

## DEVELOPMENT OF THAI HISTORIOGRAPHY : PART II

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THE traditional way of life of the Thai changed with the passing away of their monarch, Rama III, in 1851. In the words of the dying King himself, one finds the prediction eerily correct. Rama III gave his last warning to his subjects and successor of the dangerous situation facing Siam.

“In the future, there appears no danger from either Vietnam or Burma, but there looms a great danger from the Europeans. So tread cautiously whenever you have to deal with them in order to avoid falling into their traps. Whatever in their way of life which is relevant or beneficial to us, we must accept though not blindly.”<sup>1</sup>

The symbol of these changes came in the form of the 1855 Bowring Treaty, signed between Siam and the United Kingdom, which resulted in the opening of the country economically and politically to the West. The full impact of such different intellectual and material encounter was keenly felt by Thai leaders from this time onwards. It became blatantly urgent to them that in order to survive as a sovereign state and to evade the heavy hand of western colonialism, Siam must nilly-willy modernise and reform as well as to live up to the expectation of colonialist powers of an orderly, effectively administered, and progressive non-European state. It became uppermost important that Siam transformed herself into a “civilized” nation so as to uphold her sovereignty and to insure the Chakkri dynasty of its position as the ruling House of Thailand. The comprehensive reform initiated by King Mongkut and improved and extended by Chulalongkorn successfully modernised the country the way its leaders had visualised.

This article is concerned with the intellectual change within the framework of Thai thinking as result of the process of modernisation which bears consequences on the writing of Thai history from the genre of *tamnan* and *phongsawadan* to modern method of history-writing. As has been mentioned, Thai leaders found it necessary to equip themselves and their people with proper positive thinking and certain relevant western values in order to cope with the intimidation of the West, France and England in particular. The process of reform and modernisation on the western colonial administration model was soon found in every facet of the Thai public life, outstandingly in the field of intellectual thinking.

It has been said that during their times, Mongkut and Chulalongkorn (1851—1910) paid great attention to history and made use of it as evidences in support

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1 Chao Phraya Thippakorawongs, *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin, Reign III*, Kurusabha: Bangkok, B.E. 2504, vol. 2, p. 188.

of their actions and policies.<sup>2</sup> There are plenty of examples showing the Thai monarchs' awareness of the importance of history during these critical periods. For example Mongkut used the Cambodian Chronicle as evidence in support of the Thai claim of suzerainty over Cambodia against France; Chulalongkorn cited historical evidences in support of his argument against the position of *Wang Na* (the heir-presumptive) when he abolished it in 1886 in favour of the position of the Crown Prince of Siam.<sup>3</sup>

The realisation of the importance of history did not mean only the use of historical evidences as reliable facts in support of certain claims and actions. In fact the role of history changed practically overnight from that of the secretive and sacred textbook on politics, administration, and kingship of the *phongsawadan* historical recording which was suitable only for the eye and ear of the king and the nobles to that of the guideline for national awareness among people at large so that the semi-feudal administered Siam could turn into a modern nation-state of the nineteenth century European state wherein people were conscious of their national heritage, feeling themselves belonging to their country (and no longer to certain feudal noblemen), and in readiness to defend what they considered theirs and their country's. With so high and essential role given to history by Thai leaders, it became inevitable that the *phongsawadan* historiography had to make way for a better-equipped style of history-writing which would achieve the aimed target.

Thai leaders, particularly King Chulalongkorn and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab were very much influenced by western thinking in their effort to modernise and save Siam from western imperialism. This becomes quite evident when one studies the works of the king and his famous half-brother. The urgency of safeguarding Siam at the same time as maintaining the ruling House's interests led them to adopt the concept of nation-state as the main theme for the reform and the modernisation of Thailand. The European concept of a nation-state was regarded suitable because it made possible the transformation of the old Thai feudal state which based on kingship into a modern state without losing much of its traditional power and prestige. On the contrary, the concept of nation-state, wherein the king acted as the rallying point, and the symbol of the sovereignty of the nation, increased its power more effectively and with defensible rationale to support it. The process of nation-building on the line of a strong, centralised state against internal chaos and external threats naturally needed a new kind of history to propagate it, and to bring to the masses an understanding of new values concerning king and country. With history as their guide, the masses could play their appropriate role of nation-conscious citizens.

With the influence of western thinking and historical methodology, the *phong-*

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2 Craigs J. Reynolds, "The Case of K.S.R. Kulap: a Challenge to Royal Historical Writing in late Nineteen Century Thailand", *JSS*, 61:2, 1973, p. 63–90.

3 Charnvit Kasetsiri, "Thai Historiography: From Ancient Times to the Modern Period", in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, eds. Anthony Reid and David Narr, ASAA Southeast Asia Publications Series no. 4, Heinemann: K–L, 1979, pp 161-2.

*sawadan* history moved into its new phase of modern historical writing, the *prawatisat* history.<sup>4</sup>

The *prawatisat* historiography comprises of 3 categories of modern historical writing, namely the Damrong Rajanubhab School; the Nationalist School; and the Academic School. The common features among the 3 Schools of thought are firstly all aim at a wider audience than the bounds of court circle of the *phongsawadan* period, though their effort of popularising history may not have been equally effective; secondly they are all very much the product of western historical thinking which had been so alien and incomprehensible to the traditional Thai thinking. Presently it can be said that the three Schools co-exist and in fact compete one another for an audience both in the academic and the layman's world. To understand their peculiar characteristics is therefore to understand the modern genre of the works on Thai history.

### **The Damrong Rajanubhab School**

This is the school of history writing which is the direct product of Thailand's encounter with western imperialism. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's name has been adopted for this particular genre of history writing mainly because its method, objective and philosophy are mostly those [the Prince] which had propagated through his prolific writings. It can be stated also that this School of thought exercises perhaps the greatest influence upon the minds of Thai historians, in particular those in the academic world and have received their training in Thailand before the 1960's. Up to then, practically all reliable works on Thai history had been written by Prince Damrong. Indirectly the Prince became the principal "teacher" of historians-in-the-making of this period.

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943) was the son of King Mongkut by one of his minor wives, who proved himself worthy of his father's fame. Throughout his life, this celebrated prince had held various positions of great responsibility with great success, such as the position of Minister of Interior, Director-General of the then Department of Education, Director of the Vajirayana Library, later the National Library, the President of the Royal Academy, and Member of the Royal Council of State.<sup>5</sup> Personally the Prince proved himself a prolific writer on various subjects concerning in the main Thai history, culture, archaeology, politics and administration, Buddhism, and biographies.<sup>6</sup> In fact Damrong became an authority on the subjects he had written, and most of his works are still considered references in their fields. It was because of Damrong's effort to popularise history that Thai history reached out for the first time to the large audience of Thai

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4 See Charnvit, pp. 160 following.

5 For the biography of Damrong see Sulak Sivarak, *Life and Work of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab: Historical Witness of Thai Intellectual Development*, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasart Univ., Bangkok, 1980; and Sucharit Thawornsuk, *Biography and Works of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab*, Kurusabha: Bangkok 1963.

6 Of the known 1,050 pieces of works of Damrong, 297 are concerning history. See National Library, *The Works of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab*, Bangkok, 1969.

commoners. It was Prince Damrong who, as Director of the National Library, encouraged the publication of valuable historical documents found both inside and outside the country. He likewise supported the publishing of contemporary works. Also through his effort the National Library managed to obtain numerous books, documents concerning history and archaeology. Examples of his efforts are such as some of his own important works: *The Thai Fought the Burmese* (1919), *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin, Reign 2* (1914), *The Administration and Government of Siam since Ancient Time* (1927), *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya, the Royal Autograph version* (with Damrong's edition, introduction and explanation: as well as the acquisition of some of contemporary historical accounts on Siam by foreigners such as the *Crawford Papers, Records of the Relations between Siam and Foreign Countries in C17th.* and the series of *Prachum Phongsawadan* which began in 1908. Through his endless effort Prince Damrong had managed to move history out of the palace. This together with his written works on history results, not surprisingly in Damrong being regarded as "Father of Thai History" even though he did not directly become involved in the teaching of history. The first school of modern historical writing is named after Damrong because of its close tie with his thinking and objective of history.

History produced by the Damrong Rajanubhab School stresses the significance of political history with an objective of using history as an undeniable proof of the unity and indivisibility of the Thai state. Such historical accounts show clearly the development of the Thai state into a unified entity under the guidance of its "national" monarchs, and confirm the arguments advanced by Thai leaders who were facing colonial threats that Siam had since time immemorial been a unified and indivisible state under the strong and efficient rule of her kings. History thus written serves as an unquestionable evidence against any claim to dismantle the Kingdom.

The main characteristics of the Damrong historiography can be seen in its theme of history, its method of writing history, its "philosophy" and objective. In all these spheres the influence of western historical studies strongly prevails and helps transform the *phongsawadan* historiography into the *prawatisat* historiography.

### **Theme and Objective**

The main theme throughout the Damrong Rajanubhab School, as has already been discussed, is political history of Siam which performs the duty of spokesman of Thai sovereignty. Within the context of political history the historical development of Thailand could be re-constructed as a process of uninterrupted advancement towards modern state with its boundaries clearly marked, even though such boundaries only emerged by the close of the nineteenth century. Political history could likewise demonstrate the continuous power of the Siamese monarchs as "national" leaders. The Damrong School shows that the political historiography of the West and the *phongsawadan* history are really complimentary to each other, and very effective as political tool in defence of national interests. The theme of the

Damrong School concentrates therefore on the writing of political history with the institution of kingship as its central piece holding various incidents together. Its pays great attention to war and peace, struggle for power, diplomatic history of treaties and friendship, state ceremonies, and, above all, all that concerned the greatness of the Crown.

The objective of such theme of historical writing is to achieve a modern Thai nation-state and the political unity and solidarity of the Thai under their national leaders of all time i.e. the monarchs.<sup>6</sup> In sum, such theme and objective are needed as long as the process of nation-building is still continuing, and as long as the role of kingship is still needed to provide the atmosphere of stability and legitimacy to the otherwise turbulent political situation. Perhaps because of such a need the existence and the strengthened influence of the Damrong historiography among both the present-day Thai leaders and historians are commonplace. Evidences of the strong presence of the Darong School can be seen through the repeated publications of various works of Prince Damrong; the teaching of history through the Damrong interpretation in both school and university levels; and the existence of the National Committee for the Revision of History most of whose members are historians of the Damrong School.

### Methodology

There are great innovations in the field of methodology of history research and study introduced by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab which are clearly influenced by western methodology. However there are also traditional features of the *phongsawadan* history such as the writing of political history and the attention given to all activities concerning the king and the institution of kingship. These traditional features blend very well with the modern technique adopted by the Damrong historical writing. The main modern techniques introduced include historical criticism, awareness of historical context, and the new historical framework of nation-state.

Prince Damrong introduced the western method of historical criticism into the writing of Thai history. During the *phongsawadan* history period, all informations recorded were automatically accepted without question by the reader, and without interpretation and analysis by the writer. In fact there was no technique such as historical criticism in the Thai traditional historiography. When Prince Damrong adopted it as a proper method for the study of history, the new process of learning to appreciate the significance and value of historical sources was launched, together with the effort to master the art of interpreting and evaluating sources in order to exact the most accurate possible of events in the past.

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6 Comments on the objective of the Damrong Historiography see, Nidhi Aeusrivongse, *The Studies of Thai History: Past and Future*, the main lecture of the seminar on "Progress of the Studies and Research of the Present-day Thai History", organised by the History Association, May 1979. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "The Study of History of the Damrong Rajanubhab School", in *History and Thai Historians*, eds. Charnavit Kasetsiri and Suchart Swadsri, Review of Social Sciences: Bangkok, 1976, pp 27 – 61.

## Philosophy

It is obvious that like the traditional historiography the Damrong Rajanubhab School can claim no particular philosophy of history as its guidance, even though it can be surmised that Prince Damrong must have come into contact with various works on philosophy of history by leading scholars of the Postivist and Historicist Schools of Europe such as Ranke and Fustel de Goulanges. The only work of Prince Damrong concerning the Prince's idea of history is the Introduction to *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya*, the Royal Autograph Version, in which he stresses the importance of historical criticism and the use of historical works or documents "which concern Siam" in other languages in order to produce an up-to-date account of history. From this piece of work, it appears that Prince Damrong had accepted the scientific method of Fustel de Goulanges and the method of fact-finding of Ranke to achieve the accuracy of historical facts. Unfortunately this is as far as Prince Damrong would go in the field of historical philosophy. "The Father of Thai History" paid no attention to the meaning of history or the value of history as an academic subject in search of the truth about man and his development. Nonetheless he seems to have subscribed to the secondary value of history i.e. the practical usefulness of history to the life in a community. Prince Damrong and the Damrong Rajanabhab historians write history with the principal objective of glorifying and maintaining the position of the institution of kingship and the ruling clique. If this can be considered "philosophy" of history, then the Damrong School lay claim to the practical philosophy of protecting and advancing the interests of the king and his ruling clique. Its history ignores completely the role of other factors such as the part played by the majority of the people, the economic and social factors which helped shaping the course of Thai history. History remains as a political instrument to exhibit the unquestioning significance of kingship since time immemorial.

## Assessment

As the first school of modern historiography, the Damrong Rajanubhab School has contributed a great deal to the development of modern study of Thai history, particularly through its introduction of historical criticism and the awareness of the historical context of time, place and idea. From the new techniques Thai historians learn to appreciate the utmost importance of historical sources. Prince Damrong has been successful in instilling respect for historical sources in the mind of modern Thai historians. Since then the writing of history has meant the interpretation of proven facts and historical accuracy, though this has also been limited by the School's objective of producing "national" history. Prince Damrong it was who insisted upon the accuracy of history and therefore the necessity of intermitten revisions of historical interpretations whenever they appear out of date. Furthermore Damrong's realisation of the importance of historical sources led to the collection of numerous sources in Thai and foreign languages in the National Library and Archive for posterity. It was the Prince who began the systematic collection of official documents in the Archive. In this manner, Thai official documents have been preserved and available to the public and thus encouraged the academic interest in Thai history.

By this time the development of the study of historical sources in Europe had already made a tremendous progress especially in Germany and France, as showed in the strength of the academic historiography and the works on historical documents of such historians as Johann Chrisoph Gatterer (1729–99), Arnold Heeran (1760–1842), and Barthold Niebuhr.<sup>7</sup> The appreciation of historical sources improved the historian's capacity towards historical criticism. In essence, historical criticism means an ability to detect informations in both primary and secondary sources which are reliable and accurate, and which are not, irrespective of whether the sources are primary or secondary. Consequently, historians accept the fact that primary sources are not infallible, and secondary sources may sometimes be more reliable.

Prince Damrong introduced historical criticism into the study and the modern writing of Thai history which naturally changed the whole outlook of historical recording in Thailand. The tradition of writing down all events of significance along the chronological arrangement slowly gave way to the more comprehensive account of events with relevant interpretations derived from the study of sources and the writer's objective reasoning, plus his evaluation of sources employed. Damrong's treatment of the *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin, Reign 2* is an excellent example of the great change of the genre of history writing emerging as the result of the application of historical criticism. The difference between the *phongsawadan* and the *prawatisat* historiography has already been admirably studied.<sup>8</sup> The treatment of the same period of history by the two historians of the two schools of historiography, namely Chao Phraya Thippakorawongs (Kham Bunnag), the last of the chroniclers of the *phongsawadan* genre, and Prince Damrong, leading historian of the *prawatisat* history, differs from each other mainly because of the technique of historical criticism used by Damrong in his revision of Thippakorawongs' *Phraraja Phongsawadan Reign 2*. While the latter was happy to record events chronologically without any apparent explanation concerning their connectedness, the former, though still maintained the external form of *phongsawadan*, inserted the technique of historical criticism in his revised version of Thippakorawongs' work. His *Phongsawadan of Reign 2* therefore contains a comprehensive account of events together with the Prince's analysis and evaluation of sources in the old form of chronological arrangement.

Prince Damrong also adopted another significant feature of western historical method namely the awareness of historical context. The *tamnan* and *phongsawadan* historiography pays little, if at all, attention to the context of time, place, and idea similar to western treatment of historical context. For example the context of time in the *tamnan* history means only the all-embracing time of the Gotama Buddha's era of 5,000 years which contains revealed facts of the past, present, and future to all believers at the same time. As such, there exists no awareness of the difference of time of the past and that in which the writer of the *tamnan*

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7 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, OUP: New York, 1972, pp 126-133.

8 Chalong Suntharavanij, "Evolution of Writing of Thai History" in *History and Thai Historians*, op. cit., pp. 62-94.

history himself was living.<sup>9</sup> Through Prince Damrong's works, the Damrong Rajanubhab School introduces this awareness of time, place, and idea differences into the writing and studying of Thai history. Damrong's works demonstrate his understanding of the uniqueness or peculiarity of time, place and idea of each event in the past, and his attempts to interpret their meanings and consequences in the context of its particular time span as well as in the framework of cause-and effect explanation so as to show the historical development of Siam. Through the awareness of historical context the study of Thai history became systematic, coherent, and sympathetic towards its own past, as well as the past of others, particularly that of the neighbouring states.

Yet Prince Damrong also maintained various features of the traditional historiography. Outstanding among them are the Damrong Rajanubhab's treatments of irrelevant details particularly on state ceremonies, and the narrative style of recording political history which are similar to the *phongsawadan* history. Many works of Prince Damrong bear witness to the tendency of maintaining the already mentioned aspects of *phongsawadan* in the modern writing of Thai history. For instance, in his *Phongsawadan Reign 5* Damrong ignores completely the most critical event of the early years of King Chulalongkorn's reign i.e. the *Wang Na* Crisis of 1874, but, spends a great deal of time recording in incredible detail coronation ceremony<sup>10</sup> or his disregard of Chao Fa Maen Rebellion in the early reign of Rama II in his *Phongsawadan Reign 2* while paying a lot of attention to the coronation ceremony.<sup>11</sup>

Damrong had also adopted the narrative style of writing history and perfected it. Prince Damrong's works are most well-known for their simple style of story-telling as well as simple language of the common folks which are so similar to the *tamnan* method of writing history. Even though Prince Damrong had inserted certain passages of his historical analysis, the common feature of the works of leading scholars of the Damrong Rajanubhab School is pure narrative without any historical criticism worth mentioning. Perhaps the best example of this is *History of the Ratanakosin Period* by two of the Damrong historiographical scholars.<sup>12</sup> By maintaining the story-telling narrative style the Damrong Rajanubhab School achieves the assimilation of the traditional and the modern history writing, most obviously at the expense of the analytical study of history through the process of historical criticism.

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9 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "Development of Thai Historiography", *Jebat*, bil 9 1979/80, pp 195-207.

10 Damrong Rajanubhab, *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin, Reign 5*, Kurusabha: Bangkok, B.E. 2504, pp 121-176; 226.

11 Damrong Rajanubhab, *Phraraja Phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin, Reign 2*, Kurusabha: Bangkok, B.E. 2505, vol. I, pp. 14-16; pp. 25-40.

12 M.R. Saengsom Kasemsri and Wimol Pongpipatna, *History of the Ratanakosin Period, Reign 1-Reign 3 B.E. 2325-2394*, Mit-nara Karpim: Bangkok, 1972.



The Damrong School also began the study of history as an academic subject though this has been slow and gradual in development.<sup>13</sup> Since then it has expanded and developed in the way Prince Damrong, had he still been alive, would have been pleased.

On the negative or untoward effect, the Damrong Rajanubhab historiography perpetuates certain malpractices, judging by the standard of the present-day science of history-writing, naturally. For example, because Prince Damrong and a great number of the Damrong historians regard history as instrumental to certain political end and consequently entertain *a priori* theory about history, to them, historical facts and analyses become a mere means to support or verify their objectives. As a result, their method of historical criticism i.e. the examination and evaluation of sources is only conducted *externally* that is to say they only concern themselves with the determining of the type of documents and evidences, and not *internally*, namely to evaluate the accuracy of such evidences. As such the Damrong Rajanubhab School becomes in fact an obstacle to the development of the technique that it has done so much to introduce and make it widely accepted mainly because such thorough application of historical criticism would damage their *a priori* theory of interpretation of the Thai past in the narrow framework of political history. The surface-level application of historical criticism has in fact let to a great and serious inaccuracy in their interpretation of Thai history.

For instance, Prince Damrong's interpretation of the most critical war between Burma and Thailand during the reign of King Taksin, namely the Asae-wungi/Maha Thihathura war in 1774–1776.<sup>14</sup> It is most likely that the Prince had seen the account of the same war recorded in the Burmese Chronicle, the Glass Palace Chronicle, which was translated and published in the *Journal of Siam Society*, the journal of the Society of which Damrong was then the President. However it appears that his aim of presenting the favourable picture of Chao Phraya Chakkri and Chao Phraya Surasih during this critical time must have urged him to seek mainly evidences which supported his theory and play down the role played by King Taksin himself.<sup>15</sup> In so doing Damrong had overlooked both the reliable Thai and Burmese sources which have given credit where it was due, and consequently presented an inaccurate picture of one of the most important events in the history of the Dhonburi-Bangkok period.<sup>16</sup>

Probably the most serious defect of the Damrong Rajanubhab School derives

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13 See Charnvit, "Thai Historiography", op. cit, pp. 162-3

14 Damrong Rajanubhab, *The Thai Fought the Burmese*, Khlung-witthaya: Bangkok, 1962, pp. 487-516.

15 See Kachorn Sukhabanij, *Historical Facts, Bangkok Period*, Sri Nakarindrwirot Univ.: Bangkok, B.E. 2518, pp. 40-75; Sir Arthur Phrayre, *History of Burma*; and the translation of the Hmannan Yazawin Dawgyi by P. Salaruk in *JSS*, V, 1959 3-207, and VI, 1959, 1-125.

16 For one reliable Thai source of this period see *Memoir of Princess Narindradewi*, Kurusabha: Bangkok, B.E. 2513.

from its preoccupation with the writing of political history. This emphasis on only one aspect of Thai history has resulted in the narrow outlooks in the study of this subject. Outstanding among them are the followings:—

- the disregard of historical value *per se* of history and the concentration on its practical value i.e. to forward political interests of certain groups means the selection of topics for study is subject to the crude criterion of whether such and such topics are useful to the writing of political history. If the answer is negative, they can be discarded as having no historical value at all. Through this process of elimination, various significant fields of human activities have been overlooked, for instance the economic, social and intellectual fields. Furthermore because of the emphasis on the study of political history, the Damrong Rajanubhab School tends to regard man as simply a “political being”. His other needs have been ignored, and, not surprisingly, this contributes to the lack of deep understanding of man’s actions and responses to certain situations.
  
- the disregard of local or regional history since these do not fit in with the neat pattern of “national” history of Thailand, which has been written to project the picture of a Thai nation-state under a coherent, singular and central authority. As such, regional history has no place because, if studied carefully, the development of each region tends to project more the picture of fragmentation of the Thai Kingdom rather than that of national unity. It would therefore subvert the main effort of putting forward a forceful version of “national” history to encounter Western imperialist threat. Apart from the total disregard of local history, the Damrong School adopts the technique of writing history by blending together the past and the present when this is in the interest of its objectives. For example, in order to prove the existence of the Thai nation-state since the thirteenth century, scholars of this School of historiography assume without any reliable sources that Sukhothai, the forerunner of the Thai Kingdom, was in fact a nation-state. They thus superimpose the present idea of nation-state over the past development of Sukhothai. Such treatment of history results in a gross inaccurate picture of the overall development of Thai state and conceals the real history of the Thai.
  
- the capitalisation of the great-man theory in interpreting historical “success” or “failure” since such theory supports the School’s objective of history. Following this theory, the Damrong historians tend to regard great happenings in the past as a result of certain roles played by various leading personalities, especially roles of certain monarchs. For instance the success of Thailand in evading the powerful colonist hand of the West has been attributed to the progressive policy of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn; the fall of Ayudhya in 1767 was the result of misgovernance of a bad king.<sup>17</sup> Such theory ignores the fact that there exist several

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17 See Rong Symananda, *A History of Thailand*, Chulalongkorn University: Bangkok, 1971, pp. 94-97.

other factors which play a part in creating history. It also prejudices any serious research in depth as to causes which influence changed and continuity in history.

For a historian, the practical purpose of writing history, no matter how beneficial such purpose may be, is dangerous to the study of history for its truth and its own value. Practicability or usefulness of history means in truth a creation of a historical genre which leads to narrow-mindedness, inaccuracy, shabbiness — all of which are obstacles to the pursuit of science of history. History must be studied for its own sake, its own truth and with an unprejudiced mind as humanly possible so as to bring about an understanding of a society. Naturally in so doing history may produce certain usefulness beneficial to its society apart from learning the fact about one's past. But the usefulness of history must never become the main aim of knowing the past. The prime objective of the Damrong historiography of obtaining the practicability of history has blocked the genuine study of history for its own sublime value of truth about mankind. One may condone Prince Damrong for initiating this genre of historiography since he was hard pressed by external danger threatening his country, and because he came into history first as an administrator and a policy-maker, and not as a historian. But scholars who follow his footsteps without really being hard pressed by any danger, and with proper training as historian, cannot be blameless for all the defects brought to the field of history by the Damrong School.

### **The Nationalist School**

The nationalistic historiography is not a unique development in the study of Thai history alone, it is in fact an international trend throughout Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Asia and Africa in the twentieth century, particularly after the World War II. Generally speaking, nationalistic historiography began seriously in Europe in the nineteenth century in the midst of the political atmosphere wherein the sentiment of nationalism was fast spreading, as a result of the French Revolution 1789, and the Napoleonic rule. During this period there were numerous historians who sincerely believed that history had no meaning or value *per se* but offered meaningful lessons in political science, in tracing the rise and fall of civilisations, or, in other words, it gave man useful lessons in conducting his social activities. The belief that history is not a "science" and thus possesses only practical assets to man led contemporary historians to accept the role of the "high priest" of nationalism, then the most influential "ism" in Europe. History was studied and written to demonstrate the glory and achievements of the past, the high culture and the pride in "national" characteristics of each state. Such works of well-known historians as Thierry (1795–1856), Michelet (1798–1874) from France, Macaulay (1800–1850), and Carlyle (1795–1881) from England, and Droysen (1808–1884) from Prussia are examples of European nationalistic historiography.

In the twentieth century the wave of nationalism became strong once more after the World War I. But this time the stress on the glory, grandeur and great

achievements of the past gave way to the policy of territorial expansion which now symbolised the greatness of a nation, the purity and mastery of one race over others. History was again written to "prove" the "truth" of such nationalistic claims.<sup>18</sup> It was only the matter of time that this genre of history-writing reached Asia and Africa.

In Thailand in particular, the Nationalist historiography began around the beginning of the twentieth century in the reign of King Rama VI (1910–1925), and reached its climax in the 1940's when the country was under the leadership of Field Marshal Pibunsonggram. It re-emerged by the second half of the 1950's as an instrument to combat communism under the dictatorship of Field Marshal Sarit. Like the Damrong Rajanubhab School, the Nationalist School has been the product of political demand. The main causes of Thai nationalism derived from various factors such as Chinese agitation and general strike against the new poll-tax rate in the last year of King Chulalongkorn's reign; the aborted revolt of R.S. 130 (1912) by a group of young officers aiming to install a new political system in place of the absolute monarchy; Rama VI's determination to preserve the power of the Chakkri dynasty through the building up of unified sentiment mentally and physically among the Thai under the leadership of an absolute monarch.<sup>19</sup> Further factors for policy of nationalism conducted by Pibun and Sarit after the 1932 Revolution include Pibun's political objectives to remove the traditional political power and prestige of the monarch and strengthen the political power of the new leaders; the effects of Fascism and military rule in Europe, China and Japan on Thai leaders of the 30's and 40's, particularly on Pibun himself<sup>20</sup> and nationalism

18 F.L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism*, 1967.

19 For detailed study of King Vajrawudh or Rama VI see W.F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajrawudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Univ. of Hawaii: Honolulu, 1978; and the King's writings such as *The Jews of the East*, *Mud on the Wheel*, *Thailand*, *Wake Up!* and *Phra Ruang*. For example the King had written, "We were born into the Thai nation. We were born Thai. We must die a Thai. If we had to be slaves to others we would be considered dead since we could no longer call ourselves 'Thai'. Therefore whenever our country is endangered, whoever is unwilling to sacrifice his life in the defence of the motherland, must resign himself from being a Thai citizen, and stop calling himself Thai lest he brought shame upon all his Thai compatriots ...."

(Speech to the Wild Tiger Corps, 26 May, 1911)

and,

"The Chinese refuse to accept responsibilities of a citizen in his temporarily-adopted country, and refuse to become citizen of that country. This attitude is not different from that of the Jews which I have already mentioned .... they consider it legitimate that they should be given the similar protection and assistance afforded the citizen. But when the time comes that they must perform the citizen's duty, the Chinese would do their best to avoid it .... The reason why they conducted the general strike was to register their protest against paying equal poll-tax with the Thai. This is a clear evidence in support of my opinion that the Chinese want .. the benefits of the citizen but ... most unwillingly comply with the responsibilities of the citizen ..."

(*The Jews of the East*).

20 See A. Pibunsonggram's biography of his father, *Field Marshal P. Pibunsonggram*, 3 vols., 1975; Chanvit Kasetsiri, "The First Phibun Government and its Involvement in W.W. II", *JSS* vol. 62:2, July, 1974; and Thamsook Numnonda, *Thailand and the Japanese Presence, 1941-45*, ISEAS: Singapore, 1977.

as an ideological weapon against communism in the 50's until presently. Throughout these years history has been used by individual Thai leaders as most effective instrument educating the Thai masses of new political value and objectives.

The outcome of such effort is the Nationalist School of Thai historiography which aims to serve the political demands made of history in the not unsimilar manner as the Damrong School had effectively served the political need of the nineteenth century. But while the Damrong historiography concentrates on the writing of history to support the role of the Chakkri Kings in the process of modern nation-building and in unifying the country against external threats, the Nationalist historiography emphasising more on the making of Thailand as the most powerful nation in Southeast Asia and as a bulwark against the international movement of communism which threatens the socio-political position of the Thai ruling class. In practice, history produced by this school pays little attention to the power and prestige of the king as an independent political force. In fact it tries to undermine whatever influences the Palace may still exercise in the country, and in its place asserts the supremacy of the "nation", "religion" and "democracy". As far as external relations are concerned, the Nationalist School legitimise the policy of territorial expansion in the 1940's and crusade against communism in the 1950's and 60's. The policy of territorial expansion is the result of Fascist ideology on master race wherein no great nation (race) can tolerate the situation in which some of its members are under the rule of other "inferior" races; this being the case, it follows that all the land in which members of the "master" race inhabit as a minority group must be annexed to the country proper. Pibun employed this rationale in support of his expansionist policy in the 40's.

The main figure in the Nationalist School is Luang Vichitr-vadakarn, who was adviser to both Pibun and Sarit when both were Prime Minister. As the "official historian" of the Government, he had at his disposal the modern mass communication media such as radio, television, press, theatres, and publishers. With his exceptional talent for writing and composing jingoistic musicals and dramas, Luang Vichitr accomplished the great feat of popularising the nationalist history of Thailand among the Thai in the way unequalled by any historian before or after him.

Luang Vichitr-vadakarn (1898–1962) was an excellent example of the self-made man who managed to reach the top through his own effort and ability. He was born of a very humble origin and worked his way up through the *sangha*. After he had left the order he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as junior clerk and slowly worked his way up until he became Minister of that Ministry. His highest position was "Assistant to the Prime Minister" (a position especially created for him equivalent to that of the Deputy Prime Minister) which he achieved in 1958. Throughout his 28 years in the Government's service, Luang Vichitr had assumed several important roles such as that of the Politician, Diplomat, Academician, and Intellectual Adviser to the Prime Minister.<sup>21</sup> It can be said that his back-

21 Details of Luang Vichitr's Life see, *Vichitr Anusorn* (In Memory of Vichitr), Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, 1962.

ground of traditional and conservative upbringing helped to shape his outlook in life. Moreover, his presence in Europe during the height of the wave of aggressive nationalism exposed Luang Vichitr's receptive mind to the philosophy of nationalism and fascism. Luang Vichitr's must have been won over to the cause of nationalism during his working/studying life in Europe. Since then he made no secret of his political belief. His works in the field of history, public lectures and speeches reflect his deep conviction in nationalism.

It is clear that Luang Vichitr-vadakarn was first and foremost a politician and only secondly a historian. He therefore regarded history as merely a tool for advancing certain political objectives which he and his associates deemed necessary to popularise. In brief, Luang Vichitr employed history to support his main political conviction in nationalism, which can be divided into two periods:— the Pibun period when nationalist historical writing was evidence of legitimacy of the 1932 Revolution and its leaders at the expense of kingship institution, and the expansionist policy of the Government; the Sarit period when nationalist history was used to combat communism.<sup>22</sup>

The main works of Luang Vichitr include such well-known pieces as *World History* (12 volumes), *Thailand's Case*, and a repertoire of historical musicals and dramas such as the *Supan Blood*, the *Power and the Glory of Paw Khun Ramkamhaeng*, the *Power and the Glory of Love*. These musicals have been most effective in spreading the popular history of the Nationalist School among the young and the common people.

In sum, the Nationalist School propagated the concept that Thailand was destined through her past to become a great nation, since her people, the Thai race, inhibited various parts of Southeast Asian mainland. By this virtue, all territories so populated were to be incorporated into Thailand proper. The Thai, being a more qualified race, were to become one of the world's greatest races. History likewise showed that other races—especially the traditional rivals of Thailand i.e. the Burmese and the Vietnamese — were full of national defects which made them un-

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22 Examples of Luang Vichitr's works,

“There is but one way to make the Thai forget the bitterness of the past and become France's real friend, namely the return of the territories which France has so unjustly taken away from us .....

History of Thailand is the history of the sacrifice of blood. Our ancestors who have built this country and passed it on to us have not only devoted their energy but have also sacrificed their blood in the process of nation-building. It is logical that we will have to sacrifice our blood also in order to become a great nation .... let us sacrificed our lives and our body for our country.”

(*The Loss of Thai Territories To the French*, Oct. 1940)

“Nationalism is the only power feared by the Communists. A nationalist state is in itself a strong fortress against the expansion of communism. No matter how one thinks of Hitler and Mussolini, one must admit that they are the 2 people who help defending Western Europe from the clutch of communism”.

(*Contemporary World from a Historical Angle*, Aug. 1961).

questionably inferior and untrustworthy.<sup>23</sup> History also proved beyond doubt that men had to be loyal and devoted to the country so that their life would be fulfilled. Patriotism and nationalism were the sure guarantee against all foes, particularly communism which aimed at destroying national dignity and existence in order to turn one's country into an enslaved nation. To uphold "country, religion, democracy and King" the Thai must embrace nationalism and patriotism.

Principal characteristics of the Nationalist historiography include the following:—

- the writing of history as a science or a body of knowledge which can be "proved" by historical facts, so as to obtain credibility. Various works of Nationalist historians such as Luang Vichitr himself show that historical facts are selected only when they support the *a priori* theory of their interpretations of Thai history, which stress the superiority of the Thai race against all other races in Southeast Asia. So facts are selected when they confirm the "good" qualities of the Thai and the depreciatory qualities of those hostile to Thailand. The selection of facts is biased and subjective. Historical facts presented in this manner are thus distorted and inaccurate;
- the emphasis on the new theme of nation, religion, democracy, and (of a later date) king, in place of the Damrong School's stress on the significance of kingship in the nation-building process. This emphasis aimed at constructing a political base for the new leaders of the country at the expense of the monarchy which became the main political rivals of the leaders after the 1932 Revolution. Only when the position of these leaders of the democratic period seemed secure that the Nationalist historians began to pay attention to the monarchy as the source of legitimacy of

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23 Here an excerpt from Vichitr-vadakarn's work,  
"The fact that ... we could not decisively win the struggle against Burma in the same manner as the Burmese won over Ayudhya because the Burmese did not possess a permanent capital ... Burma adopted the strategy of moving the governing seat to various towns [to escape enemies] .... We could not lay siege on every Burmese town. Whenever our supplies ran out we had to lift the siege and return home. I therefore cannot accept that the Burmese were as good a fighter as the Thai ....."  
"Vietnam never had any significance in history ... never possessed national heroes who could be compared with our King Naresuan or ever King Trailoke .... even though we gave assistance to Nguen Anh to recover his throne and establish himself as the great emperor, the Vietnamese never remained steadfast to us. They forever supported and inspired the Cambodians, Laosians, and even the Kha hill-tribe to cause us trouble ... Historians know that any nation that gets hooked on certain habits, will soon adopted them as national policy and will always perform such habits whenever there is an occasion. This is something that cannot be trust ....."  
(Lecture to the military personnel on Sept. 23, 1950, entitled *Destiny of a Nation*).  
For detailed discussion see Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "The Writing of Nationalistic History: a Study of Luang Vichitr-vadakarn" *Thammasart Univ. Journal*, vol. 1, June-Sept. 1976, pp. 149–180, (in Thai).

various military leaders and as the symbol of Thai nation.<sup>24</sup> This trend only worsened the progress of a serious study of history as a real body of knowledge of man;

- the study of regional history to further the political interest of the ruling groups which aimed to present a picture of the glory and the importance of Thailand in the region with little respect for historical truth concerning Thailand's neighbouring states. Worse still has been its enormous influence on the minds of the public at large who nurture a misunderstanding about other Southeast Asian states.

It can be said with certainty that the Nationalist historiography has achieved its objective in promoting popular history among the Thai, Luang Vichitr skillfully exploited his position as "official historian" and Director-General of the Fine Arts Department which controlled all the means of mass communications, and achieved the feat unequal by other historians before or since namely the creation of popular Thai history. After the war between Thailand and France in 1941, and the introduction of the modern mass education, Luang Vichitr and other Nationalist historians, through their influence of writing history text-books, spread their version of Thai history so effectively that even now there is still no historian whose works command as numerous a following among the common folks as those of Luang Vichitr, the propounder of Thai Nationalist historiography.

### The Academic School

If the historical writing genres of the Damrong and Nationalist Schools dominate the study of history between the close of the nineteenth century and the 1950's, the Academic School of Thai historiography which began around the close of the 1950's and since seems to have taken the lead in the method of history study, at least among certain institutes of high learning, can be regarded as the leading influence in the study of history as an academic discipline.

The term "academic" is used here with the meaning to cover all who have been trained professionally as historians and to distinguish them from others who have become "historian" because of their personal interest in things of the past, or who have been drifted into the profession through various circumstances. Perhaps this is the criterion most outstanding in separating historians of this School from those of the Damrong-rajabhab and Nationalist Schools. Naturally there are always exceptions to the "rule". For example there exist quite a number of trained historians whose writings follow the pattern of the Damrong School such

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24 "If Thailand falls into the hand of the communist, we will definitely lose our national freedom. Religion will have no place, and the monarchy and the throne will be destroyed. What the Thai people must decide is whether we will or not preserve our country, religion, and monarchy [from the communist threat]"

Communique of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, written by Luang Vichitr on situation in the Loasian Kingdom in *Collection of Speeches of Field Marshal Thanarat, the Prime Minister*.



as Rong Syamananda, and Prince Chula Chakkrabhongs.<sup>25</sup>

In the main, the Academic historians are product of the popularization of mass education in Thailand in which history possesses an outstanding role in the nation-building process. History has become a subject widely taught and disseminated both at the school and the higher education levels. As the study of history as a subject developed so too the scope of its objectives. By the 1960's certain developments in the political atmosphere led to a great progress in the study of history.<sup>26</sup> Amid the atmosphere of academic freedom of the 60's and 70's, history as projected by the Damrong and the Nationalist Schools could no longer satisfy genuine interest in history as a body of knowledge concerning a Thai and his society. History therefore could no longer be studied as mere tool for various practical purposes. History began gradually to be studied for its own truth in order to derive an accurate account of man and his past. It has become the duty of the Academic historians to prevent history from being further abused. The past must be studied so as to obtain its actual truth and to form an understanding of its entire society, namely a total history which contributes to the whole process of the development of mankind.

It goes without saying that the Academic School is greatly influenced by the historical philosophy of various schools of Western historiography, the principal ones including the postivist, the idealist and the Marxist schools. In fact the Thai Academic School of historiography may be subdivided on the line of adherence to certain Western philosophy of history, into two branches namely the Academicians and the Marxians.

In brief, the Academicians embrace the wide philosophy of liberalism,

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25 Rong Syamananda, Professor Emeritus of History, Chulalongkorn University, received his academic training at Cambridge, England. However his works follow closely the Damrong School of Historiography; see his *A History of Thailand*, Chulalongkorn Univ. Press: Bangkok, 1971.

Prince Chula Chakkrabhongs, the grandson of King Chulalongkorn by his favourite son, Prince Chakkrbhongs and his Russian wife, received his education in England, read History at Cambridge. He was a well-known historian and an author of many books both in English and Thai. His *Lords of Life* is in fact an outstanding example of the work of the Damrong-ajanubhab School of historiography, which has been accepted as one of standard texts on Thai history.

26 The relaxing political atmosphere began in fact at the close of Pibunsonggram's premiership, i.e. around 1957-58 when Pibun found his grip over the Thai political reins slipping. In order to lure back popularity, Pibun adopted liberal policy and encouraged political freedom such as the forming of political party, liberal measures towards freedom of expression particularly among the literary personalities. But this was short-lived and the situation became rigid once more under Sarit's dictatorship (1958-62). However the short-termed prosperity to the sagging economy of the country, the result of the Thai participation in the Vietnam War during the 1960's, persuaded the Thanom-Prapass government to grant political freedom again. The Institutes of high learning benefited greatly from such atmosphere which for about a decade was suitable to the serious pursuit of intellectual achievement. Within this atmosphere of academic freedom, the study of Thai history developed into the pursuit of knowledge of Man and his society.

positivism, and idealism which, in practice, means that they strive to present Thai history as accurate as historical evidences permit with the least subjectiveness as humanly possible, and to introduce into the limited scope of the old political history the social, economic and intellectual aspects of human life. Their methodology likewise reflects the flexibility and willingness to upgrade historical research through the use of other related disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, sociology, statistics, philology, and others. Their philosophy can be identified with their Western counterparts, which in essence means the search for the truth about mankind in all aspects. Leading Academician historians are such as Tej Bunnag, Nidhi Aeusrivongse, and Charnvit Kasetsiri.<sup>27</sup>

The Marxians, on the other hand, are more set and rigid in their interpretations of history. This group of historians employ Marxist scientific method of class struggle to interpret the development of Thai history, and see history in term of economic and social exploitation of the ruling over the ruled. Though the Marxian historiography has not really been accepted, it plays a subtle and substantial role in the process of arousing the thinking of young Thai historians. The Marxians concentrate on the development of the nation, but not the *state* like the Nationalist School, their focus is on the people, the masses, and *not* the ruling class which has been identified with the state or the nation by the previous two Schools of Thai historiography.

Outstanding among the Marxian works are those of Jit Bhumisak who was the author of *Characteristics of Thai Feudalism*.<sup>28</sup> In this masterpiece of Jit is the classical Marxist interpretation of history which represents the Marxian historical interpretation. Thai history is divided into four periods of society, i.e. the master-

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27 All of them are product of English or American education and are involved in the teaching of history at the university level. Tej, though an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been actively involved in the teaching of history, post-graduate level both at Chulalongkorn and Sri-nakarindrwirot (Prasarnmitr campus) Universities; Nidhi is a lecturer of Chiangmai University; and Charavit is with the Department of History, Thammasart University. Some of their works include:—

Tej, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915*, OUP: K—L, 1977; "Historical Method" in *Philosophy of History*, eds. Charnvit Kasatsiri and Suchart Swadisri (in Thai),

Nidhi, *Politics in the Reign of King Narai*, Research Paper no. II, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasart Univ.; *The Study of Thai History: Past and Future*, an inaugural lecture delivered at the Historical Society of Thailand seminar on "Progress of the Study and Research of Thai History Nowadays", May, 11—12, 1979. (both in Thai),

Charnvit, *The Rise of Ayudhya*, OUP: K—L, 197 ; "The History Subject in Thailand" in *History and Thai Historians*, eds. Charnvit and Suchart (in Thai).

28 Jit Bhumisak (1930-1966) was a graduate from Chulalongkorn University, who began his literary life while reading arts subjects at the University. His masterpiece and the standard text of the Marxians, *The Characteristics of Thai Feudalism*, was published during Pibun's liberal phase of the 1950's. During Sarit's time he was twice arrested and jailed in 1958 for a period of 6 years. Once released, Jit joined the Thai Communist Party and carried on his struggle in the jungle. In 1966 he was shot dead by the Government force.

slave society; the feudal society; the capitalist society; and the socialist society. Within the context of Thai history the feudal society is the most important because of its deep-rooted effect on Thai society as a whole. This period covers the Sukhothai-Rama IV times, approximately the fourteenth-the mid nineteenth centuries. Presently, according to Jit Bhumisak, Thailand is in the middle of the struggle of changing the capitalist society to the socialist society. The Marxians, particularly Jit, refuse to recognise other Schools' method an interpretations of Thai history and dismiss them as being no-history.

The Marxian historical writing reached its highest peak so far ever in the 1973-76 period when the 14th. October Students' Uprising toppled the Thanom-Prapass dictatorship and installed an open political atmosphere wherein Marxist-Socialist viewpoints were openly and fully put forward to the public, particularly in the form of publications. It was during this period that Jit Bhumisak's works were reprinted and publicly distributed as well as gained sizeable audience, especially among university and high school students and instructors. The popular wave of the Marxian historical writings subsided together with the end of the "democratic period" of Thailand in October 1976.

The Academic historiography, perhaps more the Academicians than the Marxians, substantially works for the progress of Thai historiography and the study of history as a search for knowledge. This means the study of history with philosophy rather than with practical objectives as its ultimate goal. It also instills the awareness that history is a dynamic knowledge which contributes to the real understanding of our past, present, and our preparedness for the future.