A TRANSITION IN HISTORICAL WRITING: THE WORKS OF PRINCE DAMRONG RACHANUPHAP

by Kennon Breazeale

At the beginning of the twentieth century Thailand was a land with an indistinct and often misconstrued history. Few Thais beyond the princely elite had more than a vague notion of the outlines of history related to the Thai peoples. And certainly no foreign writer gave any indication of much historical knowledge beyond a sprinkling of miscellaneous facts among various legends and beliefs learned from the people. Rama IV had delved occasionally into some of the royal records a half century earlier; and historical research was given a certain impetus by the Antiquarian Society of the Rama V period, by government service schools at the end of the nineteenth century, and by the nationalists around Rama VI who sought in the early decades of the twentieth century to reconstruct histories of the distant past. But the beginnings of a transformation from the style of the ancient chronicler to that of the modern historian were effected largely by Prince Damrong Rachanuphap. As Chairman of the National Library and Director of the Royal Academy he devoted himself to this task almost exclusively between his retirement in 1915 from the post of Minister of Interior and his retirement from government service following the coup d'état of 1932.

During the nineteen years between his first major publication on Thai history in 1913 and his retirement, Prince Damrong gained a reputation as one of the most prominent Thai writers and historians by trying to bridge the gap between traditional and modern outlooks on the interpretation, the writing, and even the recording of Thai history. In that relatively short period Damrong successfully launched the monumental task of collecting and publishing as much as possible of the existing knowledge about Thailand, its history and institutions. In effect he tried to summarize and systematize all the work that had gone before him—particularly works written in Thailand but also those from other countries of Southeast Asia and beyond. In the field of liberal arts his purpose was encyclopaedic. He set no limitations on his own study

about Thailand and set very few limitations on the subjects about which he would write. He placed high priority upon assembling the basic facts and publishing the texts as a prelude to delineating the structures of Thai history. The inspiration for this work was drawn from many sources, but especially from the importance which he laid upon his role as an educator and his experiences in developing Thai education. It was in this office that he first came to realize how neglected were Thai studies and how any comprehensive, scholarly undertaking would be discouraged by the disarray of sources and inconsistencies therein.

I. Biographical Note

In his own notebook on government service! Damrong outlined the various stages of education for a prince of the 1860's and 1870's. He began by studying Thai language in a palace school and at the age of seven was drilled in Pali for a very short time. His early curiosity about foreigners and interest in the English language were nurtured by Francis George Patterson, a special English instructor hired by Rama V to tutor some of the princes. Quickly becoming Patterson's favorite pupil during his three-year tenure in Bangkok, Damrong accompanied him to the king's chambers for Rama V's tutorials in English composition and often went with Patterson to pay social calls among the European community in Bangkok. He thus gained access to foreign knowledge as well as fluency in English at an early age2. Damrong later learned military science as a cadet in the Military Pages Corps in the palace. He spent two lenten periods studying in the Buddhist Order as a novice and as a bhikkhu, learning a little of the basic tenets of Buddhism, admitting that Buddhist studies for most young boys were extremely limited³. He noted much later in life that he learned political science and history from Rama V4, with whom he maintained an intimate relationship throughout the king's life.

¹⁾ Thai National Archives, Damrong Papers, ร. 6. บ. 1. 3 ข, เล่ม 1/15.

²⁾ สมเด็จกามพระยาคำรงราชานุภาพ, ความทรงจำ (พระจันทร์, 2489), หน้า 205-06.

³⁾ Ibid., p. 214; also สมเด็จกรมพระยาคำรงราชานุกาพ, ประวัติอาจารย์ (เคลิเมล์, 2478), หน้า 25-26.

⁴⁾ Thai National Archives, Damrong Papers, 5, 6, 11, 3 11, 1115.

Beyond these humble beginnings Damrong was largely self-educated. It appears that, stimulated by Rama V's example and Patterson's encouragement, he prepared himself well by reading as widely as he could and by observation. The undeveloped state of Buddhist education for young men, the temporary schools in which princes might by chance be able to study, and the lack of clear planning and preparation for government service were all deficiencies in the education system to which Damrong addressed himself. And all gave evidence of the profound lack of scholarly study of Thai institutions about which government servants needed to learn in order to serve effectively.

Damrong became a military officer upon graduation from the Military Pages School at the age of fifteen and soon became involved in the administration of the School, acting as teacher himself and helping develop curriculum. During his subsequent brief stay in the Buddhist Order as a bhikkhu he continued his educational experiments by setting up a school in Wat Thamaprawat. As a result of his efforts in education he was named Director of the newly created Education Department in 1887; and his continued successes led the king to make him Director of the Department of Public Instruction two years later. The latter department, created as the temporary equivalent of a ministry during a period of extensive government reorganization, placed Damrong not only in charge of education but also the museum, hospitals, and some religious affairs.

Having directed the construction of Siriraj Hospital during 1887-88 and assisted in the subsequent opening of the first medical school in the kingdom, Damrong was also well known for his work in the medical field: and during his brief directorship he opened several new hospitals. As Minister of Interior after 1892 he became responsible for extending modern medical facilities to the provinces. In later years he acted as advisor to the Red Cross. Thus he helped lay many of the foundations for the modern Department of Public Health.

During 1891-92 Damrong toured European courts from England to Russia and Turkey, and briefly visited colonial Egypt, India, and Burma. Although appointed only as a special royal ambassador, he was in-

⁵⁾ For the political implications of the appointment, see David K. Wyatt, The Politics of Reform in Thailand (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), Chapters 4 and 5.

structed to observe carefully the education systems everywhere he went. And returning to Bangkok to present his education report, he was appointed Minister of Interior within a few days as a result of Cabinet reorganization. In this post he began using to great advantage all the knowledge of governmental systems which he had gained during his tour. For the following two decades he was directly involved in the change-over of administration from the old system of empire to that of a modern national state in which he became the most powerful man next to the king.⁷

But Damrong's first love remained education. In a letter of 1901 to a former secretary⁸ he wrote that the need for education in Thailand seemed often more important, more urgent, than the need for developing the administration of the provinces. Perhaps he felt that many of the changes urged upon the rural areas by the central government could be facilitated through education. To his experience as director of the Military Pages School was added the planning and development of a civil service school closely associated with the Ministry of Interior. But more important for the whole nation, he accepted the responsibility after 1898 for spreading education to the provinces as yet another function of his rapidly expanding Ministry of Interior. Thus by the end of his tenure Damrong had been involved with education almost constantly; and much of his work as Chairman of the National Library was a natural extension of this early experience.

In 1915 Damrong resigned from the post held since 1892 as Minister of Interior but was appointed almost immediately as Chairman of the ten-year-old Wachirayan National Library. A decade later Rama VII appointed him also Director of the new Royal Academy; and he then accepted additional responsibilities for developing the fine arts

⁶⁾ David K. Wyatt, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

⁷⁾ Damrong's tenure in the Ministry of Interior is best recounted in Tej Bunnag, "The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892 to 1915," doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1968.

⁸⁾ Quoted in วิมลวรรณ ทองปรีชา, "พระประวัติและพระกรณียกิจของสมเด็จฯ กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ" (วิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญามหาบัณฑิต, จุฬาลงกรณมหาวิทยาลัย, 2507), หน้า 74-76.

⁹⁾ The whole problem of education in the Fifth Reign is detailed in Wyatt, op. cit.

through this organization and the National Museum. During this final period of his government service in these fledgling departments, Damrong prepared the way for the post-1932 Fine Arts Department.

The coup of 1932 precipitously removed Damrong from office within three days of his seventieth birthday. After a year he took up residence in Penang, beginning a voluntary exile which was to last for almost a decade. He travelled to Burma, Singapore, Sumatra, and Java, and continued his research and writing about Thai history on a diminished scale due to advanced age and lack of access to written sources. Many of these pieces composed after 1932 thus constitute a series of memoires. Returning in late 1942 to Japanese-occupied Bangkok, Damrong once again established residence at his Woradit Palace, where he died at the end of 1943 at the age of eighty-one.

Damrong is best remembered for his contribution to the nation as Minister of Interior.¹⁰ Those were perhaps his most productive years. But his reputation as one of the outstanding figures in modern Thai history is founded also upon the scholarly work in which he was occupied during those years and which came to fruition in the final decades of his life.

II. National Library, 1915-32

After forty years of highly creditable service as soldier, educator, diplomat, and administrator—all of which assured him a position of fame in Thai history—Damrong was still an active man of fifty-three. The relatively short period from 1915 to 1932 saw the development of yet another career and brought newly found fame to Damrong. As Director of the National Library he began with a reorganization and expansion of the Library and was ultimately responsible for the creation of the Royal Academy. In an all-inclusive effort to collect and publish all written works concerning Thailand, he investigated and collected materials from all known sources and established the National Archives as a repository for government documents. As a result of this effort he not only was able to begin writing some basic descriptive histories of Thailand, but also began to provide other scholars with the facilities necessary for research.

¹⁰⁾ Wyatt, op. cit., p. 102.

Under the pressures of his earlier careers Damrong had found little time for writing except for official purposes and occasional amusement. His literary efforts appearing in the Wachirayan (2939) and Wachirayan Wiset (วษิวญาณวิเศษ) magazines in the 1890's were usually for specific pur-Some news articles gave his interpretations of foreign affairs, such as an outbreak of hostilities between Japan and China ("เรื่องสงคามจิ๋น กับญี่ปุ่น," วชิงญาณ, คอนที่ 1 เดือนคุลาคม, ร.ศ. 113, หน้า 46-53) or the backgrounds to current French and Vietnamese relations ("เรื่องญวนกับฝรั่งเศส," วชิวญาญ, ตอนที่ 2, เดือนพฤศจิกายน, ร.ศ. 113, หน้า 154-72). One work praising travel and life in the provinces was obviously written to encourage readers to accept provincial service posts ("อธิบายการไปเที่ยว," วชิรญาณ, ตอนที่ 2, เดือนพฤศจิกายน, 1.4. 113, Hun 173-84). And some early books such as "Conversations with a Thief" (เรื่องสนทนากับผู้ร้ายปลั้น, 2446) were written to educate Ministry of Interior servants in certain subjects-in this case the techniques and habits of thieves and bandits. Damrong's first original work of importance on Thai history appeared in 1913 ("คำนำว่าด้วยคำนานหนังสือพระราชพงศาวดาร," ใน พระราชพงศาวดารถบับพระราชหัดกเลขา, 2455), shortly before he took his post in the Library. In later life after 1932 Damrong wrote occasionally, devoting much of his time to the manuscripts of various memoires but venturing to publish almost nothing because of the current political climate in Bangkok. Thus 1913 to 1932 were the years during which the better part of his historical writings were completed. Equally important to consider, it was this period in which Damrong held personal control of the Library and its publishing policies; thus he could, and did, publish practically anything that he wrote.

The period of Damrong's tenure saw the realization of the potential of the National Library which had been negligibly expanded by his predecessors. Damrong had held many of the Library posts which had rotated annually among the princes since the opening of the original Wachirayan Library in 1884. He had devoted some time after the creation of the Wachirayan National Library in 1905 to finding for the Library old books, documents, and inscriptions, and had edited a few Library publications in the succeeding years. However, only after being relieved of his duties as Minister of Interior in 1915 was Damrong able to devote his time freely to this work. During this period most of the noteworthy Thai books were edited and reprinted, and important

manuscripts were collected and published. The task was not only allencompassing but largely unprecedented as well. Most people had been totally unaware that this historical and literary material existed, for only a select few had ever gained access to any of it.

An ambitious exchange program was initiated with foreign libraries and learned societies. From these sources Damrong was able to acquire foreign language books for the Library as well as copies of works about Thailand for his favorite project, the Thailand collection¹¹. In the process he began an expansion of foreign books unparalleled in the Library's history.

To help finance this exchange for foreign works Damrong developed an elaborate publication system and policy for National Library editions. The problems he faced initially were enormous. Everything existed either in manuscript form or else had been published in editions which were rare and had been circulated among only a literary elite in Bangkok. Preparing a good edition of some works required considerable searching to find older ones or manuscripts for comparative purposes.

Many of the manuscripts in the Royal Library were unique copies and even these were found to be incomplete. In 1876 the Royal Library had been transferred to the palace of Prince Bodin Phaisansophon while the Chakri Throne Hall was being constructed. When the Royal Library was returned to the Grand Palace about sixteen years later, many of the old and most beautifully decorated pieces had disappeared—unknown to anyone except the thieves at the time, as there were no lists of the manuscripts¹². Also it appears that some Buddhist texts had been lent out for copying at various times, never to be returned¹³.

While the Library was in Bodin's care, part of the collection was placed on public display for the 1881 Bangkok Centenary Exposition. A certain Nai Kulap became interested in the books and later received

¹¹⁾ สมเด็จกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, ดำนานหอพระสมุด (โสภณ 4, 2459), หน้า 81.

¹²⁾ สมเด็จกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, นิทานโบราณคดี (พระจันทร์, 2487), หน้า 116-18, 125-26.

¹³⁾ สมเด็จกรมพระยาคำรงราชานุภาพ, ตำนานทอพระสมุด (โสภณ 4, 2459), หน้า 15.

begrudging permission to read some of them. Permission to make copies was refused because royal manuscripts were considered too venerable for use by commoners. Undaunted by Bodin's refusal, Kulap took them one by one, had each copied in an afternoon by a group of scribes, and returned them to Bodin the following day. Wishing to publish these works later. Kulap was afraid someone might discover that he had made such unlawful copies. And so he set about the task of disguising the works, rewriting each here and there, changing names and dates and facts at will14. Needless to say, his publications of many of these documents during the following years added much to the already existing confusion about Thai history. And much of this was not sorted out until well after Damrong took his post in the Library. The process of editing out the inconsistencies and discrepancies to be found among various editions and manuscripts of any work published during the three decades before 1915 was a tedious task for Damrong and one which had been misunderstood by his predecessors and associates who were involved in historical study of their own.

Perhaps the greatest of Damrong's problems was his budget. At a time when government revenues were required elsewhere, little could be spared to the Library. Without adopting new policies, then, Damrong could hope to publish very little at the Library's expense. However, the custom of privately printing memorial volumes for special occasions had begun around the turn of the century; and Damrong immediately seized upon this as a means of publishing adequate numbers of many different books at private expense.

Memorial volumes could be published for and distributed at almost any important occasion requiring some sort of traditional ceremony. The most notable one was cremation, although Damrong also encouraged the distribution of books at Songkran New Year's, for special birthdays, for Thod Kathins, and for various funerary ceremonies preceding cremation. Among the nobility this custom quickly became popular as an additional opportunity to make special merit at such auspicious times; and soon most well-to-do families were following suit.

¹⁴⁾ สมเด็จกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, นิทานโบราณคดี (พระจันทร์, 2487), หน้า 103-06.

Most of these memorial events were religious in character, and therefore the initial efforts of the Library dating from about 1901 had centered on printing religious tracts and sermons. Many persons found these uninteresting to read; and so Damrong began to encourage the printing of better selections of Thai literature and other secular works instead¹⁵. A lot of writings were inappropriate, however, such as amorous literature and poetry with spicy allusions. These pieces were nonetheless worthy of publication also. By leasing the printing rights of his Library editions to various printers to publish for sale, Damrong gained in return a certain percentage of the profits for Library use while at the same time securing the publication of more and more works. And finally those books which were not likely to realize a profit from sales and which would be too expensive for private printing were financed by the Library itself.

While Minister of Interior, Damrong had begun to collect old documents relating to Thai history. Although the king put him in charge of this project officially only in 1905 when the Library was created, Damrong had occasionally found old documents and decrees and had published them in the *Wachirayan* magazine many years before. By the end of his tenure in the Interior he had ventured to clarify some of the more notable problems for students of Thai history by editing and comparing various old manuscripts and printed works in order to explain and re-create as accurately as possible the originals. His purpose eventually was to make Library editions known as the standard of excellence for Thai literary and historical works.

In 1901 Damrong had published an edition of the Thiphakorawong chronicle of the First Reign of the Bangkok dynasty (พระวิษัทษศาการ กรุงรัตษาโกศินทร รัชกาลที่ ๑, 2444). But a comparison shows that this work was essentially the same as the original, with some passages merely rephrased and stylistically improved to provide a more readable text. In 1913 Damrong published the Royal Autograph Edition of the chronicles, covering all of Thai history from the founding of the Ayuthaya kingdom in 1350 to the end of the First Bangkok Reign in the early nineteenth

¹⁵⁾ พระยาอนุมานราชธน, เมื่อข้าพเจ้าเฝ้าสมเด็จ (สำนักทำเนียบนายกรัฐมนครี, 2509), หน้า 11-12.

century. He admitted that this edition also was hastily prepared and left largely unedited 16. Significantly he did add a preface to the 1913 edition, presenting his theories on the origins and growth of the chronicles and providing a substantial, basic outline of other indigenous texts. Again in 1914 a corrected edition appeared which included a long appendix in which Damrong wrote his own explanations and theories—the results of decades of study on his own part—about Thai history for each reign from King U Thong in 1350 to King Ekathosarot in the early seventeenth century. In the revised preface Damrong wrote an outline history of the Sukhothai and pre-Thai kingdoms of the region as well, utilizing in particular the stone inscriptions which he had been collecting from the provinces for many years. Many of these theories were premature; and more extensive research by other scholars has proved them inaccurate. Although this project was left unfinished, it nevertheless provided in one work a summary of existing views on early Thai history.

In an effort to collect records of more recent Thai history, a score of countries were searched for any materials relating to Thailand; and Damrong sought to secure copies of every known text for the Library. Some of these were published in English, such as The Crawfurd Papers (1915) and the Records of the Relations between Siam and Foreign Countries in the Seventeenth Century (5 volumes, 1915-21). Others were translated into Thai, such as the series in the Collected Chronicles (ประชุมพงศาวดาว, 2457-) of American missionary papers of the nineteenth century and records of French Catholic priests and merchants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Painfully aware from his own research of how quickly official records tended to disintegrate, become scattered, and disappear, Damrong determined to gather documents at least twenty-five years old from ministry offices and place them in a newly established archives.

All Thai writings were included in Damrong's publishing effort—everything from poetry, essays, and speeches to chronicles, royal edicts, and laws; everything both ancient and modern—even plays, songs, and lullabies. There were many immediate results. Thai scholars for the

สมเด็จกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, "กำนำ ฯ," ใน พระราชพงศาวดารฉบับพระราชหัตถุเลขา, เล่ม 1 (บำรุงนุกูลกิจ, 2455), หน้า 30,

first time were able to study the important sources of Thai tradition. And foreigners also began to use Damrong's works for their own writings in western languages.

Damrong worked with many foreign scholars concerned with Southeast Asian history, and was always interested in encouraging the development of foreign scholarship. He became a patron of the Siam Society upon its formation in 1904 and assisted its members in their research through the Ministry of Interior and later through the services of the Library. Although alone he did not write sufficiently well for publication in English, many of his works were translated and published in the Society journal¹⁷. And one of his few significant works presently available in a foreign language is A History of Buddhist Monuments in Siam translated and published by the Society in 1962 for the centenary of his birth.

By 1932 with the end of Damrong's tenure in the Library, Thai historical writing had begun to emerge from an undistinguished past and had given some definite shape to the general notions about Thai history. Though very little interpretive research had been done by this time, at least the major sources had been organized and investigated sufficiently to present some accurate idea of the structure of Thai history. The Library itself was no longer the domain of princes and nobles, but a public institution. And a most significant contribution was that books in the Thai language on a great variety of subjects were available to anyone who wanted to read them.

III. Published Writings.

The subject of how many works of what kinds Damrong wrote during his lifetime is a topic which has been very little understood. There is as yet no definitive bibliography of his published writings. One compilation appearing soon after his death (ม.จ. พูนพิศมัย ดิศกุล, บัญชิพระนิทนธ์ ของสมเด็จ ๑, 2489) listed about seven hundred titles; a 1962 centenary volume listed slightly more (กามศิลปการ, รายชื่อหนังสือพระนิพนธ์ สมเด็จ ๑, 2505); and

¹⁷⁾ For reprints of these articles see Miscellaneous Articles Written for the Journal of the Siam Society by His Late Royal Highness Prince Damrong, Kurusapha Press, 1962.

finally a magnum opus of the National Library listed over one thousand titles (กรมศิลปากร; สมเด็จ ๆ พระนิพนธ์; 2512), But all of these are incomplete and misleading in that they include many, but not all, of the various editions of every book and many, but far from all, of Damrong's editorial notes found in Library editions.

Damrong wrote many different types of works, among the earliest of which were some essays, journals, and a few diaries of his travels, all detailing his own experiences and observations at home and abroad for the enlightenment of other government officials. Many of these were functional and meant to be read only by the administrative elite, appearing in magazines composed and edited by princes and nobles¹⁸. Many are simply travelogues. Some have remained popular and are still reprinted in small memorial volumes. Damrong made notes on his inspection tours of the provinces as Minister of Interior, and in later years re-wrote these as short books about provincial Thailand. Such reports were not official in character but were written entertainingly to educate the reading public about the country. They are nonetheless excellent sources for the period.

Damrong early recognized the importance of such works for future scholars. One striking example for him was the account of the Sinhalese bhikkhus who visited Ayuthaya in King Boromokot's reign and returned to Ceylon to record and preserve their mid-eighteenth century impressions of the kingdom (สบามปกตับปกา, 2509 reprint). Considering that records of this period immediately preceding the destruction of the old capital by the Burmese are indeed scarce, these bhikkhus have left Thai scholars a unique source. Damrong realized how easily records of the past could be, and often had been, lost forever. Thus he was anxious to preserve as much as he could of his own knowledge about Thailand, rightfully assuming that posterity would make good use of any works he might leave to them.

¹⁸⁾ In the late nineteenth century the Wachirayan and Wachirayan Wiset were the principle outlets for this literary activity. Damrong also wrote one palace news article in the short-lived Nangsue Court Khao Ratchakan (หนังสือคือมหน่าวราชการ) of 1875-76.

In 1901 Damrong began to upgrade the annals of the Thai by beginning to edit, at the king's request, the royal chronicles of the Bangkok era. The chronicle of the First Reign appeared that same year, but in essentially the same style of the compiler Thiphakorawong. In 1913 and 1914 Damrong prepared two editions of the Royal Autograph Edition However, he abandoned this earlier idea of merely of the chronicles. writing explications of the chronicles and of putting out corrected editions of existing works of this sort, and began to seek newer forms of historical writing, preferring topical histories to a mere recording of important names and events in a chronicle. The former method of writing was too capsulized and abbreviated to be interesting for most readers. Thus Damrong had to fill the need for a new style of writing as well as find a new approach to the recording of history. The type of presentation he chose was a rather straightforward, detailed explanation of causes and results of events.

A thematic approach was one to which Damrong was attracted. His topical histories include a large range of subjects. Most are short works, tailored to the needs of the person requesting a book for private. merit-making publication. For cremation volumes Damrong often selected a topic closely related to the deceased, sometimes about the ministry in which the man worked or simply a topic he favored greatly. Thus there appeared histories of gambling and Chinese gambling houses in Thailand (ประชุมพงศาวดารภาคที่ ๑๓ ตำนานเรื่องเลิกหวยและบ่อนเบี้ยในกรุงสยาม, 2462), of the Thai theatre (ดำนานเรื่องสครอิเทนา, 2464), of Thai orchestras (ในประชุมบทมโทรี, 2463), and of Thai warships (คำแวนเรื่อวบไทย, 2467). Often these works were not carefully researched but contained only basic information on the subject. Damrong was usually given short notice that such and such a work was required for distribution at a certain ceremony. These pressures were not conducive to scholarly investigation, but Damrong continued to turn out books on request anyway. There are miscellaneous histories of flags in Thailand (อธิบายเรื่ององไทย, 2476), of coinage (ตำนานเงินตรา, 2474), and of towns such as Ranong (เรื่องคำนานเมืองระนอง, 2472), and others. An example of the more substantial works which Damrong developed over a long period of study is his history of the Uparajas of Thailand (คำแบบจังหน้า, 2461).

These works are not exclusively devoted to Thailand, but all do concern Thai history in some aspect. Some, such as the history of Buddhist monuments (ดำนานพุทธเจดีย์สยาม, 2469) and an account of the Thai Sangha in Ceylon (เรื่องประดิษฐานพระสงฆ์สยามวงศ์ในสังกาทวีป, 2457), are largely studies of Buddhism and its development in India, Ceylon, and Southeast Asia.

Topical histories were an important new departure from historical tradition and made a lasting contribution as basic reference works for Thai studies. Through them and many of his other works Damrong wrote much of the readily apparent history of the Thai peoples in preparation for the advanced research of future scholars¹⁹. His works have not been fully utilized as intended, however, for most Thai students accept each as a definitive work rather than a guide to further investigation.

Damrong did not abandon chronicle writing entirely. He himself wrote in 1916 a chronicle of the Second Reign (พระภาษพงศาวดารกุรรัพบโกสินทร รัชกาลที่ ๒, 2459), based on, but entirely greater in scope than, the original Thiphakorawong version. He began writing the chronicle of the Fifth Reign (พระภาษพงศาวดารกุรรัพบโกสินทร รัชกาลที่ ๕, 2493) in stages during the 1920's, leaving the work very largely unfinished. Damrong's autobiography (ความทรงจำ, 2489) contains a biography of his father Rama IV as an entirely new concept of chronicle. Among his other writings are a chronicle of King Naresuen's reign (พระประวัติสมเด็จพระบเรศรวมทรงษ, 2493) and a chronicle of the Sukhothai dynasty (เรื่องพระร่วง, 2489). And his most famous "Thai Wars with Burma" (ประชุมพรศาวดารกาลที่ ๖ เรื่องไทยรบพม่าตรีงกรุงเก๋ง, 2460, และ พรศาวดาร เรื่องเราะบพม่า ๗, 2463) was developed from a simple collection of chronicle references to the Burmese wars into a monumental chronicle of Thai warfare in the Ayuthaya and early Bangkok periods.

It is unfortunate that Damrong did not want to expose the significant personal and political conflicts of his own times; for in this respect he was a poor chronicler for the Rama V period. In most of his topical histories there is a heavy concentration on the Fourth and Fifth Reigns, these being the periods in which Damrong lived and made his own greatest accom-

¹⁹⁾ Thai National Archives, 5. 6-7, 11 1. 3n/48 Letter, Prince Damrong to Sir Josiah Crosby, 10 August 1915.

plishments, and about which he knew the most details. But he provides little more than an uncritical narrative in most cases. And in these works he rarely wrote anything about the successors of Rama V except in passing.

The most numerous of Damrong's writings are his editorial notes added to most of the Library editions from 1915 to 1932. The majority of these required little or no research beyond reading a book or discussing it with his staff and then commenting upon it. Typically these are short book reviews, touching the main points and serving somewhat as an index to general content. And if there had been any earlier editions or if there were various manuscripts of a certain book to be considered, Damrong often wrote a short background to introduce the new edition. Some series of books such as the Collected Chronicles (ประชุมพงศาวตาร, 2457-) were not merely edited by Damrong; he wrote many of the volumes himself on specific topics about which there were no books at all. And by 1932 there were more than sixty volumes in this set. A series of Thailand travelogues (เรื่องเทียวที่ก่าง ๆ, 2461-) were largely works which drew from his experiences as Minister of Interior. And the series on customs and traditions to which he contributed (ลัทธิภาพเพียมต่าง ๆ) are small handbooks on Thai cultures.

The biographies written by Damrong are numbered in the hundreds. Most of them might better be called obituaries, however, for they were often written perfunctorily and consisted of only a page or two of vital statistics about the life of the deceased. Most were to be included in cremation volumes for government officials or members of the royal family. They are by nature laudatory. Damrong was never at liberty to criticize or analyze the role of his subject in the Thai government service. He was limited to writing praises in a purely descriptive style. Usually the tone is personal, as Damrong was familiar with the lives and works of most of these people. Thus many of these little pieces are anecdotal in character. In cases where he found nothing important to note, Damrong resorted to minor details, grasping for anything praiseworthy about the deceased.

The few major biographies deserving of that name were written about Damrong's closest friends and associates or respected personalities—ministers of state, princes, kings, and royal consorts. The custom of including such biographies in cremation volumes is still in popular use; and the typical biography still generally follows Damrong's format as well as his style of writing.

Many of Damrong's miscellaneous writings have been republished in collections. Sets of "Collected Essays" published in many different editions²⁰ are essentially compilations of some of his more informative introductions to Library editions. Most are historical essays; and some of his earlier ones depict common views of life in those times with special emphasis on Buddhist values. In addition Damrong himself published many of his speeches in single volumes for distribution on special occasions.

Despite his insistence that he did not consider himself a poet, he did consider himself sufficiently talented to recompose one section of the classic "Khun Chang Khun Phaen" (กูนชัวงกุนแผน) in order to remove the former inconsistencies and inappropriate passages for the revised Library edition of 1918. He demonstrated an ability to write in many of the classical forms of Thai poetry; and one volume of his poems (พวะกวินิพนธ์ ของสมเด็จ ๆ, 2487) was collected and published by one of his daughters posthumously.

Damrong tried to write a little on almost every topic concerning Thai tradition. Thus his bibliography has always appeared vast to students of Thai history. However, if all minor biographies, obituaries, essays, and editorial notes were excluded, the number of significant titles would probably not exceed seventy.²¹ Nonetheless he was still the most prolific writer of his time and the uncontested authority on Thai history. An understanding of his reputation requires a close examination of the circumstances which led to his scholarly work.

²⁰⁾ Fifty-five essays in ประชุมพระนิพนซ์เบ็ตเดอ็ด, 2 เล่ม, คลังวิทยา, 2494, and twenty-seven essays in ชุมนุมพระนิพนซ์สมเด็จ ๆ กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุกาพ, คุรุสภา, 2504. It has become a popular practice to republish combinations of a few of these for memorial volumes.

²¹⁾ For summaries of the content of many of these books, see Panya Borisutdhi, "Étude sur l'oeuvre du Prince Damrong," doctoral thesis, University of Paris, 1967, and เอมอา เจริญรัก, "สมเด็จ ๆ กรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ พระนิพนธ์และผลงานด้านพัฒนา หอสมุดแห่งชาดิของพระองก็," วิทยานิพนธ์ปริญญามหาบัณฑิต, จุฬาลงกรณมหาวิทยาลัย, 2511.

IV. Preparation and Influence

The reasons behind Damrong's great historical activities are varied, and he drew his inspiration from many sources. Most important, as Chairman of the Library and Director of the Royal Academy, it was simply his job. And he held the power to publish. But this does not explain why his contributions were so markedly greater than those of his predecessors. The post had been of less import to Crown Prince Wachirawut who held it as only one of many offices; and Prince Sommot had only five years of tenure before his death in 1915. Damrong himself had been occupied with other duties prior to his retirement from the Ministry of Interior. From the 1880's he had served variously as Chairman, Librarian, or committee member for the Wachirayan Library and later the Wachirayan National Library; but he had accepted this only as one of the regular offices of princes and had not particularly distinguished himself.

During a brief period from about 1884 to 1895 in the Wachirayan Society, which served as a forum for literary activity among the princes, Damrong had gained considerable writing experience. It was a natural concomitant of princes to be the literati, as they were among the few with enough education and leisure to engage in such activities. In a sense such was their duty. With this inclination and the loss of his position as Minister of Interior at a prime age, Damrong was free to devote all of his time to literary endeavor²².

During Damrong's youth, education was functionally oriented to-wards training the civil service. He adhered to the old notion that a knowledge of the chronicles was indispensible for good administration. And so he undertook some of his own early investigations for the purpose of elucidating the vague and inadequately written records of history, freely offering his own theories and interpretations wherever necessary. This kind of work undertaken while he was Minister of Interior and director of education proved valuable preparation for his later historical research and for recording his own experiences in administration of the country during the Rama V period.

²²⁾ Thai National Archives, 1. 6-7 u 1. 3 n/335 Letter, Prince Damrong to F.G. Patterson, 9 April 1926.

From his twenty-three years as Minister of Interior, Damrong had gained a unique knowledge of Thailand—geographical, political, historical, administrative. Most important he had gained an overall view of the nature of the country and its peoples from his administrative research and provincial tours. His work in the Ministry thus prepared him well for the tasks awaiting him in the Library.

Damrong did not accept his Library post unaware of the problems he would face. He had been occupied for at least twenty-five years in trying to solve some of the puzzles in the records, legends, and archaeological sites around the country. As Chairman of the Library he had time and the opportunity to organize his theories and begin writing them down for publication. He certainly did not do all of his research in the few years after 1915, but the bulk of his writings appeared during this time.

From the earliest period of his government service, Damrong had been involved in developing education for Thai students. He had assisted in writing textbooks and had developed a teaching method of his own in the 1880's. He was then particularly concerned about the lack of Thai books. Even for those who were anxious to gain an education and qualified for it, there was difficulty in securing books to read for knowledge or for pleasure. The need for providing not only good literature in Thai but also translations of foreign works which might be useful to Thai education had to be filled. Many of Damrong's books take the appearance of travelogues, and for good reason. They were written simply, so that anyone with a limited education could read them. They were interesting and venturesome—written with appeal to young and old alike. But in the process of composing such books, Damrong managed to introduce his readers to great quantities of historical and geographical facts in order to teach them about their own country.

There was a particular need for instructing officials as well as the public about the need for preserving their heritage. Damrong lectured provincial officials on the conservation of ancient relics and monuments and published his views in order to get wider support (dignor in the latest to prevent the needless destruction of national treasures and to preserve other fragile records of Thai history. Many written works existing in

only one manuscript copy were in danger of disappearing forever, and even the collections in the Royal Library had proved unsafe. Besides publishing what had already been written, Damrong realized the need for writing down what could be remembered of history in the lifetimes of older government officials. Working on the premise that an incomplete memory is better than none, Damrong looked for informants whenever he found the texts insufficient.

Inspiration came from many people who urged him to conduct research on various topics about which he had some special knowledge. His close, scholarly relationship with Rama V lasted for almost forty years; and the king had probably the single greatest influence upon his scholarly work. The two half-brothers had investigated together the problems of modern and ancient administration for the last two decades of the Fifth Reign. They also had engaged in discussion and debate in the Antiquarian Society on problems of Thai history—the meaning of the chronicles, ancient relics, and the interpretation of old Thai literature. Much credit for Damrong's Collected Chronicles series appearing after 1914 belongs to Rama V, who began during his reign to collect many of these chronicles from various provinces and tributary states and had expressed concern to Damrong about the need to make the records of Thai history better known.

Damrong's scholarly associates included all of the Thai men of letters of his time. But among them only Damrong was relatively free to devote himself to scholarly pursuits; and so his reputation as a learned man surpassed all rivals. His Library staff were specialists carefully selected to assist him in his work; and he profited greatly from the research of such men as the Ayuthaya specialist *Phraya* Boran Rachathanin and the Sinologist *Phra* Chenchin Akson. Damrong also encouraged and inspired others to follow his example, such as *Phraya* Anuman Rajadhon who was to become his successor as the acknowledged specialist in Thai studies.

Among the foreigners resident in Thailand Damrong found many interested in Thai antiquities. The French Consul Fernand Pila urged him to do the research which resulted in his work on Thai Buddhist monuments. Damrong's work was in general complementary to that

done by the Indologist Frankfurter during his tenure as librarian in Bangkok and especially that done by Frankfurter's successor George Coedès, who brought with him new concepts of historical writing and techniques for research and who instructed Damrong in some different schools of thought. Others such as W.A.R. Wood used Damrong's publications and personal knowledge to great advantage for their own research and writing in European languages. Such efforts were encouraging improvements over those of nineteenth century westerners such as Crawfurd, Pallegoix, Bowring, and S.J. Smith, who attempted with little success to write authoritative works about Thailand for European readers.

Damrong was stimulated by French and English progress in restoring ancient monuments and writing histories of Indochina and India. The historical problems being solved by European research had much in common with Thailand; and Damrong observed many Europeans setting a striking example²³. On his 1892 tour of India he was impressed with the great advances made in research there during the two decades since Rama V's first India tour. And after a tour of Angkor he himself composed a brief history of the city and an account of French research in the area (นิวาศนควรัต, 2468). Damrong took a special interest in the French and English methodology which could easily be applied in the Thai case. No doubt the growing contrast between advanced foreign research in colonial areas and lack of basic research in Thailand hastened his efforts for the restoration of Thai history as well.

V. Contributions to Thai Historical Writing

Accepting the inadequacies of traditional historical writing, Damrong naturally looked to western examples for methods of research and innovations in writing. He began to work towards synthesis of varied sources and some analysis rather than a mere recording of events. Writing in a personal style he added opinions wherever he saw fit, breaking away from the anonymous character of the chronicles. But even in seeking new approaches to history he did not make a clean break with tradition. He retained some old forms and his style was distinctly influenced by the traditional literati. The vestiges of tradi-

²³⁾ สมเด็จกรมพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ, นิราศนครวัด (โสภณ ๆ, 2468), หน้า 59-62

tional writing—the influences of writers of poetry, of chronicles, of official reports and laws—all linger in Damrong's style. He took old forms such as the chronicles (พงศาวดาว) and Poems of Farewell (นิวาศ) and retained their names and formats to a certain extent. But in all of his writings he tried to make innovations, which have helped to form the character of much modern historical writing.

Many Thai students of history insist that Damrong followed the prevailing western philosophies of history. But it it is doubtful that he ever really became concerned with a philosophy. His approach to history, like his writing style, shows considerable continuity from the 1880's to the end of his life. He simply sought to write clear explanations of events as he saw them—straightforward, often seemingly superficial. He does not demonstrate much interest in deeper intellectual problems concerning the most valid means of interpreting history.

Damrong maintained a traditional outlook on history in many ways. He saw history in terms of ascensions, reigns, and deaths of kings. He used regnal building blocks as a convenience in discussing most problems in his topical histories. Also in the chronicle style Damrong generally used a chronological approach as the most direct method of describing history. Occasionally he used a bewildering mixture of old calendrical systems rather than a uniform one. And following his sources closely his presentation of history is largely the stories of a few great men.

Like all traditional writers Damrong made a great fuss over certain seemingly minor details. His writings follow the chronicles fastidiously on the matter of royal ceremonies. It was of course important for chronicle writers to describe these in minute detail, for they were recording step by step all of the ritual required of a legitimate ruler. In essence they were often writing handbooks for the ruling classes. Chronicles were not meant for the reading public but as a record of slightly supernatural events in which the king was intimately involved and which had to be perpetuated for the politico-religious well-being of the land. Such records were for rulers and administrators to gain enlightenment and guidance and to find precedents for their own actions.

In many of his works Damrong preferred to concentrate on royal affairs, as distinct from administrative affairs, reflecting these same tendencies in his sources. His writings thus naturally tended to be purely descriptive and were often merely attempts to take the abstruse chronicles and write them in agreeable prose which could be comprehended by everyone. But Damrong did retain some of the traditional handbook style and did not manage to sort out of his works all that was unnecessary for the reading public or for interpretive research, thus compromising his own attempt to modernize the writing of history.

The style of writing which Damrong developed reflects the fact that he was writing for a much broader segment of the reading public than most earlier historians. If his style is characterized by loose organization and a penchant for anecdotes, it was for the purpose of providing his readers with informative works enjoyable to read. Writing for more than a small circle of scholars, he thus did not try to develop a precise composition style. If he wrote sometimes at random, often freely wandering off the subject in order to include whatever related thoughts occurred to him at any moment, he adopted this style, which he called "automatic," in order to express most fully his own knowledge and opinions on the topic, while focussing the reader's attention on the main points through frequent reiterations. The constant popularity of his works attests the attraction of his readers to these writing techniques and his clear insights into the demands of the reading public.

The relatively simple vocabulary that Damrong uses is a notable feature. Shunning sophisticated writing and use of Sanskrit and Pali loanwords whenever possible, he writes on a level which even a person with very limited education can understand. He most likely developed this habit while helping to organize the textbooks for the schools of the 1880's. Writing books of reasonably short length and using simple vocabulary were good educational techniques for encouraging students to do more and wider reading—giving them something they could grasp and retain easily. In departing from the weighty style of the chronicles and the language of poets (the complexities of which Damrong did not imitate in his own poetry), Damrong managed to create a flowing and

²⁴⁾ สมเดือกรมพระยาคำรงราชานุภาพ, "คำน้ำ," ใน คำนานคณะสงฆ์ (โสภณ ฯ, 2466), หน้า ก-ค.

readable text, with every subject discussed from every angle, leaving nothing in doubt. Closely related is the "story-telling" character of his style, which was a preference adopted early in life from his teachers and relatives. Realizing that Thai people liked to sit and listen to tales told by older persons, he seized upon this in developing a writing technique to attract the reader and hold his interest.

The cause of many of the faults in Damrong's writings is to be found in the haste in which he often worked and in the pressures of the work of the Library. Many books were written or edited in order to meet deadlines for printers so that they could be distributed at cremations and other ceremonies. Since the auspicious days for special occasions could not be changed, the Library was forced to produce whatever it could regardless of the quality in the time alloted. This meant that at times Damrong would be furiously writing the last chapters of a book after the first ones had already gone to press. Needless to say, little revision or correction could be expected; and surprisingly, although many books were republished at later dates, Damrong rarely bothered to make significant changes.

Sometimes Damrong had to change the title of a work in a later edition because he did not always write what he set out to write and perhaps did not realize the inappropriateness of the title until after the book had gone to press. His "History of Thai Buddhist Monuments" was written in such fashion. Damrong became too involved in writing about monuments and Buddhist history in India; and finding time running short, he hastily wrote only two final chapters on some of the Thai monuments. The book was revised once to clarify some problems of style and organization; and in a later revision the title was finally changed to "A History of Buddhist Monuments" to agree more closely with the content. There are many works retitled in later editions and the reader can never be certain at first glance whether he is dealing with two different books or one book with two different titles. Thai bibliographers have not made much progress in sorting out this problem.

These criticisms are stylistic and perhaps minor in considering the whole problem of a transition from traditional towards a combination of Thai and western styles and outlooks. Damrong developed his own

unique notions about recording history. He was not concerned that every work be complete or entirely accurate, but was concerned basically with preserving everything that he could of Thai knowledge. At one time there was a plan to collect his essays and notes on history and culture and publish them as an encyclopaedia because they covered such diverse fields of knowledge²⁵. A comparable goal was finally attained with the publication of his correspondence from Penang with his half-brother Prince Naris and united, 27 talu, 2504-05), preserving the ideas and final pronouncements on Thai culture of both these respected men of affairs.

Damrong made a number of other important departures from tradition. His explanations provide backgrounds to events by drawing from all available sources and giving significant results from a much greater perspective than former historians. In his works Damrong attempted to write less in the old style of history as a chronological listing of facts and tried to demonstrate instead the continuities of historical events. He began working towards a basic form of analysis. Wherever he could find very little evidence, he relied on his knowledge of customs and traditions for calculated guesswork. His method of examining the turbulent period which brought King Chakraphat to the throne ("อิกิเทย เรื่องพระเพียงราชานัก "ใน อิกิเทยเน็ตเคล็ดในเรื่องพระการสบาม. 2469) illustrates one way in which he made an elaborate reconstruction of events from scant textual evidence.

Damrong also selected many topics long neglected by Thai writers and recorded much new and valuable information about his own times. The lives of the common people were rarely reflected by traditional writers; but Damrong wrote a number of pieces²⁶ giving intimate glimpses of everyday life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writing about commoners as he observed and understood them.

Most importantly, Damrong began to see Thai history in the perspective of Southeast Asian history as a whole and as it related to India, China, the rest of Asia and Europe. He began to approach

²⁵⁾ หลวงวิจิตรวาทการ, "คำนำ," ใน สมเด็จกรมพระยาตำรงราชานุภาพ, ประมวลคำอธิบายทางนี้ที่ศาสตร์ (พระจันทร์, 2477), หน้า ข.

²⁶⁾ See for example his "เรื่องทุนกับแรง," วชิรญาณ, ตอนที่ 3 (เดือนธันวาคม, ร.ศ. 113), หน้า 234-64, and his "นิทานที่ 16 เรื่องถานช้าง," ใน นิทานโบราณคดี. พระธันทร์, 2487.

historical study from the widest viewpoint that he could comprehend, using all known Thai and foreign sources which he himself was working to collect and publish. This is evident from his varied topical works. But unfortunately after 1914 he never again attempted to synthesize a complete history.

Through these all-encompassing efforts Damrong provided the basic reference works on Thai history from the earliest times through the reign of Rama V. Through his own investigations and writings he accomplished much pioneering work on countless topics; and very few modern scholars have undertaken any study of Thai history without frequent reference to Prince Damrong. This man who has gained the reputation among Thai people as the "Father of Thai History" has thus supplied the important resources and the tools for modern research in history.

