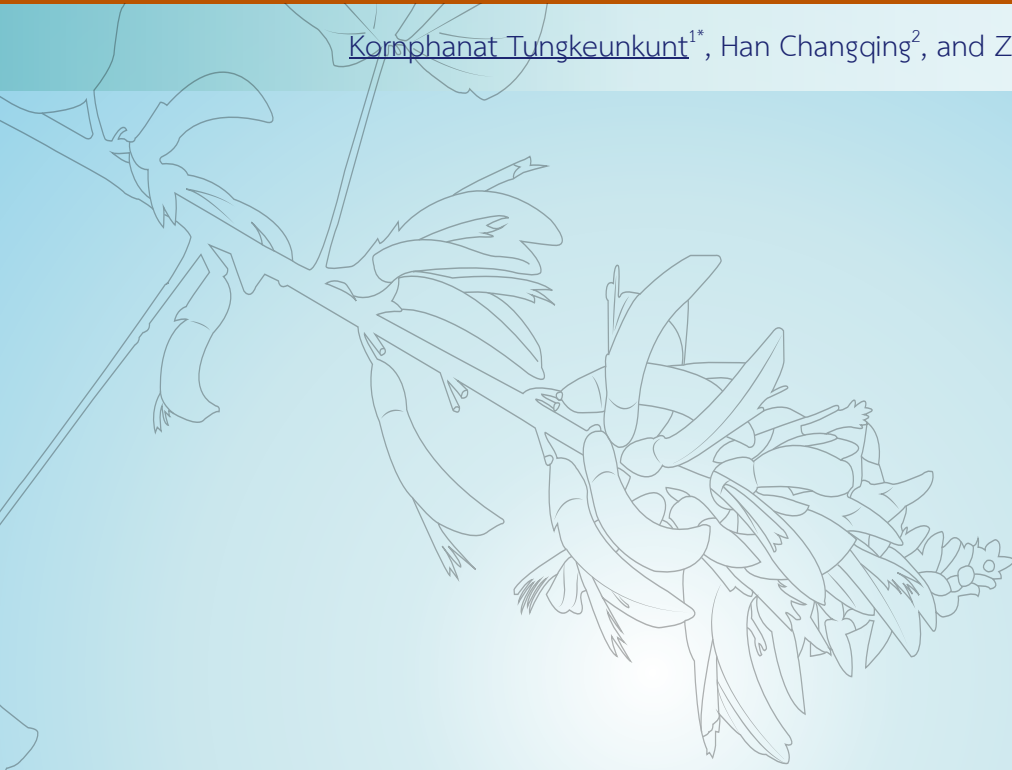


Chinese Sources in Thai Scholarly Historical Works

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Abstract

Scholarly works on modern history of Thailand have long emphasized a variety of sources, as different materials reflect different perspectives and narratives. Despite a great number of primary sources from foreign countries used in Thai scholarship, little attention has been paid to Chinese materials. This is unfortunate as China has played a crucial role in Siamese/Thai history. Therefore, this article attempts to explore a variety of Chinese sources in the historical study of Siam/Thailand. It demonstrates how the use of Chinese materials can provide valuable insights into various aspects of Siamese/Thai society, including the relationships between Thailand, China and other states. To classify Chinese source materials, this paper is divided into three sections, i.e., Chinese chronicles, Chinese archives, and Chinese-language miscellany. It will examine how Thai scholarly historical works have interpreted the Chinese materials from past to present.

Keywords: Chinese Materials, Chinese Chronicles, Chinese Archives, Chinese Sources, Thai Studies

Introduction

Scholarly work on Thai studies has long emphasized a variety of sources, as different materials reflect different perspectives and narratives. Over the past decades, the Department of History, Academic Division of Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, with financial support from Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn, has initiated a project to collect historical documents on Thai history deemed important from overseas archives, including those in the US, the UK, France, Japan, South Korea, and Cambodia [1].

Despite the abundance of primary sources from foreign countries used in Thai scholarship, little attention has been paid to Chinese archives. This is unfortunate, given China's crucial role in Siamese/Thai history and indispensability in the country's development. However, this article does not aim to be a systematic literature review of Chinese archives used in Thai studies, nor does it focus on Chinese studies (including the Chinese overseas studies) in Thailand. Instead, it seeks to introduce a diverse range of Chinese source materials in the historical study of Siam/Thailand.

This article classifies Chinese materials into three categories, i.e., Chinese chronicles, Chinese archives, and Chinese-language miscellany. The objective is to explore how Thai scholarship has utilized and interpreted these Chinese materials from the past to the present. By doing so, it demonstrates how the use of Chinese materials can offer valuable insights into not only various aspects of Thai society but also the relationships between Thailand, China, and other states. Finally, the article attempts to explore the contributions of Chinese materials to Thai studies by presenting trends and implications found in recent Thai scholarship.

Chinese chronicles

It is well known that China has a long and rich tradition of writing. Chinese accounts also have a long history of recording China's relations with foreign countries. Pioneering works of Thai scholars educated in the US in the 1970s, Sarasin Veraphol's *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade from 1652 to 1853* [2] and Suebsaeng Promboon's *Sino-Siamese tributary relations, 1282-1853* [3] extensively use Chinese official and local chronicles to examine the relationship between Siam and China under the tributary system. These works clearly demonstrate the crucial importance of Chinese chronicles in Thai history.

As accounts on ancient Thailand were scarce and fragmented, Chinese chronicles have inevitably become a significant source for understanding Thailand's past. Geoff Wade's research has been instrumental in this regard, as he explored *The Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty (Ming Shilu)* and its references to the Ayutthaya polity, comparing them to local accounts [4]. His translated work on *Ming Shilu* continues to be the primary source of Chinese records for a better understanding of the interactions between China and Thailand throughout history, including diplomatic exchanges and trade relations.

Indeed, the Thai government has recognized the significance of Chinese ancient documents in understanding the historical relations between Thailand and China, as well as the origins of the Thai people. To facilitate this pursuit, the Committee for the Study of Thai History in Chinese Records (คณะกรรมการสืบค้นประวัติศาสตร์ไทยเกี่ยวกับจีนในเอกสารจีน) was established in the early 1970s. The primary objective of this committee was to translate relevant sections of official dynastic history (*zhengshi*), including *The Chronicle of the Yuan Dynasty (Yuan Shi)*, *The Chronicle of the Ming Dynasty (Ming Shi)* and *The Chronicle of the Qing Dynasty (Qing Shi)*, as well as *Ming Shilu* and *The Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty (Qing Shilu)*. The Thai translations were published as reference books for further historical research and understanding [5].

According to Rungroj Piromanukul [6], a Thai archaeologist, *Ming Shilu* and *Ming Shi* hold significant importance in the study of the early history of Ayutthaya because they provide information not found in the records of Western visitors, who later arrive in the region. However, Rungroj has noted some limitations of these Chinese records. Firstly, they were written from the perspective of Chinese officials, which may introduce biases and a skewed portrayal of events. Their viewpoints may not accurately reflect the perspectives of other parties involved in historical events. Moreover, they were diplomatic records in nature and served the purpose of promoting the interests of China or the Ming Dynasty. As such, they may not always provide a complete or unbiased view of events, especially when it comes to interactions with other countries. Furthermore, the records may neither cover all historical events comprehensively nor fully capture the local perspectives. As such, they may not fully reflect the realities of Ayutthaya society or provide a complete picture of its

history. Therefore, it is necessary to cross reference and compare with other sources to gain more insights.

Despite the limitations, scholars continue to use Chinese chronicles for unique perspectives distinct from those found in local or Western sources. For instance, Erika Matsuda [7] employs *Qing Shilu* to explore the import of luxury goods from China to Siam during the Thonburi and early Rattanakosin eras. According to Matsuda [8], the cultural preferences of Thai elites for Chinese luxury items can shed light on Siam's own perception of its external relationships and diplomatic practices, a perspective that has been neglected since the introduction of Western diplomacy. Similarly, Piyada Chonlaworn [9] draws from both Chinese and Japanese sources to examine the history of port polities in southern Thailand, including Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkhla. Through her works, Piyada [10] contends that Japanese and Chinese records offer valuable insights into the internal politics of the region and its interactions with the Siamese, thereby presenting a novel perspective on history during this period, although these records may remain biased.

In recent years, there is a clear direction in Thai scholarship making efforts to overcome language barriers, and translation issues that sometimes may lead to misinterpretations or difficulties in understanding the true context and meaning of the records. Supakan Siripaisan and Pipu Boosabok [11] suggest that numerous Chinese historical documents related to Thai history still await proper translation. Supakan and Pipu undertake comprehensive and systematic research, financially supported by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, to explore ancient Chinese records from the Han to Yuan dynasties relating to Thailand in connection with the Maritime Silk Road. Following this research project, Pipu [12] further extends the study to include Chinese documents from the Ming and Qing dynasties, thereby broadening the scope of the investigation.

Particularly, translation and study of ancient Chinese records offer unique narratives and enrich the understanding of historical ties between China and Thai ancient Kingdoms that have been previously understudied. For example, Kanokporn Numthong's research focuses on the Lanna Kingdom, also known as the "Eight-Hundred Concubine Kingdom" (*Babai xifu*), which has historically maintained a close relationship with China [13]. In her work, Kanokporn conducts a meticulous examination of numerous original Chinese manuscripts, carefully making annotations to ensure accuracy in the translation. In addition, Puthep Prapagorn [14] studies the relationship between China and Lawo/Lavo Kingdom, known as *Luohu* during each historical period, using various Chinese chronicles.

One interesting factor contributing to the growing Thai scholarship using Chinese chronicles is the educational dynamics between Thailand and China. The educational exchange has played a role in fostering scholars and has facilitated the utilization of Chinese chronicles in Thai studies. According to the 2010–2011 annual report of the Chinese Ministry

of Education, Thailand ranked fourth among countries sending students to China, following Korea, the United States, and Japan [15]. This trend indicates that Chinese education has provided Thai students with the opportunity to master the Chinese language and immerse themselves in Chinese culture, enabling them to become knowledgeable scholars with access to Chinese materials and resources.

On the other hand, since the year 2006, Chinese students have become the major source of foreign students in Thailand. According to the Office of Higher Education Commission of Thailand, there were 9,329 Chinese students enrolled in Thai higher education institutes across various disciplines in 2010, accounting for 46.4% of the total foreign student population [16]. These students delve into Thai language and culture, then some pursue graduate studies in history. One such example is Zhou Bifeng [17] who wrote a master's thesis in Thai under the supervision of Chiangmai University's Sarassawadee Ongsakul, an authoritative figure of Lanna studies. Specially utilizing and interpreting Chinese chronicles, Zhou examines the tributary relationship between China and Lanna Kingdom. The thesis was subsequently adapted into a book titled *The Surrender of Lanna (Lanna sawamipak)* by Matichon, a leading publishing house. The success of Zhou's book highlights the potential and promising opportunities for more Chinese graduate students to find advantages in utilizing their language skills to conduct research on Thai history.

Chinese archives

Unlike Chinese chronicles, Chinese archives have not been extensively utilized, as mentioned in the introduction. This limited use can be attributed, in part, to the restrictions associated with accessing Chinese archives in Mainland China. Chinese archives in Taipei, particularly Academia Historica (*Guoshi guan*, hereafter shortened as AH), offers greater accessibility and digitalization of historical materials. Japanese scholar Murashima Eiji has long been a pioneer in exploring archives across regions including Chinese archives from Mainland China and Taiwan to conduct solid research on Thai history. He has published numerous articles in Japanese, English, Thai and Chinese languages, covering various topics such as Thai-foreign relations, transnational communism, and studies on the Second World War. His books, *The Birth of the Siamese Communist Party (Kamnoet Kommiunit Sayam)*, translated into Thai by Kosit Tiptiempong, and *Sino-Siamese Politics (Kanmuaeng chin sayam)*, co-authored with Vorasak Mahatdanobol, have become foundational works in the historiography of the Thai Communist Party and the ethnic Chinese in Thailand [18-19].

In addition to Murashima, another example of the potential in using diverse archival materials from different locations is demonstrated in Wasana Wongsurawat's *The Crown & the Capitalists* [20]. According to Sittithep Eaksittipong [21], this brilliant study integrates

archival materials from London, Bangkok, and Taipei, enabling the formulation of novel arguments unprecedented in Thai studies and the studies on Chinese in Thailand. It reveals untold narratives and sheds light on a fresh angle concerning Thailand's historical development and its interactions with neighbouring powers.

Evidently, various archival materials and a transnational perspective enable the exploration of Thailand's multifaceted historical dynamics. Another aspect to consider is an indirect use of Chinese archives published in Chinese journal articles by Chinese scholars. Sittithep Eaksittipong [22] employs this approach in his fascinating work *Writing the Chinese to become Thai (Khian chin hai pen thai)*, based on his PhD thesis at National University of Singapore titled "Textualizing the 'Chinese of Thailand': Politics, Knowledge, and the Chinese in Thailand during The Cold War". He investigates how Thai, American and Chinese scholars discuss the origins of the Thai people and the production of knowledge on the Chinese in Thailand. These two aspects are considered two sides of the same coin, as their discursive arguments reflect their countries' academic nationalism.

Based on the authors' observations, there is potential for discovering and utilizing more Chinese archives in research, particularly those that contain documents relevant to Thailand in the modern era. One such example is the AH located in Taipei. Upon examination, the authors have noticed that some of the materials found in the AH may be duplicates of what is already preserved in the Second Historical Archives of China (*Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan*), primarily known as the Records Management Office of Nanjing from the period from 1912 to 1949. The search system of the AH's website (<https://www.drn.gov.tw/>) is user-friendly, as some materials can be accessible for online reading.

In addition to the AH, the Kuomintang (KMT) Archives also serve as a valuable resource (<http://archives.kmt.org.tw/>). While they can be searched online, viewing the materials requires an onsite visit in Taipei. The authors had the opportunity to visit the KMT archives and found the "special archives" (*Tezhong dang'an*) collections/series particularly intriguing. This collection holds significant importance, as it encompasses documents related to the KMT's both local and overseas missions, covering the period from 1928 to 1949. This time frame is crucial, as it marks pivotal historical events and developments during the Anti-Japanese War.

For those interested in the Cold War, China's role as a crucial factor in shaping the geopolitical landscape cannot be overlooked. The Chinese archives, particularly the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Waijiao bu dang'an guan*) in Beijing (<http://dag.fmprc.gov.cn/>) offer unique insights into China's foreign policies, interactions with other countries, and its role in global affairs during the Cold War era. However, the accessibility of the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is limited. Scholars can find alternative opportunities for

exploration in local archives in China, which often offer a more open and accessible environment. For instance, the Shanghai Municipal Archives (*Shanghai shi dang'an guan*) (<https://www.archives.sh.cn/>) stand as a promising resource, housing a vast collection of digitized documents, such as Thai leftists and other Thai individuals who fled to China during the Cold War era, as well as assessments of local Chinese officers who hosted Thai visitors.

In a nutshell, the authors do not assert an absolute necessity to exclusively rely on Chinese archives for research, as scholars inherently engage in cross-referencing and comparing materials from various sources. However, Chinese archives do offer an intriguing alternative source, potentially fostering collaborative research among scholars spanning different countries and regions.

Chinese-language miscellany

Arguably, relying solely on government archives could potentially limit the perspective to a top-down view, primarily centered on official narratives and the political landscape. It is important to complement the insights derived from government archives by incorporating viewpoints from social and cultural aspects. In this regard, Chinese-language miscellany offers a diverse range of Chinese source materials that reflect the experiences, views, and everyday lives of individuals and communities. Particularly in research on Chinese life in Thailand, G. William Skinner [24-25] has long been a crucial figure who extensively utilized Chinese documents, including internal publications from Chinese associations and organizations, and newspapers. This section, therefore, introduces Chinese-language materials, e.g. literary works, internal publications from Chinese associations/organizations, newspapers and *qiaopi*.

1. Chinese literary works

Thai literature has long been a crucial source for Thai studies. Benedict Anderson [23] succinctly notes in his exploration to Thai literary works that political upheaval was often foreshadowed by the distant rumblings of literature. Jennifer W. Cushman [26] has highlighted the potential Chinese- and Thai-language literary publications as a highly promising avenue for exploring the dynamics of Chinese society in Thailand. Over the last decade, there has been an effort to reassess the framework of Thailand's literary landscape.

Sittitthep Eaksittipong [27] envisages the literary approach to cast the history of the Chinese in Thailand into a new light by framing it within the realm of emotion. He argues that transnational Chinese media and Sinophone Thai literature have played a significant role in shaping the identity politics of ethnic Chinese in Thailand, as they contribute to a distinct self-identification—neither Thai nor Chinese, but Chinese of Thailand.

2. Internal publications

Chinese associations and enterprises often have their own internal publications, serving as communication tools within the community. These publications provide a wealth of information relevant to the community's interests and concerns. Pannee Bualek [28-29] has long utilized such publications from Chinese associations, including those from Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce to conduct research on economic history in Thailand. Her focus has been on the role of Chinese capitalists in the Thai economy spanning from pre-WWII to post-WWII. Kornphanat Tungkeunkunt [30] has employed a collection of magazines from the Thai Rediffusion Company that operated the sole Chinese broadcast in Thailand, known as '*Song siang thang sai*' or '*Li de husheng*' in Chinese, to explore the listening experience of the Chinese community in Bangkok during the 1950s-1970s.

3. Chinese newspapers

Newspapers provide a glimpse into the public discourse and the various interpretations and dissemination of political developments among their targeted audiences. In his study, Mitchai Kulsangcharoen [31] examines the portrayal of Thai society in the Chinese newspaper *Sing Sian Yit Pao* during the Sarit regime. He demonstrates that *Sing Sian Yit Pao* supporting a liberal view similar to that of the American left or democratic perspective and KMT's government, illustrated the image of Thai society under the government's strict policy and development of the country. These aspects had a profound impact on the Chinese community in Thailand, necessitating shifts in their ways of life to align with the societal norms of that era.

Chinese-language newspapers published in Thailand have gained increased attention in recent times, fostering academic collaboration with the National Library of Thailand, Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture in 2008. The objective of this collaboration was to digitize old Chinese-language newspapers published in Thailand, facilitating academic research and enriching the Information Resource Center of Huachiew Chalermprakiet University. This initiative led to the development of a database named Thailand Digital Chinese Newspaper (TDCN), accessible exclusively within the Huachiew University's internal network. This database comprises a total of 71 titles. Those interested in utilizing the database can find detailed access information on their website: <http://www.lib.hcu.ac.th/index.php/chinesenewspaper>.

Thailand Digital Chinese Newspaper (TDCN)
since 1924 - 1986

Basic Search Advance Search

Type 1 :: Select by Thai Name

Thai name (Sort by Thai name) Select Thai

Type 2 :: Select by Chinese Name

Chinese name (Sort by Chinese name) Select Chinese

Type 3 :: Specific by Year & Month

YYYY-MM (Select Year)

Figure 1. Thailand Digital Chinese Newspaper (TDCN)

Source: The Information Resource Center of Huachiew Chalermprakiet University

4. *Qiaopi*

Qiaopi, or remittances, refer to the funds sent by Chinese migrants to their families in China, serving both as economic support and a means of maintaining ties between overseas Chinese and their homeland. These remittances were frequently accompanied by letters with instructions or personal messages. Suchada Tantasuralerk [32] pioneered research on the study of *qiaopi* patterns and developments in Thailand. Thai-Chinese independent scholars Hong Lin and Li Daogang in collaboration with the Chaoshan History Culture Research Center, have engaged in global efforts to collect and explore *qiaopi*. Their work, *Qiaopi Culture in Thailand* [33], underscores these remittances' cultural and historical significance to both Thai and Chinese societies.

Conclusion

While Thai scholarly works have extensively utilized diverse sources, including archives from foreign countries, Chinese archives have been notably overlooked, despite their pivotal role in Thai history and development. This article introduces and categorizes Chinese source materials into Chinese chronicles, Chinese archives, and Chinese-language

miscellany, aiming to showcase their contributions to Thai scholarship. It underlines the potential to explore Chinese materials to enrich the understanding of Thai society, politics, and their interconnectedness with China and beyond.

Recently, there has been a significant amount of academic work in Thailand that utilizes Chinese documents, particularly dissertations written by foreign scholars. It is important to further conduct a thorough exploration, not only of universities in the West but also of universities in Asia. The authors suggest paying more attention to studies on Thailand by Chinese scholars, which will enhance the comprehensive categorization of Chinese-language sources and evidence used in the study of Thailand.

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