

## Thai Word Coining

*An edited speech by H.R.H. Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh at the Siam Society on March 26, 1970*

It is indeed a great honour for me to speak to you after an Annual General Meeting. The efficient Chairman of the Programme Committee told me that I would draw a big crowd to the meeting. What he meant, of course, was that I would be assured of a good audience. I do not need such an assurance, for I am always ready to serve our Society and I am all the more ready to do so as he suggested to me the subject of Thai Word Coining, which is dear to my heart. In fact, I wrote an article on the same subject for the Phya Anuman Memorial number of the Journal. As, unfortunately, it has not yet appeared, I shall have to cover the same ground here and then add some examples of my coinages.

I came back to Thailand from Europe in 1919 when word coining was coming into vogue, due mainly to the necessity of establishing a Thai version of the Civil and Commercial Code after the English draft of each Book was ready.

Even before that, however, owing to Thailand's entry into World War I, King Vajiravudh felt the necessity of coining some words such as *seriphap haeng thale* for 'Freedom of the Sea'.

To coin a word is to put it into circulation with a stamp of authority—State authority in the case of legal terms in the Codes or laws or terms determined by the Royal Institute, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Defense, etc., and personal authority as in the case of scholars such as King Vajiravudh. But, however high an authority may be, a coinage will not gain permanent currency unless it has the sanction of the genius of the language.

Of course, criticism is inevitable and corners of words must be prepared to face critics.

With regard to the word *seriphap*, the critics, including the late Prince Budyalongkorn, a son-in-law of my father, pointed out that, in Pali, it meant 'self-will', 'independence' and that *seri* meant 'libertine'. The late Prince Devawongse, who was a good Pali scholar, told me that in a Pali blessing upon my father, King Mongkut used the word *Seri*, enjoining upon him to be free and independent and, of course, not to be a libertine. The late Prince Patriarch agreed, and our family wholeheartedly supported the word *seriphap*, which gained permanent currency through the Change of Regime in 1932. The lesson to be drawn in this connection is that connotations change with place and time and we can attach our own connotation to a new coinage, while what counts is the denotation of a word.

Another coinage of King Vajiravudh at the time was very instructive to me. It was the rendering into Thai of the designation 'United States of America'. The late Prince Budyalongkorn wanted a word for 'cooperative' and asked the late Prince Patriarch whether *sahakan* (*sahakar*) would do. The latter suggested that it would be better to say *sahakon* (*sahakarana*), which was adopted and is now permanently used.

Now for the 'United States of America', the late Prince Bismalok used *prathet ruam haeng amerika* 'Combined Country of America'. It is a simple rendering, easily understood but not accurate. King Vajiravudh came out with *sahakonrat amerika*, which in a scholarly way, should be pronounced *sahakarana-rat amerika*, obviously with too many unaccented syllables. The late Prince Patriarch, therefore, used *sahakar-rat amerika* which King Vajiravudh capped by using *sahapalirat amerika* 'Co-Governing States of America', satisfactory both from the point of view of meaning and sound.

There was a desire later, however, to have only three letters for the initials U.S.A. So the name is now *sahurat amerika*, with the abbreviation S.R.A. for U.S.A.

The lesson to be drawn here, and it is very important lesson, is that the rhythm of the word coined must conform to that required by the genius of the language.

My first experience in coming a Thai word was when I had to find a word for 'reparation'. I came back with the text of the Treaty of Versailles and, on joining the Foreign Office, I was given peace treaty questions to deal with.

Of course, we have a Thai combined word for 'reparation'—*kan Tham hai Khan En*, but it is very long and awkward when used as an adjective in the phrase Reparation Claim or Reparation Commission.

Now I had learned German by the philological method and the tutor told me that the Teutons, after their capture of Rome, took over Roman Civilization and, for abstract terms, transposed Latin words into German form. He then taught me the German prefixes and a few roots so that I could form words and see for myself, for example, *einschreiben*—inscribe, *beschreiben*—describe, *unterzeichnen*—subscribe, *anschreiben*—scribe, etc.

So I made an experiment. I knew that Pali and Sanskrit belonged to the same family of languages as Greek and Latin. I found out that the equivalent in Pali of the Latin prefix *re-* is *pati-* and not knowing one word of Pali at the time, I got hold of Childer's Pali-English Dictionary and looked up words with the prefix *pati*, after a few words, came *patikammam*—'repairs', 'redress', 'atonement'.

I adopted it in a draft which I submitted to my chief, the late Prince Devawongse, who was a good Pali scholar. He, in turn, adopted it, asking me how I came across it. He was very interested in my explanation and taught me that in Thai we can mix Pali and Sanskrit together, so I need not write *patikamm* in Pali fashion but could write *patikarm*, half Pali, half Sanskrit.

I was in touch with the late Prince Nagor Svarga who was Chairman of the Code Translation Committee, too. We had a Red Cross conference here in Bangkok and he wanted a word for Red Cross Policy. At a time, we only had a word for State Policy which, as used by

the Prince Patriarch, was *rattaphipalanobut*—'expedient in maintaining the State' and, as used by King Vajiravudh, was *rattaprasasanobut*—'expedient in administering the State'. Both were too long, and confined to State policy. So I suggested *nayobut*—'expedient in conducting affairs', which was adopted by the Prince but did not become widespread until the Change of Regime in 1932 when questions of policy came to be discussed and the word *nayobut* gained a wide and permanent currency.

It was at that time, too, that I became active in coining words. I saw that what was happening was not just a change of government but a fundamental change in the way of life of the Thai people: it was, in fact, a revolution like the French Revolution, and I wanted to explain all that to the Thai people. So I started a newspaper the *prachachat*—'nation' and I was at once confronted with the necessity of coining new words, because, in order to get to the people and get at the people, we cannot use English words, which have not penetrated into our system of thought. If we can get hold of a Thai word, all the better, but if we can't, we can have recourse to Pali and Sanskrit words which have come into our language. May be only the monks will understand at first but the reading public will soon understand from the context in which the new coinage is used.

I have talked above of a change of regime. For regime, I took three Thai words and made their meanings precise: *rabiap*—'order', *rabop*—'system', *rabop*—'regime', and they are now used with those meanings.

For 'revolution', we have a Thai combined word *kan phluk phuendin*—'overturing the earth', which obviously cannot be used for industrial revolution or revolution in the sense of a fundamental change in the way of life. So I coined the word *pativat* on the same principle as the word *patikarm*, and it is now permanently adopted.

I also indicated a milder form of change, that of reform, for which I proposed *patirup*. I was sharply attacked on the ground that *patirup* in Pali means 'counterfeit'. But I had no difficulty in pointing out that *patirupakari* is not a 'counterfeiter' but 'a person who sets things right'. It is a matter of connotation and we can attribute a good or bad connotation to a

word when we introduce it into the language. *patirup* is now used for reform.

There is the word 'evolution', too. I came out with *wiwattanakan* too soon. It is a simple word, already in use, and so has been taken up quickly, but its meaning is not so accurate, because it implies growth and not just unfolding: *wiwattamakan* would be better, but it is not worth while to change it now.

Even wrong words have to be tolerated when they have gained widespread public currency. Take the word *attanomat*, which means one's own opinion. It is now currently used as meaning automatic, on account of the similarity of the sound. I have a scholarly coinage to offer: *attanowat*—'self-proceeding', but I do not dare to compete with *attanomat* at the moment.

The imitation of the sound of the English word is not always successful. The Assentible Committee accepted all my coinages of treaty terms except the word *phuwah* for power. We now say *amnat* for 'power' but States are equal in international law and have no *amnat* or power to order other States. So I submitted *phuwah*, which was rejected because it did not sound smoothly.

The sound and rhythm of the word are most important. For culture I at first used the Sanskrit form of *phrutthitham*, which was rather heavy and even I myself was not satisfied with it. Then one day, as I was writing an article, the Pali form of *wattamatham* came to me and I knew that it would catch on and it did.

I coined and standardized treaty terms because diplomacy was my profession and I knew the implications of the terms used. I have written a booklet explaining their precise meanings and there have been many reprints of it.

I should like here to give you a few examples of my coinages concerning treaties.

First of all, we have *sanya* for 'contract' in the Civil and Commercial Code and we had better keep it so.

Then we have *nangsue sanya* for 'treaties' with a small 't' in the Constitution. Technically, these are known as compacts or international engagements.

These international engagements are classified as follows:

- 1) 'Treaty' with a capital 'T', formal compact of the greatest importance, such as

Treaty of Friendship, Commerce or Navigation. My coinage of *sandhisanya* has been adopted. I have added the Pali word *sandhi* for 'Agreement' to the old word *sanya*.

- a. 'covenant', a solemn treaty, such as Covenant of the League of Nations. The late Prince Devawongse coined the word *katika* for it.
- b. 'Pact', a similar treaty. I coined *katikasanya* for this.
- c. 'Charter', solemn Act, such as Charter of the United Nations. I took the word *katbat* from the Thai term *katbat kotmat*.

- 2) 'Convention', formal compact of importance. The late Prince Devawongse coined the word *ana-sanya*.

- 3) 'Declaration', defining rules of international law. The late Prince Devawongse coined *pannisa*.

- 4) 'Agreement'—*khwam tuklong*, 'arrangement'—*khua toklong*. I have standardized these terms as well as the following:

- 5) 'Protocol'—*phuthisan*.
- 6) 'Exchange of Notes'—*kan laekplian nangyue*.
- 7) 'Final Act'—*kammasamn sutthai*.
- 8) 'General Act'—*kammasan thapatt*.
- 9) *Modus Vivendi*—I have kept the Latin term as being a purely technical term, intended for technicians and not for the general public.

Scholars who appreciate the precision of terms have suggested that I compile a dictionary, coining words as I go along, but I have refused because that is not the correct method. Raghu Vira has compiled an English-Hindi Dictionary, but even the late Jawaharlal Nehru admitted that the new coinages could not be expected to be used all at once. Indeed, coining words cannot be done at the will of the coiner, the coinage must have not only the meaning required but must lend itself to uses required in various contexts and must have a form acceptable to the genius of the language. It took me fourteen years to coin *upasang*—'demand', *upathun*—'supply' in economics.

The correct method is, I think, the one at present adopted, namely that those concerned

with the use of terms in a particular subject should get together and draw up their proposed equivalents in the Thai language and then submit them to the Royal Institute for review. The Royal Institute has a Standing Committee of language experts who, together with the representatives of those concerned, will determine the final version and publish it in its name. In this way, the technical terms used in a profession or branch of knowledge will be standardized and the Thai language, as a whole,

will thereby be enriched.

That is our aim and object and I am very happy to take part in these cooperative efforts to that end.

Of course, my personal coinages still continue, as requests come to me, for one of my most pleasant experiences some years back was to see the word *horikan* ('service') on a sign put up in a small village on the way to Bangsaen. The instantaneous success of *horikan* came as a very pleasant surprise to me.