

# The Beginning of Liberalism in Thailand: Dan Beach Bradley and *Bangkok Recorder*

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タイにおけるリベラリズムの黎明：  
Dan Beach Bradley と *Bangkok Recorder*

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## Abstract

Critical comments from one member of the Siamese elite in the second half of the nineteenth century on the merits of the form of government of the United States of America published in a newspaper called *Bangkok Recorder* led to the dissemination of liberal concepts in Thailand for the first time in its history. In his published articles, Dan Beach Bradley, an American missionary and the publisher of *Bangkok Recorder*, mentioned freedom, equality, constitutional and republican government, free press, liberal mind, and meritocracy. The dissemination of these liberal concepts marks the beginning of liberalism in Thailand.

**Keywords:** *Bangkok Recorder*, *Dan Beach Bradley*, *Liberalism*, *Missionary*, *Newspaper*, *Thailand*

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## 1. Introduction

Liberalism is a political ideology that advocates ideas of individuality, equality, and reason. The admiration for this distinctive set of ideas led to the development of the concepts of freedom, rights, autonomy, meritocracy, consent, toleration, just judiciary and constitutionalism, which are important principles of politics of the modern world.

In Thailand<sup>1</sup>, liberalism became a major ideological force in politics after the Revolution of 1932. From that time on, liberalism never lost its influence on the politics of modern Thailand, even in the times of authoritarian regimes. However, historical knowledge on the beginning of liberalism in Thailand is still vague. The questions on how liberalism appeared in Thailand and how the ideology was disseminated have not yet been answered.

There are many works related to liberalism in Thailand, and these works can be divided into two groups. The first group includes works on political thought by members of the Thai elite and intellectuals, such as Tianwan and Kor Sor Ror Kularp (Chai-Anan, 1979), King Mongkut (Narumon, 1982), Pridi Banomyong (Chatthip, 1983; Chalermkeit, 1986; Tipawan, 2001), Kukrit Pramoj (Thamrongsak, 2001), Prince Damrong Rajanupab (Saichon, 2007), and Prince Wan Waithayakon (Keerati, 2009), as well as compilations on “Thai political thought” (Sombat & Chai-Anan, 1980). The second group includes works on political ideas in Thai society, such as the political ideology of the Thai military (Murashima, Mektrairat, and Phiu-nual, 1986), the intellectual history of the Revolution of 1932 (Nakharin, 1990), changes in the Siamese elite’s worldview during the period of modernization (Atthajak, 1995), the construction of “Thai-ness” (Saichol, 2002; 2005), and the development and institutionalization of communitarian thought in Thailand (Shigetomi, 2013). However, none of these works provide a history of liberalism in Thailand. Although liberalism is mentioned, it is just a complement to the subject studied. In other words, these works do not provide an adequate answer to questions on the beginning of liberalism in Thailand.

This article will try to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the earliest period of the modernization of Thailand. This exploration is guided by two assumptions: (1) if liberalism was not a domestic product of the Thai people, the only possible way it can have emerged in Thailand would be through importation from the outside; (2) the advent of any new ideology must be seen as a social phenomenon, not just the private achievement of an individual. This article will concentrate on the first Thai newspaper in Thailand, *Bangkok Recorder*, published by Dan Beach Bradley in 1865-1867. The pub-

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<sup>1</sup> Both “Siam” and “Thailand” are the name of the country. In the past, the country was called Siam, changed to Thailand in 1939 by the nationalist government. “Siamese” indicates the people who live in Siam, not an ethnic group, while “Thai” indicates the ethnic majority. “Siam” and “Siamese” are used in this article to indicate the country and people before 1939, while “Thailand” and “Thai” are used to indicate the country and people in general.

lication of a Thai newspaper by a Westerner, who came from a liberal culture in a time when liberalism was not yet known in Thailand, was the most likely beginning of liberalism in Thailand.

The focal points of this article are: (1) the event that led to the beginning of liberalism in Thailand; and (2) the liberal concepts that were disseminated at the time of its beginning.

## 2. "Mor Bradley"

Dan Beach Bradley (1804-1873) was born to a missionary family in Marcellus, New York, United States of America. He was trained in medical science and received his M.D. degree from the University of New York in 1833.

Bradley had a deep faith in Christianity since he was a child. In November 1832, when he was 28 years old, he decided to devote his life to preaching Christianity in a heathen land. He became a missionary under the supervision of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM). In his private journal, he wrote:

"I hope and pray that the Lord will open a way for me to go to a missionary field soon after I shall have graduated. I am anxious to be in the field of actual labor for the salvation of poor heathen." (Feltus, 1936: I)

On 30 November 1832, Bradley was informed by ABCFM that his area of evangelical activity would be Southeast Asia (Feltus, 1936: I-II). He left Boston in July 1834 and arrived in Bangkok, the capital of Siam, on the evening of 18 July 1835.

Bradley arrived in Siam in the earliest period of its modernization during the reign of King Nangklao (1787-1851, enthroned 1824). The king had a deep faith in Buddhism and highly suspected all activities of Westerners, both in Siam and internationally. His foreign policy brought Siam into conflict with the British Empire. However, his death and the succession of a pro-Western and compromising prince, "Chao Fa Yai,"<sup>2</sup> saved the country from a possible war and colonization. Bradley witnessed this period of transition closely (Bradley, 2004).

Bradley began his mission by opening a public dispensary. He offered free medical treatment concurrently with teaching Christianity to the people who came to him. The Siamese called him "*Mor Bradley*" (Doctor Bradley), in accordance with his expertise. The effectiveness of modern medicine and his surgical skill quickly gave Bradley a reputation as an "Angelic Doctor". When Bradley's reputation became known by King

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<sup>2</sup> Before enthronement, King Mongkut was known as "Chao Fa Yai" or "the prince who is the major son of the king".

Nangklao and other members of the Siamese elite, they began to call on his services and Bradley became involved with the Siamese government.

Under the reign of King Mongkut (1804-1868, enthroned 1851), the political condition of Siam provided exceptional freedom to Westerners. Bradley decided to publish a newspaper, *Bangkok Recorder*, in order to encourage the Siamese government to develop Siam on the model of the Western countries. In the last issue of 1867, Bradley bade farewell to his readers as follows:

“When I first published it [*Bangkok Recorder*] the Bangkok government was pleased. So people were happy to subscribe to the newspaper and praised it for its various contributions to the country. The number of subscribers was increasing every month. That made me very happy. I love Bangkok and wish for its improvement in every way. I feel sad that I cannot continue publishing the newspaper anymore. From now on, I resign from the editor’s post. May all of you live a happy life.”<sup>3</sup> (Bradley, 1867: 11)

Bradley died in Bangkok on 3 June 1873. He did not succeed in his mission to convert Siamese to Christianity, but he is recognized as the first person to introduce science, modern medicine, surgery, publishing, advertising, and a newspaper to Thailand.

### 3. Bangkok Recorder

*Bangkok Recorder* had two phases of publication. In the first phase, it was a monthly newspaper entitled *The Bangkok Recorder*, published in 16 issues from July 1844 to October 1845<sup>4</sup>. In the second phase, it was a bi-weekly newspaper entitled *Bangkok Recorder*<sup>5</sup>, published in 48 issues from March 1865 to February 1867.<sup>6</sup>

The content was significantly different between the two phases. In the first phase the publication resembled a scientific magazine, whereas in the second phase it was more of a political newspaper, concerned with the administration of Siam. The different nature of these two phases was a result of the different political atmosphere between the reigns of King Nangklao and of King Mongkut.

In the first phase, *The Bangkok Recorder* had no apparent editor and its content was selected to please King Nangklao and high-ranking noblemen. In the second phase of publication as *Bangkok Recorder*, Bradley announced that he was the editor-in-chief. However, Bradley’s editorials regularly upset King Mongkut and other Siamese nobles.

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s translation. All the texts from *Bangkok Recorder* are translated by the author of this article.

<sup>4</sup> Only 14 issues are extant; August and September 1845 issues are missing.

<sup>5</sup> The principal document of this article is *Bangkok Recorder*. When *The Bangkok Recorder* is mentioned, it will be specifically referred to the first phase of publication of the newspaper.

<sup>6</sup> Only 47 issues are extant; the first issue of April 1866 is missing.

As a result, he was harshly criticized by the king several times.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Bradley insisted on running his newspaper as he saw fit. In the issue of 9 September 1866, he wrote:

“The royal letter above seems to assume that the editor of this newspaper has appointed himself to be the master of Bangkok government. I do not consider myself as such...I am begging you, Your Majesty, please don’t look down on my work. Most of the published content is truth, I believe. Errors do happen, but only a few. I intend to harm no one.” (Bradley, 1866d: 12-13)

However, the king’s irritation at *Bangkok Recorder* came to a head in 1867 when Aubaret, the French consul to Siam, filed a libel lawsuit against Bradley. Although the subject of the lawsuit was an article by Bradley on Aubaret’s vulgarity and his interference in the internal affairs of Siam, King Mongkut was afraid that the lawsuit might provoke the colonization of Siam by France<sup>8</sup> (Bradley, 2004: 291-309). Therefore, the king interfered in the court process in order to make sure that Bradley would lose the case. This event and its political conclusion were among the reasons that finally discouraged Bradley from publishing his newspaper. Bradley stopped the publication of *Bangkok Recorder* permanently after the issue of 16 February 1867.

#### 4. Magazine for the Elite

In 1845, Bradley and his fellow American missionaries decided to publish a Thai newspaper, *The Bangkok Recorder*. The publisher stated in a prospectus that the content of the newspaper would be composed of news from foreign countries, prices of export and import goods, history of foreign countries, medical treatment, disease prevention, and English lessons (Bradley, 1844: 1). However, most of the articles published in *The Bangkok Recorder* were scientific in nature, many of them on modern medicine.

The first issue stated that the subscription fee was one baht per year.<sup>9</sup> In the be-

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<sup>7</sup> King Mongkut’s irritation came from three kinds of content published in *Bangkok Recorder*: petitions and accusations by commoners; sensitive information and critiques on the foreign affairs of Siam; and Bradley’s own proposals for the material development of Siam. All of these articles made King Mongkut think that Bradley was illegitimately interfering in the affairs of his government, which might undermine Siam’s juridical system and provoke the colonization of Siam by Western imperial powers. King Mongkut’s anger at Bradley’s editorials can be seen in almost every royal letter published in *Bangkok Recorder*.

<sup>8</sup> Aubaret came to Siam in 1864. His principal duty was to protect the interests of French people and to pursue the colonial interests of France in Cambodia. In 1866, relations between Siam and France deteriorated because of conflict over Cambodia. When Aubaret, who used to threaten King Mongkut with an invasion of French warships, filed a libel lawsuit against Bradley amid this fragile situation, King Mongkut intervened to prevent the issue escalating to a point where France might attempt to colonize Siam.

<sup>9</sup> The value of one baht in 1844 is best understood through the price of rice at the time. As quoted in the issue of July 1844 of *The Bangkok Recorder*, the price of 2,400 kilogram of good quality rice was 97.125 baht, meaning the price of 1 kilogram of good quality rice was about 0.04 baht. Therefore, the annual subscription rate on one baht for 12 issues of *The Bangkok Recorder* would buy around 25 kilogram of good quality rice.

ginning, the missionaries did not differentiate the subscriptions rates between nobles and commoners. However, in the issue of June 1845, the missionaries announced that the newspaper was available free for nobles and senior monks, while commoners still had to pay, but only one fourth of the previous price (Bradley, 1845a: 1; 1845b: 1).

Therefore, *The Bangkok Recorder* was a scientific magazine for members of the Siamese elite. Both its content and its subscription method were meant to draw the attention of the Siamese elite which, at that time, was highly interested in Western science and technology.

However, the missionaries abruptly stopped publishing *The Bangkok Recorder* after the October issue of 1845, without giving any reason.

There is nothing in *The Bangkok Recorder* that has a significant influence on a dissemination of liberalism in Thailand. The dissemination of liberalism began with the second phase of the newspaper, *Bangkok Recorder*.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. The Question of Good Government

On 22 July 1865, Bradley published in *Bangkok Recorder* a critical comment from a reader under the title "Doubt on the President of the United States." The reader began by mentioning the uncommon political enthusiasm of an American who lived in Bangkok. This American, according to the reader, praised the President of the United States and the republican form of government highly. Then, the reader asked: Why had rebellion happened in the United States? <sup>11</sup> Was it because of a disagreement about tradition? Why did so many people agree with the rebels on the issue of slavery? Since a presidential election took place every four years, why would the assassin kill President Lincoln? Why did the assassin not wait for the next election?

At the end of the comment, the reader concluded by saying that if the United States was a well-ordered country, as Bradley had always claimed, a massive civil war would not have occurred. Moreover, the reader also challenged Bradley to provide more information about the United States so that Thai people who read *Bangkok Recorder* would be able to praise and respect the United States as a leading country of the world (Bradley, 1865e).

To Bradley, the underlying message of this comment was that the political values held by American people did not make the United States a better country than Siam. If the United States was better than Siam in terms of its form of government, a civil war should not have happened. For Bradley, this comment was not a sincere question,

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<sup>10</sup> In one issue of the first phase, October 1844, *The Bangkok Recorder* published a short news item on a promise by the Turkish authority, the British ambassador, and the French ambassador to spare the life of a Muslim who abandoned Islam ("Toleration in Turkey"). However, this was a very short and plain report on the event. There was no explanation of the concept of toleration in the article.

<sup>11</sup> The reader means the American Civil War (1861-1865).

but an insult to his country.

Bradley assumed that the reader who sent this comment was a senior officer or a powerful member of the Siamese government. Bradley took this comment as evidence of the attitude of the Siamese government toward the United States. He responded to the comment by making a counter argument on the subject of good government and rebellion. He also promised to publish more information on the “American Rebellion” and the political system of the United States, as the reader had challenged him to do (Bradley, 1865f). This provocative comment was the origin of the lessons on liberalism that Bradley gave to all readers of *Bangkok Recorder* for almost a year from that point on.

Before the reader sent the comment to Bradley, *Bangkok Recorder* had already started publishing articles on general topics about the United States such as news items, history, geography, population, military capacity, and the assassination of President Lincoln. This was because the United States had captured the world’s attention due to the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. After receiving the criticism, Bradley devoted his articles to explaining the causes of the American Civil War and the form of government of the United States. He hoped that member of the Siamese government who reading his articles would abandon their doubts and respect the United States as a leading country of the world. In “Words for Disentangling the Doubt,” Bradley replied to the reader who sent the criticism to him as follows:

“...I hope that the Siamese government will soon relinquish all doubts regarding America and will accept and respect it as a leading country. I will try to provide detail information on America, as you have asked me to do.” (Bradley, 1865f: 7)

From July 1865 to March 1866, Bradley regularly published articles about the American Civil War, slavery, and the Constitution of the United States in *Bangkok Recorder*. In these articles, Bradley explained and defended the cause of the abolition of slavery and the righteousness of Lincoln’s government in fighting the Civil War. This defense inevitably made Bradley mention freedom, equality, rule of law, republican government, and political rights. By mentioning these liberal concepts, Bradley educated the readers of *Bangkok Recorder* on liberalism. In other words, liberalism appeared in Thailand through Bradley’s patriotic defense of American political values.

## 6. Two Aspects of Freedom

In his articles in *Bangkok Recorder*, Bradley mentioned freedom in two aspects. The first is “freedom as a fundamental condition of living as a human”, which was cited in

the context of the cruel conditions of being a slave in the United States. Bradley stated that slaves in the United States had no rights at all. They could not possess anything, even their life and their family. They lived and worked for their masters as if they were animals. In "The Cause of the Rebellion in America," Bradley wrote:

"Legal practice that allows slavery is extremely wicked; a slave does not have freedom at all. A slave is property that absolutely belongs to the master like an animal such as a horse or cow. The slave master separates a slave from his child and wife, and sells them to other places like an animal. It is because the law allows that practice. A slave is not allowed to be a true husband or wife because the law does not allow anything for a slave. They cannot own their wife. They cannot own their child. They cannot own anything that is attached to their body."  
(Bradley, 1865g: 2)

In describing and condemning the suffering of slaves in the United States, Bradley indirectly told the readers of *Bangkok Recorder* about the merits of being a free person. The readers could ascertain that being a free person was of great value because a free person could live life as desired while a slave could not. A free person could enjoy family and private property, which no one could rightfully take from them.

Bradley's animal metaphor implied that the right to family and property were conditions of living as a human. Therefore, if freedom was a prerequisite for these conditions, freedom was a fundamental condition of being a human.

The second aspect of freedom mentioned by Bradley was "freedom as an opportunity to develop oneself". This aspect of freedom was a continuation of the first aspect and related to another liberal concept, equality.

Bradley believed in human development through education and he saw no difference between white and black people in terms of self-development. Bradley applied his belief in equality among humans to the Siamese as well. Bradley's view was reflected in his proposal for the establishment of a university in Siam (Bradley, 1865a). This concept of human development combined with the concept of freedom led Bradley to draw a connection between freedom, equality, education, and the strength of a country. In his comment on the emancipation of four million slaves after the end of the American Civil War, Bradley wrote:

"They are all free men and they will have education. This will contribute strength to the country." (Bradley, 1866c: 9)

In other words, if all slaves were emancipated, they would have an opportunity to



develop themselves through education, and would contribute strength to their country through their ability to work.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, freedom was a necessary condition that also implied equality through the self-development process of an individual.

According to Bradley, freedom was the pathway that could lead humans away from the animal conditions of slavery, and enable them to become valued citizens of a country. Furthermore, the freedom and ability to develop oneself through education implied equality among humans.

## 7. King of the United States

Between October 1865 and January 1866 Bradley translated some parts of the Constitution of the United States and published them in *Bangkok Recorder*. He intended to introduce a blueprint of the form of government of the United States, a republican government, to the Siamese reader.

In “King of the United States,” Bradley explained to the reader that the Constitution was a concise law that had been established by the people in order to protect their freedom and advance the prosperity of the country. The Constitution occupied a supreme status in the country, similar to the status of the king in a country that is ruled by monarchy. All government actions had to conform to the Constitution. People protected their Constitution by electing one individual among them to be president (Bradley, 1865i). In “King of the United States,” Bradley wrote:

“... all citizens of all states have established the Constitution to be their sovereign, instead of a king. And all citizens have elected the President to firmly protect the Constitution.” (Bradley, 1865i: 1)

Bradley’s explanation of the Constitution clearly showed the reader of *Bangkok Recorder* that sovereign power resided with the people, and that people exercised this power through their representatives. The Congress was the supreme political organization because it was rooted in the consent of American people.

In other words, Bradley told his readers that the United States was a country of free people, ruled by law rather than by the arbitrary will of one man. Furthermore, Bradley also mentioned that republican government was a form of government that allowed all citizens to remain free while the country had equal status with other leading countries of the world (Bradley, 1865f).

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<sup>12</sup> Although Bradley said black and white people were equal in terms of being human and having the faculty of self-development, in one article, “The Cause of the Rebellion in America” (7 August 1865), he stated that all humans are equal because they are children of God and have the same white ancestors.

## 8. People's Participation and Free Press

Bradley's intended mission for *Bangkok Recorder* was to help King Mongkut and the Siamese government in developing the country. Bradley published many comments and proposals on various topics concerning the administration of Siamese government such as salt tax, treaty on Cambodia, railways, telegraph, counterfeit money, corruption of judge and nobleman, university, agricultural methods, Siamese household sanitation, and destruction of Buddhist icons. By doing so, Bradley showed the readers of the newspaper that common people could participate in the administration of government, and that a newspaper was a necessary tool that made the participation possible.

However, King Mongkut was displeased with Bradley's attempt to participate in the administration of his government. He openly expressed his antipathy several times. In some cases, he accused Bradley of publishing false information. He even announced that *Bangkok Recorder* could not be trusted. This attack forced Bradley to defend his newspaper by explaining the social benefit of a free press.

Bradley firmly believed in the social contribution of a newspaper. He thought the benefit that a newspaper contributed to a country could compensate for any harm it might unintentionally and temporarily do to an individual. He often compared a newspaper to the light that illuminates darkness (Bradley, 1866b).<sup>13</sup> For Bradley, a newspaper was the best tool that citizens could use to help their government improve the country. In "Bradley's Letter," Bradley wrote:

"Any government in Europe or America allows its citizens to use a newspaper to accuse others. Even if it contains some errors, the light of the newspaper will dispel any doubt and this will turn out to be beneficial to the country. Any resulting court case will disappear because of the light of the newspaper, just as a dangerous animal that loves darkness runs away when the sun rises." (Bradley, 1866b: 9)

The way that Bradley argued in favor of a free press implied that people had a right to participate in the administration of government. Therefore, a free press and people's participation were two sides of the same coin. However, this thought was far ahead of Siamese thinking at that time. During the time of *Bangkok Recorder*, the administration of government was an exclusive right of the elite, and Thai commoners accepted this situation docilely. They only perceived *Bangkok Recorder* as another channel for voicing their suffering to those in authority. Citizenship did not exist in

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<sup>13</sup> Bradley did not justify the merit of a free press on ground of a right to participation. It was clear that Bradley tried to persuade King Mongkut and the readers of *Bangkok Recorder* by citing a practical benefit, namely the material development of the country.

the mind of the Siamese at that time.

## 9. Liberal Mind and the Siamese Attitude

In “One Kind of Measurement,” Bradley stated that the Siamese strongly preferred everything to continue in the same way it had always been done by their ancestors as if they did not have any intelligence to improve anything (Bradley, 1865c). Therefore, according to Bradley, Siamese people did not make any innovations for improvements that could transcend the achievements of their ancestors.

By contrary, he argued, Westerners did not follow their ancestors blindly, but were always trying to improve what their ancestors had left to them. The Westerner was ready to relinquish the old for the new, if it had been proven that the new was truly better. As a result, everything in Western countries was getting better all the time. (Bradley, 1865c)<sup>14</sup> In “One Kind of Measurement,” Bradley described the attitude of Siamese people as follows:

“...in Siam, the good and elegant things that make one’s appearance pleasing in the eyes of others are not desired. Because it [the weather] is extremely hot. One can live happily in a house that is not closed off. Low quality clothes can be used as well. Or if a tool for doing things is not good in quality and has a blunt edge, it will be used as such, without sharpening it...This is the character of the nation due to the abundance of the land.” (Bradley, 1865c: 7)

A comment sent by a member of the Thai elite to the *Bangkok Recorder* on 22 July 1865 displayed this attachment to tradition in the context of politics. This comment presented a hypothesis on the cause of the American Civil War, suggesting that changes in the status quo were a cause of chaos and insecurity. In “Doubt on the President of the United States,” the comment ran as follows:

“Perhaps the President and the Senators who rule the country have changed the old tradition and established a new one, haven’t they? Did the rebels disagree with them? Did the rebels try to change or destroy the old tradition? Or, did many people think it was a good thing [the new tradition] but the ruler still preferred the old tradition and did not indulge them, so the war happened.” (Bradley, 1865e: 5)

In Bradley’s view, this attachment to tradition was the converse of the liberal way

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<sup>14</sup> However, at the end of the article, Bradley concluded that Western countries prospered because they had Christianity as their religion.

of thinking. To the liberal mind<sup>15</sup>, such as Bradley's, people should focus on progress at all times. An individual should actively improve oneself and one's country. The mind of an individual should always be open for innovation. Old traditions and habits should not be blindly adhered to. Change should be embraced as an opportunity for a better future.

The concept of a liberal mind was alien to the Siamese in the nineteenth century. They had unconsciously preserved an unchanged way of life for a very long time. Bradley offered an alternative idea. He told the readers of *Bangkok Recorder* that a passive mind, which accepted the poor quality of housing, food, cloth, and tools, was the greatest obstacle to the development of the country. If the Siamese wanted to improve their life materially, a liberal mind was necessary. Blind attachment to old traditions was an act of ignorance (Bradley, 1865d).<sup>16</sup> In "One Kind of Measurement," Bradley compared Eastern countries to Western countries in terms of their liberal "tradition" as follows:

"In Western countries, people are not attached to tradition. They are always thinking about a development of the old. If they think the tradition of their fathers and mothers is not good, they abandon it...In Western countries, people attempt to use their intellect purposefully. They make an improvement on everything for the benefit of themselves. It is because their countries have a tradition that if anyone makes an innovation, the inventor can apply for a patent [from the government] at the capital city...the Eastern countries do not have this kind of tradition. Therefore, the intellect which is responsible for the improvement of oneself, is not there as in the Western countries." (Bradley, 1865c: 7-8)

## 10. The Man Who Made His Fortune

In nineteenth century Siam, the status of all individuals was determined by their birth. An individual's ability and effort had no meaning in the social structure of that time. The only way for a commoner to move up to a higher social status was to place himself under the patronage of a member of the elite. This patronage system was taken for granted. In other words, vertical relation between the elite and the common people were part of the accepted worldview. In *Bangkok Recorder*, Bradley occasionally published stories of ordinary men who succeeded in life by their own ability and ef-

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<sup>15</sup> In the article "News from Europe" (20 September 1865), Bradley gave a definition of "liberal" to his reader as "the group of people who always prefer [to establish] a better tradition."

<sup>16</sup> A story that can be considered as an example of a liberal mind is the story of George Stephenson (1781-1848) which Bradley published in instalments in *Bangkok Recorder* in April-May 1866 (eight months after the article on the Siamese's attitude). Bradley did not state his intention in publishing this story. However, in telling the story of the inventive engineer who became the "father of railways", it was perfectly matched with Bradley's vision of the material development of Siam and his view of the character of the Siamese.

fort. Whether intentionally or not, Bradley displayed an alternative society where birth was not the determining condition for a successful life.

The best example was the story of Andrew Johnson, the seventeenth President of the United States, published in the 1 July 1865 issue of *Bangkok Recorder*. Bradley told the reader that this story was about the “tradition” that allowed a poor man to become a “king” of the United States. Andrew Johnson was born in a poor family, and lost his father when he was a boy. Johnson made his living by sewing clothes for other people. He had no opportunity to attend school but he taught himself to read and learned mathematics from his wife. Johnson was elected to a public office when he was twenty years old. He flourished in his career until he was elected Vice President of the United States, and assumed the presidency in April 1865 after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Bradley, 1865b).

The subtle message of this story was about meritocracy. If Johnson had not been raised in a meritocratic society such as the United States, his industriousness and his perseverance would have had no meaning. Johnson would not have been able to escape his poor birth and become the President of the United States.

However, meritocracy is like other liberal concepts that were introduced in *Bangkok Recorder*. Bradley may not have had a specific agenda in telling the story of Andrew Johnson, but the social context of Siam at that time meant that the story had a significant political message.

## 11. Conclusion

Liberalism came to Thailand through the American missionary, Dan Beach Bradley, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although Bradley was important as the carrier of this ideology, it was the political context that allowed the ideology to be expressed. The exceptional freedom that developed after the coronation of King Mongkut allowed Bradley to present liberal ideas to the Siamese through the only possible means of that time, a newspaper.

However, Bradley’s intention in publishing *Bangkok Recorder* was to assist the material development of Siam, not to change its political values or its form of government. Liberal concepts appeared in the background of the opinions and stories that Bradley published. He never directly introduced liberalism to his reader. If the critical comment on the form of government of the United States had not been sent to Bradley, the concepts of freedom, equality, and constitutionalism may not have been introduced to the Siamese at this time. The liberalism disseminated by Bradley was not in an academic form, but was fragmented and unsystematic.

On 31 January 1866, *Bangkok Recorder* had only 102 subscribers (Bradley, 1866a). Most of the subscribers were members of the elite: members of the royal family,

noblemen, and wealthy Chinese. However, among the commoner subscribers, there was one intellectual, Tianwan, who would play the same role as Bradley at a later time.<sup>17</sup>

There is no evidence of the influence of the liberal concepts that Bradley introduced. Although the members of the elite were the majority among subscribers of *Bangkok Recorder*, they are the people who disagreed with those concepts the most. For the Siamese elite in the nineteenth century, liberal concepts as presented in *Bangkok Recorder* were just an alien tradition of the Westerner. However, it is possible that Bradley sowed the seed of liberalism into the mind of commoner readers of *Bangkok Recorder*.<sup>18</sup> The commoners may have learned ideas and an alternative political system that was more worthy than the system they had endured at that time.<sup>19</sup>

Railways, trains, telegraphs, and a university, all items that had been proposed by Bradley, were introduced during the reigns of King Mongkut's heirs but no one gave credit to Bradley. More than a hundred years after his death, Bradley was finally recognized as the person who introduced science, modern medicine, surgery, publishing, advertising, and a newspaper to Thailand. However, no one referred to Bradley and *Bangkok Recorder* for his contribution to the development of liberalism in Thailand.

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<sup>17</sup> Tianwan was the first Thai commoner intellectual who called for a comprehensive development of Siam. In his journals, Tianwan mentioned several issues concerning freedom, equality, meritocracy, people's participation, etc. It is possible that Tianwan might have been influenced by Bradley but there is no clear evidence on this issue. Some works on political history of modern Thailand suggest that Tianwan contributed to the expansion of the concept of liberal democracy, thus paving the way to the Revolution of 1932.

<sup>18</sup> The number of subscriptions and the literacy rate are not good indicators of the reception of the new ideas promulgated in *Bangkok Recorder*. The Siamese have a tradition of reading text aloud to others. Moreover, *Bangkok Recorder* was a spectacular object of curiosity because it was one of the first printed works. The content was probably shared beyond the limited number of subscribers.

<sup>19</sup> Soon after the time of Bradley and *Bangkok Recorder*, the comparison between Siam and other modernized countries (European countries, the United States, and Japan) in terms of civilization, prosperity, and military power became a popular topic among the educated Siamese. This topic was one of the inspirations for the attempted revolution in 1912 and the actual revolution of 1932.

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