



PHYA ANUMAN RAJADHON—AN OBITUARY

With the death of Phya Anuman Rajadhon, President of the Siam Society, on 1st July 1969, the country did not only lose an important man of letters, but also a formidable link between the past and the present. The new generation, no matter whether it comprises students, writers, scholars or government officials, who were proud of their Thai heritage, regarded Phya Anuman Rajadhon as their teacher—the lamp who guided their path to virtue.

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Phya Anuman Rajadhon was born on Friday, 14th December 1888, at Tumbol Wat Phya Krai, Amphur Yannava, Bangkok. His original name was Yong and he received his surname, Sathirakoses, from His Majesty King Rama VI. His parents' names were Nai Lee and Nang Hia. They were ordinary people, who sent their eldest son to be educated at Assumption College until he completed standard 4. After this the young Yong went to work at the Oriental Hotel and later he entered the government service in the Department of Customs. He was given the title of Khun Anuman Rajadhon and was finally promoted to be Phya. He started his career as a clerk and ended up as an Assistant Director-General. After the 1932 *coup d'état*, he was dismissed from the service to give way to the promoters of the *coup*. He was then reappointed as Head of the Cultural Division in the newly-established Fine Arts Department, of which he finally became Director-General.

After his retirement, he carried on as a part-time lecturer in linguistics at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, having taught this subject from the first year that the University extended this course to the degree level. Later he gave lectures on other subjects in the Faculties of Education and Political Science at the same university. For this service as well as for his contributions in the field of Siamese culture, Chulalongkorn University conferred on him the honorary Doctorate Degree of Letters and elected him an honorary professor of literature.

At other institutions of higher learning, Phya Anuman Rajadhon also shared his knowledge with members of the younger

generation; for example, he lectured on Comparative Religion at Thammasat University and Comparative Literature at the College of Education. He was one of the founders of Silpakorn University, which conferred on him the honorary Doctorate Degree in Archaeology in the first year that the University held a degree ceremony.

His talent had been noticed from the time that he was a young man, working in the Department of Customs, for his work was recommended by the Royal Literature Society in the reign of King Rama VI. H.R.H. Prince Damrong tried to persuade him to work for the National Library. Although Phya Anuman did not accept this offer, Prince Damrong nevertheless proposed him as a member of the Literary Association that was founded in the reign of King Rama VII. Prince Damrong was always helpful to Phya Anuman and predicted to Prince Naris that Phya Anuman would become a distinguished man of letters. Prince Naris was in habit of corresponding with Phya Anuman when the latter started his career in the Fine Arts Department. This correspondence was later published in five volumes entitled *Notes on Siamese Knowledge* when UNESCO and the Thai Government celebrated Prince Naris's 100th birthday anniversary. Phya Anuman was chosen to deliver an address.

When the Royal Institute was established in 1934, Phya Anuman was elected a fellow in the field of literature. Later he became President of the Institute until his death. In this position, he was responsible for the publication of the *Thai Dictionary* in 1950, of the publication of the *Thai Gazetteer* in 1964 and the first 8 volumes of the *Thai Encyclopaedia*. He himself wrote many books for the Royal Institute among others *Linguistics*, *Comparative Religions*, *The Study of Thai Tradition*, and *Thai Life Before the Present Times*. He played a leading role in coining new Thai words and thus helped develop the Thai language in the modern technological age.

Phya Anuman served as member of the National Research Council, Chairman of the Committee for Historical Accuracy, and the Committee for the Publication of Historical and Archeological Documents. If there was any work to be done concerning the culture, history, language and customs of the Thai people, the government

always asked him to participate in it. Having accepted the invitation, Phya Anuman worked to the best of his ability. For his services, the government asked His Majesty the King to confer various decorations upon him. He received the highest class of the order of the White Elephant only recently. As to the order of Chula Chom Klao when he was made a Phya, he only received the third class. Not until the present reign was he promoted to the second class order, special division, which was taken to be a royal sign of appreciation of Phya Anuman's contribution to Thai knowledge. Among the royal decorations accorded to Phya Anuman, the one of which he was most proud was the Dushdi Mala Medal, the equivalent of the British Order of Merit. He also served as a member of the committee set up to consider the qualities of candidates for this honorific award.

His writings became famous under the pseudonym "Sathirakoses", which usually appeared with "Nagapradipa", the pen name of Pra Saraprasert. The two were cotranslators of the *Hitoprathesa* as well as their master pieces *The Pilgrim Kamanita* and *Friends' Religions*. They also encouraged their first publisher, Khun Sopit-aksornkarn (Hae), to bring out new editions of Siamese classics. His experience in writing and editing became very useful to Phya Anuman when he later worked with the Fine Arts Department and published a number of valuable books as well as the famous journal of the Fine Arts Department.

Phya Anuman wrote all through his life. He was also in the habit of writing introductions to books written by young scholars, and writing letters to encourage would-be authors. His last work, which is unfinished, was the third volume of *Recollections From the Past*, partly auto-biographical and partly devoted to the historical background of Bangkok. The first two volumes were produced on his 79th and 80th birthday anniversaries respectively.

"Sathirakoses" was not very concerned with royalties from his many books. Any friend could ask for the books to be published for sale or for free distribution. When he reached the sixth cycle (72 years old) a group of his former students set up a research fund after his name. If he received some money for copyrights he then

gave it to this fund. In 1968 when he was 80 years old, a number of writers who respected him established the Sathirakoses Foundation to raise money to support poor writers and to encourage would-be authors. He then gave all the benefits that might result from his copyrights to this foundation. In addition, the government and the people who appreciated his contributions to the nation set up a special library to honour him in the National Library Building. After his death, the municipality of Bangkok renamed the road on which his house stood after his name.

He was appointed a temporary member of Parliament in 1932 and also a senator in 1947, but he played no important role in politics and refused to join any cabinet.

Phya Anuman Rajadhon was harmful to none. He was a teacher who supported his pupils, a master who encouraged his subordinates. He lived by righteous deeds, and was detached from wordly things. He did not love to accumulate much. He preferred to give more than to take, and was always grateful to his parents as well as to other benefactors. Although he was quick-tempered, he regained his composure easily. He liked to be friends with people of any class, nationality and age. This made him well-known in society; he was frequently invited to initiate wedding ceremonies. Everyone who knew him loved and respected him. It was felt that among the ordinary Thai people, there was no one who had done so much for Thai Studies as Phya Anuman Rajadhon. In his most recent book, *Essays on Thai Folklore*, Prince Narathip, the present President of the Siam Society, wrote in the preface: "Phya Anuman is, indeed, a well known authority on the Thai language and Thai literature. Foreign scholars who come to Thailand either go to him direct or are referred to him". When Professor W.J. Gedney, of Michigan University, edited Phya Anuman's work and published it as *Life and Rituals in Old Siam* he had this to say: "Phya Anuman Rajadhon occupies, or rather has created for himself, a position in the field of Thai letters and scholarship which is unique and paradoxical. Though he is not an academician by training, his scholarly attainments have . . . made him one of Thailand's most highly respected university professors. Though he is not a trained anthropologist, no one has made so great

a contribution as he to the study of traditional Thai culture. Though he is not primarily a student of language and literature, no one can proceed very far in Thai philological or literary studies before he has to seek enlightenment from the contributions which Phya Anuman has made in these fields. Though he is not a product of Western education, hardly anyone has done more than he to introduce and popularize Western learning among the Thai. Though he is much more than a popular author, one could hardly find a professional writer in Thailand who can match the grace and wit of his prose style. Most astonishing of all, though he is not a Thai by ancestry, no student of Thai culture, history, literature, and language, has displayed greater devotion to these fields."

Phya Anuman had never been to Europe until he was 70 years old. He only completed grade 4 of Assumption College, in Bangkok, yet Cambridge University asked him to be a tutor to a Ph.D. candidate. Calcutta University also asked him to be an external examiner to a Doctorate Degree. He wrote so profusely that he won recognition from foreign scholars who were interested in this country. His English articles were usually published in the *Journal of the Siam Society* and he served as Member of the Council of the Siam Society for many years and was finally elected President of the Society this year. This was the first time that a Thai commoner had been elected President of the Siam Society.

Phya Anuman Rajadhon was generally healthy, worked hard, went to bed early and had a morning walk almost every day. He first went to hospital three days before he died. His only wife, Khunying Lamai, survived him. They had nine children, the eldest son being H.E. Somchai Anuman Rajadhon, ambassador to the United Arab Republic. His Majesty the King graciously agreed to light his funeral pyre at the Royal Crematorium, Wat Depsirind, on his birthday anniversary—14th December 1969.

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