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### **St. Petersburg's Man in Siam**

A.E. Olarovskii and Russia's Asian Mission, 1898-1905

**KAREN SNOW**

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par KAREN SNOW

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KAREN SNOW

## ST. PETERSBURG'S MAN IN SIAM

### A.E. Olarovskii and Russia's Asian Mission, 1898-1905

When the *Pamiat' Azova* sailed into the Gulf of Siam in the spring of 1891 with the future Tsar Nicholas II, a new door opened in Russian foreign policy in Southeast Asia. As a result of this voyage and the expansion of Russia's imperial interests in China and commercial shipping to the Far East, consuls were appointed to the major ports along the Southeast Asian coast. Their primary mission had been to safeguard Russia's trade and shipping interests en route to China while maintaining diplomatic relations with the colonial powers in the region of Southeast Asia. At various times consuls in Singapore and the Dutch East Indies had been instructed to search for appropriate sites for coaling stations or trading opportunities and to closely observe the experiences of colonial rule in the region. But, in no respect were they to directly become involved in the political affairs of Dutch, British or French colonial rule for fear of complicating or endangering Russia's position in Southeast Asia or the Far East.<sup>1</sup> There is only one exception to this rule and that occurred when the Russian government appointed a diplomat to Siam towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The story of A.E. Olarovskii's appointment as resident-minister<sup>2</sup> to Siam in October 1898 and his role in furthering Russia's role in the imperial politics of Southeast Asia reveals an unexplored dimension to Russia's Asian mission or plans

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1. See the author's articles on Russian consuls in the region of Southeast Asia which discuss the typical mission and activities of Russian consuls in the 1890s: "The Russian Consulate in Singapore (1890-1905) and British Expansion in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asia*, 25, 2 (Sept. 1994): 344-367 and "A Russian Consul in the Dutch Indies (1894-1899): Southeast Asia through Russian Eyes," *Russian History Histoire Russe*, 31, 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 61-82. Both articles are based on archival and published primary materials (see footnote 2 and 3 below).

2. He arrived in Bangkok in April 1898 after his appointment as charge d'affaires in December 1897, but in October 1898 was promoted to resident-minister. See "Ukazatel' imen" in *Politika kapitalisticheskikh derzhav i natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie v Iugo-Vostochnoi Azii* [hereafter *Pkd*], vol. 2 (M.: Nauka Publishing, 1967), 466.

for expansion in East Asia. Between 1898 and 1902, he had close contacts with the Siamese king, mediated in delicate negotiations between the French and Siamese and made many attempts to expand Russia's trade in the region.<sup>3</sup> During this period Olarovskii had been in the forefront of politics in the Siamese court but his influence would decline with the eventual settlement of the Franco-Siamese negotiations in 1904 and Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). An ambitious and far-sighted individual, he had been determined to raise Russia's imperial stature in Southeast Asia. Little has been published on Russia's presence in Southeast Asia in this period<sup>4</sup> because historians of foreign policy have largely focused on Russia's expansion in the Far East, in particular Manchuria, and its efforts to gain financial and territorial concessions from China. Yet Olarovskii's diplomatic and economic activities in Siam<sup>5</sup> and the reasons for Russia's

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3. Between mid-1902 and mid-1903, Olarovskii's ill-health made him take a year's absence from Siam. See *Pkd*, document 122 [14 (27) May 1903], 239. His published reports in *Pkd* from Bangkok only go up to 1904 and after mid-1903 are concerned primarily with relating the increasing influence of Japan at the Siamese court. He eventually became envoy to Siam in October 1906 but died in 1910.

4. Most of the Western and Russian historiography on Russian imperialism has focused on the expansion of Russia's eastern empire through Central Asia and eastern Siberia to Manchuria and China and the role of explorers, traders, adventurers and government officials in that process. As a result, very little has been done on the important link between Russia's Asian mission in the Far East and Russia's presence in Southeast Asia. There are two monographs by Soviet historians on Russia in Southeast Asia: M.G. Kozlova, *Rossia i strany Iugo-Vostochnoi Azii* (M.: Nauka, 1986) and Ch.A. Sedov, V.A. Tiurin and A.N. Uzianov, eds. *Iz istorii stran Iugo-Vostochnoi Azii* (Moscow: 1968) along with the publication of documents on Russia and Southeast Asia in *Pkd*, vol. 2. This valuable collection of documents from the Russian Archive of Foreign Policy and other government departments contains five sections of documents related to Russia's interests in Thailand from 1891 to 1917. Section 4 on "Russia and the Anglo-French struggle for Siam" includes an extensive number of Olarovskii's reports to the Foreign Ministry as well as the correspondence of the major Russian diplomatic representatives in Paris and Bangkok and of Siamese government officials and diplomatic representatives to the Russian Foreign Ministry including King Chulalongkorn's telegrams to the tsar. This article relies mostly on these published documents in sections 4 and 5 ("Russian-Siamese Relations and the Origins in Siam of Japan and Germany [1900-1914]") for its primary source of investigation on the period of Olarovskii's appointment in Siam between 1897 and 1905. However, I also investigated the Archive of Foreign Policy (Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossii - AVPR), Resources of the Pacific Ocean Department in Moscow in 1993 and 1997 on the Russian Consuls in Singapore and the Dutch East Indies and found that the above edited publication of documents are generally comprehensive especially on Russia's political and foreign relations in Southeast Asia as well as on some naval issues and trade. Soviet historians have also published articles on Imperial Russia's relations with Burma and Siam and in English there is the groundbreaking article by Rosemary Quesed, "Russian Interests in Southeast Asia: Outlines and Sources 1803-1970," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1, 2 (Sept. 1970): 48-60.

5. Some discussion of Olarovskii and his activities in Siam can be found in the Soviet work on Russia and Southeast Asia by Kozlova, specialized articles on Russian-Thai relations cited in this article as well as the introductory articles to the published documents on this topic in *Pkd*. In the English language, Quesed's article briefly refers to his role in Siam and there are two unpublished conference papers (in addition to my own presented to the 11th Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities on 23-25 March 2006) referring to Olarovskii's role in Russia's relations with Siam: Pensri Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand from the Reign of King Chulalongkorn to the First World War," *Papers of the Manila Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia* (November 1983): 1-45 and Manuel Sarkisyanz, "From Russian Diplomatic Reports on Thailand, (1865-1917)," *Papers of the First International Conference of Thai Studies*, (Bangkok, August 1984): 1-11. Both of these papers give an overview of Russia's interests in Siam and utilize Olarovskii's diplomatic

involvement in Siam's struggle to protect its independence from the control of France in the late 1890s, are closely intertwined with its interests in China. Russia's Asian mission and Tsarist dreams for a more dominant role in East Asia are embedded in the goals of Olarovskii's diplomatic activities in Siam. An examination of the latter can provide us with a new and fresh regional perspective on Russia's Asian mission at the turn of the century, the extent of its aspirations in East Asia and their connection to the French desire to expand its empire in Indochina and interests in China.

## I

By the 1890s, the Russian government, under the guidance of the dynamic Finance Minister (1892-1903) Sergei Witte, had embarked on an ambitious imperial undertaking in the Far East. With the building of the Trans-Siberian railway, the expansion of trade with Northern China and the eventual occupation of Manchuria,<sup>6</sup> the Finance and Naval ministries turned their attention to the sea route between the Black Sea and Vladivostok and the development of Russia's strategic interests in Southeast Asia. This sea link, along with the railway, was essential to Witte's Far East venture, which espoused "a peaceful penetration" of China's borders and the expansion of commercial gains through financial agreements at the Chinese court.<sup>7</sup> The Pacific Fleet had been based in Vladivostok since 1860 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 meant that more ships, settlers and supplies traversed the sea route from Odessa to Vladivostok on the Volunteer Fleet to further

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reports and activities as well as some British Foreign Office records and Siamese sources but do not sufficiently draw attention in any contextual way to the link between Russia's role in Siam and the ambitions of its overall mission in East Asia. An article by M.J. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," *Journal of the Historical Society of the University of Malaya*, 3, (1964/65): 60-67 discusses Olarovskii's role in Siam in connection to the Dual Alliance and is predominantly based on English Foreign Office records and the correspondence of the British charge d'affaires at Bangkok, George Greville. A recent work by Patrick Tuck *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb: The French Threat to Siamese Independence, 1858-1907* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995) makes brief reference to his influential position at the Siamese court and his role in the discussions with M. Doumer, governor-general of Indochina, but the discussion is more concerned with how the outcome of the talks reflected Doumer's ambitions for the French takeover of Siam than the nature of Olarovskii's role at the Siamese court.

6. David Schimmelpenninck Van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies and the Path to War with Japan*, (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2001), 61-146.

7. On Witte's aims in East Asia Theodore H. Von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism, 1860-1914: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987); Boris A. Romanov, *Russia in Manchuria, 1892-1906* (New York: Octagon books, 1974); Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904*, (Berkeley: University of California press, 1958); David J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1950); A.L. Narochnitskii, *Kolonial'naia politika kapitalisticheskikh derzhav na Dal'nem Vostoke (1860-1895)* (M., 1956) and William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

Russian colonization of Eastern Siberia.<sup>8</sup> But the extension of Russia's imperial presence in East Asia in the 1890s required wider trade and shipping contacts with the major ports of Southeast Asia and made the government more aware of the need for a consular presence there.

Between 1890 and 1891, the tsarevitch also undertook a world tour to the Far East and along the way had stopovers in Bangkok, Batavia and Singapore, which gave him personal acquaintance with the region of Southeast Asia and a sense that he knew Asia and its people. During this tour, which culminated in the inauguration of the Trans-Siberian railway, the future Nicholas II, under the influence of Prince E.E. Ukhtomskii, his tutor and advisor on the trip, began to shape his dreams of Russia's potential for political and cultural leadership in Asia. A leading spokesman of the *Vostochniki* (Easterners), Ukhtomskii believed that Russia had a special destiny in Central Asia and the Far East because of its geographical, cultural and historical affinity with Asia and deep understanding of Asians which surpassed any other Western power seeking to expand in the region.<sup>9</sup> These views are expressed throughout his published account of the voyage:

When Europeans encounter native elements in the East, they seem to be people from another planet but Russians, on the other hand, are acquainted with the customs of the East [...] so that in the end we do not have any critical attitude toward the East because we are part of its existence, live its same order and interests and our geographical position allows us to be more conscious of its existence.<sup>10</sup>

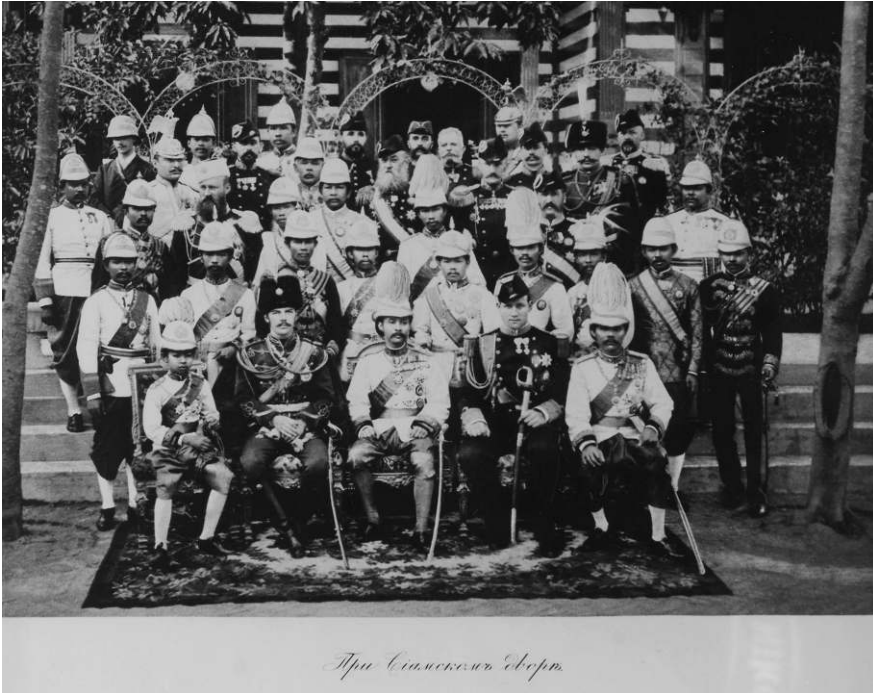
Ukhtomskii wrote that Asians “understood the basis of autocratic power” and “patriarchical existence” and had “a similarity of spirit” which is “not just an embryo of Russian power in the East” but a real “blossoming of its strength and

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8. The Volunteer Fleet, founded in 1878 by a group of merchants and directed by K.P. Pobedonostsev as its vice-chairman and director and Alexander III as the Honorary chairman eventually engaged in the tea trade with China and carried soldiers, exiles and settlers to Siberia. Pobedonostsev and later Witte tried to put the Fleet on workable commercial basis but the Naval ministry resisted this and for the most part it acted as an auxiliary military squadron, which trained sailors and officers to compete with British naval forces. Because of this it had limited commercial success despite the intention of its original committee to boost Russian trade in the East. See R.F. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 132-38; N.I. Zabulin, *O sudokhodstve na Russkom dal'nem Vostoke* (SPb., 1896) and M. Poggenpol', *Ocherk vozniknoveniia i deiatel'nosti Dobrovol' nago flota za vremia xxv-ti letnago ego sushchestvovaniia* (SPb., 1903).

9. For a recently published work which discusses the different perspectives on Russia's Asian mission including a chapter on Ukhtomskii see Part I, Schimmelpenninck Van Der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 42-60. The author describes Ukhtomskii's “close ties to Nicholas II” and “active part in East Asian politics in the early years of his reign”, but is careful to put out that the *Vostochniki* were never “the main driving force” of Russian foreign policy in the Far East but “reflected certain perceptions at court” and among the educated public. Also on Ukhtomskii and the views of other *Vostochniki*, see Milan Hauner, *What is Asia to Us?* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and for its specific relation to Russian foreign policy in Southeast Asia see K. Snow, “A Russian Consul in the Dutch Indies”: 63-64 and 71.

10. E.E. Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie na Vostok ego Imperatorskago Vyschestva gosudaria Naslednika Tsarserevicha 1890-1891* (Leipzig: F.A. Brokgauz, 1897), 44.



Tsarevitch with King Chulalongkorn and his Court, Siam, 1891

influence".<sup>11</sup> Not all of these supporters of the Asian mission, among them Sergei Witte or Olarovskii, were imbued with the ideas of affinity with Asia but Ukhtomskii's closeness to the tsar undoubtedly influenced the latter's outlook on Russia's place in Asia and its diplomatic presence in Siam.

During this trip eastwards a personal friendship and diplomatic relationship developed between King Chulalongkorn of Siam [1868-1910] and the future tsar, which undoubtedly reinforced the latter's sense of Russia's destiny in the region. The king had sent a special invitation to the tsarevitch to visit Bangkok en route and Ukhtomskii's account of their journey to the Far East contains a formal photograph of the tsarevitch with King Chulalongkorn and his young son and other Russian and Siamese officials at Bang Pa-In Summer Palace in the spring of 1891. The tsarevitch had been pleased with his welcome and "the charm and beauty" of Saranrom Palace where he stayed during his stay in Bangkok,<sup>12</sup> though Chulalongkorn later jokingly

11. *Ibid.*, 31-33.

12. *Ibid.*, see attached picture taken in 1891: Chulalongkorn, dressed in a white uniform is in the center of the first row and on his right is the tsarevitch. The young boy is the king's son Chakrabongse, who will go to St. Petersburg for military training in 1898. The pictures and illustration included with this article come from the edition of the *Puteshestvie* cited in footnote 10. The tsarevitch was particularly delighted with the Palace's attentive servants and beautiful curtains made of multicoloured freshly gathered flowers renewed every day. Eileen Hunter with Narisa Chakrabongse, *Katya and the Prince of Siam* (Bangkok: APA Publications, 1994), 24-25.



recalled to Olarovskii that the tsarevitch found the heat oppressive and spent his time in his shirtsleeves.<sup>13</sup> During this trip, Ukhtomskii also convinced the future tsar that Russia, as an ally of France, could help Siam maintain its independence from British as well as French control and hence could act as a check on British expansion in the region.

The Siamese struggle against the imperial incursions on its territories provides a striking example of the way a subjected nation cleverly and effectively utilized international politics and diplomacy to combat the imperialist politics of European powers. A combination of effective and insightful rulers in King Mongkut [1851-1868] and his son Chulalongkorn, along with skillful ministers allowed the government to diplomatically maintain a level of resistance to British and French incursions on its territories in the 1890s. However, the British held the major political and economic sway in Siam and their diplomatic mediation with the French at various times also acted as a counterbalance to French threats and encouraged the Siamese to restrict the role of the French in Siamese politics.<sup>14</sup> Since the mid-1880s, King Chulalongkorn had set Siam on the path of modernization by abolishing slavery, reorganizing the ministries and the judicial and financial branches of his government, establishing a new school system and reforming the military.<sup>15</sup> International diplomatic contacts were established in Europe and foreign advisers from different nations were appointed to the Siamese court in either economic, financial or military categories; the number of adviserships for each nationality was dependent on the level of investment and assistance given to Siam with the largest number given to Britain, Germany and Denmark.<sup>16</sup> Siamese officials and royal relations were sent to Europe to get an education or training to broaden their knowledge of the European world and its national rivalries and power struggles. The king hoped that modernization would strengthen Siam's economy and military and help it combat English and French designs on its territory while at the same time building international support to help in that process.

Throughout the second half of the century, countries in Southeast Asia, among them Burma and Siam, had made some efforts to develop a relationship with

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13. Andrew D. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat: Outposts of the Empire, 1893-1917*, ed. Alexandra Kalmykow (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 122.

14. Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 249.

15. See David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 175-197 and David Joel Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 183-186. Also Chris Baker and Pasik Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47-80 and B.J. Terwiel, *A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942* (London: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 162-284. All of these reforms had enhanced Chulalongkorn's reputation in Europe as an Asian ruler with willing to draw on Western support and direction in his struggle against French expansionism.

16. Foreign adviserships were attached to most departments of the Siamese administration especially in the area of economic development and before 1896, two of the major ones of Finance and Railways went to the British and German governments respectively. See Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 176, 114-115.



Russia<sup>17</sup> but it was not till the 1890s, after the tsarevitch's visit and the appointment of consuls in the region that Siamese officials came to see the possible advantages of a diplomatic relationship. Among the Russian officials in that photograph during the trip to Siam was A.M. Vyvotsev, the newly appointed Russian consul in Singapore.<sup>18</sup> During his visit, the Siamese had proposed further trade and political agreements with Russia and later offered him a treaty on a most-favoured nation status.<sup>19</sup> The Russian consul emphasised Siam's potential for Russian trade but also as an important "field for the collection of information about Asian affairs".<sup>20</sup> Vyvotsev had been instructed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay particular attention to the actions of the French and British in Siam. In his reports to the Ministry in the first half of the 1890s, he reported in detail on Siam's struggle to maintain its independence between the encroachment of Britain and France and in 1893 he predicted that "within three years Siam would become a 'vassal' of Britain".<sup>21</sup> He also realized the need to preserve an independent Siam as a buffer zone between the British Empire in India and French Indochina.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1893, Chulalongkorn had sent a telegram to Tsar Alexander III requesting his intervention on a dispute with the French<sup>23</sup> but the tsar declined to intervene perhaps because Russia was just in the early stages of its alliance with France and the boundaries of British and French imperial control in Siam were still in flux.

By the mid-1890s, significant changes in the diplomatic scene in Europe and Asia turned Chulalongkorn's special attention to Russia. Nicholas II had acceded to the throne in 1894 and Chulalongkorn saw an opportunity for Russia to mediate in his disputes with France especially when, in that same year, Russia also entered into a Dual Alliance with France. In 1897, Chulalongkorn undertook a tour to Europe to shore up his diplomatic support in his negotiations with France after the latter demanded more territory on the east side of the Mekong. Along the way, the king visited St. Petersburg and stayed for eleven days during which photographs of the two rulers were published in most European countries confirming the belief of the friendly relations between the two. More informal photographs of the king with the

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17. In this period, Russia was primarily concerned with maintaining the commercial and navigation lines of the Volunteer Fleet through Southeast Asia to China and by 1863 had sent naval ships to Bangkok to greet King Mongkut's government. But Russia was slow to see the potential of Siam as a promising economic partner and the attempts at trade agreements fell through. See introduction to published documents "Rossiia i frantsuzskaia ekspansiiia v Siame" in *Pkd*, 2, 101.

18. For more information on Vyvotsev and his activities in Singapore, see Snow, "The Russian Consulate in Singapore": 344-367. The consul can be seen in the 1891 photo in the last row second from the left and on his right is Ukhtomskii.

19. "Rossiia i frantsuzskaia ekspansiiia v Siame" in *Pkd*, 2, 101.

20. *Pkd*, 1, (M., 1965) document 44 [18 (30) Sept.1891],106 and AVPR, d.1355 [25 Feb (9 March) 1894, ll. 41-43.

21. *Pkd*, 1, document 45 [2 (14) Feb.1893],107.

22. *Ibid.*, 107.

23. *Pkd*, 1, document 51 (16 (28) July 1893), 116.



The tsar with King Chulalongkorn, St. Petersburg, summer 1897

tsar and his family were also taken during his visit, demonstrating the close and relaxed nature of their friendship.<sup>24</sup> In a letter to the queen, Chulalongkorn reflected on the “perfect” reception he received in Russia and noted that he was “proud to have such good friends who are truly sincere.”<sup>25</sup> Later in 1898, one of his sons, Prince Chakrabongse would enroll in a military school in Russia during which time he would live at the Winter Palace.<sup>26</sup>

During his stay, the tsar also actively supported Chulalongkorn’s mission and acted as a mediator to facilitate the king’s visit and formal reception in France in spite of some reluctance on the part of the French.<sup>27</sup> British sources reported that Nicholas II even advised him not to give up any territory to Indochina.<sup>28</sup> Chulalongkorn also requested that the tsar send a diplomatic representative to Siam and Nicholas II complied. The king’s own critical needs for diplomatic support in 1897 and onwards now coincided with the rising confidence of the Russian

24. Eileen Hunter’s book on Chulalongkorn’s son Chakrabongse and his Russian wife contains a personal photo of Chulalongkorn with the tsar and his family on his visit to Russia in 1897. See Hunter, *Katya*, 27. This article includes a more formal 1897 picture from the *Puteshestvie*.

25. See Duke, “The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...,” 6

26. For an account of Chakrabongse’s training and life in Russia from the perspective of his Russian wife, see Hunter with Narisa Chakrabongse, *Katya and the Prince of Siam*.

27. “Rossiia i anglo-frantsuzskaia bor’ba za Siam,” in *Pkd*, 131-132.

28. Chandran, “The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect,” 63.

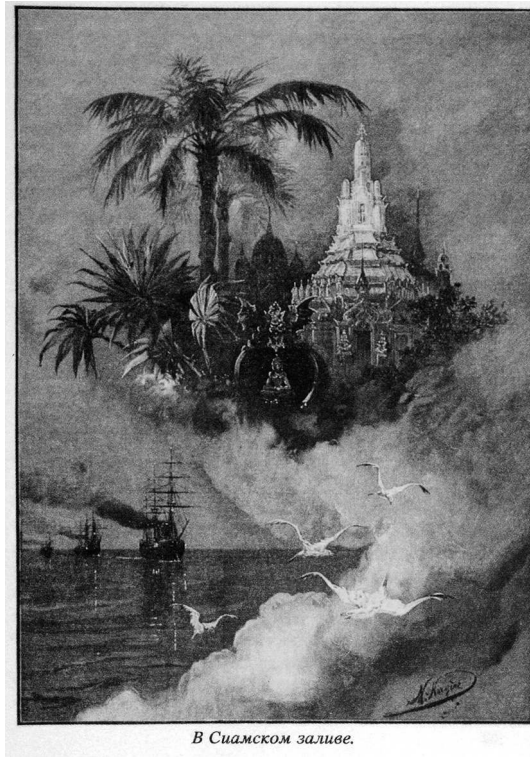


Illustration from the Journey (*Puteshestvie*) of the Tsarevitch's ship *Pamiat' Azova* in the Gulf of Siam

government in East Asia and the ambitions of the tsar and Witte to assert an imperial presence there. Russia's profile in East Asia had enlarged with the building of the Trans-Siberian railway in Manchuria and its stronger links with the Chinese government, especially after its dual alliance with France in 1894<sup>29</sup> and the expansion of Indochina. A diplomatic presence in Southeast Asia could only help reinforce Russian ambitions on a political and economic level in East Asia and the appointment of Olarovskii was designed to do just that.

## II

In April 1898, Olarovskii arrived in Bangkok with instructions to establish official diplomatic relations and advise Siam in its disputes with France. His character and ambition would suit this position admirably. As consul-general in San Francisco

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29. Several authors have written about Russia's ventures in China but the recent work by Schimmelpenninck Van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 32-146 especially notes how Russia's diplomatic success in China led to intense interest in official circles with Russia's imperial position in the Far East.

and New York, Olarovskii had most of his consular experience in America and married an American woman. Nevertheless, while in New York he read specialized literature and press reports on Siam and made himself Russia's leading "Siamese expert".<sup>30</sup> His extensive knowledge of Siam, its politics, society and economy is evident in a preliminary report he sent in July 1897 to the minister of Foreign Affairs, Count V.N. Lamsdorf while he was still general consul in New York.<sup>31</sup> In addition, his personality was admirably suited to the important social side of his interactions with other Western diplomats in Bangkok and with the Siamese court. Andrew Kalmykow, his first secretary in Bangkok, recalled that he was "powerfully built, jovial, expansive and hospitable" as well as "embarrassingly frank, openly anti-English but notwithstanding popular in the English colony. Altogether he was an extremely likeable man and a very sensible diplomat, active and resourceful."<sup>32</sup>

Olarovskii's ambitions in Siam were encouraged primarily by his privileged position at the Siamese court and personal access to the king. Upon arrival, he immediately set about establishing his influence with the Siamese court and in the diplomatic circles of Southeast Asia and was pleased to report that the Russian mission was close to the Royal Court. He inaugurated the mission with a successful evening ball of 175 Siamese and 130 Europeans including important Siamese government officials with such as the older brother of the king. Olarovskii proudly noted that they stayed till midnight and that, for the first time a group of around twenty Siamese women attended a formal event in a European house. More importantly, the party was also attended by those Siamese officials whom the diplomat hoped would be useful in shaping a pro-Russian party at court to extend his influence there, among them Siam's navy commander Admiral Krommuen Prabporapak and Prince Devawongse, minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>33</sup> Prabporapak would be key to his direct contact with the king and the ministers of government, which became very important in his mediation between the French and Siamese disputes over territory. In this way, Olarovskii developed a friendly relationship with Chulalongkorn, and Kalmykow noted in his memoirs that "Chulalongkorn was enormously amused by Olarovskii and appreciated his solid qualities, and treated him as a trusted friend".<sup>34</sup> The diplomat used all these connections to assert Russia's imperial influence in the region, giving rise to British concern about his influence at the Siamese court.

In September of 1898, the Siamese government actually requested Olarovskii employ military and naval personnel to help train their Siamese counterparts and be advisors to this newly established force. Olarovskii considered it one of his first

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30. For this biography on Olarovskii see Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat...*, 111 and Manuel Sarkisyanz, "From Russian Diplomatic Reports on Thailand...", 3.

31. *Pkd*, 2, document 64 [1 (13) July 1897], 145-149.

32. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat...*, 111.

33. *Pkd*, document 67 [23 May (4 June) 1898], 151-153.

34. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat...*, 112.

tasks to acquire more Russian advisors in various capacities to the government so it would be "more acquainted with Russia" and what it could offer to Siam.<sup>35</sup> All of these connections set off alarm bells among the English in Bangkok, and the British charge d'affaires in Bangkok, George Greville, asked Prince Devawongse if military and naval advisors had been requested; the prince denied it but admitted Olarovskii might acquire civil officers to deal with negotiations with the French. Eventually, a retired Russian naval officer did come to Siam and applied for a position with the Royal Navy.<sup>36</sup> Because of the close friendship between Olarovskii and the naval commander, Prabporapak, the British feared the Russian naval officer would play an active role in Siam's navy.<sup>37</sup>

The Siamese government also wanted to employ Russians to work in various government offices. On a visit to Russia to see Chulalongkorn's son, the general advisor to the Siamese government, Rolin Jacquemyns (a Belgian), had been instructed to engage several Russians as legal advisors.<sup>38</sup> In March 1899, Olarovskii requested Chulalongkorn give him a position in the Ministry of Local Government<sup>39</sup> but the British dissuaded the Siamese against this. The Russian diplomat's ambition to undermine British influence in the Siamese government would remain so much wishful thinking. Chulalongkorn was careful to placate the British who had the military and political clout to affect the course of Siamese affairs if offended and on occasion expressed their displeasure with the king's efforts to draw the Russians into a more concrete role in his modernization efforts.

Olarovskii's ambitions for his position in Siam coincided closely with Russia's foreign policy aims in East Asia. From the beginning his reports back to St. Petersburg conveyed his historical knowledge of the politics of France and England in Indochina and clear understanding of the context of their expansion in Siam.<sup>40</sup> Since Siam bordered on China, its independence from British and French control affected Russia's long term foreign policy aims to assert itself in China and East Asia. In particular Olarovskii and the Ministry of Russian Foreign Affairs feared that Britain might use its control of Burma to gain access to China. As Russia's representative in Bangkok, his duty was to protect Siam's sovereignty and, if possible, to do so at England's expense. Upon his arrival, he noted the interest of the English press in Russia's relations with King Chulalongkorn and the circumstances that were conducive to the spread of Russian influence in Siam. Acknowledging the achievements of the government, which he regarded as "the most cultured in a European sense"<sup>41</sup> of the Southeast

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35. *Pkd*, document 67, 154.

36. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 63.

37. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...," 18.

38. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 63.

39. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...," 18-19.

40. *Pkd*, document 64 [1 (13) July 1897], 146-147.

41. *Ibid*.



Asian countries, he praised Chulalongkorn for his reforms and concern for the growth of “civil life and welfare” in Siam and his drive to maintain Siam’s independence. Although this independence had been guaranteed by the Convention of 1896 signed by France and England and the spheres of influence of each country demarcated, France still wanted more control in the Upper Mekong and the southern provinces of Yunnan and Szechuan on the Chinese border.<sup>42</sup> Although England often advised the Siamese government in its squabbles with France over territories in Laos, Olarovskii believed, as did Chulalongkorn, that Russia as an ally of France, could be more actively constructive as a mediator in these discussions and help preserve Siam’s independence while diminishing England’s political influence in Siam.

But Olarovskii, like Sergei Witte, viewed economic success as the route to political influence in Asia and stressed “the value of our relations with Siam”<sup>43</sup> as a means of protecting Russia’s economic interests in China. Overall, his objectives in Siam were concerned primarily with trade and railway concessions as a way of expanding Russian influence in the region. His stay in the United States had undoubtedly convinced him of the importance of commercial and entrepreneurial activity for modern nations in the twentieth century. Olarovskii was particularly concerned with the possibility that England could endanger Russia’s future economic relations with Indochina and southern China. He hoped that France, with the backing of Russia and its “influential support in Peking and Bangkok” could “paralyse England’s influence” in the region by obtaining railway concessions in South China.<sup>44</sup> In this way, Russia could also acquire valuable markets in Siam and the south of China for its kerosene and petroleum and other cheese products. There had long been a fear in the Russian Foreign Ministry that Britain would construct a route through northern Burma to southern China and interfere with Russian and French designs to expand trade there. These hopes for Russian markets in southern China corresponded very neatly with Sergei Witte’s future goals after the extension of the Trans-Siberian railway into Manchuria.<sup>45</sup> In August 1898, Olarovskii wrote:

Our tasks in Asia with the structure of the Siberian-Manchurian railway are, it seems to me, far from finished and south central China in view of its proximity to our Central Asian possessions and other possessions found under our sphere of influence, must not be given up to the influence of Britain and even other less friendly nations.<sup>46</sup>

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42. *Ibid.*, 148.

43. *Ibid.*, 147.

44. *Ibid.*, 148-49.

45. A.S. Guzin, “K voprosu ob ustanovlenii russko-siamskikh diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii,” in *Problemy vneshnei politiki afro-aziatskikh stran: Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (M., 1980), 34.

46. *Pkd*, document 72 [1 (13) Aug. 1898], 167.

By the end of the century, Russia had established trade with China through Mongolia and Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan) on the western border<sup>47</sup> and now with Witte's expansion of Russian influence in Manchuria, the alliance with France and diplomatic friendship with Siam the door seemed open to further opportunities within the southern region.

Throughout his stay, Olarovskii remained active in promoting Russia's trade with Siam. The tsar had written "very interesting" on the margin of Olarovskii's report next to the suggestion of exporting Russian petrol oil to Siam, stating that "this is almost all a Russian representative in Siam needs to know"<sup>48</sup>. But many of the diplomat's efforts in that regard proved unsuccessful. Russia's major export of kerosene to Siam was not as competitive as the American kerosene trade there, and its import of teak and rice was actually transported indirectly through British ports.<sup>49</sup> Olarovskii also tried to encourage private Russian mining companies to come and mine the southern part of Siam but there was little response from Russian merchants. In the end they were reluctant to take on the many financial burdens in overseas expansion and were not given any assistance by the Russian government. In an interview to a St. Petersburg paper, the diplomat noted that a heavy tax system deterred Russian merchants from expanding overseas.<sup>50</sup> In 1901, Count V.N. Lamsdorf as foreign minister wrote to Finance Minister Sergei Witte expressing the many gains to be had from the Russian expansion of trade with Siam.<sup>51</sup> By the early twentieth century, the Japanese and Americans were strong economic competitors in the region and Germany had made great headway in directing railway construction in Siam in the 1890s.<sup>52</sup>

Olarovskii also played an important role in the Danish East Asian Company,<sup>53</sup> and looked after their interests in Siam using his influence with the Danes to boost

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47. See Mark Mancall, "Russia and China: The Structure of Contact," in *Russia and Asia: Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1972), 313-329.

48. Sarkysianz, "From Russian Diplomatic Reports on Thailand...", 3-4 and A. Popov, "K istorii vozniknoveniia russko-siamskikh otnoshenii", *Novyi Vostok*, 6 (1924), 38-40.

49. *Pkd*, document 94 (Notes of Kalmykow about Siam) [19 April (2 May) 1901], 199. By the end of the century, Russia had a sizeable kerosene trade to India and Southeast Asia. Also see a report by the Minister of Foreign Affairs A.B. Lobanov-Rostovskii in *Pkd*, 1, document 7 [22 Feb. (6 March) 1896, 161 and E.V. Koriander, "O vyvoze russkogo kerosina v indiiskii okean," *Gornyi zhurnal* (SPb.), kn.7 (1884).

50. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 20.

51. *Pkd*, document 119, Letter from Lamsdorf to L.P. Urusov about the policy of foreign powers in Siam [6 (19) July 1901], 236.

52. Germany had stepped up trade to Siam in the 1890s and was keen on trade with China and Manchuria, but its most important role in the Siamese economy was in the railway system, where a German acted as director and advisor to the State railway for five years. Germany was also rumoured to be seeking coaling stations from Siam. See "Russko-siamskie otnosheniia i proniknovenie v Siam i Iaponii i Germanii (1900-1914)," in *Pkd*, 2, 230-232.

53. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 66. For more information on the Danish East Asian Company and its relations with Russian commercial shipping, see K. Snow, "Russian Commercial Shipping and Singapore, 1905-1916," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 29, 1 (March 1998): 47.



Russian trade with Siam. Denmark was the homeland of the Empress Dowager, Maria Fedorovna, hence Russia's close commercial connection with this country. The Danes were also in second place (along with the Germans) among European countries in the number of contract workers in Siam (22) so their relationship with the Russians put the latter in a more potentially influential position from the British perspective.<sup>54</sup> The Company was strongly connected with Witte's drive to expand trade with China and create a Russian merchant fleet to carry freight to the Eastern ports. In 1900, a Russian Steamship Company was formed under the auspices of the Danish East Asian Company and as a result six of its twelve ships flew the Russian flag.<sup>55</sup> In 1899, Olarovskii tried to persuade the Siamese government to grant the Danes a concession for a national bank in Siam so Russia could get control over some monetary and trade policies in Siam. He also supported the French in their efforts to form a dock company in Bangkok but both these projects were seen as "potential threats" to British agency houses and banks in Siam and were viewed as a Russian attempt to undermine their influence in Siam. Later Olarovskii would even try to persuade the Bank of Russia-China to play a role in the Siamese economy by financing the government.<sup>56</sup> Both ventures failed because of British pressure on the Siamese government not to support these efforts.

Any extension of Russian trade required the necessity of a coaling station for its ships. Towards the end of 1898, the British charge d'affaires, George Greville had heard rumours that Olarovskii was trying to find a coaling station for the Russian navy.<sup>57</sup> Other Russian consuls in the region such as Vyvadtsev had been instructed by the Russian Navy to find a coaling station in the region to maintain the navigation route between Russia and ports in the Far East. In May 1898, Olarovskii wrote a report to Count M.N. Murav'ev, then minister of Foreign Affairs, which briefly referred to the search for a coaling station off the Malacca Peninsula as part of his mission in Bangkok, especially important in military times<sup>58</sup>. Later that year he met secretly with Prince Devawongse to ask for a concession to dig a canal through the Kra Isthmus. It has been suggested that he did this on behalf of the French hoping that they would allow Russia to build a coaling station in the Indochinese islands.<sup>59</sup>

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54. The British came first with 58 contract workers and the Germans were tied with the Danes. See Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 176.

55. In 1900 H.N. Andersen, the founder of the East Asiatic Company met with Witte in St. Petersburg where an agreement was reached for six ships of the Company to fly the Russian flag. AVPR, d. 1325 [19 Mar. (1 Apr.) 1899], 1.11 and [18 Feb (2 Mar.) 1899], 1, 7.

56. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 66.

57. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

58. *Pkd*, document 67 [23 May (4 June) 1898], 153-154. There is not a lot of information in the published documents of Olarovskii's reports back to the Ministry about the search for a coaling station, unlike documents of the failed attempts of other consular efforts in Singapore and Batavia but English diplomatic sources and newspapers seemed convinced of Olarovskii's intentions in this regard.

59. See Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 63-64 and 66.

He renewed this effort in 1902 but to no avail. Eventually a secret 1907 Anglo-Siam convention prevented Siam from fulfilling his request.<sup>60</sup>

### III

In the end, Chulalongkorn's diplomatic disputes with France offered Olarovskii the best opportunity as a mediator to expand Russia's political influence in Siam and the region. The tsar and his Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed him to give "beneficent assistance" and "moral support" in Siam's "unequal struggle with its mighty neighbours" which "must be free of all selfish motives and efforts to obtain any advantages."<sup>61</sup> Throughout the 1890s, France was encroaching even further on Siam's territories and had sparked a major diplomatic row over its control of Laos, traditionally under Siamese control. In 1893, fighting broke out between French and Siamese troops on the Chaophraya river and one French officer was killed. France used this incident now known as the Paknam Incident as a pretext for war and tried to send gun-boats up the Chaophraya. After this altercation with Siam's defensive forces, the French put several aggressive demands on the Siamese government.<sup>62</sup> Britain gave only moral support to Siam and in the end, the latter had to give in to the extensive demands of the French. It included an indemnity of three million francs along with the cession to France of the whole of Laos east of the Mekong, the creation of a twenty-five kilometre demilitarized zone on the west bank of the Mekong as well as the occupation of Siam's coastal provinces, Chanthaburi and Trat.<sup>63</sup> France wished to extend its territorial base outside Indochina and saw itself as protector of the Vietnamese empire in Laos and Cambodia. In response to the British extension of control in Upper Burma and the Shan states there, France also wanted to protect its potential trade to Szechuan and Yunnan provinces in southern China via the Yunnan-Tonkin railway line.<sup>64</sup> As an ally of France, Russia was very interested in the potential for its own trade with southern China that could emerge from this railway extension.

Since the mid-19th century, Britain had the predominant political and commercial position in Siam and acted as one of its major advisors on relations with the French.<sup>65</sup> Alarmed by French actions in 1893, Britain had reached an

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60. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 19.

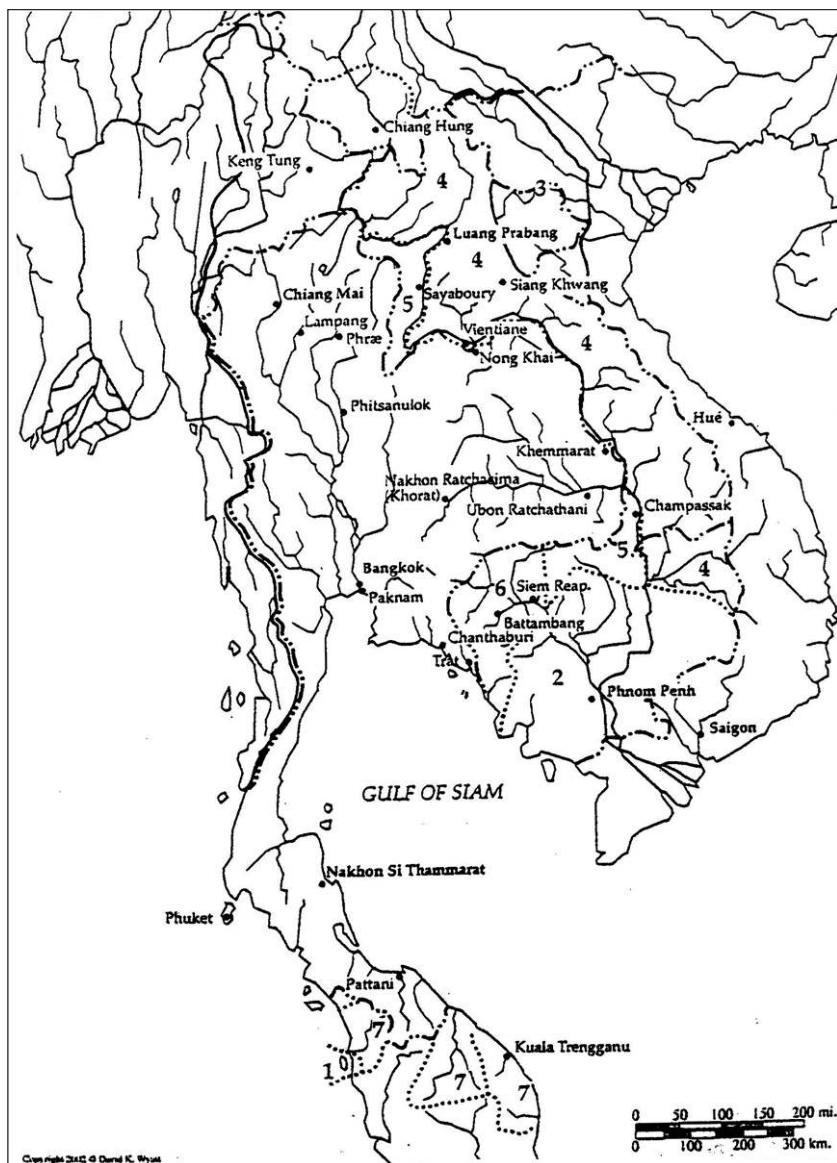
61. O.F. Solov'ev, "Iz istorii russko-tailandskikh otnoshenii," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 6 (1967): 111-130.

62. See Wyatt, *Thailand*, 189 and also see in "Rossiia i Frantsuzskaia ekspansii v Siame (1891-1895)," in *Pkd*, 2, 100-101.

63. Wyatt, *Thailand*, 189. Also Hugh Toye, *Laos: Buffer State or Battleground* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 23-49 and Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McKoy, *Laos: War and Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), 53-66.

64. *Ibid*.

65. See Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 176-177. Also D.S. SarDesai, *British Trade and Expansion in Southeast Asia* (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Books, 1977), 220-263.



Source : David K. Wyatt, *A Short History of Thailand* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 193.

Thai territorial losses, 1785-1909

1. Cessions to Britain by the Sultan of Kedah, 1785-1800.
2. Cambodian territory placed under French protection by Franco-Siamese Treaty, 1867.
3. Black Tai mŭang taken by France, 1888.
4. East bank of Mekong ceded to France by Franco-Siamese Treaty, 1893.
5. West bank territories ceded to France by Franco-Siamese Treaty, 1904.
6. Western Cambodian provinces ceded to France by Franco-Siamese Treaty, 1907.
7. Malay states ceded to Britain by Anglo-Siamese Treaty, 1909.

agreement with France in 1896 that set the Mekong as a boundary to British Burma and French Laos and settled the balance on their spheres of influence in the region<sup>66</sup> for the rest of the decade. French colonialists, however, aggressively persisted in their efforts to extend French extraterritorial rights from Siamese controlled territories in Laos and revise the Franco-Siamese Treaty and Convention of 1893.<sup>67</sup> For the most part, the British were keen to preserve an independent Siam as a buffer state and did not wish to risk a military confrontation with France over Siam by intervening in its disputes. Thus Russia had a diplomatic opening, as an ally to the French and a rival of Britain, to contribute to the international pressure by other foreign powers for Siam's independence. In 1897, on his visit to Europe, the king had been pleased with his formal reception by the French government and some tensions had been eased but there were still three issues that had not been resolved: the regulation of the twenty-five-mile zone on the east side of the Mekong including Battambang and Siem Reap as set forward by the Franco-Siamese Treaty and Convention of 1893,<sup>68</sup> the territory of Luang Prabang in Laos on the east side of the Mekong, and the registration of Laotians in Siam as French citizens with rights of extraterritoriality that made them free from the jurisdiction of the Siamese court.<sup>69</sup> Albert Defrance led the French Legation as minister in Bangkok (1895-1907) and took a hard-line approach in these negotiations.

Upon Olarovskii's arrival in Bangkok in 1898, his reports to Count M. Murav'ev in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were concerned with relating the particulars of the Siamese-French conflict and his role in advising Siam on negotiations. He believed that Russia's mediation in this conflict could do much to enhance its political stature in Siam and in the game of imperialist politics in the region.<sup>70</sup> By protecting Siam's independence, Russia could ensure a friendly power on China's southern border and protect any potential for Russian trade there. Britain's interest in Yunnan's rich minerals in the southern part of China also needed to be contained and Olarovskii feared that French aggression towards Siam might activate its further expansion into China through upper Burma or give Britain an excuse to take over more of Siam. Maintenance of Siam's independence was therefore vital to

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66. There were three zones: the first zone, which included the portion of Siam drained by the Chaophraya River, the most populated and richest part of the country, remained neutral and both France and Britain recognized its independence; the second French zone included the north and eastern regions on the right side of the Mekong, western Cambodian provinces and Laotian territory while the third zone gave the British control of the peninsula of Malaysia. See Wyatt, *Thailand*, 190.

67. *Ibid.*, 187-191 and "Rossiia i anglo-frantsuzskaia bor'ba za Siam (1896-1909)" in *Pkd*, 2, 130-135.

68. In this Convention of 1896, the British and French had agreed to the Mekong as the boundary between British Burma and French Laos; see Wyatt, *Thailand*, 190 and *Pkd*, 130.

69. *Pkd*, 130-134. Also see Wyatt, *Thailand*, 190 on the importance of the extraterritoriality issue to the Siamese. He stresses that the French had abused their privileges that put French subjects beyond the jurisdiction of the Siamese courts, and had enrolled as French subjects anyone born or claiming descent from anyone born in Laos or Cambodia.

70. See *Pkd*, document 69 [23 June (5 July) 1898], 160. Also see documents: 70, 71, 73, 76, 77, 79, 80.

Russia's position in China as well as Southeast Asia, and the Russian diplomat hoped his mediation between France and Siam could ensure this process and thus deal England a "strong blow" in imperialist competition.<sup>71</sup>

Olarovskii's direct acquaintance with the regional issues and the politics of the Siamese court could not but enhance his approach in this undertaking. From 1898 up to 1901 he tried out a number of tactics to resolve the issues between France and Siam and this proved to be the main forum of his political activity in Siam. In the summer of 1898, the king of Siam was primarily concerned with France's demands of extraterritoriality so Olarovskii proposed that a census of French subjects be conducted by Russia, France and Siam on the west side of the Mekong to resolve the tricky issue of extraterritoriality that France used to assert its political influence in Siam. The French rejected the plan and Olarovskii believed that they were more interested in prolonging the border disputes with Siam and their military occupation of the province of Chanthaburi.<sup>72</sup> He feared that the actions of the French risked driving the Siamese to find support in England, which would then seize the opportunity to make Siam a protectorate.<sup>73</sup> By December 1898, there was an incident on the border and fighting was reported in Battambang, an area on the east side of the Mekong occupied by Siam. In conversations with Olarovskii, Chulalongkorn seemed in despair with the slow process of the French negotiations and expressed the hope that the tsar might let him go into exile in Russia!<sup>74</sup>

In December 1898, Olarovskii suggested to the Russian Foreign Ministry that he intervene personally and start negotiations with M. Doumer, governor-general of Saigon. He knew Doumer was keen on plans to build a Tonkin-Yunnan railway and resolve any immediate tensions between the French government and Siam which could upset those plans.<sup>75</sup> Initially, Russia did not approve Olarovskii's suggestion as the Ministry felt it was out of their diplomatic jurisdiction. But he eventually undertook several meetings with the Foreign Minister Dewavongse to convince him that Doumer was open to negotiation. In spite of some doubt put in the minister's mind by the British on the success of this endeavour,<sup>76</sup> his proposal for

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71. *Ibid.*, and document 72 [1 (13) Aug. 1898], 167-168.

72. *Ibid.*, document 76 [18 (30) December 1898], 171-172.

73. *Ibid.*, document 80 [4 (16) March 1899], 180-181. Much of this expansionist policy of the French in Southeast Asia was further stirred by the debacle at Fashoda in upper Egypt in 1898 when the French were unable to match British forces in the Sudan and had to back down from a confrontation. See Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 170.

74. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat...*, 117.

75. *Ibid.*, document 76, 171-172. Ironically, Doumer is regarded as one of the radical French colonialists of the time because of his ambitious plans to eventually extend French control to the Upper Mekong and Laos and also to annex Siam to create a greater French Empire on par with the British Empire in India and Burma. Spurred by France's humiliation by the British in the Fashoda incident in Egypt in 1898, he wished to regain France's honour in Southeast Asia. See Patrick Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 189.

76. *Pkd*, document 79 [4 (16) March 1899], 177-178. In this report, Olarovskii writes in detail about his efforts to counter the British attempt to thwart these talks in his conversations with Prince Devawongse and how Prince Damrong, the Minister of Interior and Prabhporapak backed

an exchange of official diplomatic visits and a personal meeting between King Chulalongkorn and Doumer was eventually accepted by the Siamese government. In March 1899 a Siamese official, the commissioner of Battambang, visited Saigon where he received a great welcome.<sup>77</sup>

The story behind Olarovskii's efforts to convince both Doumer and the Siamese officials to negotiate, as described in Kalmykow's memoirs, depicts the immense resourcefulness of this diplomat. He sent his secretary to accompany Mrs. Olarovskii to Saigon presumably on a trip to better her health; the real purpose was for Kalmykow to meet Doumer, convince him of the sincerity of the Siamese and set the stage for the arrival of the Siamese embassy to Saigon.<sup>78</sup> In return Doumer visited Siam in April and Olarovskii arranged clandestine meetings between him and the king and was present at all the negotiations. In the end, Chulalongkorn was pleased with the results as was Doumer who later announced on 21 April 1899 that he had resolved all of the issues with the king. In return for small concessions in territory and the registration of French citizens, Doumer claimed to have obtained French military and public service adviserships in the Siamese government.<sup>79</sup> For Olarovskii, this would be the height of his diplomatic success in Siam.

Unfortunately for both of them, it turned out that Doumer had exaggerated the success of the negotiations and Olarovskii later confirmed that the king had not agreed to a French military advisership.<sup>80</sup> In any case, the French government later rejected these negotiations and Olarovskii blamed it on the pro-British group and Mr. Rolin Jacquemyns who set out to discredit him.<sup>81</sup> More than likely, it was the French government's disapproval of Doumer, taking charge of the negotiations as a colonial official, that led to the breakdown of the talks. Instead, Albert Defrance was eventually appointed as chief negotiator<sup>82</sup> and the meetings were temporarily shifted to Paris. As a result, Olarovskii lost some credibility with the Siamese government. His promotion of, and alliance with Doumer in these negotiations clearly demonstrated the East Asian angle of Russia's Dual Alliance with France. Without a doubt, this relationship between Doumer and Olarovskii had been cemented by the latter's hopes that Russia might also eventually benefit from the governor-general's plans for a railway connection into southern China. Chulalongkorn and his officials may have suspected that Olarovskii had falsely raised expectations for a resolution to these disputes and wasted their time and effort because of his own ambition to extend Russia's role in East Asia.

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his efforts and were key in opposing "the anglophilic sympathies" of Devawongse and some other ministers, 179.

77. *Ibid.*, 176-179.

78. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat*..., 117-120.

79. See Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 197-198.

80. *Ibid.*

81. Pkd, document 82 [22 May (3 July) 1899], 182-183 and document 83 [20 July (1 Aug.) 1899], 184-185.

82. See Patrick Tuck, *The French Wolf and the Siamese Lamb*, 188-194.



In September of 1899, another round of talks proceeded in Bangkok with the arrival of Defrance. Olarovskii was again appointed mediator and proposed to Siam that a tripartite committee register French subjects on the west bank of the Mekong, which they accepted.<sup>83</sup> But by the end of October 1899, France still proved intransigent in its negotiations with the Siamese and Defrance's refusal to return Chanthaburi to Siam led to a breakdown in talks. Throughout this period, Olarovskii would send secret telegrams to Foreign Minister Murav'ev on the progress of the negotiations that showed his exasperation with the attitude of the French.<sup>84</sup> Later, after a visit to Russia in 1900, he also put forward a proposal accepted by Siam that they give Battambang to France in exchange for Chanthaburi.<sup>85</sup> At one point, France agreed to give back the latter but in February 1900, the French government ordered Defrance to end negotiations indefinitely without any reason, even though the drafting of a convention was in process.<sup>86</sup>

Chulalongkorn sent a letter to Nicholas II in the summer of 1900 which outlined his disappointment with the negotiations on the issues of the registration of Siamese citizens as French subjects, the cession of the east bank of the Mekong and the evacuation of Chanthaburi: "We were prepared to give France, who has everything to gain, as much as it was possible to give, while on her part France gives us nothing"<sup>87</sup>. Olarovskii also believed that Defrance's position was unfriendly to Siam<sup>88</sup> and it was essential that France recognize the importance of keeping the country as a buffer zone between the English and French zones to protect itself and Russia from the further territorial expansion of the English. Eventually, in September 1901, France sent a new negotiator, Antony Klobukowski, to Siam and requested Olarovskii as a mediator in the talks.<sup>89</sup> In the meantime Olarovskii still continued to discuss matters in Saigon with Doumer, who was apparently on good terms with Klobukowski.<sup>90</sup> Undoubtedly, his contacts within the Siamese

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83. *Ibid.*, document 83, 184. Olarovskii notes that he hasn't lost influence with the king but he needs to see him more often: "Since the arrival of Defrance, my position has not been easy..." (185) but he still thinks he can have some positive impact on the negotiations.

84. *Ibid.*, document 87 [15 (27) Oct.1899], document 88 [12 (24) Dec.1899] and document 89 [18 (30) Jan.1900], 190-191.

85. *Ibid.*, documents 87 and 88, 190-191. In his memoirs, Kalmykow claims to have first originated the idea of an exchange of Battambang for Chanthaburi when Olarovskii had returned to Russia in early 1900. He spoke to Prince Damrong and later with Doumer, whom he greatly admired, in Paris about this possible resolution. Since a later treaty was signed along these lines, Kalmykow seems to claim some victory for the protection of Siam but of course as we see above, the treaty did not get signed until later with the help of an American negotiator in 1904 and Olarovskii remained as the chief negotiator with Klobukovski after Kalmykow's re-posting in 1900. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat*, 133-134.

86. *Ibid.*, A.D. Kalmykow to M.N. Murav'ev about France's cessation of Franco-Siamese negotiations, document 90 [29 Feb.(11 March) 1900], 191-192.

87. *Ibid.*, document 92 [11 (24) July 1900], 194.

88. *Ibid.*, document 89 [18 (30) Jan.1900], 191.

89. *Ibid.*, document 98 [1 (14) Dec. 1901], 202. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand..." 12. Klobukowski was French minister in Siam from 1901 to 1902.

90. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand..." 12-14.



government still proved useful to the French who certainly used him to put a more obliging face on the talks. But in the end, France placed new conditions on Siam, which the latter interpreted as a limit on their sovereignty. Chulalongkorn became more and more distrustful of France's willingness to quickly evacuate Chanthaburi, and Olarovskii now tried to convince the Siamese to accept the conditions.<sup>91</sup> At the end of November 1901, Olarovskii presented Chulalongkorn with a telegram from the tsar suggesting that the king should now settle its dispute with France.

The king of Siam was alarmed by this change in outlook and when the first secretary of Siam met with Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Count V.N. Lamsdorf, he blamed Olarovskii for the ineffective mediation on behalf of Siam.<sup>92</sup> The diplomat was ordered to leave the negotiations and in May 1902 the French sent troops into Chanthaburi. Chulalongkorn then wrote the tsar in June appealing for help in the Paris negotiations: "I am induced to transgress upon your Majesty's goodness for furthering the aims of this mutual settlement, which cannot but lead to the betterment of mutual interests, and the prosperity of Siam".<sup>93</sup> After this, Lamsdorf requested the Russian envoy in Paris, L.P. Usurov, to cautiously approach the French on this issue.<sup>94</sup> Throughout this period, Olarovskii reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Chulalongkorn's belief that France could not negotiate in good faith,<sup>95</sup> which, in turn, also affected the king's trust in his role in those negotiations. Ironically, later negotiations between France and Siam in 1904 led by an American negotiator did result in stricter registration of French "Asian" citizens in Siam and in 1907 the French completely abandoned claims of jurisdiction over their Asian subjects in Siam. France eventually evacuated Chanthaburi in 1906 but in return, Siam had to cede the provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap and Sisophon in West Cambodia.<sup>96</sup> By that time, the French had become more willing to negotiate and turned its imperial attentions to Africa.

Why did the Russian government and Olarovskii change their tactic in 1901 and side with the French in the negotiations? One historian has suggested that France promised some islands in the Indochina Sea for a coaling station to the Russian navy and better trade opportunities in French controlled territories in Siam.<sup>97</sup> But the more likely reasons are connected to the determination of the French to extend their empire in the region at the expense of Siam and compete with the British in the

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91. *Pkd*, document 99 (Siamese charge d'affaires in Russia (Prii Sridkhamasand) to Lamsdorf) [21 Dec. 1901], 204. Klobukowski presented the following conditions: Siam should not grant concessions to any other nation than France on the east bank of the Mekong and Siam should not hire any national other than French to work within the 25-km limit on the east bank of the River. The Siamese found these conditions unacceptable and a threat to their sovereignty.

92. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 14-15.

93. *Pkd*, document 104 [11 (24) June 1902], 212.

94. *Pkd*, document 106 [24 Oct. (6 Nov.) 1902], 214-215.

95. *Pkd*, documents 98 and 100.

96. Wyatt, *Thailand*, 190-191.

97. Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 13-14.

extension of their railway and trade into southern China. Olarovskii and certainly the Russian government were also keen on the possible benefits from its alliance with France in this respect. As early as the summer 1898, Olarovskii had expressed the hope in a report to Count Murav'ev that "[...] in the reception of the Belgian concession related to the railway line from Peking to Hankow we quickly gain a concession to extend the line to Yunnan and unite it with the French Tonkin-Yunnan line."<sup>98</sup> The resident-minister may have been stretching his ambitions here beyond the specific aims of his superiors in St. Petersburg but certainly the government believed French demands in Siam had to be satiated at this stage and that Russia could only go so far in convincing the French government to be more cautious in its demands for territory. Initially, Olarovskii believed that Doumer's concerns with the continuation of his railway projects made him more willing to settle the immediate disputes with Siam but such was not the case. The Russian diplomat's desire to be a friendly negotiator for both Siam and France had reached its limits by the end of 1901 and there was no other option.<sup>99</sup>

Chulalongkorn eventually became disenchanted with Olarovskii's lack of influence with the French and even came to believe that his mediation may have been motivated by opportunism rather than genuine concern for Siam's predicament. In late 1899, an anonymous article on "Russian and French Designs in Siam" appeared in the newspaper *Le Courier d'Haiphong*, stating that Russia wanted French help to acquire a coaling station in the Gulf of Siam and that Doumer's involvement in the negotiations was to facilitate that goal. Olarovskii told the king that DeFrance had written the article in an attempt to embarrass the Russians, and Chulalongkorn was upset by what he saw as Russian-French intrigues.<sup>100</sup> By 1902, Chulalongkorn's disappointment with the lack of progress in the talks made him realize that the Russian diplomat was perhaps more willing to sacrifice Siam's interests to France if it was in Russia's better interests. Certainly Olarovskii's main drive was to preserve the future dream of a Russian predominance in East Asia with the assistance of the French in Indochina. Nevertheless, his reports do demonstrate that he was sincere in his efforts to aid the Siamese as he expressed his despair on several occasions with the reckless expansionism of the French and their lack of appreciation of the importance of leaving Siam as a buffer state. At one point he wrote to the Count Murav'ev that he could see the danger of France "risking another Fashoda incident with Britain".<sup>101</sup> In the beginning, Chulalongkorn had believed in Olarovskii's sincerity and hoped the Russian government would prove useful to his struggle but by 1902 he turned to other Asian means of support to counter imperial incursions on the territory of Siam.

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98. *Pkd*, document 72 [1 (13) Aug. 1898], 168.

99. *Ibid.*, document 100 [7 (20) April 1902], 207-208.

100. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 66. *Le Courier d'Haiphong* was a French colonial paper in Indochina which frequently carried articles on Siamese affairs.

101. *Ibid.*, document 80 [4 (16) (March 1899)], 180 and also document 69 (23 June) 5 July 1898, 160-161.

The increasing presence of the Japanese in Siam made the Russian government realize that it was best now to side with France in these disputes. From late 1901, Olarovskii complained of his difficulty in meeting with the king and the influence of the Japanese over such "self-serving and ambitious" ministers as Damrong and Devawongse who tried to limit the king's involvement in the negotiations with the French.<sup>102</sup> In reports from 1901 to 1904 he described Japan's growing political influence in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs and Justice in Siam and expressed his belief that Japan sought to increase antagonism between England, France and Germany. At the time, Russia was in competition with Japan in Manchuria and Korea and viewed the Japanese with both envy and distrust. By 1902, the Japanese Minister-Resident Inagaki played a significant role in Siamese political and social circles; the same year, Japan had also entered into an alliance with England and at the time twelve Japanese citizens out of a total of 130 foreigners in Siam worked for the Siamese government and penetrated almost every branch of government.<sup>103</sup> Damrong, the Minister of the Interior, also favoured Japan, and his appointment to the highest political position in the Siam government increased Japanese influence there. In 1904, Olarovskii was alarmed to hear Inagaki had proposed that Siam sign a convention with Japan for a twenty-five-year lease on Ko Khram Island, presumably to set up a coaling station. He believed the Japanese wanted a place to put their patrol boats there to keep a watch on Russia's Pacific Fleet.<sup>104</sup> The proposal was eventually turned down by Prince Devawongse but, in the midst of Russia's increasing tensions with Japan leading up to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), one can see why Olarovskii and his government were concerned with their increasing influence in Siam.

Around 1900, the British also stepped up their campaign against the Russian influence in Siam. In general, they disliked Olarovskii's close contacts with Chulalongkorn, involvement with the French negotiations,<sup>105</sup> and close association with the Danes, who represented a possible economic threat to British commerce there. However, many of these fears were exaggerated as Russia never fulfilled its economic potential in the region. Furthermore, Prabporapak's death in 1899 had seriously decreased the Russian influence at court<sup>106</sup> in spite of some pro-Russian support in high places.<sup>107</sup> The signing of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902

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102. *Ibid.*, document 98, 202-203 and also see "Russko-siamskie otnosheniia i proniknovenie v Siam Iaponii i Germanii (1900-1914)", 230-231.

103. *Ibid.*, document 120 [22 June (3 July) 1902], 236-237.

104. *Ibid.*, document 124 [1 (14) Nov. 1904], 242-243.

105. Chandran, "The Dual Alliance of 1894: A Siamese Aspect," 66-67.

106. *Pkd.*, documents 83 [20 July (1 Aug.) 1899] and 85 [15 (27) Sept. 1899]. Olarovskii reported to Murav'ev that although his influence on the king was "not lost" he had less opportunity to see him after Prabporapak's death and the arrival of DeFrance, 84-85.

107. Krom Luang Danrongrajanupah, considered pro-Russian by the British and even closer to the king than Prince Devawongse, had a position in government in 1900. In addition, a high-ranking officer in the Siamese Army, who finished his training in Denmark, Prince Chiraprawat Voradej, was also a good friend of Nicholas II. See Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 21-22.

consolidated Britain's position and further reduced Russia's influence in Siam. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the British were becoming more concerned with the expansion of Germany's naval programme and its drive to increase trade and investment in the Far East and Southeast Asia.<sup>108</sup>

Olarovskii had been a useful diplomatic means for Chulalongkorn to fend off French demands between 1898 and 1902. The Russian diplomat's gregarious personality and ambition worked to Siam's advantage as he offered different proposals to resolve disputes, met back and forth with French and Siamese officials on the spot and mediated in the various complicated disputes between France and Siam. His personal contact with the king and his officials also enabled him to convey a direct sense of the attitudes of the Siamese and the French back to the Russian Foreign Ministry. On the European front, the tsar and the Russian Foreign Ministry also intervened on Chulalongkorn's behalf via the Russian envoy in Paris to moderate France's demands on Siam in the negotiations between 1898 and 1902. All these efforts by Russian officials bought Chulalongkorn the passage of time and some stronger international diplomatic intervention in his disputes with the French, which he may not have had otherwise<sup>109</sup>. Although they did not succeed in maintaining Siam's territories in Laos and Cambodia, it did, for a short while, give Siam some diplomatic leverage in maintaining its existence as a buffer state and help restrain further French ambitions in the region after the signing of the Anglo-French Convention in 1896.

For all of Olarovskii's efforts on Siam's behalf at the end of 1899, Russia was rewarded with a most favoured nation treaty between Russia and Siam, which allowed Russia to enjoy extraterritoriality rights with the other Western powers.<sup>110</sup> Between 1902 and 1908, various other Russian officials made efforts to negotiate trade agreements with Siam and monopolize the kerosene trade with Siam.<sup>111</sup> But from 1902 onwards, Chulalongkorn looked to other powers to resolve his issues with the French especially after Russia's image was further tarnished by its losses in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Although Siam took a neutral stance during this war, the government was generally sympathetic to the Japanese.<sup>112</sup> With Russia's military debacle in the war Chulalongkorn's faith in its international influence further declined and he later decided against sending another one of his sons there. Prince Chakrabongse's return from his military training in Russia in 1906 failed to improve relations as his marriage to a Russian woman caused Chulalongkorn great

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108. *Ibid.*, *Pkd*, 230-231. Also document 117 (A.D. Kalmykov to M.N. Murav'ev) [14 (27) April 1900], 233 and document 118 (Olarovskii to Lamsdorf) [24 May (6 June) 1901], 233-234.

109. In a telegram to his son Chakrabongse in February 1904, Chulalongkorn had noted that "Tsar Nicholas of Russia had certainly helped us to complete successfully our negotiations with France." Duke, "The Political and Economic Roles of Russia in Thailand...", 17.

110. Although it is difficult to see the actual benefit of this in practical terms as Russia at the end of the century had only something like three citizens living in Siam. The main purpose was to equalize Russia's legal status in relation to Britain in Siam. See *Pkd*, 131.

111. See *Pkd*, documents 111-171 and Quested, 54-55.

112. *Pkd*, document 123 [30 May (12 June 1904)], 241.

dismay.<sup>113</sup> Russia still maintained an interest in the international politics of the region but with the death of Chulalongkorn in 1910, the heyday of its political influence in Siam had definitely passed.

#### IV

Russia's mission in Siam had emerged from a fortuitous combination of circumstances in the last decade of the century: the tsarevitch's trip to East Asia and his friendship with Chulalongkorn, the enthusiasm of Nicholas II for Russia's Asian mission and Witte's imperial venture in Manchuria, Siam's struggle for sovereignty and search for diplomatic support and the allied ambitions of France and Russia in China and their rivalry with England. But it was the appointment of Olarovskii to Siam which melded these circumstances together in his determination to expand Russia's presence in the region. His attempts to find coaling stations, railway and trade connections in the region and his mediation in Siam's disputes with France were designed to further the Russian mission in East Asia. He saw it as his duty to remind the tsar and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the importance of Siam to Russia's success in East Asia and its connection to the aims of Witte and Doumer to extend the economic and railway penetration of China. Olarovskii's views were highly regarded in government circles but how far his superiors could support his endeavors in a practical way depended on international forces beyond his control.

In the end the stronger position of the imperial powers of Britain, France and Japan in Southeast Asia outpaced the diplomat's ambitions and prevented the opening of a new frontier in Russian foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Although Witte's push to industrialization had great success in strengthening the economy, Olarovskii still faced a lack of bureaucratic foresight and entrepreneurial spirit on the home front as well as British interference in Siam, so opportunities to capitalize on trade and other projects in the region were lost. Nor could he moderate the ambitions of France as an ally when his mediations eventually led to some significant losses of territory for Siam and Russia appeared weaker and weaker in the eyes of the king and the Siamese authorities. Finally, the rise of Japan in the politics of Siam did not bode well for the empire's future in East Asia especially after the 1904-1905 war demonstrated Japan's superiority as a military power. Olarovskii's considerable skills as a diplomat could not surmount these obstacles and the potential of Russia's mission in Siam remained unfulfilled.

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113. See Hunter and Chakrabongse, *Katya and the Prince of Siam*.