

SIAM. No. 1 (1886).

---

COMMERCIAL REPORT

BY

HER MAJESTY'S ACTING CONSUL

IN

S I A M

FOR THE YEAR

1885.

---

---

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.  
June 1886.*

---

---

LONDON :

PRINTED BY HARRISON AND SONS.

---

To be purchased, either directly or through any Bookseller, from any of the following  
Agents, viz.,  
Messrs. HANSARD, 13, Great Queen St., W.C., and 32, Abingdon St., Westminster;  
Messrs. EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE, East Harding St., Fleet St., and Sale Office, House of Lords;  
Messrs. ADAM & CHARLES BLACK, of Edinburgh;  
Messrs. ALEXANDER THOM & Co. (Limited), or Messrs. HODGES, FIGGIS, & Co., of Dublin.

*Commercial Report by Her Majesty's Acting Consul  
in Siam for the year 1885.*

---

*Report on the Trade of the Port of Bangkok during the year 1885.*

THE trade of the port of Bangkok during the year 1885, though it can hardly be characterized as very good, did not suffer to the extent that many other places have in these times of almost universal depression.

To a deficient rainfall is to be ascribed the decrease in the export of the two principal staples, namely, rice and teak.

For five years past the rainfall has been considerably below the average, and during the last two years greatly so. In 1885 the rain appears to have fallen in sufficient quantity for the cultivation of paddy in the delta of the Menam alone.

At a distance of some 80 miles up the river the want of rain seriously affected the cultivation, and further to the north and eastward the consequences are so serious that a state of things approaching to famine has actually occurred in those parts. This has been notably the case in the Laos Provinces of Phre and Lakhon. A considerable increase in dacoity, a great scourge in these countries, will probably result.

The fall in the value of silver had the same effect upon the trade of Siam, stimulating exports and adversely affecting imports, that it has had in the other silver-using countries of the East. The effect upon exports has been as yet greater than that upon imports.

The value of the exports in spite of the injury caused to many branches of trade by the bad seasons of 1884 and 1885 amounted to 9,436,730 dollars, or 1,572,788*l.*, at the exchange of 6 dollars to the *l.*, a sum which is less than 332,000*l.* below the average value of the export of the preceding ten years.

The total value of the import into Bangkok in 1885 was 6,830,018 dollars, equivalent, at the same rate of exchange, to 1,138,338*l.*, a sum which exceeded that of the preceding year by 582,125 dollars, or 97,020*l.*, and was above the average of ten years by 1,145,826 dollars, or 190,971*l.* During the latter part of the year the amount of the imports fell off, while storekeepers and traders complained that their sales were decreasing and large stocks remained on their hands.

The quantity of rice exported in 1885 was 3,648,615 piculs, or 217,179 tons, valued at 5,885,186 dollars, or 980,864*l.* This was less than the quantity exported in 1884 by 61,548 tons. It was, however, above the average of the annual export of the previous ten years. The prices obtained were still higher than those of the year before, and were very profitable to the cultivators, but it is to be feared that this class, on account of their improvident habits, and fondness for gambling, for which excessive facilities are afforded by the licensed gambling-shops established in every town and village, do not derive as much permanent benefit from their good fortune as might be expected.

The export of rice in 1885 was of course the produce of the harvest of

Trade in 1885 generally.

Rainfall deficient. Rice and teak suffered. Deficient rainfall for five years past.

Drought in north and east.

Fall in silver. Its effect upon imports and exports.

Value of imports, 1885. A decrease upon those of 1884.

Value of imports. Increase upon 1884.

Export of rice. Decrease upon export of 1884. Prices high.

Export of rice.

1884. The rainfall of 1884 had been so small that a worse harvest had been expected than eventually resulted. Of late years a considerable quantity of new land has been brought under cultivation in the lower parts of the delta of the Menam. The export of rice during the year 1886 will, it is to be expected, be below the average owing to the want of rain in 1885.
- More land cultivated.  
Export of 1886 probably small.
- Of late years a change has taken place in the rice export trade. The mill-owners formerly used to mill the paddy and sell it to others who exported it, credit being given to them by the mill-owners. This plan, however, resulted in so many losses to the latter that now most of them mill and export the rice on their own account.
- Mill-owners now ship on their own account.
- 1885 only 17,437 tons of rice were sent to Europe, against 46,740 tons in the previous year, the prices in China and Singapore being generally too high to admit of profitable shipments to Europe.
- Export to Europe.
- Irrigation is but little resorted to in Siam. The country is by nature so well provided with rivers that it would need but very little trouble to bring a sufficient supply to secure good crops even in the worst seasons. Pumps to be worked by cattle would probably find a ready sale if they were cheap and the cultivators could first see them at work.
- Teak.
- Throughout the year the prices affixed for teak in Europe and China were good, and the export from Bangkok was, although below that of the two previous years, above the average of the preceding five years. The rivers have now for two years past been very low, and consequently much of the wood could not be floated down. There is now a considerable quantity of logs up country, the accumulation resulting from two bad seasons, awaiting favourable floods to get down. More European capital is now being invested in the working of the teak forests, and it is to be hoped that the experiment will result successfully. Hitherto the forests have been leased chiefly to Burmese, very few of whom have sufficient capital. The result has been that the forests have been worked in a meagre and unsatisfactory fashion, and litigation between the foresters and the persons advancing them money has been bitter and constant. The export of the teak may be said to almost entirely depend upon the ship-building business in Europe, and as long as the present stagnation in that trade continues, the prospect before teak merchants will not be encouraging.
- A down effect of deficient rains.
- European capital now employed.
- Hitherto improperly worked.  
Prosperity of teak trade dependent upon ship-building.
- In 1885, 1,436 tons of pepper were exported, valued at 445,329 dollars, or 74,221*l*. This amount has only once before been exceeded, namely, in 1883, when the export was 1,571 tons. The prices to the end of the year kept their previous high level, about 4*l*. 12*s*. for the picul, or 133½ lbs., of white pepper, and 3*l*. for the picul, or 133½ lbs., of black.
- Pepper.  
Increased export in 1885.  
Prices good.
- The export of hides in 1885 shows a slight increase in quantity, though not in value, upon that of 1884.
- Hides.
- The quantity of teel-seed exported in 1885 was about half the quantity exported in 1884; being, for 1885, 57,834 cwt., against 114,069 cwt. for 1884.
- Teel-seed.
- The number of cattle exported to Singapore shows the same steady increase that it has done of late years; in 1885, 12,654 head, valued at 159,331 dollars, or 26,555*l*., were exported, as against 10,537 head in 1884. The prices both at Singapore and Bangkok rose during the year.
- Cattle.  
Increasing export.
- The export of cattle overland to Burmah is very large, exceeding 40,000 head a-year. There are immense numbers of fine cattle found throughout Siam, and the prices in the interior are very low, the value of a fine cow with its calf being some 6 rupees. In some of the Siamese provinces in the northern portion of the Malay Peninsula a deadly disease raged among the cattle in 1885, and the people, having lost nearly all their cattle, are very hard pushed as to finding means to cultivate their fields.
- Export of cattle to Burmah large.  
Prices up country very low.  
Disease amongst cattle.

The take of "platu," a sea-fish somewhat similar to the herring, was in 1885 very small. These fish usually congregate in immense shoals at the head of the Gulf of Siam during the last three months of the year, and the take, when they are in large numbers, forms an important item in the trade here. Their scarcity has of late years been coincident with the lowness of the rivers, and it is therefore supposed that the rivers, when in full flood, bring down vegetable matter specially attractive as food to these species of fish.

Fish.  
Take of 1885 small.

Scarcity coincident with lowness of rivers.

The export of "platu" in 1885 was 3,812 tons, valued at 23,466*l.*, as against 8,056 tons, valued at 40,394*l.*, in 1884.

An abundant supply of salt is always procurable. It is obtained by evaporating sea-water. It is principally used in the preparation of "platu" for export. Last year, owing to the small quantity of fish exported, there was but little demand for salt, and prices were very low. An attempt was made to export it to Singapore, but the amount of the tax levied here upon it deprived the venture of any profit. Salt forms an important article of the up-country trade.

Salt.  
Mode of manufacture.

59,598 lbs. of raw silk, valued at 8,649*l.*, were exported in 1885, as against 145,733 lbs., valued at 16,403*l.*, in 1884. The prices fell very considerably during the year.

Raw silk.

A certain amount of silk is manufactured into cloths and taken away to Burmah for sale. Lately a small industry has arisen which has for its object the dyeing of silk cloths for exportation to Burmah. The white silk cloth is imported from China and dyed black with the juice of the wild tomato.

Silk exported to Burmah.

The total value of the exports to Hong Kong in 1885 was 725,709*l.*, and to Singapore, 649,425*l.*, thus reversing the relative position of the trade as it was in 1884, when the exports to Hong Kong were valued at 627,632*l.*, and to Singapore at 922,607*l.*

Export to Hong Kong greater than to Singapore.

The import trade in 1885 was better than perhaps might have been looked for, showing an increase upon that of 1884, when again there had been a considerable increase upon the preceding year.

Import generally.

"Chowls," white shirtings, grey shirtings, silk piece-goods, miscellaneous piece-goods, all show an increase upon the preceding year.

Increase in shirtings, piece-goods.

The cloths called "chowls"\* are manufactured at Ahmedabad, in India. They are dyed and printed by hand, and a strong glaze is given to the surface which the Siamese much appreciate.

"Chowls" made in India.

A small quantity of gold and silver cloth, used for Court dresses, is also imported from India. Ivory is the only article sent thither in return.

The management of the Opium Farm changed hands during the year, and the import rose from 669 chests in 1884 to 771 chests in 1885. This is all Indian opium imported from Singapore. The northern provinces of Siam are supplied with Chinese opium grown in Yunnan.

Opium.  
Import increased.

The import of muskets declined considerably in 1885 on account of the clause in the Treaties forbidding the import of arms unless with the consent of the Siamese Government having been enforced.

Muskets.  
Import declined.

In 1885 the import was to the value 2,231*l.*, against 6,165*l.* in 1884.

Articles coming under the head of jewellery showed in 1885 an increase to 23,831*l.*, from 16,063*l.*, the value of the import of the year previous.

Jewellery.  
Import increased.

A considerable number of diamonds of second and third quality, size being the great desideratum, are imported. Until recently they were imported through the post without paying the duty, which is 2 per cent.; now, however, the duty is exacted.

Diamonds of inferior quality imported.

Of Manchester goods and European articles the sales in the bazaar

Manchester goods.  
European article.

\* "Chowl" is the name given by the Indian traders to a cloth about 8 feet long by 3½ feet wide, which forms the chief article of clothing of Siamese of both sexes.

- Sale in beginning of year fairly good. are reported to have been fairly good in the beginning of the year. In the latter portion of the year they were less lively, and traders have now large stocks on hand.
- Contraction in credit. The reluctance to give credit which wholesale traders have shown of late still prevails, and though this tendency will no doubt be of benefit in the end, for the present it causes some contraction in trade.
- Many middle-men concerned in sale of European articles. European articles, before reaching the hands of the native consumer here pass, as a rule, through a great number of hands. The manufacturer in Europe sells them to the merchant, who sends them out to Singapore. There they are sold to a Chinese merchant, who sometimes sends them himself and sometimes sells them to another person, who sends them to Bangkok. They are then again sold to a native trader, who either sells them himself, or re-sells them to another trader, who takes them up-country. It would be of benefit to the home trade if the manufactured articles could reach the hands of the consumer more directly.
- Import from Singapore exceeds that from Hong Kong. The greater portion of business in imports is carried on with Singapore. The value of the import from Singapore was, in 1885, 776,461*l.*, and from Hong Kong, 293,402*l.*
- Coolie immigration. As but a very small portion of the imports came direct from the country of origin, it is not possible to give, with any approach to accuracy, a Return showing whence the respective imports originally came. Singapore is the great centre to which they come and from whence they are again distributed.
- Heavy cost of remitting to China. The coolie immigration from China is a source of considerable profit to British steamers. Last year the immigration, which had fallen off considerably on account of the war between France and China, regained its former numbers. Many of the coolies when doing well send back money to their relatives in China.
- Shipping. The business of remitting these moneys is in the hand of a few Chinese firms, who make a charge of 20 per cent. on the amount sent.
- Telegraphs. It is to be regretted that, seeing the large amount of fertile land lying ready for cultivation, the Chinese immigrants do not take up agricultural pursuits. A few of them, however, do engage in agriculture. The Siamese are so accustomed to the employment of slave labour that they do not at all understand the idea of hired servants, and do not care to employ Chinese; while the Chinese, on the other hand, not being accustomed to slavery, will not enter into it, but prefer to be hired servants, receiving regular pay.
- Posts. The total tonnage that cleared in 1885 was 204,415 tons, a decrease upon the year previous of 36,734 tons. British shipping, however, more than held its relative position, in 1885 forming 64 per cent. of the total tonnage, as against 61 per cent. in 1884.
- The telegraph to Chiengmai was completed and opened at the end of the year. The line connecting Bangkok with Burmah has been working satisfactorily, in spite of the difficult country through which it had to be taken. This line will shortly be duplicated by another, crossing the hills between Siam and Burmah at Myawadee, to the north of the present line. Another line is in course of construction, passing from the capital down the east side of the coast of the gulf. The line connecting Bangkok with Saigon has for some time past been out of order and useless, as the insurgents in Cambodia pull down the wires and cut them up for bullets. The line running along the river to Chiengmai will be of considerable benefit to the teak trade.
- Siam has now entered the International Postal Union, and is actively engaged in extending the internal service, which, at first, must necessarily be rather costly, as the Government is compelled to find its own means of

transport. By providing, however, speedier and safe modes of communication, the postal service will also do much to stimulate trade.

During the last few months of the year cholera prevailed to some extent. This was unusual, as it is not generally looked for except during the great heats of May, June, and July. A great many cases of bad fever occurred about the end of the year. The capital has increased so much of late years, both in population and extent, that the question of providing it with some system for carrying off the sewage is now a problem of very great importance. An attempt has been made to supply a part of the town with water. Unwisely, however, the water is taken from a place in the river where it is already much contaminated.

The usual number of fires occurred in the capital during the year.

Attap-roofed houses, when closely packed together, are a source of danger, not only to themselves, but to neighbouring houses. No fire brigade, however well organized, could successfully cope with a conflagration amongst such houses, owing to the rapidity at which the fire progresses. No restrictions are placed upon the storage of petroleum, and the large quantities warehoused in many stores throughout the town constitute a very serious source of danger.

A Company has been formed to work for gold at a place called Bang-taphan, on the east coast of the northern part of the Malay Peninsula, and has now commenced operations. The gold there is alluvial. It has always been known that there was gold there, but the deadly fevers which have attacked those working for the gold, whether Europeans or natives, have hitherto deprived the venture of any success.

The sapphire diggings have not been so vigorously worked as before. The price of the stones has now fallen considerably, and the finds have not of late been good.

A revision of the Siamese laws is now in process of being made. The old laws, suitable, perhaps, to a period when the country was in a very backward state of civilization, are no longer suited to these times of rapidly advancing trade and intercourse with foreign nations. The laws providing for the abolition of slavery in the case of persons under 20 years of age are now beginning to make their action felt.

The abolition of the system of *corvée*, which weighs very heavily on the people, would be a boon of infinite benefit to the country. It is not only that the service lawfully due is heavy, but the opportunity for imposing vexatious and severe labour, with a view to receiving a bribe for dispensing with it, is eagerly taken advantage of by unscrupulous officials. A poll tax of reasonable amount would probably bring in a greater sum to the Royal revenues, and would bear but lightly on the people. There is reason to believe that the Siamese officials are, as regards the more enlightened among them, aware of the disadvantages of the *corvée* system.

Native paper is manufactured out of the bark of a tree called "tou koi." The process of manufacture is simple. The smaller branches of the tree are cut, and steeped in water for two or three days. The bark is then stripped off, and brought in bundles and sold to persons who make the paper. The bundles of bark are put in water for two or three days by the paper-maker, and having been cleansed from dirt, are taken out and steamed over a slow fire for two days, a little clean stone lime being sprinkled through the bark. It is then steeped in water in earthen jars, and more lime is added. After a few days it is taken out of the jars, and having been well washed to free it from the lime, it is beaten with a wooden mallet until it becomes a mass of soft pulp. A frame of netting, about 6½ feet long, and of width varying from 18 to 5 inches, is set afloat in water, and the pulp, having first been again mixed up in water, is

Public health.  
Prevalence of  
cholera.

Fires.  
Attap houses a  
great source of  
danger.

Unrestrained  
storage of  
petroleum.

Mining.  
Gold mining  
Company  
formed.  
Danger of  
fever.

Sapphire  
diggings.  
Diminished  
production.  
Prices fallen.  
Revision of the  
laws.

Corvée system  
burdensome.  
A means of  
oppression and  
extortion.

Manufactures.  
Native paper,  
mode of  
making.

skilfully poured out on to the frame, so as to be equally distributed over it. The frame is then lifted out of the water, and a small wooden roller is run over the surface of the pulp. By this process, the water is squeezed out and the pulp pressed together. The frame with the pulp on it is then set to dry in the sun. In the course of some ten hours it is quite dry, and the sheet of paper can then be lifted off the frame. It now only remains to smooth the surface. This is done by applying a thin paste of rice-flower to the surface, and then rubbing it down with a smooth stone.

A black paper, which is written on with a slate pencil, is made by colouring the surface with a mixture of charcoal.

The industry heavily taxed.

The industry is burthened by a heavy tax, varying from 7 per cent. on the best quality of paper to 100 per cent. on the commoner sorts. No wonder the manufacture does not extend when it has to contend with so heavy a tax.

Native manufactures are but few in Siam, and should be carefully fostered, and apart from the evident bad policy of such an impost, it is certain that the sum yielded by the tax cannot exceed a very small amount.

Revision of the Tariff advisable.

A careful revision of the whole Tariff of the country would be well repaid, for many of the taxes, though yielding amounts almost insignificant when the expenses of collection are allowed for, are very burdensome and vexatious to the people, and seriously hamper trade and industry.

Native cloth decreases.

The manufacture of native hand-woven cotton cloths has of late years decreased considerably, the imported goods, though not so durable, being far cheaper.

Exchange

Every year a considerable number of Mexican dollars are melted down at the Royal Mint and coined again into the native currency. The dollar and the tical, the Siamese coin, are usually at par (60 cents = 1 tical), and sometimes the dollar rises to a small premium. During the latter months of the year, however, the import of dollars increased considerably and they fell to a discount.

Of late the quantity of European goods sent up the river for sale in the north has considerably increased. The cost of transport, which is very slow and expensive, adds greatly to the cost of all articles sent into the interior. A service of shallow-draught steamers which could ply as far as Raheng during the eight months of the year when the water is sufficiently deep for them would be a great service to the trade, both of imports and exports, and should, if properly managed, be a profitable undertaking. From the eastern provinces of the kingdom which have not the advantage of direct water communication with the capital, it necessarily results that only a very few of the less bulky productions of the country are ever brought in for sale. A survey for a line of railway to connect the capital with Korat, a town of considerable importance, situated some 150 miles east of Bangkok, was made last year, and it was found that the country offered but slight obstacles. It is understood, however, that no definite steps have as yet been taken towards carrying out this scheme.

A considerable number of Burmese Tongsoos (Toungthoos) come over from Burmah into Siam, bringing with them piece-goods, miscellaneous objects of barter, and money, which they exchange for silk cloths, brass utensils, cattle, ivory, and elephants.

Water police organized. Effect beneficial.

A body of water police has now been organized, and its services are much appreciated by the owners of the teak logs which are moored along the banks in large numbers. Before the institution of this force the number of logs annually stolen was very large. It would be of great benefit if the services of the water police were extended to the portion of the river which passes through the lower parts of the town, where at present thieving is very rife.

In the management and organization of the land police there is much room for improvement. Town police inefficient.

(Signed) E. H. FRENCH, *Acting Consul*  
April 8, 1886.

(Annex A.)—RETURN of Shipping at the Port of Bangkok in the year 1885.

ENTERED.

	Sailing.		Steam.		Total.	
	Vessels.	Tons.	Vessels.	Tons.	Vessels.	Tons.
British .. ..	25	11,178	172	117,442	197	128,620
Siamese .. ..	58	21,664	..	..	58	21,664
German .. ..	10	3,718	48	30,099	58	33,817
Other countries ..	25	13,205	2	1,248	27	14,453
<b>Total .. ..</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>49,765</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>148,789</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>198,554</b>

Total for the year preceding, 423 vessels, of 236,043 tons.

CLEARED.

	Sailing.		Steam.		Total.	
	Vessels.	Tons.	Vessels.	Tons.	Vessels.	Tons.
British .. ..	22	17,714	173	116,684	195	134,398
Siamese .. ..	56	21,052	..	..	56	21,052
German .. ..	12	4,448	49	30,923	61	35,371
Other countries ..	22	11,239	3	2,355	25	13,594
<b>Total .. ..</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>54,453</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>149,962</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>204,415</b>

Total for year preceding, 419 vessels, of 241,149 tons.

(Annex B.)—RETURN of principal Articles of Export from Bangkok during the year 1885.

		1885.		1884.	
		Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
Rice .. ..	Tons ..	217,179	£ 980,864	278,727	£ 1,180,540
Teak .. ..	.. ..	15,238	95,348	15,270	99,532
Pepper .. ..	.. ..	1,436	74,221	1,046	53,893
Hides .. ..	.. ..	20,348	27,931	19,017	28,419
Cattle .. ..	Head ..	12,654	26,555	10,537	21,104
Teel-seed ..	Tons ..	2,891	24,428	5,602	54,266
Sapan-wood ..	.. ..	2,938	21,596	2,586	18,892
Other articles ..	.. ..	..	321,845	..	409,116
<b>Total .. ..</b>	<b>.. ..</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>1,572,788</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>1,865,762</b>



(Annex B—*continued.*)—RETURN of principal Articles of Import to Bangkok during the year 1885.

		1885.		1884.	
		Quantity.	Value.	Quantity.	Value.
			£		£
Chowls ..	.. Corges* ..	130,489	105,542	69,556	92,052
White shirtings ..	.. Pieces ..	253,665	83,237	238,665	79,105
Opium ..	.. Chests ..	771	71,942	669	66,730
Gold leaf ..	.. Boxes† ..	187	71,440	234	65,112
Grey shirtings ..	.. Pieces ..	192,159	45,086	238,665	79,105
Silk piece-goods ..	.. ..	55,824	39,730	16,122	12,502
Mixed „ ..	.. ..	548,580	35,876	301,475	30,016
Silver ware ..	.. Packages .	452	35,570	312	3,571
Other articles ..	.. ..	..	649,913	..	613,122
Total ..	.. ..	..	1,138,336	..	1,041,315

\* A corge = 20 lbs.

† The boxes are of unequal size.