

NOTES

SOURCES IN THAI HISTORY: THE PAPERS OF PRINCE DAMRONG

by

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The main holdings of the National Archives (Bangkok) consist of the files of the Royal Secretariat for the Fifth through Seventh Reigns, collected by reign and subdivided by ministry.¹ In addition the National Archives also has custody of several special collections of documents, among the most important of which is that comprising the personal papers of Prince Damrong Rachanuphab.² This collection totals more than 80,000 pages, divided by subject matter into four groups of documents of greatly varying size, which are subdivided into a total of 58 sections. The 58 sections are further subdivided into files, the number of files per section varying from one to nearly 700, each file in turn containing from one to several hundred pages of documents ostensibly relating to a single topic. The first 49 sections are included under the general Archives designation for the Papers of Prince Damrong, u. 1.3; Nos. 50-55 comprise u. 1.3 n, "correspondence;" Nos. 56-57, on the writings of Prince Damrong and chronicles, comprise u. 1.3 r; while the final general heading u. 1.3 n. consists of the single section No. 58 containing biographical data on Prince Damrong.

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- 1) For a general description of the organization and holdings of the National Archives and the National Library, and a detailed inventory of materials relating to the Fifth Reign, see David K. Wyatt and Constance M. Wilson, "Thai Historical Materials in Bangkok", *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1965, pp. 105-118.
- 2) The papers of Prince Damrong are, it should be emphasized, housed in the National Archives and not, as might be expected, in the Damrong Library, a separate structure which adjoins the Archives and houses Prince Damrong's collection of books and journals.

Prince Damrong, a son of King Mongkut and a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn, had a career remarkable for its breadth of activity, for its record of lasting accomplishment in many fields of endeavor, and for its sheer length. One of the most able of the royal relatives to whom Chulalongkorn turned for assistance in implementing his far-reaching plans for reform and modernization, Prince Damrong held high positions in the military and in education while still in his 20's, and then at the age of 30 became Minister of the Interior, a post he was to hold for 23 years during which time he carried out a reorganization of the entire provincial administration of Siam. In 1915 he left the Ministry of the Interior and for the remainder of the Sixth Reign his energies were largely devoted to scholarly and cultural affairs, most notably as head of the National Library, although near the end of the reign he was again named to the Cabinet as Minister of the Privy Seal. At the beginning of the Seventh Reign he returned to the center of power as one of the five members of the Supreme Council of State, and down to June of 1932 he remained one of the most influential voices in the government. The *coup* of June 1932, which took place two days after his seventieth birthday, resulted in Prince Damrong's being removed from official position and briefly detained. Released, he once again retired and turned to studies of Thai culture and history. Following the unsuccessful revolt led by Prince Bowaradej in October of 1933, Prince Damrong, like several other leading members of the royal family, chose to live abroad, and he spent the next nine years in Penang. In this period he continued the research and writing which have made him known as the 'Father of Thai History', and he also carried on a voluminous correspondence with persons both in Siam and abroad, including the bulk of the letters exchanged with his half-brother Prince Naris and subsequently published as *San Somdet*. In 1942, with Penang and Thailand both in the Japanese sphere, Prince Damrong returned to Bangkok, where he died in December of 1943 at the age of 81.

The subjects treated in the papers of Prince Damrong are as varied as the career of the prince and provide a wealth of information on the multitude of activities and interests of a life which spanned five reigns, as indicated by section titles ranging from the Cabinet and Supreme

Council of State to Northern Provincial Towns, Gambling Places, and Amorous Songs. Although the bulk of the materials are from the Sixth and Seventh Reigns there are documents going back as far as the First Reign of the Bangkok Period, and also a considerable amount of material, particularly correspondence, from the Eighth Reign. In a few cases the materials continue even beyond the death of Prince Damrong in 1943. Considering the central role of Prince Damrong in the government and politics of the Fifth Reign there would seem to be, with certain notable exceptions, a relative paucity of Fifth Reign materials, while the documentation of politics, administration, and economic affairs for the Seventh Reign, when Prince Damrong sat in both the Cabinet and the Supreme Council of State, is particularly complete, including a number of political documents which are apparently not to be found in the corresponding Seventh Reign files of the Archives.³

The papers of Prince Damrong have been indexed in two large volumes (in Thai) by the Archives staff, and most particularly Khun Aranya Rodkul, and the papers and indexes have been open to approved researchers for the greater part of the past decade. The classification has been done with care, and while there are occasional instances of documents which are obviously misfiled, the indexes on the whole provide a reliable summary of the contents of the collection. The nearly illegible state of some of the handwritten materials, as well as Prince Damrong's habit of occasionally omitting names of correspondents and dates from draft letters, cause some problems, and special historical circumstances may also result in confusion in the cataloguing. Thus for example the file of correspondence with Francis B. Sayre (No. 50/176) contains a number of letters signed 'Kalyan', the name, derived from his awarded title of nobility 'Phya Kalyan Maitri', with which Sayre normally signed his correspondence with Thai officials. The later letters in the file are in fact from Sayre, but a series from 1915-1917, also signed 'Kalyan', are not from Sayre but from Jens I. Westengard, an earlier

3) For examples see the collection of Seventh Reign materials edited by the present writer, *Siam's Political Future: Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy* (Data Paper No. 96, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1974).

American adviser who also bore the title 'Phya Kalyan Maitri' and used the signature 'Kalyan'.

The occasional anomalies of the classification, and the range and variety of the materials, make research in the papers of Prince Damrong a serendipitous experience, with one never knowing what one may come across next. Thus for example, in a file entitled "Correspondence on Various Subjects" in a section entitled "Miscellaneous" (No. 49/143) and ostensibly dated 1929/30 one unexpectedly finds, among unrelated correspondence, assorted pamphlets, dinner seating plans, circular advertisements from publishing houses, etc. (it would seem that Prince Damrong never threw anything away), a large colored hand-drawn map, which turns out to be of the area to the north and east from Luang Prabang, with towns, villages, mountains, and streams graphically depicted in elaborate detail, and with notations added about routes and campsites used in the Haw campaigns of the late nineteenth century.

Among the parts of the papers of Prince Damrong likely to be of greatest interest to the historian are the substantial sections dealing with financial affairs (No. 37, approximately 2200 pages), with matters which came before the Cabinet (No. 42, approximately 11,000 pages), and with matters which came before the Supreme Council of State (No. 47, approximately 7700 pages). Also of particular interest are the files of correspondence, consisting of letters received and, in many cases, drafts of letters sent by Prince Damrong. The six sections of correspondence are divided into correspondence with foreigners, correspondence with companies, correspondence with (Thai) persons, correspondence with members of the royal family, correspondence with members of the Buddhist Sangha, and correspondence with associations, each section being arranged in Thai alphabetical order. Among the more substantial files likely to be of interest in the section of correspondence with foreigners (No. 50) are correspondence with Sir Edward Cook (file 84, 40 pages); George Coedès (files 172 and 173, 169 pages); Francis B. Sayre (file 176, 70 pages; see however the remarks above); Eric Seidenfaden (file 182, 43 pages); Reginald LeMay (file 385, 73 pages); and W.A.R. Wood (file 504, 61 pages). The section of correspondence with

(Thai) persons (No. 52) includes files of letters exchanged with Luang Boribal Buriphan (file 194, 121 pages); Chao Phya Mahithon (file 335, 152 pages); Phya Mano (file 340, 18 pages); Phya Anuman Rachathon (file 597, 279 pages); and Phya Indra Montri (F.H. Giles) (file 631, 141 pages). Among notable correspondents in the royal family section (No. 53) are Prince Damrong's daughter Princess Čhongčhitthanom (file 18, 408 pages); King Chulalongkorn (file 29, 26 pages); Prince Dhani (file 73, 234 pages); Prince Naris (file 77, 473 pages); Prince Boriphat (file 83, 162 pages); Prince Purachatra (file 87, 62 pages); King Prajadhipok (file 89, 52 pages); Prince Damrong's daughter Princess Poon Phitsamai (file 126, 58 pages); Prince Bhanurangsi (file 131, 80 pages); King Vajiravudh (file 132, 35 pages); Prince Mahidol (file 134, 30 pages); and King Ananda (file 225, 10 pages).

Other important sections (most notably Nos. 56 and 57) contain drafts and working papers for many of the published works of Prince Damrong, and it would require an extensive knowledge of his writings to identify and evaluate properly all of the various drafts and fragments, and to determine whether significant previously unpublished materials are included in the files.⁴

As a whole the papers of Prince Damrong comprise a valuable source for Thai history, and especially although not exclusively the history of the early twentieth century. It is singularly appropriate that the papers of the man who played such a central role in the process leading to the establishment of the National Library, the National Archives, and similar institutions dedicated to preserving the Thai past should form an important part of the Archives historical records.

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- 4) For a survey of Prince Damrong's published works, as well as some biographical data and an evaluation of his place in Thai letters, see Kennon Breazeale, "A Transition in Historical Writing: The Works of Prince Damrong Rachanuphap", *Journal of the Siam Society*, July 1971, pp. 25-49. There is further discussion of Prince Damrong's work, and alternative approaches to the writing of Thai history, in Craig J. Reynolds, "The Case of K.S.R. Kulap: A Challenge to Royal Historical Writing in Late Nineteenth Century Thailand", *Journal of the Siam Society*, July 1973, pp. 63-90.

In the following list the renderings in English of the names of Thai bodies are in some cases not precisely the English versions used during the period. Also, the estimates of the numbers of pages in each section are only approximate, and in some cases they are considerable underestimates, as the index figures, from which the estimates have been calculated, often exclude certain types of enclosed printed materials from the page totals given for each file of documents.

PAPERS OF PRINCE DAMRONG RACHANUPHAP (National Archives, u. 1.3, Nos. 1-49; u. 1.3 ก. สาส์น, Nos. 50-55; u. 1.3 ข, Nos. 56-57; u. 1.3 ค. No. 58).

- No. 1: Law, 16 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 1000 pp.
- No. 2: Palace Records, 1 file, 7th Reign, 19 pp.
- No. 3: Railways, 6 files, 6th-7th Reigns, 18 pp.
- No. 4: Royal Secretariat, 5 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 300 pp.
- No. 5: Privy Council, 8 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 650 pp.
- No. 6: Reception of Foreign Visitors, 71 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 150 pp.
- No. 7: Royal Decrees, 1 file, 5th-7th Reigns, 109 pp.
- No. 8: Agriculture, 12 files, 5th-7th Reigns, approx. 500 pp.
- No. 9: Royal Decorations, 1 file, 7th Reign, 72 pp.
- No. 10: Prince Damrong's Birthday Celebrations, 12 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 700 pp.
- No. 11: Royal Family Cremations, 14 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 900 pp.
- No. 12: Foreign Relations, 42 files in 3 vols., 5th-8th Reigns, approx. 2800 pp.
- No. 13: Writings of Other People, 43 files in 2 vols., 5th-8th Reigns, approx. 1700 pp.
- No. 14: Gambling Places, 7 files, 1st, 2nd, and 5th Reigns, 27 pp.
- No. 15: Personal Histories, 13 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 150 pp.

- No. 16 : Announcements of Auspicious Ceremonies, 23 files in 3 vols., 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 450 pp.
- No. 17 : Invitations to Cremations, 24 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 450 pp.
- No. 18 : Bills, 16 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 1500 pp.
- No. 19 : Archaeology, 22 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 550 pp.
- No. 20 : Administration of the Buddhist Sangha, 2 files, 7th Reign, 23 pp.
- No. 21 : Lectures, 17 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 1300 pp.
- No. 22 : Announcements of Appointments and Removals from Various Positions, 8 files, 5th-7th Reigns, approx. 150 pp.
- No. 23 : Chronicles, 4 files, 6th Reign, approx. 250 pp.
- No. 24 : Royal Ceremonies, 54 files in 2 vols., 5th-7th Reigns, approx. 1800 pp.
- No. 25 : Miscellaneous (Thai-Chinese Royal Correspondence), 2 files, 1st and 8th Reigns, approx. 600 pp.
- No. 26 : Museums, 13 files, 7th Reign, approx. 100 pp.
- No. 27 : Amorous Songs, 10 files, 5th Reign, approx. 550 pp.
- No. 28 : Interior (Ministry), 33 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 850 pp.
- No. 29 : Inheritances, 9 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 400 pp.
- No. 30 : Justice (Ministry), 2 files, 7th Reign, 74 pp.
- No. 31 : The Royal Academy, 27 files, 7th Reign, approx. 350 pp.
- No. 32 : Schools and Education, 38 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 550 pp.
- No. 33 : Petitions Against Injustices, 24 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 850 pp.
- No. 34 : Boy Scouts and Wild Tiger Corps, 9 files, 7th Reign, approx. 250 pp.
- No. 35 : Religion, 73 files, 3rd-8th Reigns, approx. 1250 pp.
- No. 36 : Thai Red Cross, 17 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 700 pp.
- No. 37 : Financial Commission, 76 files in 3 vols., 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 2200 pp.

- No. 38 : Commission on the Security of the Kingdom, 4 files, 7th Reign, 22 pp.
- No. 39 : Literary Associations, 1 file, 7th-8th Reigns, 176 pp.
- No. 40 : Various Organizations and Associations, 16 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 200 pp.
- No. 41 : Various Printed Materials, 2 files in 2 vols., 6th-9th Reigns, approx. 2150 pp.
- No. 42 : Cabinet, 411 files in 16 vols., 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 11,000 pp.
- No. 43 : Travels Abroad, 15 files in 2 vols., 5th-7th Reigns, approx. 1400 pp.
- No. 44 : Trips to Hua Hin, 13 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 200 pp.
- No. 45 : Royal Library, 12 files, 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 200 pp.
- No. 46 : Northern Provincial Towns, 11 files, 7th Reign, approx. 1050 pp.
- No. 47 : Supreme Council of State, 251 files in 10 vols., 6th-7th Reigns, approx. 7750 pp.
- No. 48 : Public Prosecutor, 3 files, 6th-7th Reigns, 20 pp.
- No. 49 : Miscellaneous, 204 files in 7 vols., 5th-9th Reigns, approx. 5580 pp.
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- No. 50 : Correspondence with Foreigners, 628+40 files in 6 vols., 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 4020 pp.
- No. 51 : Correspondence with Companies, 96 files, 6th-8th Reigns, approx. 560 pp.
- No. 52 : Correspondence with (Thai) Persons, 653+40 files in 6 vols., 5th-8th Reigns, approx. 4525 pp.
- No. 53 : Correspondence with Members of the Royal Family, 254 files in 5 vols., 5th-8th Reigns, approx. 6850 pp.
- No. 54 : Correspondence with Members of the Buddhist Sangha, 97 files, 5th-8th Reigns, approx. 450 pp.
- No. 55 : Correspondence with Associations, 35 files, 5th-7th Reigns, approx. 180 pp.

II. 1.3 7.

- No. 56 : Writings of Prince Damrong. 107 files in 5 vols., 3rd-8th Reigns, approx. 6280 pp.
- No. 57 : Chronicles, 24 files in 3 vols., 7th Reign, approx. 2970 pp.

II. 1.3 8.

- No. 58 : Biographical Material on Prince Damrong, 6 files, 4th, 7th, and 8th Reigns, 195 pp.