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Nov 19, 2020 by [Silada \(Lydia\) Rojratanakiat](#)

When the Fortress Falls: Thailand's Quest for World-Class Medical Care Rank ^[1]

The fall of Ayutthaya Kingdom, Thailand's former capital, tells the story of the Siamese people's failed effort to protect themselves from neighboring countries by using an ineffective defensive strategy. The Siamese people heavily entrusted in the idea that they could win the war by waiting behind the wall because nature would eventually wipe out the invaders. Then, 250 years later, the Siamese people in the name of Thais have also attempted to win a war through a similar strategy by delaying time in the hope that the enemy will lose momentum over time.

Why does Thailand seek to end the COVID-19 crisis in the country as much as or more than other countries? For years, the Thai medical service has gained a positive international reputation for having sophisticated medical and wellness practices as well as reasonable prices for services. The Thai medical market outlook has demonstrated promising growth . Nevertheless, in the living memory of any previous outbreaks, Thailand has not been widely

recognized to foreign publics as a country that effectively deals with pandemics. Since the country has long strived to emerge as the world's medical hotspot, the COVID-19 outbreak is a golden opportunity for Thailand to improve its reputation in the global medical tourism industry. Thailand's successful performance in fighting COVID-19 will pave the way to positive media coverage; there is always something compelling about an underdog that succeeds against the odds. Foreigners would feel astonished that a developing country with much domestic unrest could manage a pandemic crisis better than other developed and technologically advanced countries.

Thailand was proud of its efforts. For over 100 days between May and August, the country rejoiced, having recorded zero cases of local transmission. Thailand's success story of flattening the COVID-19 curve was praised worldwide. For a period of time, the Global COVID-19 Index (GCI) had ranked Thailand first in the global Covid-19 recovery index. The United Nations said that Thailand should be admired for its remarkable resilience and solidarity in battling with COVID-19. Bloomberg also ranked Thailand along with Taiwan and New Zealand as countries which performed well in containing the pandemic. Although practicing social distancing and implementing quarantine measures for Thai people contributed to this victory, the critical factor that led to success was the ban on inbound international flight to Thailand.

As Siamese people during Ayutthaya period could not stay safe in their tower, in the same manner, fortification does not work with COVID-19. Fortification was a wise option in the early stages of the pandemic, as it suppressed the number of infections and avoided overwhelming the country's medical capacity. Thailand has won several battles against COVID-19, but seemingly loses the war through this very same strategy. One of the major flaws is that the Thai economy is tourism reliant. Travel restrictions pose distressing economic and social costs that have increased throughout the long duration of this pandemic. Regardless of the heavy price that Thailand has paid to control cases of local transmission, COVID-19 will break through, as Thailand plans to reopen in fear of facing collapse in the economy.

When the fortress falls, what is Thailand's next move? Since the beginning, Thailand has focused intensely on shielding the borders while paying less attention on crafting the best shield, a COVID-19 vaccine. The question is, does Thailand only plan to have an image for being a hiding place, shelter, or refuge from COVID-19? Since Thailand may no longer be safe from COVID-19, the country's past success in flattening the curve is perhaps disregarded. Now, Thailand needs to create a better story. As there is no clear escape from Covid-19, it is time to commit in this fight by making a vaccine against this virus. The race for vaccine will give status, credibility, and validation which Thailand seeks from foreign publics, but how does the public perceive Thailand in the vaccine race? My research shows that in Twittersphere for the first 9 months of 2020, when the public talked about Thailand and COVID-19, the tweets rarely included the word "vaccine." Of all 28,635 English tweets that included Thailand and COVID-19/Coronavirus, only 330 tweets also mentioned the COVID-19 vaccine, which are equivalent to around 1%. Vaccine was stated nine times by Thai government affiliated media while the rest belonged to non-Thai-state-affiliated media including top new agencies like Bloomberg which mentioned the Thailand-COVID-19-Vaccine eight times.

Although top Thai virologists have advocated for the urgency of creating a Covid-19 vaccine since January, the issue was not well-received by those who could make resources feasible to produce a vaccine/ The idea of Thailand as a frontrunner in the vaccine race has been perceived as unrealistic, even among Thais. The established consensus in Thailand is that

they will wait for an imported vaccine from foreign producers. Thailand tends not to be a contributor but a beneficiary. Contributors are praised by people, not beneficiaries. Therefore, Thai vaccine producers, whether governmental or non-governmental, have their shared responsibility and roles in shaping the image of the country. Thai vaccine producers must be highly driven with the resources to support the work because quality and safety are vital at every step, and there is no shortcut.

Success in inventing Covid-19 vaccine is even a better underdog story than success in controlling the virus, but it is unknown if Thailand can become competitive in this global race. Nevertheless, joining in the vaccine race will be a good learning experience for Thailand. The vaccine's development will be another milestone for Thailand in pursuit of reputation as a world class medical hub as well as demonstrating a strong preparedness for any global medical issue that may occur in the future.
