

RECENT SIAMESE PUBLICATIONS

285. Sun'ôrn Bhū: *Ram'panpilāp* (i.e. Laments) รำพันพิลาป introduction by D. Yūpo with illns & plan, Sivap'ôrn Press Ltd., Bangkok, B.E. 2504, 63 p.

The volume is published by the Fine Arts Department as a memento of the celebration of the poet's 175th anniversary birthday on the 26th June 1961 at wat Tēpadhidā in Bangkok. It has been carefully edited and prefaced by an introduction by the learned Director-General of the Fine Arts Dept.

Just why this particular work has been chosen for the occasion the editor says :

“The poem reveals to us in detail additional items in the life of Sun'ôrn Bhū, which should enable the reader to fathom the poet's thoughts. Though the work has been published at times, no attempt seems to have been made to get at the bottom of the facts of his life. I have therefore tried to do so by reading through his narrative with every sympathy; and, by offering my personal reaction to his viewpoint, hope to draw my readers to take similar interest in reading the poem. If my convictions are not appreciated by the readers they can leave them aside as the reaction of one who has taken interest in Sun'ôrn Bhu's work.”

Bhū was King Rāma II's Private Secretary and to a great extent his colleague in writing though their styles differed considerably. Bhū moreover had a character of irresponsibility and led a carefree life which was tolerated by his master and benefactor. He was not however looked upon as benevolently by that King's successor, Rama III, who had no use of him. He left the service and wandered about, now as a vagabond and now as a monk of a sort-not necessarily observing the strict rules of the monastery that we now see observed. He has been in fact compared to Omar Khayyam owing to his love of the bottle which no doubt was responsible for

his successive troubles and poverty. It was in such a condition of life that he wrote, within the monastery of *Tēpādhidā*, the present *Laments*.

The narrative of the poem commences with a scene in the shabby cell in wat *Tēpādhidā*, which is still pointed out to tourists. The poet is trying to sleep but is kept awake by worries of poverty, which have dogged his steps in life. He then reflects on his recent past adventures in poverty. Falling asleep at last he dreams that he is lost at sea—the old poet being fond of sea-travel as may be gathered from his writings—and rescued by a visionary young lady from the heavens. He then wakes up and reviews his monastic surroundings mentioning many landmarks which can still be identified in the monastery. He goes on with what may be called a dream awake in which full rein is given to his imaginary trip over the seas on a mechanical contrivance which he calls a *ṛayont* (พยุหนต์), escorting the lady of his dream who is almost verbally indentified with the King's favourite daughter, Kramamun Absōrnsudāṭep, with whom he imagines himself to be in love. The Princess for whom King Rāma III built this monastery took upon herself the duty of supporting the monastery and its incumbents; she was, moreover, an enthusiastic reader of Bhū's romance of *Ṁra Abhaimani* and reputed to have asked him to continue producing further instalments of it for a long time; and it might have been for these reasons that Bhū thought himself specially favoured by Her Royal Highness. One cannot help thinking that, had Rāma III come across this poem, he might in a moment of vindictiveness have dealt with the poet quite severely for such an idyll however imaginary would have been an act of *lèse majesté* punishable with the highest penalty.

The poem under review was written during Bhū's period of extremely bad luck, when he had escaped from the vengeance of his literary adversary who had mounted the throne, though it is evident that the new King was not taking vengeance on the man.

Bhū's style is highly popular even to the present day because of its sharp wit, rhythmic sonance and fertile if extravagant imagination. He was often carried away by his vivid imagination to seem

as if he aspired to the love of his patroness the King's favourite daughter, even though the lady was decades younger than the old profligate monk that he was.

286. Čaofā Dharmadhibeś : *an Anthology of his poetry* เจ้าฟ้าธรรมธิเบศร์ ed. with a biography by Dr. D. Yūpo, Director-General of the Fine Arts Dept. w. ill. & map, B.E. 2505. 334 p.

Much of the work of this poet of exceptional literary merit has managed to survive the sack of Ayudhyā in 1767. The poet's biography has been reconstructed and appears on pp. 1-23. Born the eldest son of 'His Majesty of the Sublime Urn' (1732-1758), the last but two of the sovereigns of Ayudhā in whose reign literary activities bloomed their last before the holocaust of 1767, Prince Dharmadhibeś, nicknamed 'Kuṅ', the Shrimp, was created Kromakhun in 1733 and lived through a period of dynastic troubles which no doubt weakened the nation and prepared the way for its fall in 1767. The Prince's jealousy of his righteous cousin, combined with his intrigues to that end, was the cause of the King, his father's displeasure from which he fled to the sanctuary of the monastery to save his life. While a monk he developed a taste for religious literature resulting in the composition of two poems of acknowledged literary merit, the *Nandopananda Sūtra* and the *Mālaya Sūtra*. Some four years later he was pardoned; and, resuming lay life, was created Crown Prince. He was entrusted with the extensive repairs of the Chapel Royal of Pra Śri-sarbejña and the now-famous landmark behind the Royal Palace of the image of the Moṅkolaboṅit. His dissolute nature again got the upper hand; though having already no less than 11 consorts of respectability, became involved in a case of adultery with one of his father's young wives, which was considered a guilt of treason punishable with death.

Of his extremely elegant writings the most famous is the Boat-song still regularly sung by propellers of the state-barge on which the King sits on his annual progress to present the Kathin gifts on the other bank of the river. *The song of Kūki* is another beautiful piece of poetry. The Prince also wrote erotic poetry of

the *nirās* type, all ranked as gems of poetry. All these have been collected and published in the volume under review. Dr. D. Yūpo contributes a biography. Well chosen illustrations taken from the manuscripts of these works and from murals from the Chapel Royal of the Palace to the Front in Bangkok, good photographs of the state barges and a map make up the compendium of the work of a poet of high literary merit. The volume is artistically bound in red and forms one of a series of literary gems. Traces of the masterhand of the learned Director-General of the Fine Arts Department are evident. It is indeed a pity that the creator of all this was such a decidedly bad character typical of the decadence that brought about the fall of the nation.

287. Sthirasut, L.: *I Tsing's Lives of Buddhist Pilgrims to India*. ประวัติพระสงฆ์จีนจาริกไปสืบทพระธรรมประเทศอินเดีย โดยสมณะจีเจ็ง Ruyṅakon Press, Bangkok, with notes and a map, B.E. 2505, 57 p.

It is pointed out in the introduction that, of the writings of Chinese Buddhist Pilgrims who went to India in quest of the Master's Teaching, those of Fa-Hian and Hiouen-Tsang have been translated into Siamese and published respectively by P'rayā Surindrājā and Mr. Keylian Sribuñriṅ. I Tsing however has not been translated and to fill up the gap the author has undertaken the summary herein published with the addition of short mentions of other pilgrims from China as yet unknown by the Thai public. First of all is of course a summarised biography of I Tsing, who among other accomplishments translated into eloquent Chinese the *Buddhāvataṃśaka-mahā-baipulya-sūtra* and some 56 other Sanskrit Buddhist classics. He also had the distinction of introducing the Mantrapitaka into his motherland. I Tsing's records of travel in pilgrimage were two in number, one of which formed the source of this book under review. It was written in Sumatra where the pilgrim sojourned on his way back to India in B.E. 1228. Instead however of dealing with the travel the work under review has contented itself with nothing beyond a catalogue of the pilgrims, 60 of whom were known to I Tsing personally.

An additional detail which can hardly be left without mention is that the translator has not distinguished between the long and short a's when romanising Sanskrit names, such as हरशवारधन (p. 56) for Harshavardhana, जालंधर (p. 2) Jalandhara, सद्धर्मपुण्ड-
चारिकसूत्र (p. 10) for Saddharmapundarika Sūtra. Such mistakes are often made by writers who transcribe from the English without a knowledge of Sanskrit; but they cannot be accounted for in the case of our author who knows Sanskrit.

288. Scientists of the Department of Mines : *Touring Saiyōk* เที่ยว
ไทรโยคกับโลหกิจ Borikārṇ Tōy Co., Bangkok, B.E. 2504, ill. map 90p.

Again another sequel to the series of books for children issued by the Department on Children's Day (1 October), two of which we have reviewed in *Recent Siamese Publications* no. 264 (JSS XLIX, 1) and no. 284 (JSS L, 1). Again it " combines the delightful narrative primarily addressed to children " with what is worth knowing for grown-ups. The topic this time is Saiyōk, a valley of great natural beauty which is now earning great notoriety for prehistoric finds as evidenced by the result, as yet to be examined scientifically, of the Thai-Danish Expedition organised jointly by Danish philanthropy, the Fine Arts Dept. and the Siam Society.

The brochure commences with an eloquent tribute to the King who had passed 26 years of his life on the battlefield and yet managed to devote the rest of his life to reconstructing the state by restoring the economic and cultural status of his nation, himself living to the good old age of 74.

Drawing a parallel of that King's methods in the art of war with the requirements of scientific research in mineralogy, the author or authors point out how the work of preparation has to be based in either case on a thorough knowledge of the terrain to be covered. In their treatment a considerable knowledge of history is made use of and that serves to arouse interest on the part of children. Artistic interest is promoted by the description of the valley's natural beauty, for that is known to have inspired the writing of music and rhetorics

as evidenced by the composition by the late Prince Naris of his *Saiyōk Idylls*. Scientific interest is stimulated by a very readable sketch of the geological development of the rocks alongside the river and no phenomenon of natural beauty escapes the attention of the authors. And yet very little if any of the material thus presented can be accused of being dull 'shop', to eliminate which the scientific phenomena are often accompanied by quotations of poetry from well-known authors in literature. The volume is accompanied by a well drawn map of the route by which King Rama I marched west in his great campaign of 1787 and which was the one adopted by this scientific party.