

LITERATURE

A POETIC TRANSLATION FROM THE SIAMESE

PRINCE DAMRONG'S REPLY IN VERSE TO RAMA V

by

James N. Mosèl

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In 1893, King Chulalongkorn was faced with a national crisis. The French, with gunboat diplomacy, were pressing for the concession of large portions of Lao territory which at the time were tributary to Siam. The King fell seriously ill, both in body and spirit, and ceased taking his medical treatment. In deep anguish he composed a poem in *chand* (ฉันท) verse bidding farewell to the royal family. H.R.H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab relates that upon receiving his copy, he immediately composed a poem in reply. It is said that as soon as the King had finished reading the reply his spirits were renewed; he resumed his medicine and soon was able to get about once more.¹

Prince Damrong is remembered as an outstanding scholar and a brilliant administrator rather than as a poet. However, like many of his royal compatriots he instinctively (and quite competently) turned to verse to express his most delicate and deeply felt thoughts. His poetic reply to King Chulalongkorn is of interest not only for its touching eloquence, but also for its unusual (but little recognized) historical significance, and for the insight it affords into the character of a great man.

The poem is written in classical *chand* (ฉันท) verse, the most difficult and demanding metre in Siamese poetry. There are some 59 variations of *chand*; Prince Damrong's poem is in the form called *intharawichien* (อินทรวีเชียร), which is perhaps the most widely used. The metre structure of *chand* is of Indic provenance, modified by the Siamese through the addition of rhyme patterns. *Chand* metre is extremely difficult to compose

1. For an account of this incident, and for the poem itself, see พระกวีนิพนธ์ของสมเด็จพระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, (อุคณ Publishers), B.E. 2487, pp. 43-49.

because of its rigorous rules regulating the sequences of "heavy" (๑๓) and "light" (๑๒) syllables. These requirements oblige the poet to employ a large number of Indic loan words, with the result that the composition appears learned and formidable, and also dignified and stately. *Chand* is rarely written nowadays. In the days of the absolute monarchy when court activities were more prominent, it was the favored medium for royal eulogies and ceremonial occasions. Thus it was the natural metre for the events of 1893.

English translation cannot, of course, reproduce the acoustic effect of the *chand* metre. To compensate for this loss, the translator has attempted to recreate the mood of the poem by choosing English words which at times extend the imagery of the original wording.

The translator wishes to express his great gratitude to H.S.H. Princess Poon Pismai Diskul who aroused his interest in the poetic works of Prince Damrong, and to Mr. Davi Dvi-Vardhana who gave indispensable assistance in forcing certain cranky Indic loan words to yield up their poetic meaning.

อินทรวชิษฐ์

ขอเดชะเมองบาท
 ราชอาณาจักร
 ได้รับพระราชทาน
 ทง โคลงและฉันท
 อินพระประชวรคอง
 เหล่าข้าพระบาทความ
 ประดาแต่จะอยู่ไกล
 เลือดเนื้อผเจอยา
 ทกหน้าทกตาด
 ปรบทุกขทุรนทราย
 ตจเหล่าพละนา
 นายทายฉงนงัน
 นายกตประจัจกร
 จะรอกกระแวง
 อัดอดทกหน้าท
 เหตุห่าบคยาน
 ถาจะว่ำบรรคากจ
 เรือแดนทะเลดม
 ธรรมคามาห่าดมุทร
 มคราอดลาคัน
 ผจะพอกำดังเรือ
 หากกรรมจะบรรคาค

วรราชะปกค
 มนะตงกคณณ
 อานราชันพนชค
 ษาจตวรคาวหตาม
 นแททงไฟทลยาม
 วิตกพนจะอุปมา
 ทงร ไซวาหนกหนา
 ใหลายใตจะชงถววย
 บพมผจะพงดบาย
 กนมเวณทวฉน
 ฉะเหวดวากบิตน
 พคทางกคกลางแคลง
 จะใช้หนกกันกหนาง
 จะไมทนชระการ
 ทกขทวทกฉนฉน
 ฉนเคยไวฉนใจฉน
 กไมผคณนยม
 จะเปรียบคอกพอกน
 มคราอดหยตพายผน
 ทงระดอกระฉอกฉน
 กฉนรอกไมราราน
 กคองดมทกฉนไป

English Free Verse

May it please you, sire; most noble one above us :
I stand in confidence and gratitude, and yet in tears.
Your lines have come to hand and eye
And my thought to your illness turns,
Your illness shared in truth by all your nation.
Each one is fraught so deep
It escapes the poet's artful phrase,
Though I stand near and know it be not mortal.
If blood and flesh could blend as balm or herb,
I would in haste give mine to heal.
To seek contentment in another face or eye is vain,
For no day breaks but to recount complaint and anxious heart.
We are as mariners, all sorrowing for our captain;
Likened us to a helmsman who peers ahead uncertain of his course,
Or to the engineer by the ship's machines
Ready to throttle full ahead, yet staying his hand in doubt,
Waiting with vigilance for any sign,
In fear that time will not last out the tide.
We are uneasy in our tasks;
Our plight redoubles with each day.
Far we are from your path, my lord, the path of the people's trust;
'Tis not amiss to say that in our rounds
We resemble a ship that flounders in the sea,
In nature's way; betimes the ocean's winds are stilled,
But betimes come hurricanes and waves to break and pour upon us.
If the vessel's might is equal to the sea
She makes her course unscathed, without event,
But if doom so decrees, then every vessel shall be lost;
These things the hearts of mariners know well.
But while their decks remain afloat
They meet the sea with their united strength
And bring their craft to shore, rejoicing to survive.
If their strivings fail, and they go down,

ชาวเรือยกยอมี^๒
 แต่ดอยยอ^๒ตราบไต่^๒
 แกรอดคดตลอดฝั่ง^๒
 เหลือแกลกจะจม^๒
 ผิดระทอ^๒ดรุระ^๒หนึ่ง
 ทัด^๒คุด^๒ดัญ^๒ดำ^๒
 ผิดกันแต่ถ้า^๒แก่^๒
 ใครห่อน^๒ประมา^๒ทใจ^๒
 เด็ย^๒ทก^๒ม^๒ช^๒อ^๒
 ดั่ง^๒ดาร์^๒ว่า^๒กร^๒ร^๒ม^๒เกิน^๒
 น^๒ใน^๒น^๒า^๒ใจ^๒ช้า^๒
 ทุก^๒ว^๒น^๒น^๒อ^๒า^๒ด^๒ร^๒
 เปรียบ^๒ค^๒ว^๒ห^๒เ^๒ม^๒อ^๒น^๒อ^๒ย^๒า^๒ง^๒มา^๒
 ผูก^๒ค^๒ร^๒อ^๒ง^๒บ^๒ง^๒ห^๒เ^๒ย^๒น^๒อ^๒า^๒น^๒
 ค^๒อ^๒ย^๒พ^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ป^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ท^๒บ^๒อ^๒า^๒ด^๒นี้^๒
 ค^๒า^๒ม^๒ค^๒า^๒่^๒พ^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ห^๒ัย^๒ไ^๒ท^๒
 ไก^๒ด^๒ไ^๒ก^๒ล^๒บ^๒ไ^๒ด^๒เ^๒ล^๒เ^๒ก^๒
 ต^๒ร^๒า^๒บ^๒ท^๒า^๒ง^๒จะ^๒ถึง^๒ด^๒า^๒
 ช^๒อ^๒ต^๒า^๒ย^๒ไ^๒ห^๒ั^๒ด^๒า^๒ห^๒ล^๒บ^๒
 ก^๒ิ^๒ต^๒มา^๒ป^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ส^๒พ^๒ภ^๒า^๒ร^๒
 ค^๒ว^๒ย^๒เด^๒ช^๒ระ^๒บ^๒ุ^๒ญ^๒ญา^๒
 ด^๒ั^๒ค^๒ย^๒ช^๒า^๒จ^๒ง^๒ไ^๒ด^๒ั^๒ง^๒

ฉะ^๒น^๒อ^๒ย^๒ท^๒ก^๒จิต^๒ใจ^๒
 ค^๒อ^๒ง^๒จ^๒ำ^๒ก^๒แ^๒ก^๒ด^๒ว^๒ย^๒แ^๒ว^๒ง^๒ระ^๒ด^๒ม^๒
 จ^๒ะ^๒ร^๒อ^๒ด^๒ท^๒ง^๒จ^๒ะ^๒ช^๒น^๒ช^๒ม^๒
 ไ^๒ห^๒้^๒ป^๒ร^๒า^๒ก^๒ว^๒า^๒ถึง^๒ก^๒ร^๒ร^๒ม^๒
 บ^๒ว^๒น^๒น^๒ง^๒เ^๒ย^๒ย^๒ว^๒ย^๒า^๒ท^๒า^๒
 เ^๒ม^๒อ^๒น^๒ท^๒แ^๒ก^๒ไ^๒ม^๒ห^๒ว^๒า^๒ด^๒ไ^๒ห^๒ว^๒
 ไ^๒ห^๒ค^๒เ^๒ม^๒แ^๒ย^๒จ^๒ัง^๒จ^๒ม^๒ไป^๒
 ว^๒า^๒ช^๒ด^๒า^๒ด^๒เซ^๒ด^๒า^๒พ^๒เ^๒ร^๒า^๒ะ^๒เ^๒ม^๒า^๒เ^๒มี^๒น^๒
 ไ^๒ด^๒เ^๒ด^๒อ^๒ง^๒ด^๒ี^๒ด^๒ั^๒ร^๒ร^๒เ^๒ร^๒เ^๒ร^๒เ^๒ย^๒
 ก^๒ำ^๒ด^๒ัง^๒ค^๒อ^๒ก^๒จ^๒ัง^๒จ^๒ม^๒ด^๒ัญ^๒ญ^๒
 อ^๒ป^๒มา^๒บ^๒ัง^๒ค^๒ม^๒ท^๒ู^๒ด^๒
 ค^๒า^๒ด^๒ท^๒ป^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ช^๒ว^๒ร^๒น^๒า^๒น^๒
 ท^๒ี^๒เ^๒ป^๒น^๒พ^๒า^๒ห^๒ะ^๒ย^๒า^๒น^๒
 ป^๒ร^๒ะ^๒จ^๒ำ^๒ห^๒ำ^๒พ^๒ด^๒ับ^๒พ^๒ด^๒า^๒ช^๒ัย^๒
 ก^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ห^๒ย^๒บ^๒ั^๒บ^๒า^๒ท^๒จะ^๒พ^๒า^๒ไ^๒ค^๒ด^๒
 ช^๒จะ^๒ช^๒ัก^๒ไป^๒ช^๒้ำ^๒ย^๒ช^๒ว^๒า^๒
 จ^๒ะ^๒ก^๒ร^๒ะ^๒เด^๒็^๒ก^๒เ^๒็^๒ม^๒ป^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ด^๒า^๒
 ร^๒ะ^๒ช^๒ว^๒ค^๒ม^๒ด^๒า^๒ย^๒ป^๒ร^๒า^๒ณ^๒
 ค^๒ว^๒ย^๒ช^๒อ^๒น^๒บ^๒ว^๒า^๒ช^๒า^๒ย^๒ช^๒า^๒ญ^๒
 ช^๒ุ^๒ระ^๒ไ^๒ด^๒ำ^๒เพ^๒็^๒ญ^๒ท^๒า^๒
 ก^๒ิ^๒น^๒ิ^๒ห^๒า^๒ร^๒ะ^๒ห^๒่^๒ง^๒ค^๒ำ^๒
 ฤ^๒ท^๒ช^๒ิ^๒ด^๒ัง^๒ม^๒โน^๒ห^๒มา^๒ย^๒

The world will call it fate, and know their death was not in vain.
But were neglect to still their toil
And make them vacillate, confused,
And cease to mend their ship,
The ship is lost, as were their strength exceeded,
How different if the answer lay beyond our power
And we were drowned;
For then no man can dare malign
Nor call us heedless, craven.
Through this defeat comes name and praise,
Since compassion knows fate conquered strength, if thus we drowned.
Each day I grieve that you are ill,
There comes to mind a simile;
I am like your steed, your charge,
Harnessed and saddled, waiting for you to mount
Before the Royal Pavilion,
Feet chafing the earth to carry you forward
To your destination,
Left or right, far or near,
With all my might and no debate
To life's last breath.
My Liege, I beg to die with eyes closed in contentment
In a name recalled for courage.
I was born to bear this burden
And fulfill the task assigned.
May the power, the devout desire of these, my words
Consummate what lies within my heart;

ขอจงวราพาธ
 พระจิตต์พระวรกาย
 ขอจงดำเรัจฉนา
 ปกฆ่าฝ่าละของ
 ขอเหตุทชุนชิต
 จงคตายเหมือนหตายมี
 ขอจงพระชนมา
 เพิ่มเกยวติอนุกด

บรรณาทเว้งเคดอนคตาย
 จงผ่องพันทหม่นหมาง
 ทะประดั่งคททรงปอง
 พระบาทให้สำมคค
 จระวคตพระชนิต
 ละดมเดิกละตายสุญ
 ยุดถาวรพน
 ดยามรัฐพิพนผล

And may your tribulations all be banished,
Your body and spirit cleansed
Beyond the touch of infelicity;
May you fulfill your every design and wish.
In your shelter, my lord, lies our oneness;
May this adversity that smites forbearance
Be severed as in long years past,
And lie forgotten, vanquished and dissolved;
May these your times endure, replenish
With renewed honor and service
To glorify, exalt the state of Siam.

