



## KING MONGKUT

**Dr O. Frankfurter**  
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Dr Oscar Frankfurter was President of the Siam Society from 1906–1918. He was present at the inaugural meeting of the Society in 1904 and was its first Honorary Secretary. Oscar Frankfurter was born on 23 February 1852 and educated at the Universities of Gottingen and Berlin. He joined the Siamese Government Service in 1884 and was employed in various capacities, notably as interpreter at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, until he was appointed Chief Librarian of the National Library in 1905. He wrote three chapters, on history, language, and religion for *The Kingdom of Siam 1904*, edited by A. Cecil Carter, reprinted by the Siam Society in 1988. He also translated Luang Prasert's Chronicle of Ayudhya for the *JSS* which was reprinted for the Society's Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative publication in 1954. It is appropriate that Frankfurter's article on King Mongkut should be reprinted in the year in which the bicentenary of the King's birth and the centenary of the Society are celebrated. The article is remarkable for its comprehensive account of the Fourth Reign, which remains valid a hundred years after it was first written for its approach, analysis and understanding of the forces and factors which shaped the reign.

Tej Bunnag

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1804, the King known in history as King Mongkut was born of Somdet Phra Buddha Löt La and Somdet Phra Sri Suriyendramat. His father, who held at that time the position of Chao Fa Krom Luang Isara Sunthon, was born in 1765, being the son of the founder of the Chakri dynasty, Somdet Chao Phya Mahakrasatriya Suk, afterwards known as Somdet Phra Buddha Yot Fa. Ayuthia had been destroyed by the Burmans and the capital established in 1767 on the left bank of the Menam Chao Phya at Dhanaburi by Khun Luang Tak. To his energy Siam owed her renewed existence as a political entity. Khun Luang Tak reigned for 15 years in Bangkok, Dhanaburi, but became demented and was deposed, and in 1782 Somdet Chao Phya Maha Krasatriya Suk by the will of the nobles and people was raised to the Royal Throne. As King he continued the work which he had commenced in the reign of Khun Luang Tak as his chief adviser and general.



These were troublesome times in Europe. The chief colonial Powers were engaged in warfare, and Siam, free from outward political influence, was enabled to shape its own destiny, and when after a reign of 26 years Somdet Phra Buddha Yot Fa died in 1809, his son Phra Buddha Löt La succeeded him on the throne, which he occupied up to 1824. His name will always be remembered as that of one of the best, perhaps the very best Siamese poet, and we shall not be very far wrong, if we ascribe the forcible and plain language used by King Mongkut to the influence of his father. Also during his reign Siam was free from outward troubles. The political relations which existed for centuries with Portugal were renewed; and in his time the Viceroy of India sent an embassy under Crawford to enter into relations with Siam. That this embassy led to nothing was perhaps due to the negotiator, who can scarcely have been considered successful in his relations with Annam: but regard must also be had to the time in which the embassy fell and to the instructions he received in relation to the internal policy of Siam. Phra Buddha Löt La died in 1824. The part which Chao Fa Mongkut played during the reign of his father was necessarily little conspicuous: but it is curious to note that the first event related in his life, after the bathing ceremony was performed (1812) and before even the hair-cutting ceremony, was that he was sent with his uncle Somdet Chao Fa Krom Luang Phitaks Montri to receive the Peguans who had taken refuge in Siam and who settled afterwards in Prathumthani and Nonthaburi. More conspicuous throughout the reign of Phra Buddha Löt La was his eldest son Krom Mün Chesdabodindr born in 1787. It was due to him that a conspiracy which broke out on the accession of Somdet Phra Chao Löt La was suppressed. It was he who during the whole reign of his father had charge of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

After the Napoleonic wars were over the attention of Europe was once more directed to the East. In 1819 the first war between Burma and Great Britain broke out: Burma, the hereditary foe of Siam, was defeated and had to buy peace by ceding a province, and was thus practically excluded from the seashore. It was clear that another factor had arisen in Far Eastern Asiatic politics; that China was no longer the paramount power, a position which she tried to maintain and to usurp. This was clearer yet when in 1824 a treaty was made between Great Britain and the Netherlands defining, as it would be called now, their spheres of influence, and possessions in the Far East. The responsible statesmen of Siam recognized this fact, and we shall not at this distance of time be far wrong if we partly attribute the election of Krom Mün Chesdabodindr as King of Siam in preference to Chao Fa Mongkut thereto.

The Prince Chao Fa Mongkut was only twenty years of age and had just entered the priesthood when his father died. It was necessary that a strong experienced hand should be at the head of affairs; and such a one undoubtedly Krom Mün Chesdabodindr was. He had gained experience in Government work



under his father: he was first to again recognize the fact that the system of isolation could no longer be maintained, and thus we find that under his reign the Burney treaty with Great Britain was concluded in 1826.

Chao Fa Mongkut remained in the priesthood during the whole reign of Phra Nang Klao, the name by which Krom Mün Chesdabodindr is known in history. New ideas were brought to him: formerly surrounded by the strictest Court etiquette, he was now brought into contact with that most democratic institution the Buddhist priesthood. Averse to caste and recognizing no other merit than that brought about by one's own deeds, the receptive youth laid here the foundation of the principles by which he was guided when he was called to the Throne. King and Royalty were no longer for him exalted beings; all were the servants of the State; all were to be considered by the acts they had done and by the fruit of these acts, in strict agreement with the tenets of Buddhism. His life in the priesthood also showed him the necessity of education. The policy of self-sufficiency and isolation were for him things of the past, and when he was called to the Throne he put into practice, first and foremost amongst the Royal Family, what he had learnt in unrestrained intercourse with others, that the basis of the State lies in education, and that only by education could those who were called upon to govern influence the governed classes. He recognized that if Siam wanted to take a place amongst the world nations, it could only do so by adapting its own institutions to those of other nations and especially those of the western world. In the priesthood he likewise found a field for his energy.

During the troublesome time following the conquest of Ayuthia by the Burmans the doctrine and practice of Buddhism had lost much of its pristine purity, and Khun Luang Tak especially during the last years of his reign tried to interfere with it. It was no doubt also one of the reasons for his deposition that he claimed control over the priests and claimed in regard to them for himself a position to which he was not entitled. Learned priests there have always been in Siam: whilst at no time priests were allowed to interfere in worldly affairs or control them. As long as they were in the priesthood, any interference of the temporal authorities in the ecclesiastical Government was resented. The Chakkri dynasty as soon as it came to the throne showed by its enactment its endeavours for the purity of the doctrine: it is known that deputations had previously been sent from Ceylon to Ayuthia to get from Siam the Buddhist ordinances as it was rightly considered that the doctrine was there preserved in its purest form as Siam was free from outward influence. One of the first acts of Phra Yot Fa was the convocation of a council for the recension of the Tipitaka and the building of a special hall in the Wat Phra Keo to preserve it – the Ho Phra Samud Mandira Dharma. Chao Fa Mongkut when he entered the priesthood took his duties in full earnest and during the whole time he was in it, up to the time he was called to the throne, he studied the tenets of Buddhism. By his own work he influenced the doings of others. He was the

spiritual adviser of all who came to see him. He followed in all respects the precepts of the Vinaya and in his numerous pilgrimages, he always travelled on foot, without any large retinue. He was accessible to all and what he had practiced in the priesthood, he practiced also when he was called to the throne. Whilst in the priesthood he became the founder of the Dhammayut sect, and it is curious to note that whilst it was more orthodox in going back to the original precepts of Buddhism, it was in fact more liberal. *Unitas, Charitas, Libertas* were the governing rules of this sect. Whilst in the priesthood he acquired by personal intercourse with the followers of other creeds and with missionaries an insight into foreign creeds, and it was perhaps due thereto that when the treaties with foreign powers were made the principle of perfect toleration and liberty of conscience was once more embodied in them. The leisure he had in the priesthood he employed in historical and linguistic studies. The numerous little edicts on grammatical questions, on archaeological matters, etc. which were issued during his reign although signed by others were due to his initiative, and to him was due the publication of the *Phongsavadan* by Somdet Phra Boromanuchit, which gives the history of Siam in a concise form from the year 1350 up to the destruction of Ayuthia. From his own hand we have an English grammar and the brief *Notices of the History of Siam* written in English, and further numerous notices on obscure points of ancient history, archaeology and tradition, which in any serious study cannot be neglected. The time he spent in the priesthood showed him the need of Siam for further development, as in his position, free from political restraint, he could judge for himself by his intercourse with persons of other nationalities. It was therefore natural that during the last years of the reign of Phra Nang Klao he was consulted by what might be considered the young Siam political party. The Burmese war had shown that the East could no longer shape its policy independently from the rest of the world. China, which for years had been considered by the countries of the Far East as their natural protector and master, had failed in its policy of isolation and had to admit for trade and intercourse representatives of the West. It is of course unnecessary to enquire whether the special causes which led to the so-called opium war with China could be justified: the war must be considered from a historical standpoint, as one to break down the impossible policy of isolation.

The attempts of foreign nations to establish intercourse with Siam had not at that time led to any appreciable result. The attitude of Siam might be considered a passive one: it was not adverse to intercourse, but on the other hand it certainly did nothing to encourage it. The early treaty negotiated by Capt. Burney, whilst establishing relations, could not lead to any result, as the trade privileges given to China made competition impossible and the rules under which trade had to be carried on, were partly vexatious owing to the numerous monopolies. The treaty therefore remained a dead letter. The mission of Sir James Brooke fell at a very

inopportune time, and probable the Raja, who had carried all before him in other parts of the East, did not in his dealings with Siam show sufficient tact. Nor can the attempt made by the United States to enter into treaty relations be considered serious. The Plenipotentiary sent was not a persona grata, The foreign relations were thus practically at a standstill under Phra Nang Klao. At the end of the reign numerous monopolies had been established and vexatious restraint had been put on internal trade.

Phra Nang Klao died in 1851, and as no provision could be made by him to appoint a successor the choice of the Ministers naturally fell on the eldest son of Phra Buddha Löt La, the Chao Fa Mongkut, to succeed him. Great was the joy of the people when the announcement of the election of King Mongkut became known: flowers were brought to him from all and sundry: it was felt instinctively that the Prince Priest would as King take an interest in the welfare of his people as he had done when he was in the priesthood. There were few foreigners at the time of the accession of King Mongkut in Bangkok: but from the few records left, we can see that his accession was hailed with universal satisfaction. Great things were expected from the King and it is not too much to say that, without outward pressure, these expectations were fulfilled. It is known that in the Burney treaty, 1826, a heavy measurement duty was levied on ships in lieu of customs duties: that the export of rice was forbidden, that is to say only if a three years supply of grain was in the country permit for export was granted, just as was the case in Burma: that teak could not be exported and the import of opium was made a crime. There were besides numerous monopolies: the rights which the people enjoyed in former times regarding rights on fisheries were, owing to religious scruples, curtailed in the reign of Phra Nang Klao. By a proclamation issued in the commencement of the year 1852 all this was altered. The measurement duty was reduced; opium was made a monopoly; fishery taxes, and therewith the right of the people to trade, were again introduced. This proclamation is the more curious as certainly a great deal of opposition was made by Chinese and others in whose hands the trade was. The population of Siam is mainly agricultural and the feudal system militated against the people engaging in trade: therefore opposition to this measure was even to be expected from those who, as the future has shown, were benefited by it.

The next step was to embody in Treaties the principles by which the intercourse with foreigners would be regulated. By these treaties Siam is governed today in its relations with foreign powers, and it is no mean praise to the statesmanship of the negotiators that they are workable even now after nearly fifty years. One might have wished that certain distinctions had been drawn with regard to the extraterritorial rights. It is of course easy to criticize: but we should never forget the conditions prevailing at the time. Steamship navigation was, as far as Siam is concerned, in its infancy. The sailing-boats which came to Bangkok in the monsoon were at the same time traders. There arrived in 1850, 332 vessels

carrying 937,300 piculs to the value of £541,375. Of these vessels only two with a capacity of 10,400 piculs belonged to English merchants, and two with a capacity of 8,000 piculs to American merchants. We can thus not wonder that in the penal clause of the Treaties the ship was made responsible for a breach of customs regulation. The 3 per cent import duty levied since that time also appears inadequate as regards present conditions: but it was the duty levied on produce coming from China: and China held in the estimation of the Government in former times a high rank. It is known that from olden times foreigners in Siam were allowed to live according to their own laws and customs: but the persons administering these laws were appointed by the King. Thus we find in the Treaty made at Louvo on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 1685 that “cases amongst the Christian converts shall be adjudged by a mandarin specially designated for the purpose.” We find amongst the officials of the Ministry for Finance, which had charge of foreign affairs, the Krom Tha Sai and the Krom Ta Khwa as having charge of foreign settlers in Siam: when the Treaties were made the European powers had scarcely any colonies from which immigrants came to Siam. It could not enter the mind of the negotiators that persons whose religions, laws and customs were similar to those of Siam should be exempt from the jurisdiction of Siam and liable to alien laws.

But whilst the Treaties were thus made by the officials, the statesmanship of the King was shown in the personal relations on which he entered with the negotiators, Sir John Bowring, Charles de Montigny, and others. Throughout his reign we find thus, if we may say so, a democratic trait in all negotiations. He was not averse to making known his views by publication, and in his reign the Official Gazette was first issued. It was the communication “of the King to the nobles and people regarding Government affairs, in order that they may conform to them.” Whilst he could not all at once break down the official etiquette existing in all countries of the Far East, he, in his personal intercourse, made himself free from it; he willingly fell in with the claims of the French Treaty regarding the help and facilities to be given to savants: he had, whilst in the priesthood, seen what a mine of knowledge remained unexplored, and whatever books were published in his reign were due to his initiation or even issued with his help. The records of foreign travellers written in his time amply bear witness. His own language was always forcible and to the point; he was averse to squeamishness. He knew, of course, Pali well: but he deprecated the use of Pali words when a Siamese conveyed the same meaning, and when only to show over-learnedness such Pali word was used. He hoped that the users of such words would become bald; and he characterized the whole tendency with the expressive word Uttari (supernatural), and it is known that to pretend to supernatural knowledge is considered in the Buddhist commandment a deadly sin.

The life he led in the priesthood naturally affected the King's ideas of his kingly office. The King did not feel himself a being apart from others: more demo-



cratic notions prevailed. It is known that according to Chinese and Indian notions and customs the sanctity of the King is so great that he cannot be seen by profane eyes. The different questions connected with the audience of foreigners in the Far East have all their origin in these notions. When the King showed himself in the street, the people had to go out of his way: they were driven away by attendants: they had to keep their houses and shops closed and one of the first laws renewed when the present dynasty came to the throne was one having reference thereto. It is related in old books that when at the ploughing ceremony the representative of the King came in procession, the people had to have their shops and stalls closed, as otherwise the mock King would confiscate the things thus exposed for sale. De Vliet relates that in his time the noble vested with this authority got about three catties, a sum which of course represented a much higher value than at the present time. In the proclamation having reference to this question the King relates that in the reign of his father, a woman who intended looking at the King's procession was hit in the eye by an arrow shot by one of the lictors. Being informed of it the King at once had enquiries made and compensation paid to her. There was no safety, King Mongkut went on to say, for the King in the people hiding themselves from him. He would like to see his people so that he might have a chance of addressing them and meet those with whom he was acquainted. The old law was therefore repealed: the householders themselves were made responsible for the good order in the street and they were told to make obeisance to the King every one according to the custom of his nation. Like in other proclamations he showed himself the educator of his people, and thus had sown the seed which gave to the people consciousness of themselves.

The new laws and customs he had introduced were, of course, made necessary through altered conditions, but that he recognized these new conditions at once shows his wisdom. The number of persons from foreign countries were few, and the only foreigners who came in great numbers were the Chinese, related both by race and language. Malloch mentions that between 1840–1850 the immigration of Chinese was at the rate of 15,000 annually, and this rate has been constantly increasing, whilst in the time of Phra Narai there were 3,000 settled permanently. Of other nations we find mostly those who took refuge in Siam to escape persecution in their own country. Here they found liberty of religious belief and soon formed part of the people with whom they easily intermarried, just as the prisoners of war did who had been brought to Siam in former years.

A new condition of things had arisen with the Treaties. It became necessary to provide for the new wants. The existing coins were not sufficient, now that foreigners wanted to buy the products of the country. The merchants had on their part to create a demand for the products of other countries: for the monopolies had this time really ceased, and it is curious how the wants of the population gradually changed and adapted themselves to the new conditions of things.



The original money tokens were cowries; of silver money we find the bullet or rather shell-shaped ticals and it does appear that in previous reigns the smaller coinage was regularly issued. In the commencement of the reign we find bullet-shaped silver pieces of Ticals 2 and Tical 1 and a salüng and a füang. This was gradually replaced by the flat coinage consisting of pieces of Ticals 2, Tical 1, 1/2 Tical and 1/4 Tical and a bronze coinage. It is interesting to note the attempt made to establish this coinage and do away with cowries. Eight hundred cowries were worth one füang, which would appear to have been the silver coin in general use, although smaller bullet-shaped silver coins are met with. It is said that a woman could buy her provisions in the market with 50 cowries, so that it became necessary to make the smallest coins issued of that value. This was the solot (Pali, solasa) i.e. one sixteenth of a füang: its double was the att (attha) one eighth of a füang. Solots of the King's reign can scarcely be found: they were locally manufactured: but the metal used was so base that edicts had to be issued forbidding their being counted on hard boards. In the beginning of the reign edicts had also to be issued that foreign coins should and could be accepted: still people were unwilling to take them and Mexican dollars had to be stamped with the Royal Arms to give them currency. To this scarcity of coins was perhaps due the provision of the Treaty that \$3 Mex. should be accepted as Ticals 5 and other foreign coins as the rupee and guilder in proportion.

To remove the scarcity of money, gold coins were issued—the thot (dasa), phit (visati) and phatdung (batimsa) 10, 20 and 32. The names indicated that 10, 20 or 32 of them were equal to one catty (80 ticals), and consequently the thot was equal at that time to one pound sterling. These gold sovereigns did not, it seems, meet with much approval, which after this length of time one may regret, as certainly it would have done away with the ever-present question of exchange.

Other provisions of the Treaty had also to be made known to the people. This was above all the case in regard to the new law adopted in allowing the export of rice. The permission to export rice was justified by stating that the money to be derived from the export duty would be used for road-making, but that everyone was at liberty to refuse selling paddy if he apprehended scarcity, and that, moreover, if a scarcity was to be apprehended the export of rice would be prohibited. This measure was, as is known, resorted to several times in the reign of King Mongkut; experience has shown that the prohibition of the export of rice in years of dearth is no remedy, and this measure has in more modern times not been resorted to.

It has been often made a reproach that the chief export of Siam is rice: but perhaps it is well to remember that the country is best adapted for its cultivation, that it is the best-paying article inasmuch as complete failures of the crop never occur. It is the staple food of the country: but it never formed a monopoly, and as soon as its export was allowed the cultivation of other articles was given up. Of

other tropical products sugar has been cultivated in Siam only since the end of the eighteenth century, whilst tobacco has only been grown since the beginning of last century. Furthermore the feudal system and monopolies prevented people from cultivating other products: for pepper, for instance, the grower was paid 8 ticals per picul, and it was sold by the Government for 12 ticals. Cardamons, ivory, gamboge, turtle eggs, agila and sapanwood were some of the monopolies. All these monopolies were given up during the reign of King Mongkut but the rules by which taxes had to be paid in kind were only abolished during the present reign, when for all kinds of "suai," contributions in kind, the tax of "Kha Rajakan" was substituted.

It was also due to the feudal system and in execution of the clauses of the Treaty, which permitted foreigners to take into their service Siamese in every capacity whatsoever, that the King issued proclamations allowing and explaining to his people the rules by which they were allowed to take service, that he pointed out to them the benefit they might derive therefrom, and how they ought to take service. It is, however, unfortunately also true that this feudal system led to the insertion of the clauses of the Treaty which were onerous and impracticable, as to rights of servants in the employ of the foreigners. We may also ascribe to this system the clauses in the Treaty regarding the settlement of cases between foreigners and Siamese, a clause which has now become a dead letter.

It is known that in 1808 under the reign of Phra Buddha Yot Fa the laws as they were then existing had been collected and according to them justice was administered. Modifications had been made to them in previous reigns and it was especially in the reign of Phra Nang Klao that by a curious application of the Law of Redemption most of the barbarous punishments as they were laid down in the statute books were abolished. The reign of King Mongkut might be considered as regards legislation also a personal one, inasmuch as most of the new enactments were due to his initiative.

It is recorded that the King came out every Wan Phra to receive the petitions of the people, a right which in some form or the other the people enjoyed from olden times. The King examined the petition himself: he formed his opinion on the justice of the claims: the proverbial delays of the law were abolished by stringent regulations couched in strong, cutting and incisive language: he pronounced in Siam the maxim that all were equal before the law and the judges were instructed to take all cases into consideration: he broke down the assumed or real privileges of the nobles and princes to give refuge to runaway evil-doers, and to him Siam owes the first steps made for the abolishment of slavery.

The old law regarding slavery is based, as is well known, on the Indian law which allowed the money master to refuse the redemption money tendered to him by the slave at harvest time and at other times when his labour might be wanted. This was based on the maxim that the slave was created for work just as the fruit of the field was for consumption. In a special case brought before him the King laid



down the law that money tendered for redemption must at once be accepted, and the judges who assisted the money master in evading the law were made liable to severe punishment.

The status of women was also raised by him. A petition was handed in by one Amdeng Chan stating that, without her knowledge, her name had been inserted in a slave paper by her husband. The King ordered the law books to be searched about the rights of the husband over his wife. The law was clear that the husband had such a right. This led the King to make the characteristic remark that in such a case only the male was a human being, the female a beast of the field, and he had the law so amended that for the intended sale of the wife by her husband the consent of his wife was necessary. In the same enactment the right of the parents to sell their children was limited to the time before they had reached the age of fifteen, and he had other opportunities of showing his sense of equity.

In amending the old law of abduction the King also raised the status of women. A woman, one Amdeng Hnu, had presented a petition to the King, in which she set forth that her parents wanted to compel her to marry a man, although she was in love with another man with whom she had had intercourse. She gave in the petition all necessary details of the harsh treatment she had had undergone and the King ordered that if the facts were as related, she should be given to the husband she loved. The husband, however, had to ask for pardon and had to pay compensation to the parents. In the decision on the case the King goes on say: "It appears that the parents sell their daughter 'as if she were to enter a mousetrap.' If this is the case let it be laid down the parents are not owners of their children in the same way as the owners of the cattle and elephants may put a price on them and sell them: or like the money master who has a slave with a fixed value and may sell him for such fixed value. If the parents are in distress, so that they are obliged to sell their children, they may only do so if the children agree, or if the children only agree to be responsible for a part of the indebtedness they can only be sold for such a price." The old law to the contrary was abolished.

Amongst other laws which show a new departure, mention must be made of those affecting the priesthood. He reminded them, and laymen, of their duties as members of the Buddhist community. As in all things, the King does not mince matters: he calls a spade, a spade: he plainly shows what abuses have crept into the practice of the priesthood: he says that many only enter the priesthood to lead an idle life: he does not wish the priest to become the laughing stock of earnest people: he forbids the introduction in the ceremony of extraneous matters of a frivolous character apt to lead to profanity. He makes the laymen responsible for the misdoings of the priest, inasmuch as he makes them liable to punishment, if they, knowing and seeing abuses, do not inform the ecclesiastical authorities thereof.

The King recognized the baneful influences gambling, opium smoking and drinking had on his people. Sir John Bowring informs us in his diary how much he



regretted that he could not comply with the wish of the King to have provisions inserted in the Treaty restricting the import of spirits. The King, as is well known, tried in the Treaty with France in 1857 to make some provision regulating the import of spirits: and we may take as proof the wording of article XX of the French Treaty of 1857 stating "that Frenchmen were at liberty to trade in all merchandise, which upon the signature of the present Treaty shall not be the object of a formal prohibition or special monopoly." Both opium and spirits were at that time special monopolies: and whilst in the English Treaty provisions were made only as regards the trade in opium, the King hoped that also spirits might in the French Treaty be included in "trade liable to special restriction." It is well known that only in the Treaties made with all foreign powers in 1883, during the present reign, the abuses of the spirit trade were remedied.

How keenly the King felt the evil influence of opium on his people is also shown by the fact that he ordered that those of his Siamese subjects who smoked opium should wear the Chinese queue and dress, and should be liable to pay the Chinese poll tall, a tax which, apparently at that time, carried in the way it was levied contempt with it.

Already in previous reigns the time for which people had to lend their service, as an outcome of the feudal system, to the state, had been reduced: and under King Mongkut they were no longer called upon to perform work which might be done by paid labour, as part of the work they owed to Government. Thus the waterways constructed during the reign were made by free labour, and these waterways were numerous, and their planning shows a true understanding of the wants of the country.

Whilst the King altered many of the customs in a democratic sense he showed to the nobles he created his solicitude. One of the most significant and imposing ceremonies is the drinking of the water of allegiance. Nobles and people pledge in it their faith to the King. In former days the King himself did not take part in it. Under the King Mongkut this was changed, and whilst the princes, nobles and people pledged their faith to the King, the King pledged his to them. He also gave to his nobles and the chiefs of the outlying provinces and territories titles appropriate to their rank, and whilst allowing them in the territories under their care liberty of action with regard to local matters, he took care that the general laws of the kingdom were respected, especially those which were made necessary by the new conditions.

Most characteristic as showing the way in which the King considered his position, is a proclamation he issued when about to start on a journey to the provinces. He left the care of the State to his brother Somdet Phra Pin Klao, who was enjoined to consult with the King's brothers and sons and with the nobles on all matters affecting Government. For every possible contingency provisions were made, and he was especially anxious that his absence from the capital should not

be made the pretext of delaying pending law cases or claims made by either his own subjects or by persons under foreign jurisdiction. He gave also instruction what should be done about ratifying the Treaties with Denmark and the Hanseatic Republics. As to his own position he goes on to say: "if one of the officials or one of the people should complain against the King of Siam, let such complaints be accepted: let orders under the seal of the Rajawong Powar Sthan be issued to all Ministers and the Lady officials inside the palace, let them give evidence about the case and let judgment be given. If such evidence is not sufficient or not clear, let a letter be addressed to us as King and we will reply according to truth."

The reign of 17 years was thus filled. He found in his reign time for everything, and certainly not the least remarkable part in it was that, besides entering into treaty relations with the countries of West, he sent to them on various occasions Ambassadors to help on these relations. He appointed Consuls in the chief commercial cities to watch over commercial interests, and by taking a conspicuous part in the Paris Exhibition of 1867 he drew the attention of commerce to the possibilities of Siam as a trading centre. Nothing affecting affairs of state or private individuals escaped him: that he was a true friend is shown by his private correspondence with foreigners, as far as it has been made public: whether this publication was always made with tact and discretion, or whether it did not partly at least constitute a breach of confidence, we have no business to enquire. In his outbreaks of temper, in his cutting remarks and witty sayings he showed himself a man.

He died, as is known, after having invited many foreign savants to Wua Wan to witness the total eclipse of the sun which took place on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1868.

He came back from this trip suffering from jungle fever. The King never doubted that he would die and his last thoughts were for the welfare of his Kingdom. We have the deathbed scene described to us by his faithful attendant Chao Phya Mahindr. To show that he was perfectly conscious he conversed in English, he read the famous stanzas on death in Pali he had composed, and according to the testimony of Phya Sri Sunthon Voharn they were faultlessly written. He gave instructions, or to speak more correctly, he made known his wishes as to the future of the kingdom: and these were carried out and Siam entered on the new reign prosperous. He died, as he wished it should happen, on his birthday on the full moon day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month.

Certainly it is early and would be premature to give a final judgment on a historical character like King Mongkut. In his reign Siam may be said to have passed from the middle ages to modern times, to use a locution which is perhaps misleading. What European countries were allowed to accomplish gradually, Siam by circumstances had to accomplish within a few years and these changes were not brought about by pressure of the people, but by the governing classes who had to educate the people to these new conditions: the governing classes themselves were

sometimes averse to changes, lest such should interfere with their privileges, and then it was the King who guided them. It was the spirit of the liberal absolutism of Frederick the Great which guided King Mongkut in his reign. That the new order of things was brought about from within may be accepted as an omen that it is a permanent order.

Note : This paper was intended to have been read at a meeting to be held on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of King Mongkut, but for various reasons had to be postponed.

In preparing the paper the following publications were principally made use of:-

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