

Grigory De Wollant's Observation of Siam as an Example of Russian Orientalism

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Abstract

This research article aims to representations of Siam in the travel notes of the Russian diplomat and traveler Grigory de Wollant through the lens of Orientalism concept, highlighting the specific features of how the Russian traveler perceived the East. De Wollant's notes, "Around the World", appear to be an informative travelogue that covers most topics of interest to a Western (Russian) traveler, while also expressing his personal views. De Wollant shares his impressions on Siamese history, architecture, ceremonies, nature, activities and the lifestyle of ordinary people. In this travelogue, a few instances reveal the Researcher's attitude from a standpoint of Western culture superiority, marked by condescending and arrogant intonations. Nevertheless, he maintains a lively curiosity and sincere interest, along with the romanticized admiration towards certain aspects of Siamese culture.

Keywords: Grigory de Wollant; Russian Travelogue on Siam; Orientalism

Type of Article: Research Article

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บันทึกเรื่องสยามของกรีกอริ เดอ วอลลันต์ ในฐานะกรณีศึกษา แนวคิดบูรพาคติของรัสเซีย

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการนำเสนอภาพลักษณ์ของสยามในบันทึกการเดินทางของกรีกอริ เดอ วอลลันต์ นักการทูตและนักเดินทางชาวรัสเซีย ถือเป็นตัวอย่างหนึ่งของแนวคิดบูรพาคติของรัสเซีย และเน้นย้ำถึงลักษณะเฉพาะของตะวันออกที่มองผ่านสายตาของนักเดินทางชาวรัสเซีย บันทึกการเดินทางของเดอ วอลลันต์ เรื่อง “รอบโลก” นั้นเป็นบันทึกที่ให้ข้อมูลที่น่าสนใจในหลากหลายหัวข้อที่นักเดินทางชาวตะวันตก (ชาวรัสเซีย) สนใจ เดอ วอลลันต์ได้เล่าเรื่องราวความประทับใจของเขาที่มีต่อประวัติศาสตร์ สถาปัตยกรรม พิธีกรรม ธรรมชาติ และวิถีชีวิตของผู้นครมรดกในสยาม ในเนื้อหาของบันทึกการเดินทางส่วนใหญ่ นั้น จะเห็นได้ว่ามีตัวอย่างที่แสดงให้เห็นถึงมุมมองของนักวิจัยที่มองจากอำนาจที่เหนือกว่าทางวัฒนธรรมของตะวันตกด้วยน้ำเสียงที่ดูหมิ่นและเหยียดหยาม อย่างไรก็ตามแม้จะมีมุมมองเช่นนี้ ก็ยังสามารถรับรู้ได้ถึง ความอยากรู้อยากเห็นและความสนใจอย่างจริงจังผสมผสานกับความชื่นชมในแบบแนวคิดบูรพาคติของรัสเซีย โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในด้านสถาปัตยกรรมของสยาม

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Background and Significance of the Problem

The East has never been perceived by Russia as something exotic and alien. (Rezvan, 2019) For Russia, there have always been more “Easts” than for the West, and, importantly, some of these “Easts” were, at various stages, integrated into the broader Russian identity, while others remained “foreign”. There is still room for debate about what exactly constitutes Russian Orientalism, often linking it to colonial conquests in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and comparing Russia to Great Britain and other European colonial powers. The similarity between Russian Orientalist discourse and its European counterparts has become a primary focus of research for many foreign, and later Russian, scholars. Edward Said’s book, “Orientalism” (Said, 1978), is one of the key milestones in the Western intellectual world today and is still finding its place in Russian academia.

According to Said, the East became a subject for Western scholars to explore and, in the process, reinforced European power through a binary opposition between the West and the Orient. His book revolutionized the approach to studying the East, using the Middle East as an example. The first complete Russian translation of Orientalism was published in 2006. However, due to the poor quality of the translation and numerous inaccuracies the book’s reception was affected. A new, updated translation was released in 2022.

Meanwhile Russian Orientalism possesses its own distinct characteristics. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Russians were searching for their spiritual roots in the East, which distinguished the Russian nobility from the elites of Western colonial powers. Many intellectuals believed that Russia’s politic future should lie in the East. However, the image of the East was multi-layered; shaped by Western fiction, travel notes, scientific studies, translations of Eastern literature and philosophy, impressions of Eastern “guests,” exhibitions and more. While English and French orientalists consistently identified the East as the “Other,” Russian scholars and travelers found themselves in a dual position: on one hand, they saw themselves as Westerners due to their education and cultural orientation, but on the other hand, they were aware that, to the West, Russia was itself considered part of the East. Moreover, they understood that, because of geographical, national, religious, historical and political factors, Russia had far closer connections with the East than Western countries did. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (Van Der Oye, 2010) effectively highlighted a key feature of Russian Orientalism: empathy for the East, recognizing its differences from the “Other” as seen through the Western lens, which continually justified its superiority over non-Western societies, including Russian. Thus, it becomes particularly interesting to define the main feature of the Russian travelogue as the combination an Orientalist attitude (i.e., perceiving Siam as the

“Other”, exotic) with a simultaneous search for similarities and a positive outlook. This marks a notable difference from the position of European authors and can be explained by Russian Empire’s fluctuating identity between East and West, as well as the absence of any colonial interests between Siam and the Russian Empire.

Thus, this article aims to explain the features of Orientalism in the notes of one Russian traveler, highlighting Russia’s knowledge of Siam in the nineteenth century as seen through travelogues and diplomatic correspondence. This period is characterized by the significant role of narratives, observations, primary information, and visual data, prevailing over economic and political information. The article explores Russia’s view of Asia, the East, and the Orient, particularly in relation to Siam as a foreign Eastern country and analyzes the early Russian descriptions of Siam through an Orientalist lens.

Research Objectives

1. To examine and demonstrate the evidences of Orientalist attitude in the travel writings of Grigory de Wollant.
2. To elucidate how Russian travelers perceived Siam in geographical, cultural and social terms, drawing from diverse perspectives and background.

Scope of the Research

The study and examination of Russia’s knowledge of Siam in the nineteenth century primarily rely on personal notes, diaries, and memoirs of travelers, which form the foundational material of this article. Numerous facts have been collected, and many archival materials have been uncovered by both Russian and Thai historians. The main object of the research in this article is de Wollant’s notes “Around the World”. Grigory de Wollant, a Russian diplomat and traveler who was the consul to Japan at the time, visited Siam in 1892. The explorer wrote some notes on Siamese history and described its mythological origins.

Research Benefits

1. This article offers insight into the Orientalist attitude reflected in the travel writings of the early Russian travelers to Siam.
2. This article explains how Russians perceived Siam in geographical, cultural and social terms in the nineteenth century.

Concepts, Theories, and Related Literature

The genre of travel writing (travelogue) combines objective facts about the course of a trip (the collection of useful information about the land, its peoples and their customs) with the subjective impressions of the author. These impressions allow to draw conclusions about the self-perception of travelers and their attitude towards a foreign culture. Moreover, travelogue as a genre implies a subjective dimension shaped by the cultural context in which the author is situated. The Russian travelogue has its own characteristics of the literary style. Researchers of Russian “travel notes” identify a unique narrative phenomenon: Their inevitable imitation of the imaginative literature of the era. There is a number of articles dedicated to Russian travelogue study, for instance, the collection of articles edited by T. I. Pecherskaya and N. V. Konstantinova, titled “The Russian Travelogue of the 18-20 Centuries: Rout, Locus, Genre and Narrative”. (Pecherskaya & Konstantinova, 2016)

Conceptual Framework

This study of Russian travel writing about Siam, especially in comparison to the European or Western travel writing, is based on the main concept of Orientalism. In a broad sense, Orientalism refers to the study of the East in scientific research, as well as its depiction in literature, painting, and music. In a narrower sense, Orientalism is a concept of the literary critic and forms a crucial part of the postcolonial studies in the 20th century. These works and concepts help clarify the fundamental idea of Orientalism in its original meaning.

Hypotheses of the Research

Interest in the East became a specific feature of the culture of the Russian creative intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, which was trying to reevaluate the unique Eastern culture and determine the degree of European and Asian social and spiritual mutual influences, utilizing the achievements of both European and domestic scientific thought. This endeavor spurred the formation of an imaginary image of an ideal Orient world in people’s mind, which could only be reinforced or challenged by eyewitnesses’ accounts. Over time, these testimonies evolved into historical and literary documents. A prime example is the notes of nineteenth century diplomat Grigory de Wollant.

Research Methodology

The research of the travelogues serves as the primary vehicle for analysis. The main approach used is the historical analysis. The data utilized is derived from historical sources that meet the following criteria:

- Chronology (timeline);
- Theme (key point of interest);
- Traveler's personality.

Results

Around the World

The history of the relationship between the Russian Empire (Russia) and Siam (Thailand) dates back 125 years. Since the nineteenth century, Siam, along with China, Japan and other countries of the East, has been regarded as a fantastic mystery, a Mysterious Mirage, filled with charm and mysteries. The first notes from Russian travelers who visited Siam directly began to emerge in the early nineteenth century. One such traveler was the outstanding Russian diplomat Grigory de Wollant, whose writings remain relevant today.

Grigory de Wollant was a noted Russian diplomat, traveler, ethnographer, and publicist who served in the Imperial Asian Department and held consular positions in Budapest and Japan. He later served in the USA as the Russian mission secretary in Washington, D.C., 1896–1902, and in Mexico, 1906–1910. De Wollant visited Southeast Asia in 1892–1893. Born in 1847 in St. Petersburg and studied at Moscow and Leipzig Universities, in 1883, de Wollant was appointed as a head of the Press Department of the Asian Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Three years later, he became consul in Hakodate, Japan, to which he traveled in a roundabout route that included stops in Spain, Egypt, India, Burma, Indonesia, and French colonies in Indochina and China along the way. In 1892, Grigory de Wollant arrived in Siam from Cambodia, unofficially, as a traveler.

De Wollant outlined his observations and impressions of the trip in his illustrated travel notes “Around the World”. These notes were first published in 1890 to 1894 in separate issues of the “Russian Review”, a magazine published in the Russian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century. Later, in 1894-1895, the travelogue was published as a separate book by the printing house “Public Benefit”, consisting of two volumes: Volume 1, Spain, Egypt, Ceylon and India, and Volume 2, Burma, Java, China, Tonkin and Cochinchina. (Presidential Library, 1985)

With a total of 235 pages, of which 70 are dedicated to de Wollant's visit to Siam, the travelogue has been digitalized and is available for free access on the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library's website. (Presidential Library, 1985) The travelogue contains lyrical digressions, a number of interesting comparisons for Russian and European readers, and an original interpretation of Siamese culture as a synthesis of the cultures of China and India. De Wollant's experiences and keen observations in other countries in East, Southeast and South Asia allow him to notice

the similarities and differences between the Thai material and spiritual culture and those of neighboring peoples. For example, the houses of poor Siamese remind him of those in Cambodia; the features of national cuisine and eating rituals reflect Indian traditions, and the use of tea is influenced by Chinese customs. De Wollant 's travel notes on Siam are recognized as not only among one of the most detailed in the entire corpus of Russian sources, but also the most diverse in terms of the set of topics covered.

In his notes, de Wollant to more or less extent has covered most of the typical points of attraction for foreign visitors to Siam at the time. He described the clothing of the Siamese, the furnishings of the Siamese houses depending on the social class, food and drinks, the use of betel, childbirth and childhood, the role of the Chinese in Siamese society, the Siamese language, religion, monasticism and the hierarchy of the clergy, as well as gambling. He introduced Russian readers to a brief history of Siam, transport and travel routes, and shared stories about the activities of Europeans, particularly Germans. He recounted the legend of the origin of Siam as an independent country, and outlined key historical events, including the founding of Ayutthaya, the story of Constantine Falcon, the capture of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767, and the translation of some royal titles.

The first semantic section is devoted to the ethnographic description of Thailand. In this section, the author touches upon the issues of national dress, housing and cuisine, as well as religious life. Another part of the travelogue discusses the legendary and historical past of the country. The main portion of the notes describes the trip itself around the country. Traveling along Chao Phraya river (the text uses the obsolete name Menam), he ascends to Bangkok, where he lived long enough”, and from there he made a river trip to Ayutthaya.

Orientalism Attitude

The West-East dichotomy is clearly visible in the comments of a Russian traveler: “The contrast between the rich and colorful vegetation and the miserable habitation of man is striking”, with villages are repeatedly described as “pathetic”. The author remains silent on how they compare to Russian villages. The paradigm of ethnographic description characteristic of that time involved a combination of impartial positive and negative characteristics of the object (subject) of description. For example, the Siamese are described as “very clean”, but with “their teeth are in a terrible state, that is, they are completely black”.

At the same time, signs of a new, industrial era also appear in the narrative – including an unidentified “gigantic factory with long pipes”, observed from a ship on the way to Bangkok, and a sugar factory in Pattaya. De Wollant paints a grandiose picture of Bangkok - referring

to it as the “Eastern Venice” - a “river city” with “small houses on rafts”, a “city of pagodas”, and the royal capital, which reminds him of “the splendor of the tale of a thousand and one nights”. While sightseeing in the central part of Bangkok with one of the local Europeans, De Wollant pays special attention to the urban development and architectural styles, expressing noteworthy judgments about the influence of European Gothic. His descriptions of individual temples and elements of the palace complex are valuable for local studies. Bangkok appears as a true global city, a crossroads of Asian cultures and peoples.

De Wollant notes that slavery, including debt slavery, flourishes in Siam. This fact is further emphasized by contrasting the etymology of the name of the country (“free people”). Gambling is a common cause of loss of freedom. He writes, “The Siamese are big gamblers and are ready to lose even their sampot. To play, they often sell themselves into slavery”. De Wollant recounts, how one of his companions mentioned: “A visit to a gambling house is a humiliation for a European, but I, of course, did not listen to him and watched how the Siamese played... The local Monte Carlo is not luxurious; it is a huge barn”. Thus, de Wollant’s curiosity led him to ignore the locals’ warnings of humiliation. He critiques the state monopoly on the sale of rice vodka and opium, which results in this trade being “farmed out to the Chinese”. The same applies to gambling and prostitution, which certainly exacerbates interethnic relations. De Wollant discusses the significant proportion of the population of the kingdom, which is made up of Chinese (1 million to 2 million Siamese, see, and about the intensive assimilation processes occurring due to mixed. He states somewhat categorically: “All Chinese, living in Siam have Siamese wives”. As a result of close proximity, “Siamese hate the Chinese and there are very often fights between these peoples”; “The Siamese look down on the Chinese”.

In attempting to provide an anthropological characteristic to the Siamese people, de Wollant notes that the population of the country belongs to the “Mongolian race”. However, he adds a comment that can be interpreted in two ways, depending on how one perceives the semantic nuances of the word “regular”: “Between them there are people with the regular features of the Caucasian (i.e. Caucasoid – S.B.) type”. For an outside observer, the difference between these nations - the titular and those constituting a significant minority - largely comes down to an external sign, a detail of their hairstyles. De Wollant natively remarks: “It happens very often that, after spending some time in the pagoda, where they shave off the braid, the Chinese already refuse the braid and become Siamese”. The reverse procedure marks a public censure: “A Siamese who smokes opium is punished by being forced to wear a scythe in the manner of a Chinese”. It is important to note that the differences between these two

peoples lack religious overtones. Negative characteristics of the Chinese population and its habits are found further in the text, outside the ethnographic digression, which introduces the opposition of Thais and Chinese. This includes an episode involving unscrupulous Chinese individuals. However, according to de Wollant's observations, the Chinese surpass the Thai population in their business skills and hard work.

The graphic scenes of burning corpses and public executions, which the locals "look at ... without any shudder", shock the author.

De Wollant attributes quite a few negative characteristics to the Siamese people as a whole. It appears that these negative traits were assigned to both high society and common people alike. The author notes the strong corruption among Siamese officials and Chinese nationals and the prevalence of bribery in the country. According to de Wollant, "Siamese people have cut their teeth on corruption" (they were too good in corruption – S.B.); "Everything here is bought or sold. Foreigners are trying to grab even more". He supports this with examples of German railway projects in Siam, explaining how a German official at the Siamese court had to share the financial benefits with Siamese government officers. Once a Siamese official received the payment, one could wait a long time to get it, leading to inflated bill numbers just to pay off the officials first.

De Wollant, when discussing the provinces of Sem Rap and Battambang, demonstrated a particularly example of negative Orientalist attitude, calling Siamese people ignorant: "When, instead of weak Cambodia, France appeared strong enough to defend the rights of its vassal, there was a misunderstanding, and at the delimitation between France and Siam, these provinces were awarded to Siam. ... It is a pity that the famous ruins of Angkor Wat remained in the hands of ignorant people". He also criticizes the Bangkok rulers' unwillingness to "take care of a better position for the ruins" of the ancient capital, Ayutthaya.

De Wollant writes that the Siamese bureaucracy is highly corrupt. Although it is possible to achieve one's goal without paying bribes, the process could take years.

He also observes that "The Siamese are very suspicious and not very trusting of Europeans", which he cites as the reason why a Russian citizen cannot find work in Bangkok. Additionally, de Wollant described the Siamese people as passive and lacking their own initiative. He remarks: "The English are slowly getting their hands on Siam; the Siamese do not strongly oppose this and are beginning to adopt the English culture".

According to de Wollant, there are several hundred Europeans in Siam, and they are "attracted to Bangkok by a fairly significant trade in rice, teak and ivory; ...The Siamese are very suspicious and do not really trust Europeans". This judgement coming from a Russian diplomat

could be interpreted as a cautious perception of the natives, fitting into the Orientalist view that perceives the East as a zone of danger and threat. When discussing the political influence and the economic presence of European nations in Siam, de Wollant highlights the dominant position of the British, stating: “The English here, as well as all over the world, captured the best places”. He also notes signs of the Westernization of Siam, particularly in the capital’s palaces (as the author puts it - “our (Russian) uniforms are already adopted by the Siamese court” and describes the “white uniforms of European style”. De Wollant’s attempt to gather statistical data involved interviewing local guides and European businessmen in Siam. He discovered that the European colony, mainly consisting of British, Germans, and Danes, was relatively small, numbering about 400 people, or 0.1% of the city’s population.

In terms of linguistic competence, De Wollant’s understanding was limited by the contemporary knowledge of the time. However, linguistic issues were not his primary focus. He grouped Thai and Chinese into a “family of monosyllabic languages”, as well as a “category of melodious languages”. Furthermore, he did not differentiate between the scripts of South and Southeast Asia, mistakenly arguing that the Thai language “in its alphabet (...) belongs to India”.

A number of observations were made by Russian traveler on the government and administration system of South East Asia. De Wollant, an experienced and observant traveler, and a proponent of Russia’s eastward expansion, made many critical remarks about the nature of British colonial policies in Burma. According to de Wollant, the proximity of French Indochina does not influence the linguistic preferences of the Thais: “If a native learns a foreign language, then it is certainly English. They don’t even mention French”. Corvée labor and the natural “tax from the fields” (tire), according to the author, are very burdensome for Thai peasants. De Wollant was particularly critical of some local rulers, as seen in his description: “The governor seemed very unrepresentative to me... I could not look without disgust at the governor chewing betel nut with pleasure and spitting out blood into a special vessel offered by one of the mandarins”, However, de Wollant’s negative impression could also have real grounds: “Intellectually, the governor seemed very undeveloped to me, he had a very vague concept of Europe and Russia and for some reason imagined that some giants lived in Russia”.

De Wollant’s general critical attitude towards the Thai royal aligns with his negative portrayal of the socio-economic situation in Siam: “The Siamese king has untold wealth. Even pessimists admit this. At the same time, no one talk about the population, and does it even need much in such a fertile climate?”. By this, de Wollant implied that Thai people, living in a fertile climate, could survive with very little, while the King continued to amass wealth. Although

he does not directly condemn the King's prosperity, de Wollant finds it questionable that the King maintains a large harem and that there is even a "price of harem women". When listing the sources of the royal court's income, de Wollant states that they are "disposed of by his entourage, and in that approximation, there are many abuses". Describing the royal gardens, de Wollant notes the presence of the "inevitable lawn tennis" (referring to the courts – S.B.), with an audience of "gentlemen" and "misses" "playing lawn tennis deftly".

His sarcastic tone is especially evident when he discusses the meaning of the word "Thai," which translates to "free," in contrast to the existence of slavery in the country: "It's a weird thing: slavery flourishes in the land of free people".

In terms of feelings, boredom is quite evident when de Wollant writes about the natural landscapes of Siam, while describing Thai traditional houses raised on stilts, types of boats and buildings. He remarks: "We have entered Chao Phraya, there is the same monotonous landscape". The statement is repeated twice, clearly reflecting his disappointment with the jungle scenery: "The shacks among the palm groves at first seem very decorative, but then this landscape quickly becomes boring in its monotony". A vivid anecdote about the history of the development of the railway network in Thailand underscores De Wollant's criticism of corruption, as he writes that Thai officials "have already eaten the dog in the bribe case". The same applies to legal proceedings: "It is very difficult, as some say, to obtain one's rights, and one must resort to bribery everywhere". De Wollant also expresses his annoyance with the local fauna, including – lizards in a hotel room, "huge cockroaches," and mosquitoes.

Travel conditions in Siam were also uncomfortable for him: "In a small village with houses on stilts, we had to transfer to tiny boats resembling ours. Because of the low roof on these boats, you don't know how to arrange yourself. If you want to sit, you bump into the canopy, and lying down is equally uncomfortable; you don't know where to put your feet. Our arrival alarmed the entire young generation of the village, who gathered on the shore. Most were notable for their lack of clothing, and children with distended bellies involuntarily caught my attention". However, De Wollant disagrees with Bowring claim that the only mode of transport in Bangkok is by river, noting the presence of good roads and horse-drawn carriages in Siam.

Oriental Romanization

Throughout his travelogue, it is evident that de Wollant was most positively impressed by the architecture of Siamese temples and royal courts, as well as the Siamese music. The royal residence, with its unique layout and style seemed to de Wollant like "an entirely

different world” for de Wollant. The diplomat informed Russian readers that it could take several days just to study the details of the architectural decoration of the temples, the abundance of which aroused admiration. De Wollant pointed his attention to the large amount of gold and beautiful mosaic decorations, but noted with annoyance that “there are, of course, elements of bad taste, such as stone statues depicting admirals and generals in European uniforms”. Obviously, the author found the combination of European and Asian styles inelegant and tasteless. A very typical comparison for both European and Russian travelers is the one with “Thousand and One Night” fairy tales. De Wollant wrote: “The golden tops of palaces and shining temples... were a picture dazzling in its brilliance”. The reflections of the multi-colored mosaic in the sun “reminded in their splendor of the fairy tale “A Thousand and One Nights.”.

The Russian traveler also noticed something positive in Siamese farming techniques. The one suggests that Russians could learn a lot from the so-called “savages”. He wrote: “At every step, we come across water-lifting wheels for irrigating fields. The design of these wheels is very simple... And it is a pleasure at every step, as water is essential for irrigating fields and vegetable gardens. Somehow, involuntarily, at the sight of this primitive, yet time expedient irrigation device, I remember my distant homeland. And there, in the south, there are many rivers and rivulets that can be forced to perform free service, but who thinks about this? If the subject of irrigation is raised, they will immediately demand millions, but how much is needed for a simple fence and a simple wheel? And all this is done by these supposed savages. Their agriculture is no match to ours. Their farming is intensive in every sense of the word”.

De Wollant found Thai music to be more agreeable than that of other Asian countries: “Siamese music is quite pleasant, soft in tone, and does not have those dissonances that abound in Chinese or Japanese music. Siamese music conveys sadness, cheerful feelings and the solemn mood of the soul. The Siamese, as I was told, have many musical plays. They have a great abundance of musical instruments.”

Discussion and Conclusions

Said’s “Orientalism” remains an extremely relevant and widely debated book, and it continues to influence and guide scholarly work that seeks to understand the social and cultural contexts of different societies. Although the discussion about Russian Orientalism and its specific characteristics persists and remains problematic, the application of the Orientalist approach to Russian travelogues, especially those about Siam, is rarely seen even in contemporary Russian academic studies. A reexamination of Russian travelers’ accounts on Siam is necessary in light of

Said's theory. De Wollant's travelogue serves as a valuable source for historians and the analysis above allows to draw several conclusions. The oppositions between the East and the West in de Wollant's writing are distinct and clearly visible. Geographical, economic, ethnographic and other data collected were interpreted and shown to a Russian audience in a typical Orientalist way, dividing the world into binary categories – civilization versus barbarians, progress versus backwardness, East versus West. In general, de Wollant provided a rather negative assessment of the Siam's socio-economic development of Siam, both rural and urban. This is particularly emphasized, through his choice of language: a steamer sailing along Bangpakong river is described as “small, nasty, and dirty”; a casino, sarcastically referred to as “local Monte Carlo,” turns out to be “a huge barn hastily knocked together from planks”. The benefits of modern civilization are seen as localized phenomena, alien to the rest of the country (“all this does not look like Siam, but rather resembles Europe”. Interestingly, De Wollant also praises certain aspects of Siamese culture and government, at times romanticizing them. As a traveler, he was not merely a discoverer of the Siamese land, but has also a critic and evaluator of the kingdom's economic and political situation, casting his judgments through an Orientalist lens.

Recommendations

To date, there have been few studies and researches on Russian travelogues, diplomatic correspondence and other Russian writings concerning Siam, particularly from the perspective of Orientalism. These works are of great importance and deserve closely examination to foster mutual understanding and strengthen the relationship between Russia and Thailand. In addition, many Russian works about Siam, framed within the concept of Orientalism, remain relatively unknown and untranslated. Therefore, studying and researching these Russian travelogues is significantly important. This article aims to stimulate interest in these works, and can serve as a valuable resource and guide for further research, It offers insight into the Orientalist attitudes present in Russian travelogues and notes about Siam across various dimensions, providing a foundation for those seeking to explore this subject more deeply.

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