Siam and the League of Nations: modernization, sovereignty, and multilateral diplomacy, 1920-1940

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Abstract: This study analyses the relations between Siam and the League of Nations from 1920 to 1940. It identifies Siam’s policy towards the League as a cornerstone of Siam’s foreign policy and an important element of Siam’s domestic modernization during the sixth, seventh and eighth reigns of the Chakri dynasty. In doing so, the study aims at adding a key multilateral dimension to the existing historical analysis of Thai foreign relations during the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that Siam’s League membership played an important role in modernizing the country, reaffirming elite rule and regaining full sovereignty. This study concentrates on the inter-war years and traces Siam’s League membership in the most significant areas of interaction among the wide range of multilateral policy fields. It draws on extensive primary sources which have so far not been studied; the bulk of these files are located at the Thai National Archives in Bangkok and at the League of Nations Archives at the United Nations European Headquarters in Geneva.

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League, and Siams abstention has usually been viewed as evidence of pro-Japanese sentiment which was growing in certain circles in Bangkok.