored military training and education abroad was expanded to well educated commoners and high performing military officers as well. The target world powers for Thai officers to acquire advanced military education also included nations that provided assistance to Thailand, as well as nations that propagated anti-western imperialist pan-Asian aspirations, namely, Japan. Nonetheless, Khana Ratsadorn leaders, especially Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, did not intend to be wholly reliant upon external superpowers for the survival of the new Thai nation-state in the same way that the absolutist regime had relied so heavily upon their British and Russian connections at the height of colonial threats. Hence, even as Thailand was drawn closer to Japan's sphere of influence in

the 1930s–1940s, key individuals, such as Phibunsongkhram's own sons were sent to Britain and the US for military education, with the expectation that this would allow Thailand a more balanced relationship in the global arena and that Phibunsongkhram himself might not be so overtly influenced by his government's increasingly close relationship with Japan.

While the degree to which Siam/Thailand was or was not colonized by western imperialist powers in the late-19th to early-20th century remains up for debate, the acquisition of modern military education from more technically advanced world powers appeared to be a choiced diplomatic method of both the imperialist-friendly absolutist regime and the fiercely anti-imperialist Khana Ratsadorn government. The former sent royal and noble offspring abroad to strengthen dynastic ties and encourage imperialist support for the absolute monarchy. The latter sought to use international military ties to affirm the constitutional regime's legitimacy, to assure a balanced and independent foreign policy, and to enhance solidarity with fellow anti-imperialist pan-Asian regimes.

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