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THE SINO-SIAMESE RELATIONSHIP

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The Sino-Siamese Relationship

LAST summer we heard a great deal about the oppression of our compatriots in Siam, the agitation for a boycott of Siamese rice, and later the boycott itself. Our people have relied on the effectiveness of the boycott to bring the Siamese leaders to their senses, and in this they are not mistaken, for the boycott has had its effects upon the Siamese people, as pointed out by Yang Hsin in his article. The question that is before us now is how to take full advantage of the situation and establish treaty relations between the two peoples who cannot do very well one without the other.

Before we do this, let us, however, consider for a moment how close the relationship between the two peoples is. For Siam to be without the Chinese would be the reverse of England—a nation without shopkeepers—and more, she would be without industrialists and without the more efficient laborers, both skilled and common, as well. A Chinese lawyer, lately travelling with a Siamese official in China, who may be regarded as a spokesman of the Siamese, said that there are three classes of Siamese, the officials, the farmers and vendors of simple things. For the rest—or almost all the rest—of her economic activities Siam depends upon the Chinese. Rice is the biggest single industry in Siam, and 80 to 90 per cent of the rice mills are owned by the Chinese. Moreover, the farmers often borrow money from the Chinese to live between sowing and harvest, after which it is again the Chinese who transport the rice from the country to the rice mills. After milling once more it is the Chinese who export the rice to other countries. Fish is, next to rice, the most important food for the people of the land, and 90 per cent of the fishing in Siam is carried on by the Chinese.

On the other hand, some 2,500,000 Chinese make their living in Siam and their remittances amount to millions every year. In making their living and earning the money they send home, however, they incidentally help many Siamese to make their living. If left alone, undoubtedly the Siamese will be worse off for it. Much of their industry would not have come into existence, or else they would be exposed to the more ruthless exploitation of the westerners, whose grips upon the country would certainly be tighter than that of the Chinese who are interested in making an honest living and care not for political domination over other people.

The present situation in Siam demands cooperation between the Siamese and the Chinese for several reasons. Firstly, it would be impossible to replace the Chinese with the Siamese in their economic structure. The impossibility to enforce the labor law in the fishing industry is a most eloquent proof of this. Even if it were possible, it would prove too costly to the Siamese nation.

Secondly, Siam needs China to help her in her reconstruction. The cultivated land in Siam was estimated to be only one-twentieth of her total area. For the Europeans to do the spade work in reclaiming Siam's virgin land is, of course, out of the question. Even the Japanese find it hard to acclimatize themselves to the tropics. Besides, they have political ambitions while the Chinese have not. So there is no other people in the

world with whom the Siamese can cooperate better than with the Chinese.

Thirdly, both China and Siam are fighting domination by certain Powers. The European Powers are divided into the have's and the have-not's, the Asiatic countries are divided into the dominating and the dominated. Both China and Siam are fighting hard to shatter their fetters, why should they antagonize each other? Moreover, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's nationalism is one of freeing China and helping other countries to free themselves from foreign yokes. There should be cooperation between the Siamese leaders and the followers of Dr. Sun who now run the Chinese government.

It is true that China cannot help Siam very much in getting on her own feet; nevertheless in her reconstruction program, Siam may be greatly helped or hindered by the cooperation or lack of it on the part of the oversea Chinese who occupy such a peculiar position in Siam's national economy.

On the other hand, a certain Asiatic country, from whom Siam has lately been getting much help, has that ambition of which it would be well for the Siamese to beware, even as the Filipinos do. Let not Siam get out of the Scylla of British and French domination only to fall into the Charybdis of Japanese imperialism.

Fourthly, Siam needs Chinese culture. If China is the best possible friend Siam can have to help her in the field of economics without a political axe to grind, then it follows that the numerical strength of the Chinese in Siam is a blessing rather than a curse. Their cultural contact with China need not be a menace to Siam even as the Boer culture does not menace the political independence of South Africa nor does the French culture do any harm to Canada, provided they are fairly and justly treated. Indeed the Chinese culture will greatly enrich the Siamese culture in the future, as it did in the past. Of this fact the Siamese national museum and library (where a few years ago most of the books were Chinese) are a living testimony.

Even if the Siamese government should regard the oversea Chinese as a potential menace to the country, the best way to handle them would be not to antagonize them and arouse their national feeling. The anti-Chinese measures are doing exactly the opposite. They not only remind the Chinese that they are Chinese but also make them see the importance of their political allegiance to China in order to obtain protection from the Chinese government.

There is, therefore, every reason why the two countries should come together on closest terms and no reason whatsoever why they should estrange each other. There are indications that the Siamese leaders may now welcome the establishment of treaty relations. It is time for the Chinese government to make another overture for the purpose.

In this connection we would urge the immediate departure of a goodwill party to Siam. When they reach Bangkok, they may serve as a channel to convey the readiness of the Siamese leaders to establish normal relations between the two countries.