

The Formation of Laborer's Movement in Thailand

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The formation of laborer's movement in Thailand cannot be viewed without regard to the development of capitalization. Thus this paper consists of two parts, the historical background of capitalization and the organizing process of the laborers' movement.

I. The Historical Background of Capitalization

The trend of number of hired laborers and the expansion of Thai industry will be discussed. According to the change in sociopolitical structure of Thai society, the numbers of hired laborers and employers will be viewed and compared between two different periods, the periods under the Absolute Monarchical Regime during 1767-1932, and under the Constitutional Monarchical Regime during 1932-1973.

The Period under Absolute Monarchical Regime, 1767-1932

As being known, from Ayuthaya period up to the reign of Rama V, the corvee or the forced labor system was functioning mainly for the kings and nobles's life. When King Taksin was putting an effort to build the new capital of Thonburi, the shortage of manpower was a serious problem. The king solved the problem by permitting and encouraging the Chinese immigrants of all kinds to work in Thailand such as general laborers, laborers in construction, shipping, trading, and navigation. The immigrant groups including the well-educated Chinese were hired as counselors in the court. (Skinner1957: 97) The later kings of early Bangkok also continued to encourage Chinese immigrants by non-restrictive policy. The status of Chinese in Thailand was very advantageous. They were, exempted from corvee labor, free to travel and settle anywhere without restriction, and entirely free from slavery. (Skinner1957: 97)

Thai people who experienced hardships under the corvee system were undoubtedly avoided any labor service work by heading to independent work in agriculture instead; unsurprisingly Chinese occupied the hired labor market. The Chinese were working in

forestry, rubber plantations, mining, governmental construction, temple building, digging canal, etc. A model of number of Chinese in early Bangkok period is shown in the following table,

Table 1. The Probable Model of the Growth of Chinese Population in Thailand, 1825-1917 (Skinner 1957: 79)

Year	Estimated Total Population	Estimated Total of all Chinese	% of Chinese in Total Population
1825	4,750,000	230,000	4.8
1850	5,200,000	300,000	5.8
1860	5,450,000	337,000	6.2
1870	5,775,000	383,000	6.6
1880	6,200,000	435,000	7.0
1890	6,670,000	497,000	7.5
1900	7,320,000	608,000	8.3
1910	8,305,000	792,000	9.5
1917	9,232,000	906,000	9.8

Even though certain number of Chinese cannot be traced back to the King Taksin 's reign (1767-1782), the tendency of the increase of Chinese population over time is noticeable in the above table, which, should be analyzed in relation with the source of national revenue shown in the following table.

Table 2. Sources of Thai National Revenue 1892-1917 (million baht) (Ingram 1971: 185)

Sources	Year: 1892	1905	1906	1915	1917
Land tax & Capitation	1.7	8.0	12.51	15.91	17.02
Indirect taxes: Import-export, Duties, Excercise taxes, Inland transit, Gambling farms	8.6	19.84	18.14	22.73	18.92
State Domains: Forest revenue, Mining revenue	0.68	3.26	3.01	4.04	7.59
State enterprises: Opium, Commercial services	2.48	12.60	11.85	21.40	26.36
Fees, fines, licenses and others	2.15	6.76	10.00	10.28	12.57
Total	15.38	50.46	55.51	74.36	82.46

The correlation of the two tables can be viewed as follows. First, the state enterprise taxes, which were based on opium and commerce, were directly involved with the consumption and work of Chinese. Second, the increase of land tax and capitation tax

from 1.47 million baht in 1892 to 17.02 million in 1917 could be explained that it was made possible by the switching from corvee labor to the capitation tax system in 1899. Evidentially the government could increase its revenue promptly from 1.47 million in 1892 to 8 million baht in 1905. After the abolishment of the corvee labor system, it was certain that most of the Thai people went into the agricultural work and cultivated new land. In the process of the economic development in Thailand, it was clear that Chinese who engaged in trading and worked as middlemen gained most advantages meanwhile the government regained advantages from the Chinese.

From the reign of Rama V (1868-1910) to 1932, it can be considered the initiation period of capitalistic industry in Thailand. The first industrial laborers appeared in 1858 when an American built the first rice mill, hiring 300 laborers. Since then, several kinds of factories and laborers emerged yearly, as they are shown in the following table,

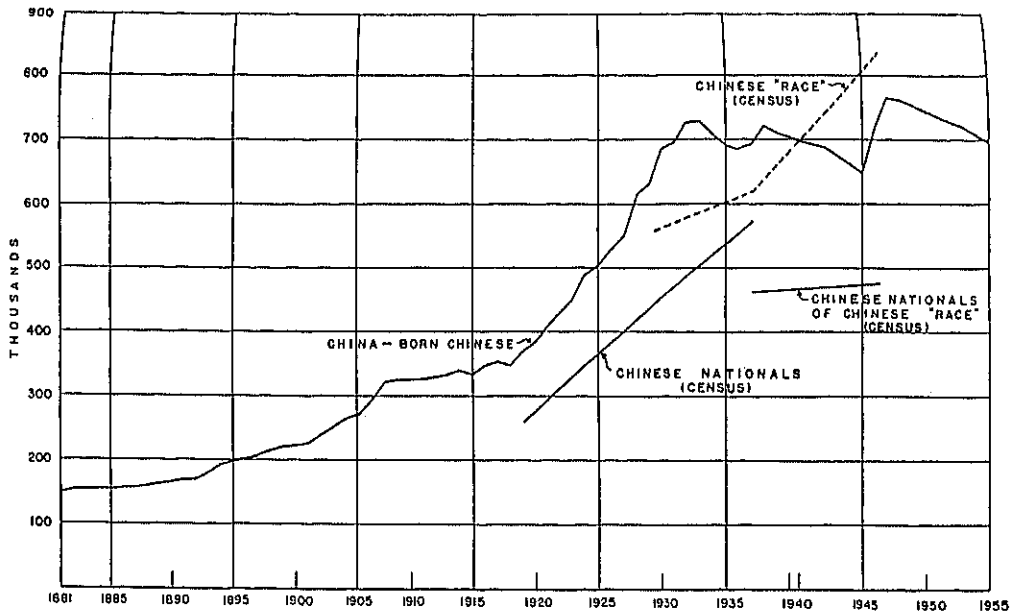
Table 3. Initial Years of Thai Industries, 1884-1950
(Ramagomut 1976: 4)

Year	Industries
1884	Mining
1887	Electricity, Tram
1888	Publishing, Forestry
1890	Railway
1913	Cement
1920	Tobacco
1926	Match
1927	Liquor & Beverage
1933	Dying
1937	Sugar
1950	Spining

The investors of these industries were mostly Westerners and Chinese. In the period of 1910-1930, approximately 60% to 75% of laborers in Thailand were Chinese. In some fields like forestry in northern Thailand, most of the laborers were the Laotians, Khmers, and Burmese. However in other fields such as rubbery, mining, rice mill, saw mill, transportation and manufacturing, the Chinese laborers were predominantly hired.

There is no reliable data concerning the number of the laborers at that time, neither on Chinese laborers nor the Thai. But considering the growth of Chinese immigrants from 1882 to 1955, it was possible to presume approximate trend of the Chinese laborers as shown by the graphic line in Figure 1.

Chart 1. A Model of the Growth of the Chinese (born in China) Population in Thailand, 1882-1955 (Skinner 1957: 77 Chart 2)



From the above figure, it is seen that in a decade before 1932, the number of the China-born Chinese came to its peak. The political situation and struggles in China pushed their people to move out. On the other hand, the great immigration flow of Chinese laborers exactly served the growth of Thai industrialization. However, lacking of record of other industries, only the numbers of rice mills are shown below.

Table 4. Growth in Numbers of Rice Mills during 1919-1929 (Skinner 1957: 214)

Year	Number
Established before 1919	56
Established during 1919-25	198
Established during 1926-29	296
Total	593

The increase of rice mills more than ten times from 56 to 593 within ten years leads to assumption that number of other industries must have increased as well, even not as rapid as that of the rice mills. Noticeable fact is that the Chinese held important roles both as laborers and as industrial capitalists. By 1930s, Chinese were estimated to

constitute 85% of the “commercial class” and to hold 90% of the country’s commerce and trade in their hands. (Skinner 1957: 220)

The Period Under Constitutional Monarchical Regime, 1932-1973

Since 1932 when Thailand changed its regime, the new era of the Thai capitalization had embarked within the political framework of constitutional monarchy. Subsequently, the composition of people could be structurally categorized as follows,

1. The new elites (high officials and politicians) and the traditional elites (royal family members and nobles). These two groups held very high social status and gained most advantages from society. Based on their common interest, they allied to each other, but yet ideological conflicts were obvious.

2. The capitalists who were holding economic power. Most of them were Chinese and Westerners. They functioned as a strong interest group in the society to expand their business. Their profits were directly gained from their industrial works. In addition to economic power, they attained rather high social status through cooperation with the first group.

3. The middle class commoners. A very small group they were but expected to perform leading roles because of their high and modern education received in domestic and foreign institutions. In 1930s, this group of people was employed as officials in many levels in the modern bureaucracy.

4. Industrial urban laborers. This group of people was lately formed up along with the growth of capitalization in Thailand. These hired laborers were mostly Chinese at the beginning. But after the restriction of Chinese immigrants in 1935 by the Thai government the ratio of Thai laborers started to increase.

5. Agricultural peasants. This group of people consisted of the majority of the Thai population (see Table 5). As explained before, the Chinese did not show much interest in agriculture, their number was negligible. Apparently, the Thai peasants who were majority of the country’s population had been the target group of exploitation by the kings and nobles during both the absolute monarchical period, as well as by the traders, the middlemen or by the whole capitalistic system in the constitutional monarchical period.

Table 5. The Ratio of Laborers in Agriculture (Peasants) and in Industry, 1937-1967 in Percentage (Ramagomut 1976: 36)

Sector	1937	1947	1960	1966	1967
Agriculture Industry,	89.0	84.4	81.6	79.8	73.8
Commerce and Services	11.0	15.6	18.4	20.2	26.2

From the above table, the agricultural peasants obviously declined in percentage over years, meanwhile the industrial laborers paradoxically increased in the fields of industry, factory, commerce and services. Considering the situation that the Chinese Restriction Law enacted in 1935 limited the number of Chinese immigrants to only 200 persons a year, and much fewer Chinese could emigrate due to the out break of Sino-Japan war, the increasing of laborers in non-agricultural areas could not be the new influx of Chinese. Statistics indicate the shift among domestic laborers, that is the Thai peasants' changing from agricultural work to other fields.

The reason the new government of 1932 coup did not seriously pay attention on the industrial laborers, could be because the laborers were mostly Chinese and the industrialization was not in much advanced stage that could bring to attention. The main national exports were totally based on agricultural products. Some industrial goods had to be imported for important domestic industries which, were related to agricultural and forestry products, for instance rice mills and saw mills. The development of Thai industry was slowly growing until five years before the World War II. In 1940, industrial goods were insufficient due to the international political and economic situations. Therefore the Thai government urgently supported domestic industrial production, and built its own factories to produce materials of necessity like papers, cloth, jute bags, sugar and other items to supply the government's needs in military, and for the civilian's consumptions as well. It should be noted that the ministry of industry was established in 1942, in the middle of the war time. However after the war ended, the government reduced its interest in industry, turned to support the agricultural production for export again. (Sangthong 1972: 6)

A decade after the World War II was the activating period of the Thai laborers, especially after the anti-Communist Law of 1935 was revoked in 1946. Some labor unions committed themselves to and had connection with the international labor unions such as The World Federation of Trade Union (WFTU), Trade Union Congress (TUC). Some representatives attended the labor day meeting arranged in Peking. At this point, if the laborers' activities and movements had not been interfered by the international powers, the pattern of capitalization and modernization of Thailand by now would have changed its course, be much different from what it had been so far.

Since China changed its regime in 1949, and the Korean war broke out in 1951, the politics of international power had strongly affected the inside politics of all Asian countries. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established in 1954, of which the headquarter was located in Bangkok. This period was known as the cold war period when the United States was involved with many groups, the pro- and anti-

Communists and Socialists. The Thai anti-Communist governments in the 1950s were backed up by the United States. Much of military and economic aids were offered to Thailand especially after General Sarit Thanarat came to power, becoming the prime minister in 1958. The amount of aids in many forms over years is shown in the following table.

Table 6. U.S. Economic and Military Assistance to Thailand
(U.S. fiscal years-millions of dollars)

	Economic	Military	Economic & Military
1951-57	149.2	221.6	370.8
1958	25.9	19.7	45.6
1959	58.9	18.0	76.9
1960	25.9	24.7	50.6
1961	24.3	23.9	48.2
1962	47.6	39.1	86.7
1963	21.9	68.5	90.4
1964	15.1	52.7	67.8
1965	41.4	36.4	77.8
1966	60.4	40.7	101.1
1967	37.0	46.9	83.9

Source: Statistics and Reports Division. Office of Program and Policy Co-ordination, Agency for International Development, U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance from International Organizations, Obligations and Loan Authorization, July 1, 1945-June 30, 1967 (March 29, 1968), p. 73, in Wilson 1970: 144

It should be noted that the Sarit's government posed emphasis on economic and social development along with the strengthening of army. He emphasized the National Economic Plan as his important national policy to pursue the long-run development. This National Economic Plan was taken over to the next generation as follows.

1st plan 1961-1966

2nd plan 1967-1971

3rd plan 1972-1976

4th plan 1977-1981

The expenditures of Sarit 's government were divided as shown in the following table.

Table 7. Central Government Expenditures (Ingram 1971: 302) (million baht)

Year	Total Expenditures	Functional Classification				
	Economic	Social	Defense	General Admin.	Other	
1959.....	6,443	1,406	1,755	1,420	1,297	511
1960.....	6,703	1,429	1,885	1,379	1,508	502
1961.....	7,727	1,925	2,127	1,461	1,597	617
1962.....	8,472	2,069	2,313	1,581	1,738	772
1963.....	9,589	2,400	2,674	1,661	1,977	877
1964.....	10,772	2,678	3,135	1,767	2,195	1,000
1965.....	12,449	3,382	3,635	1,979	2,195	1,258
1966.....	14,028	4,155	3,766	2,225	2,694	1,188
1967.....	17,333	5,528	4,446	2,694	2,752	1,913
1968.....	19,485	5,157	4,635	2,998	3,028	3,667
1969.....	21,613	6,216	5,601	3,733	3,149	2,914

Among the five functional classification : economic, social, defense, general administration and others; the economic category includes irrigation, transportation, industry etc. and the social category includes education, health and social welfare.

In order to enlarge industrialization and encourage the investors especially foreigners, the government issued the Investment Promotion Law offering privileges and reducing some types of taxes to the industrial investors. In addition, the government's policy was to be in control of the laborers more strictly to satisfy the investors. The situation brought to a sudden decline of the laborers' movements, providing preferable atmosphere for investment. It appeared that the industrial factories rapidly increased as shown in the following table:

Table 8. Expansion of Factories (Chantharawithun 1967: 42)

Year	Bangkok-Thonburi	Up-country	Total
1958	5,740	6,291	11,761
1959	6,634	6,669	13,303
1960	7,018	8,989	16,007
1961	7,740	15,322	23,062
1962	8,305	16,252	24,557
1963	8,857	18,479	27,336
1964	9,513	19,917	29,430
1968	12,001	32,257	44,258

The number of the factories sharply increased from 23,062 in 1961 to 44,258 in 1968 showed a fair success of the First Economic Plan. Interesting obvious point is that the major aim of the economic plan was to increase GNP, emphasizing on the industrial and agricultural productions, but there was no mention to requirement on laborers or the employment issue. The size of the labor market at that time was supposed to be sufficient to serve industrial demand. However the size of total population of the countries should be taken into consideration, as shown in the following table,

Table 9. Growth of Population in Thailand 1911-1970
(Public Health Statistics: 1971)

Date of Census	Total Population
April 1, 1911	8,266,408
April 1, 1919	9,209,355
July 15, 1929	11,506,207
May 23, 1937	14,464,105
May 23, 1947	17,442,689
April 23, 1960	26,257,916
April 1, 1970	34,152,000

The population doubled within twenty three years after the war end indicates that Thailand had plenty of labor supply. Here is another census of number of laborers in 1960 and 1967.

Table 10. Census of Laborers in 1960 and 1967
(Chantharawithun 1967: 47, and Ramagomut 1976: 35)

	1960	%	1967	%
1. Agriculture	11,334,382	82.3	11,206,423	73.8
2. Mining	29,568	0.2	20,966	0.1
3. Manufacture	471,027	3.4	752,092	5.0
4. Construction	68,813	0.5	171,753	1.1
5. Public	15,535	0.1	9,026	0.1
6. Commerce	779,904	5.7	1,317,736	8.7
7. Transportation	165,939	1.2	240,406	1.6
8. Service	655,271	4.8	1,230,907	8.1
9. Others	257,665	1.8	231,998	1.5
Total	13,772,104	100	15,181,307	100

Clearly shown above is the decrease of agricultural laborers while their counterparts in manufacturing, commerce and service increased. In 1972, the number of laborers in Thailand increased up to about 17 millions. The non-agricultural laborers were 4 millions among which the hired laborers were 2 millions or 12% of total laborers of that year.

II. Organizing Process of Thai Laborers' Movement

In Early Bangkok Period, 1767-1932

During this period the hired laborers were mostly Chinese. There was no labor union of present concept. But among the Chinese, there was a kind of an association called "secret society" which functioned similar to a labor union. The secret societies were introduced to Siam from China probably in the 17th century or at the latest by the early 18th century. (Skinner 1957: 139) The objective purpose of the society in Siam was to provide protection and economic advantages for its members by extra-legal, if not illegal means. (Skinner 1957: 140)

As for the influence of these societies, the British consul in Bangkok said in his report of 1900 that the Chinese societies in Siam were supposedly using their influence to keep down the immigrating laborers in order to maintain the increased wage rates. (Skinner 1957: 65) By 1902, it was said, "all Chinese belong to one or other of the numerous secret societies." (Skinner 1957: 140)

The bosses of the big societies were primarily farmers of opium, gambling and spirits. (Skinner 1957: 140) These societies were occasionally caused problems to the Thai government. There were several times of Chinese rebellions and uprisings against the tyrannical local governments. Sometimes, they were very serious both in Bangkok and up-countries. Therefore in 1897, the government promulgated the Secret Society Act, providing for compulsory registration and police control of all societies as well as a heavy punishment for organizing or managing unlawful societies. (Skinner 1957: 145) Since then the Chinese societies began to decline. Especially the rapid decline of secret societies after 1910 was a result of several factors. The gradual abolition of monopoly farms, gambling and opium smoking ended the rivalry among the Chinese. Some societies had political aims, these were obviated by the overthrow of the Manchus in 1911, and after that any remaining political furor or patriotic altruism was captured by the new Chinese nationalist movement. Besides, the Thai government began a serious campaign of suppression of the Chinese soon after Rama VI came to the throne in 1910. (Skinner 1957: 166)

After 1910, some of the secret societies simply became inactive. The newly established associations, the speech (dialect) groups and regional associations functioned more legitimately. They protected the special occupational interests of members, and helped new immigrants to find jobs and get established. The first speech group association was founded in 1877. (Skinner 1957: 167)

In addition to the Chinese secret societies and associations, there were established labor unions. The Tram Employee Union was the first labor union in Thailand, consisted of about 200 members, found in 1879 the year when the Secret Society Act was proclaimed. The purposes of this union were to promote the member's saving, to help them at retirement and so on. (Sangthong 1972: 9)

It should be noted that the organizations of laborers before 1932 had no relations with political issues. The associations and unions of laborers did not play any roles as protectors of the laborers' interests, simply because they did not have right to make deal or negotiate with the employers. Either the laborers did not consider themselves as an interest group. Generally, the associations did not involve in the laborers' strikes. There were only two exceptions, the strike of the seaport laborers in 1921, and of the national railway laborers in 1930, in which the latter one, the leader of Thai railway laborers was arrested on charge of being a communist supporter. This was the first time laborer was accused of Communist influence. (Sangthong 1972: 9)

Communism expanded into Thailand around 1927 by two groups of people. One was the Vietnamese who escaped from the French suppression in Vietnam, the other was the Chinese who ran away from the suppression of the Kokumintang government in China. (Sriworaphongphan 1976: 49) Again in 1929, some important members of the Communist Chinese party escaped into Thailand. These people aimed to step into the Chinese associations especially in the Chinese laborers' organizations. Meanwhile the Thai government tried to arrest the communist propagators and did arrest some of the high level Chinese Communists in 1931. (Ramagomut 1976: 10) However, the Communist activity among the Thai laborers was not visible before 1932.

It could be said that the role of the association which the laborers attached to, was usually to help their members on welfare and private matters. Some movements of laborers were for economic needs. There was no political movement. Even though some laborer associations might be influenced by the Chinese nationalists or Chinese Communists, their activities did not yet have any relations with Thai politics.

Under the New Political Establishment during 1932-1973

As mentioned in part I, a group of people called the People's Party did a coup d'etat and changed the absolute monarchical regime into a monarchical democratic. As soon as the new government was established, the laborers in Bangkok took this chance to demonstrate and strike. They were laborers from different industries such as the tram laborers, taxi drivers and Chinese women dyers. Among them, an interesting protest was

that of the 6,000 Chinese rickshaw pullers in August 1932. They appeared to be well organized during the five-day sabotage, but there was little record about this strike and others during these period. In relation to the Communism ideology which was introduced into Thailand before 1932, no doubt to believe that the Chinese laborers are their targets. The first Communist journal was published in 1932 in three languages, Thai, Chinese, and English, and their first debut name was "Communist Party of Siam". However the Communist's purpose at that time was to convince the Chinese and the Thai-born Chinese to support their struggle in China. (Sriworaphongphan 1976: 51)

The new Thai government of 1932 did not lay a hand on the laborers. This might be due to the fact that the government was then facing other serious problems. For instance, in 1933 there was a rebellion of provincial army and civil officials headed by Prince Boworadej, a former Minister of Defense. The first five years of the constitutional regime were filled with a number of significant events, which might amount to the shaking down of the regime. Among them an event had direct effect on the Communist party in Thailand, the proposal of the economic plan by Pridi Pranomyong the civilian brain of the People's Party, in 1933. The plan was set forth in the following six-point program in the Party's manifesto. (Wilson 1962: 16)

1. Freedom and equality of the people in politics, law, court, and business.
2. Internal peace and order.
3. Economic well-being and work for all, by means of economic planning.
4. Equality and privileges.
5. Freedom and liberty which were not conflicting with the forgoing.
6. Education for all.

Pridi took the third point of economic well-being as a mandate to draft a general and somewhat elaborate economic plan for the nation. The care of this plan was radical statements, to nationalize virtually all natural and industrial resources including land; the people with some minor exceptions were to become state employees. The plan immediately met strong opposition and was labeled, with perhaps some indelicacy but also with practical justification, as Bolshevism. Discord appeared in the People's Party between Pridi's civilian reformers and the more conservative military group. (Wilson 1962: 17) Subsequently, the law against Communism was proclaimed and Pridi was personally urged to go abroad.¹ Even though this anti-Communism law was unintentionally to suppress the Communist party then, it made the Communist party in Thailand suddenly turn their work into secrecy for the first time since the beginning of its founda-

¹ Pridi left for a short period, he was back to join the cabinet again in 1933. (cf. Dantrakool 1971)

tion in 1930's.

In the period before the second World War, some of the assembly members proposed to the parliament a labor protection law to protect and improve the laborers' right and condition several times. The parliament disagreed, with a reason that the law might affect the economic situation and on the other hand the investors and capitalists would be unsatisfied with this law. Many in the government did not believe that the laborers were in actual support of the law proposal. Some politicians in the government realized the necessity of organizing the laborers as a force in politics. They ordered the chiefs of official departments and chiefs of public corporations of which the government was a shareholder, to gather the laborer leaders of electricity plants, railways, and cement company under their control. However the organizing of these laborers was restrictedly to only the non-Chinese and only occasionally. The Chinese Labor were still much attached to and influenced by their speech group associations.

It can be said that between 1932 to 1941 the first year of the World War II, Thai laborers accumulated experiences of trial and error in fighting for their own interest under the democratic regime. Lacking of labor unions and a well established leading ideology, most of the laborers did not have working class consciousness, never considered themselves an exploited group. They might go in on strikes sometimes but they did not realize of their bargaining power with the employers.

The war exploded when the Japanese soldiers attacked and settled the troops in Thailand in December 1941. The laborers' movement disappeared during the war time. The leaders in the government divided into two sides in the war policy. One agreed to cooperate with the Japanese army but the other was anti-Japanese. The anti-Japanese group created an underground movement called Seri Thai (means Free Thai), led by the liberal Thai elite group who sought refuge abroad (the group consisted of both the rightists and leftists). Nationalistic feeling helped to develop the Seri Thai mission rapidly among the Thais. Meanwhile the Thai Communist party took chance to expand Communism into the anti-Japanese group. They founded the Thai Issara (also means Free Thai) movement in order to inspire the Thai laborers with the ideology of Communism. Even though there was no evidence of how much the Communist party succeeded in its propaganda with Thai laborers, owing to the fact that until then there was no leading ideology or leading principle among laborers at all, the initiation of Marxist ideology could be very educative and attractive to some laborers at this period of time. The Communist party of Thailand rearranged the inside structure, changing its name to the "Thai Communist Party", and opened the first general meeting on December 1, 1942 a year after the war began. This party had been helped and advised by the Communist

Party of China throughout the process of their establishment. (Sriworaphongphan 1976: 52)

When the World War II was ended on August 15, 1945, Seni Pramoj the leader of the Seri Thai movement was circumstantially enforced to become the prime minister. The new government negated from responsibility of all cooperation with Japan during the war. Moreover, the government under the leadership of Seni announced its war time commitment with the Allies, which could assure the status of Thailand as an independent country after the World War II. After the war the Seri Thai movement was dissolved. Even though it was well organized and had an important function during the war time in integrating Thai people's nationalism under patriotic slogan, but in reality the war time Siri Thai movement was not deeply rooted in the local society. Its function and organization ended with the war.

In order to open a diplomatic relation with the USSR and to join the United Nations Organization, the Thai government evoked the anti-Communist Law in 1946. As soon as the law was abolished, the Communist fraction emerged in public, headed by Prasert Sapsoonthorn. At first, this fraction had no relation with the concurrent existing Thai Communist Party, but later they amalgamated and Prasert became the chairman of the new party. (Sriworaphongphan 1976: 53) However, in the election of 1946 this party had only one successful candidate, Prasert himself.

Undoubtedly, the main target of the Communist party was the laborers who began to organize themselves into labor unions. In 1944, The Central Union of labor (CUL) was established of which members were mostly Chinese. This labor union was officially registered in 1947. In 1949, this union declared itself a member of World Federation of Trade Union (WFTU). Another labor union which was founded under the influence of the Communist party was The United Occupations Laborers of Thailand (UOLT). The UOLT consisted of laborers from match factories, rice mills, cement factories, saw mills and of rice carriers. It claimed 75,000 members most of whom were Chinese. This union was officially registered in 1947, after that it began its open activities in public.

In the history of Thai laborers before 1973, the period from 1945 when the anti-Communist law was abolished, to 1948 when Phibun Songkhram seized the political power, could be called the "first democratic period" of the Thai laborers' movement. May 1, 1945 the ceremony of the Labor Day was first held in Bangkok. On the same day a group of the representatives of the labor unions went to attend the May day meeting at Peking in China. (Ramagomut 1976: 58)

It was recognized by the public that the Communist party was backing up the Thai laborers. In every strike, the Chinese and Thai laborers cooperated and a symbol of

hammer and sickle printed on the posters. (Ramagomut 1976: 15) The demonstrations and strikes of laborers were done on purposes asking for higher wages and improvement of their working conditions, no particular record of their activities related to political movement. The laborers' movement was conditioned by the suppressing economic situation after the war and the need to improve their living condition. However, being stimulated by the Communist Party's organizers, the laborers were ready to up rise and call for anything they wanted. It was estimated that during the years of 1945-46 there were 173 strikes of laborers. (Ramagomut 1976: 58) By average it was about very 4-5 days for two years. Among the demands of the laborers, the legislation of Labor Protection Law was an important issue. Despite both the laborers' demonstrations and the pressure from many politicians, the government had no intention to pass the law, which was partly due to the reality that the government was having its own instability problem. There was a coup d'état in November 1947 by a military group and the civilian prime minister was appointed. Again in 1948, a militarist seized the power and declared himself a prime minister. Another reason might be that the more active the laborers were the more the government were afraid of giving them rights and legal protection under the specific protection law.

In April 1948, Phibun Songkram government, the strongly anti-communist government came to power. Phibun had a precise policy to resist the Communist and Socialist laborers by supporting the social-democratic laborers. Therefore he encouraged these laborers to organize another labor union called "Thai Labor Union", which was later reformed and renamed as "Thai National Trade Union Congress" (TNTUC) in 1951. The union imitated the name of Trade Union Congress of England for expecting the assistance from international social-democratic group. (Pholakorn 1972: 58) The government patronized this union in order to put it in the place of The Central Union of Labor (CUL). At the same time the government oppressed the leftist labor union by arresting many members of the CUL with charge of being Communists. The CUL was gradually dissolved.

The government tried to eliminate all the Communist influence, which helped to expand the TNTUC in every aspect. The members did not have to pay the membership fees. Membership was not limited to the hired laborers, all kinds of workers could be a member including tricycle drivers, peddle merchants and rice carriers. There were branched all over the country and it claimed about 70,000 members who were mostly Thai. (Pholakorn 1972: 59) The government had spent a lot of money for this union including hiring union officers. Most of the administrators of the TNTUC were politicians or politician supporters.

Beside the TNTUC, the government realized that they needed another organization to control the Chinese laborers. Therefore the "Free Workmen's Association of Thailand" (FWAT) was founded in 1954. Similar to those of the TNTUC, the members of the FWAT did not have to pay membership fees and any kinds of laborers were welcomed. The government contacted a Chinese businessman to secretly manage the Chinese laborers. This Chinese association was financially patronized by the government and was looked after by the Chief of Police Department. This association consisted of 14,000 members. (Pholakorn 1972: 61) Many labor unions were supported by the government such as the Tricycle labor Union founded in 1950, Women Labor Union founded on 1951. These labor unions were led by the high officials, politicians and well-known persons in business and politics. The laborers did not administrate the union by themselves.

It can be said that in order to gain influence over the laborers and get political support from them, the government tried to please them as much. Some of the laborer leaders were even sent to study abroad. Whenever the laborers had a strike, the government paid wages in the name of the labor unions. (Pholakorn 1972: 61) The government facilitated all convenience to the laborers. The office was offered as well as the expenses for their journal printed in Thai, Chinese and English. The government even gave the welfare aid to the union members. These policies to the laborers is viewed as the intention to spoil and make them dependent so that they were incapable to work and organize by themselves. Under this condition, the laborers became less enthusiastic cooperating together. They became an instrument under the government's total control.

The government's implementation naturally weakened the employers' power. They had to more accept and compromise with the laborers because they knew the government was backing up the labor unions. In the same token, the employers also received a support from the government. Some businessmen associations were established under the subsidies from the government as well. (Pholakorn 1972: 63)

It should be noted that not all laborers were unsatisfied with the government's policy. This brought about the separation of laborers. In reality, even though the Communist Party's activities disappeared from public, they still worked underground and among the laborers. Since some politicians sought supporting group among the leftist laborers, no matter how hard the government tried to please the laborers, the government could not control them all.

In 1955, the Political Party Act was passed and many political parties were born including the Labor Party, headed by Prakob Tolaklam. The main policy of the Labor Party was to call for the Labor Protection Law, the issue supported by the majority of the

laborers. Since China had changed the regime in 1949, this historical event somewhat affected the laborers movement in Thailand. During 1955-1956, a group of laborers demonstrated against the government. The topic of the demonstration was to call the government to withdraw from Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and to open relationship with the Republic of China. (Ramagomut 1976: 20) Confronted with this demonstration, some of laborer leaders in the government side were convinced and shared their standpoints with the leftist laborers. (Ramagomut 1976: 20) By the dynamic intervention of the other groups' movements the government began to loose its control over the laborers. Another new group of laborers called "The 16 Units of Laborers" was formed. This group strongly requested and put pressure on the government for the labor protection law.

Finally the Labor Protection Law was passed in 1956. According to this law the labor union was allowed to establish legally. As soon as the law was proclaimed, 154 unions were registered by 1957. (Neelayothin 1974: 37) The record of the laborers' strikes occurred in 1957 was the highest record in terms of numbers of laborers involved in the laborers' history of Thailand before 1973. The statistics is shown in the following table:

Table 11. Statistics on Strikes in 1957
(Labor Statistic Report of 1957: 8)

Month	Time	Laborers involved	Working days
January	5	6,864	49,839
February	6	1,445	12,198
March	1	1,515	370
April	1	320	5,897
May	2	3,242	14,309
June	-	-	-
July	-	-	-
August	3	652	8,256
September	-	-	-
October	1	100	100
November	1	29	29
December	1	280	560
Total	21	12,947	91,698

No record shows whether the strikes were related to politics or not. As a matter of fact, but the political situation at that time was unstable and difficult to predict. The general election of February 1957 was rigged by many groups of politicians. The candidates of the Labor Party were not elected at all. The representatives of the ruling

party were not a majority. This confusing situation was ended up in a coup d'etat led by General Sarit Thanarat in June of the same year. No laborers' strikes occurred in June and July. Another election was held in December that year, but during the process of political struggle Sarit led a coup d'etat again in October 1958 at which he himself became a prime minister. Sarit remained in this position until 1963 the year he died and was succeeded by General Thanom Kittikachorn who stayed in power with stability until the student uprising in October 1973.

Sarit passed a mandate criticizing the Labor Protection Law of 1956 that it provided chances to the Communist to interfere and be a threat to the country's progression, evidenced and witnessed by the troubles of the laborers' demonstration. By this justification, Sarit abolished the Labor Protection Law on October 31, 1958. Moreover, Sarit who was strongly influenced by the anti-Communist ideology arrested an enormous number of the leftist politicians and laborers. Many were put in jail for long term and some were executed. (Ramagomut 1976: 24) This suppression made all Communist movement go underground since.

Sarit's coming to power in 1958 marked an end to the long decade of political struggle since 1948 when General Phibun seized political power, also it finally marked the end of the period of post-war political instability. Sarit's government oppressed not only the anti-government groups such as Communists or Socialists, but also all other political fractions inside the ruling group. Consequently, the number of the labor disputes and work stoppages decreased remarkably in the following year, as shown in the table below,

Table 12. Labor Disputes and Work Stoppages during 1958-1963
Yearbook of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor (1958, 1978)

Year	Times	Number of Laborers	Working days
1958	4	458	4,202
1959	11	846	8,060
1960	2	3	64
1961	2	68	93
1962	3	81	63
1963	4	118	159
Total	26	1,574	12,641

Sarit's government evidently showed high political stability. The stabilization was mainly based on the establishment of the powerful and modernized military force. The expenses on the forces are shown in the following table,

Table 13. Military Expenditures of Thailand during 1955-1971 (in million baht)
(Hoadley 1975: 232-3)

Year	Total government expenditure	Defense, military expenditure	Defense, military as percentage of total expenditure
1955	3,999	545	13.6
1956	4,539	789	17.3
1957	5,745	1,567	27.3
1958	6,013	1,390	23.2
1959	6,442	1,420	22.1
1960	6,710	1,378	20.5
1961	5,655	1,080	19.1
1962	8,157	1,570	19.3
1963	9,210	1,609	17.5
1964	10,379	1,745	16.8
1965	11,915	1,877	15.7
1966	13,558	2,055	15.1
1967	16,880	2,437	14.4
1968	19,682	2,990	15.2
1969	21,617	3,638	16.8
1970	26,454	4,898	18.5
1971	28,068	5,383	19.1

It was certain that the rapid modernization of the Thai military force grounded from the American aid which was a part of American international policy of the cold war.

Having achieved a political stability, Thai government began to speed up the national industrial growth. In 1959, the Promotion Industry Act was legislated in order to prepare a better atmosphere for industrial development.² As mentioned before, the First National Economic Plan was started in 1961, in which a large amount of national and international funds were invested for completion of infrastructure. Prepared with the following five factors, Thailand became a preferred country for private investment as well.

1. High political stability backed up by the strong military and police force.
2. Large amount of public investment strongly supported by the international organizations to promote the national infra-structure.
3. Increasing military budget as an accelerator of all the industries.
4. Large number of cheap laborers with relatively good education.
5. Possibility to promote a consumer's market in Thailand and Southeast Asian countries.

² In addition to that, Thai government legislated the Act on the Promotion of Industrial Investment in 1962 in order to encourage the private investment especially from abroad.

From the Table 15 below, among the foreign investors in Thailand during the decade between 1959-1969, Japanese entrepreneurs were the biggest followed by the Americans and the Taiwanese.

Table 14. Registered Capital by the Investor's Country (in million baht)
(Statistic Report, Board of Investment: 1970)

Countries of Investors	1959-65	1966-69	Total
Thailand	1,725.5	2,422.7	4,148.2
Japan	374.5	283.7	658.3
Taiwan	160.6	140.4	301.0
United States	87.7	245.4	333.1
United Kingdom	28.9	77.3	106.2
Malaysia	26.8	60.3	87.1
West Germany	25.8	21.1	46.8
Denmark	22.8	5.8	28.3

Along with the growth of the investment, industrial laborers of Thailand increased drastically during the same period. Despite the strong suppression of the laborers' movement by the government, there occurred an explosion of the labor disputes in 1965, numbering the lost working days of 6,566 comparing to that of 539 in 1964. (see Table 15)

Table 16. Labor Disputes and Work Stoppages 1964-1977
(Yearbook of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor 1958, 1978)

Year	Times	Numbers of laborers participated	Working-day lost
1964	6	300	539
1965	17	3,753	6,566
1966	17	5,413	18,764
1967	2	470	470
1968	14	1,867	3,217
1969	18	5,345	23,593
1970	25	2,888	6,004
1971	27	5,153	12,646
1972	34	7,803	19,903
1973	501	177,887	296,887
1974	358	105,883	507,608
1975	241	94,747	722,946
1976	133	65,342	495,619
1977	7	4,868	12,331

The seriousness of labor disputes in 1965 made the government urgently issue an Act of Labor Reconciliation in the same year. Under the pressure of the continuous laborers' movement, the government finally issued another labor act called the Law of Labor Protection and Relations in 1972. Owing to the protection provided by this law, the number of labor unions registered increased to 75 and one employer's association registered by August 1972.

With the rapid capitalization and concomitant rise of the laborers' movement, the struggle between the laborers and the entrepreneurs reached a new stage in the middle of 1960s. As a result of a prevailing democratic movement, a new constitution was legislated in 1968, followed with the first election since 1957, taking place in 1969. However, due to the disorder of the political parties, Thanom Kittikachorn led a coup d'etat against his own government in 1971. The worsened economic condition in the country resulted in many disputes, demonstrations, and the accumulated frustration of the people. The only group of people who could actively show their frustration through many activities was, the high-social-status university students who relatively enjoyed their freedom of expression under the regulation of Martial Law.

In 1969, the National Student Center of Thailand (NSCT) was established as a federal organization of the newly uprising student associations in the universities and colleges. (Prizzia & Sinsawasdi 1974: 28) At first the activities of the NSTC were concerned with cultural and social issues, but gradually they shifted to political. In November 1972, it organized a well-known campaign against Japanese goods. One month later in December 1972, it organized a demonstration against the Decree 299 issued by the National Executive Council which was intended to transfer the Chairmanship of the Official Judicial Committee from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to the Minister of Justice. In June 1973, it organized a demonstration against the expulsion of Ramkhamhaeng University's radical students. These series of activities of the students came to its peak in October 1973. The student demonstrators who requested the promulgation of the Constitution, cooperated with laborers and general people, collided with the soldiers and police officers on October 13-14, 1973. Some of the demonstrators were killed. As a result of this bloody fighting, Thanom's military government was dissolved and a more democratic civilian government was formed. After this political change, the democratic atmosphere suddenly overflowed the Thai society. The long-hiding ideological groups as well as other interest groups appeared and reactivated their actions in public, calling for attention and fairness from the government. If taking the working-day lost in the labor disputes as an indicator of this sudden change, the number of working day lost increased from 19,903 in 1972 to 296,887 in 1973; 507,608 in 1974; and 722,946 in 1975.

(see Table 16). After October 1973, the Thai people enjoyed "the second democratic period" for three years until October of 1976. The second democratic period came to an end in a bloody coup d'état by a military group in October 1976. Hundreds of students and common people were cruelly killed in open public, and thousands were arrested under the charge of Communism which could give them a death sentence. The number of the working day lost drastically decreased to 12,311 in the following year. After October 1976, many activists in the laborers' and students' movement were continually arrested.

Conclusion

Evidently, the industrial laborers in the beginning period of industrialization in Thailand were mostly transferred from agriculture. Some common characteristics shared by both the Chinese immigrants and the Thai: being untrained, too differentiated in skills, diverse in ethnic background and separation in ideology, were resulted in lacking of labor organization and well-organized unions. In the middle of domestic and international political change, having been affected by the external factors, the war and the cold war between powerful countries, laborers in Thailand missed a chance to develop themselves to learn the principle ideology of the capitalism. Needless to say, under the condition that their activities were prohibited by the Anti-Communist Law, they failed deeper into the confusion in understanding another ideology, socialism.

Throughout the so-called "second democratic period" (1973-1976) agricultural laborers, for the first time in the history, showed their strong will and power by several demonstrations. The landless or poor peasants strongly urged the government to carry out land reformation and implement the project of financial loan for the peasants. These movements of agricultural laborers revealed the seriousness of the peasants' problems themselves as well as uncovered the reality that the peasants' associations were not well indoctrinated either organized. In other word they were also in the beginning stage of organization, weak in ideology and unity similar to industrial laborers.

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