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MILITARY REPORT
ON
SIAM

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British Intelligence on Siam (Thailand) and Mainland
Southeast Asia 1887-1948

India Office Political and Secret Files and Confidential Print



BRILL

IDC
PUBLISHERS

British Intelligence on Siam (Thailand) and Mainland Southeast Asia 1887-1948

The files and associated confidential print which accumulated at the India Office in London over the period 1887-1948 provide a uniquely British Government of India perspective on the affairs of mainland Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand.

Theoretically British India should have had little direct involvement with this area. Thailand was an independent country and relations with it were conducted through the Foreign Office. The Malay peninsula was partly a British colony and partly under British suzerainty, with officials reporting to the Colonial Office. Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were colonised by the French.

But in practice India had a prominent role in the region:

- the Indian Army was always the main resource in British strategic planning;
- the evolving border between British Burma (created in three stages by annexations after the wars of 1824-26, 1852-54 and 1885-86, and administered as a province of British India until 1937) gave India several hundred miles of interface with Thailand, as well as contact with French interests along the northern Mekong;
- there were large numbers of British colonial subjects, mainly Burmese and Indians, living and working in Thailand.

THE PRESENT COLLECTION HAS BEEN ARRANGED IN SIX GROUPS:

BIM-1

Southeast Asia: military reports 1892-1932

Military reports and route books were produced by the Intelligence Branch at army headquarters in India or, in the case of Malaya and one of the two issues on Indonesia, at the War Office in London. Their supposition is that the Indian Army might be engaged against a European enemy in the region – indeed the Siam volumes of 1902 and 1907 are markedly anti-French.

BIM-2

Siam (Thailand): political affairs 1887-1948

This section, beginning with 21 volumes of Foreign Office confidential print on *the affairs of Siam*, covers Anglo-French rivalry, the gradual emergence of agreement on recognition of the 'buffer state', Thailand's modernising progress, constitutional developments and the monarchy, and the rise of the 1930s' civil/military political cliques.

BIM-3

Siam (Thailand): boundaries 1894-1945

A small group of files treats changes to the Burma-Siam, borders, especially in the Shan States and the Malay peninsula. For additional material see the IDC collection *Delineating British Burma*.

BIM-4

Siam (Thailand): railways 1907-1947

British India had a continuing interest in various schemes for railway extension, including an early project for a Burma-Siam line. The fate of the infamous Japanese version is covered here, and there are also annual reports of the Siam State Railways for 1919/20-1920/21 and 1927/8-1934/5.

BIM-5

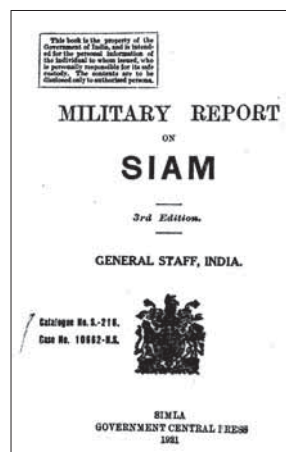
Siam (Thailand): consular tours 1912-1941

Officials of the British consular service were based at Chiang Mai (with a sub-office at Lampang) and Songkhla (with a sub-office at Phuket) in addition to the main diplomatic mission at Bangkok. The Chiang Mai consulate was actually financed by the Government of India, which routinely received its consular tour reports, as well as those from Songkhla. In both cases British India's interest was a mixture of border concerns and questions of consular jurisdiction over/responsibility for British Indian subjects (extraterritoriality in Siam lasted until the late 1920s), but the reports also contain valuable comment on local politics and personalities.

BIM-6

Siam (Thailand): 2nd World War 1930-1948

The final section covers the increasing influence of Japan in the 1930s, the rise of the Phibun militarist faction, Thailand's short-term territorial gains under Japanese tutelage, and the post-war settlement. The material on the British wing of the Free Thai Army (which was eventually based in India) is of particular importance.



Provenance and historical background

All the files and related confidential print reproduced form part of the papers of the Political & Secret Department and the Burma Office in the India Office Records (apart from two items from the Military Department library, L/MIL/17).

The files comprise a wide variety of papers received from the Government of India Foreign Department and other sources in India, from the Government of Burma, and from the Foreign Office in London, together with India Office-generated minuting, comment and replies. Incoming papers passed through the departmental registry, where they were placed on a file numbered in an annual sequence before being passed to the department's officers. As a result of a regular programme of 'weeding' and merger the files in the present collection were eventually archived in one of five groups:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| L/P&S/10 | Political & Secret Separate (or Subject) Files, 1902-1931
On-going files of documents on a particular subject accumulated over a period of years. |
| L/P&S/11 | Political & Secret Annual Files, 1912-1930
Files relating to business disposed of within a single year. |
| L/P&S/12 | Political External Collections, 1931-1950
Broad subject collections, each containing a large number of on-going files. |
| M/3 | Burma Office Annual Files 1937-1948 |
| M/4 | Burma Office Annual Files: Foreign & Frontier, 1946-1948
When Burma was separated from British India in 1937 officials within the India Office were nominated to constitute a Burma Office, and the Secretary of State for India assumed the same role for Burma. |

The Political & Secret Department also maintained a separate series of memoranda prepared by India Office, Foreign Office or Government of India officials (L/P&S/18), and had its own reference library of secret/confidential print and official publications (L/P&S/20).

All the India Office departments were subsumed within the Commonwealth Relations Office (subsequently the Foreign & Commonwealth Office) after Independence in 1947 and 1948. In 1982 the Foreign & Commonwealth Office transferred the administration of the India Office Library & Records to the British Library, where it now forms a part of the Library's Asian & African Collections.

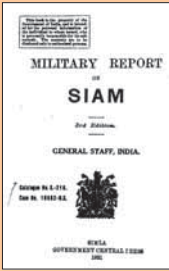
Within the six subject groups the following information is provided for each item:

- fiche number
- subject description (or bibliographical details)
- covering dates
- India Office Records reference number
- original India Office/Burma Office registry reference
- number of folios/pages

A J Farrington
Consultant
The British Library



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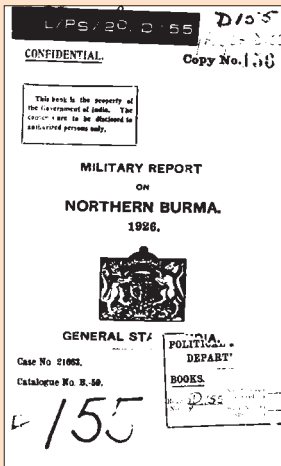
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