

CHAPTER 2

TRADITION OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THAILAND

1. Phongsawadan History Writing

1.1 Characteristics of Phongsawadan History

Traditional history writings in Thailand are represented by phongsawadan and tamnan. In short, a phongsawadan is a history of a dynasty, while tamnan is a history of Buddhism. Phongsawadan is a chronicle type historiography composed of a record of major events in each reign. On the other hand, in the tradition of tamnan, history is written mainly as a part of Buddhist history. Compared with phongsawadan, tamnan includes folk data, and covers people, their values and other world views which contribute to the formation of the community identity.¹

However, the main stream of conventional history writings in Thailand was phongsawadan rather than tamnan. The tradition of phongsawadan history writing started in the beginning of the 17th century under the Sinhalese influence.

Phongsawadan literally means the story of a dynasty or kings which had absolute power.² This word can be divided into two segments, "phongsa" and "avatara." The former is equivalent to "wongsa" which

¹Dhida Saraya, Tanman and Tamnan-History in the Study of Local History, Bangkok: Office of the National Culture Commission, 1982. p.82.

² วุฒิชัย มูลศิลป์, "ประวัติศาสตร์กับการศึกษา" ใน สังคมศาสตร์กับการศึกษา, กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักงานคณะกรรมการการศึกษาแห่งชาติ, สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี, 2522. หน้า 68.

means family or dynasty, and the latter means the incarnation of a god in human form.³

Initiated by the central administration of Ayudhya, phongsawadan represented centralist ideology, and strongly emphasized Ayudhya and its kings.⁴ There are chronological record of major events in each reign and are directly concerned with the ruling elite.⁵

1.2 Ayudhya and Bangkok Phongsawadan

Regarding Ayudhya phongsawadan, the scope of history is limited within the central Ayudhya region. It excludes other domains, and is closely related to the dynasties reigning at Ayudhya. It is said to be the sacred literature of the ruling class.⁶

There are many versions of phongsawadan titled "Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya" [Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya]. Some were compiled during the Ayudhya period, while the others were edited in the early Rattanakosin period. Unfortunately, although numerous versions were written, for the first category most of them were lost. Here, let us mention one surviving version, which is considered to be the most reliable source.

³Sunait Chutintaranond, personal communication, July 18, 1995.

⁴Dhida, Tamnan and Tamnan-History in the Study of Local History, p.86.

⁵Ibid., p.82.

⁶Sunait Chutintaranond, personal communication, July 18, 1995.

Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Luang Prasert

[The Luang Prasert Chronicle of Ayudhya]

Compiled in 1680 by order of King Narai, it is said to be the oldest chronicle in the Thai language ever discovered. Though it deals with events in Ayudhya between 1324 and 1604, it was named after Luang Prasert who eventually discovered it in 1907.

The tradition of phongsawadan history was carried on to the Chakri dynasty. These works usually start from the foundation of Ayudhya, list the activities of successive kings, and conclude with the fall of the kingdom.

In the reign of King Rama I (1782-1809), a great number of phongsawadan were written. It is noteworthy that although they are titled Royal Chronicles of Ayudhya, these phongsawadan works were intended to lead history up to the foundation of the Chakri Dynasty. This phenomena reflects the motive to establish Bangkok as the legitimate successor to Ayudhya and to confirm the rights of the Bangkok monarchs as the restorers of Ayudhya's glory.⁷

Following are brief descriptions of some major versions edited in the reign of King Rama I .

Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Phan Chantanumat

[The Phan Chantanumat Chronicle of Ayudhya] popularly known as
Choem

This was written in 1795 by Chaophraya Phiphitphichai by order of King Rama I and covers the history of Ayudhya from 1351 until 1767.

⁷Dhida, Tamnan and Tamnan-History in the Study of Local History, p.187.

Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Somdet Phra Phonrat
 [The Somdet Phra Phonrat Chronicle of Ayudhya]

Written in 1807 on the basis of Choem, it covers the period from the foundation of Ayudhya until 1792. It had become the authoritative document of the history of Ayudhya, but was later replaced by the Luang Prasert version after its discovery and also by the Royal Autograph Chronicle.

Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Siam [The Chronicle of Siam]

This was originally written in 1807 (the same year as the Phra Phonrat version) by order of King Rama I. Discovered by Kachorn Sukhabanji in 1958 at British Museum, it is also called the British Museum Version.

Regarding its contents, they are basically in accordance with the two preceding versions of Phra Phonrat and Phan Chanthanumat (Choem), but contains descriptions of events prior to the foundation of Ayudhya.

It is noteworthy that the title of phongsawadan became "Krung Siam," though its contents still concern the history of Ayudhya. This can be attributed to the intention of the ruling class to adopt the name Siam to represent the new dynasty.

Upon the dawn of modernization, many economic and social changes took place, which influenced history writings. The Bowring Treaty concluded in the reign of King Rama IV (1855) resulted in the expansion of the market as well as an increase of merchants and people with professions. This phenomenon was followed by the abolition of slavery which was gradually completed during the period of reform under King Rama V, which brought about the freedom of occupational choice and the

creation of a free labor force.^๑ In response to such economic and social changes, history writing entered a new era in which the activities of the general public were of importance, contrasting to the preceding time.

It was from the reign of King Rama IV that historical study began to be challenged by a critical spirit. The traditional way of history writing represented by phongsawadan, consequently, was open to question for the first time.

The following is the most significant historical work of phongsawadan done in the reign of King Rama IV.

Phraratchaphongsawadan chabab Phraratchahatlekha

[The Royal Autograph Chronicle]

This was first written in 1855 by Kromluang Wongsathiratsanit (a half-brother of King Mongkut) on the basis of the Phra Phonrat version. Revised by King Mongkut, it was named "the Royal Autograph Chronicle." It describes the history of Ayudhya after its foundation in 1351 up to its fall in 1767, and also the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782), and ends with King Rama I's accession to the throne. King Mongkut probably intended the work to stand as the official chronicle of Ayudhya and Bangkok.

In later days, upon the discovery of the Luang Prasert version in 1907, and probably also the publication of Phra Phonrat version in 1863, Prince Damrong interpreted the Royal Autograph Chronicle. He

^๑ อรรถจักร์ สัตยานุรักษ์, "ประวัติศาสตร์สามยุคก่อน พ.ศ. 2475" ใน ชาคริต ชุมวัฒน์ และ อุกฤษณ์ ภิรมานันท์ (บรรณาธิการ), สายธารแห่งความคิด, กรุงเทพฯ: คณะกรรมการจัดกิจกรรมมิชชันนารี 60 ปี อาจารย์คุณวรุณา สมิตวงศ์ ณ อยุธยา, 2532. หน้า 160-161.

carefully compared the first text (written by Kromluang) with those two versions and clarified many obscure points. His endeavor can be seen in the editorial work for the first publication of the Royal Autograph Chronicle in 1914 in the reign of King Rama VI. His interpretation is considered to be the most scholarly treatment of the dynastic history of Ayudhya and is still influential among contemporary historians.⁹

As seen in the story of its compiling process, the Royal Autograph Chronicle has two parts, the part written by Kromluang Wongsathiratsanit and the part which went through Prince Damrong's interpretation. The former part represents the old narrative-type phongsawadan, while the latter part introduces new views on history with some additional information and analysis of historical events of each reign.

This mixture of these two elements in itself shows the delicate position of the Royal Autograph Chronicle in the tradition of phongsawadan writing. Viewed on a time scale, the Royal Autograph Chronicle lies at the end of an era in which the old, chronicle-type phongsawadan were compiled. It is, at the same time, the beginning of a new era which gave rise to the concept of national history.

In other words, the Royal Autograph Chronicle was compiled during a transitional period. Its fundamental elements were carried on within the national history and later within Lak Thai which was to be written by Khun Wichitmatra.¹⁰

⁹Charnvit Kasetsiri, The Rise of Ayudhaya: A History of Siam in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976. p.168.

¹⁰Sunait Chutintaranond, personal communication, July 18, 1995.

In the reign of King Rama V , phongsawadan history functioned to reinforce the power of the authorities. Under both internal and external circumstances, its centralist approach was promoted.

Domestically, Thailand was going through the process of centralization. Administrative revisions were carried out, dividing the kingdom into the areal units called monthon. Each monthon was then placed under governance of the officials appointed by the central polity. The study of phongsawadan, which more or less functioned to create the sense of belonging to the kingdom, was a means to support this centralization process.

Externally, during the latter half of the 19th century, Thailand faced the threat of western powers. It was an urgent task for the monarchy to demonstrate a political unity in order to prevent any intervention from western countries. It was particularly important to claim title to various border cities. Phongsawadan writing was promoted by the court, aiming to assert its sovereignty over the land of Siam.¹¹

At the same time, this period of time corresponded to the start of the process of building a "nation state." According to Wit Wisadavet, one of the factors essential to the establishment of a nation state is a people who share the same historical background.¹²

Speaking of an historical background, it was preferable for the monarch to have a long-sustained history of its glory. The history of Siam was thus traced back further to the past, and included states or

¹¹Dhida, Tannan and Tamnan-History in the Study of Local History, pp.85-87.

¹²วิทย์ วิศุทเวทย์, ปรัชญาการศึกษาไทย 2411-2475, กรุงเทพฯ: คณะกรรมการการศึกษาแห่งชาติ, สำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี, 2526. หน้า 8.

kingdoms which had never been incorporated as part of the Siamese kingdom in the past. In those days, it was commonly accepted that the history of "Thai ancestors" had started in Ayudhya as described in phongsawadan. However, this theory was displaced and Sukhothai was brought into prominence, being regarded as the original dynasty started by the Thai.¹³ The base of their argument was the stone inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng which mentions that the domain of Sukhothai was very broad including various ethnic groups.¹⁴

The idea of a nation state which was a major concern for the kingdom during the reign of King Rama V grew into nationalism in the following reign,¹⁵ and accordingly, nationalist history writing was increasingly encouraged.

As mentioned above, one characteristic of nationalist history was its attempt to expand both the time length of history further back in the past and the scope of geopolitics of the Siamese territory. There are some other noticeable characteristics to mention.

First of all, attention was paid to the history of prominent local cities inhabited by Thai people. Such cities as Chiang Saen, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Nakhon Sri Thammarat became the subject of study. However, it was not the same kind of study of local history as carried out at present. Instead of studying the development of each city, as an independent local unit, they tried to explain how these

¹³ สายชล ลัคนานุรักษ์, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย และการใช้หลักฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์" ใน เอกสารการสอนชุดวิชา ประวัติศาสตร์ไทย หน่วยที่ 1-8 (10201), กรุงเทพฯ: สาขาวิชาศิลปศาสตร์, มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมาธิราช, 2534. หน้า 21.

¹⁴ Dhida, Tamnan and Tanman-History in the Study of Local History, p.89.

¹⁵ วิทย์ วิศเวท, ปรัชญาการศึกษาไทย 2411-2475, หน้า 24.

cities "participated" in the main stream of the national history, and were incorporated as part of the Siamese kingdom.¹⁶ In this sense, the local history of these cities was subordinated to the aims of centralist Siamese history.

Secondly, this nationalist history dealt with symbolic historical figures like King Naresuan, Thao Suranari, Thao Thepkasatri and Thao Srisunthon - heroes or heroines who saved the country from attacks by neighboring countries. The emphasis on their feats of arms, paralleled by the construction of their statues, led Thai people to be conscious of the need to defend their country.

Thirdly, nationalist history was characterized by its idea that the king or the royal institution was the determiner and the leading figure throughout Thai history. Therefore, such topics as various wars directed by kings, relationships with foreign countries formed by kings, and a king's contribution to the arts and culture were the focuses of the concern.¹⁷

The Chronicle of Ayudhya has a long-sustained tradition as described above. In summarizing its characteristics, it can be said that most of the versions are written in the same tone; that is they focus on the history of a reign and the achievements of the ruling class. Nevertheless, it is not likely that history had been written with the same manner throughout the years.

As for the Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya written in the Ayudhya period, the history was compiled using original data of those days. On the other hand, those issued in the Rattanakosin period are "revised"

¹⁶สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย และการใช้หลักฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์," หน้า 22-23.

¹⁷เรื่องเดียวกัน, หน้า 23.

versions of Ayudhya's history. Even though they are based on original historical records of the Ayudhya period, they are colored by the ideas of historians of later ages that were under influence of the times. In other words, Ayudhya's history was rewritten and "re-edited" upon the beginning of a new dynasty. Strictly speaking, it is not correct to use the word "write," with regard to the Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya published in the Rattanakosin period; "rewrite" or "revise" is more appropriate.

This process of the "revision" of Ayudhya's history started from the beginning of the Chakri Dynasty and declined during the reign of King Rama IV. Throughout the process, the history of Ayudhya was re-described in ways that were desirable to the intention of the ruling class. In short, the prominence of Ayudhya was emphasized and its honor was raised to create a common history for Siamese people which was equivalent to an intangible heritage on which the new dynasty was built. Reorganization of the Chronicle of Ayudhya was promoted with the purpose of supporting the foundation of Royal authority.

The following study on how phongsawadan was "retouched" during the Rattanakosin period will explain the intention of the leaders of those days as well as their view of Ayudhyan society. However, such revision of Ayudhya's history became an obstacle to making academic inquiries of Ayudhya's "true" history.¹⁸

¹⁸ พรเพ็ญ อันตระกูล, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย" ใน เอกสารการสอน ชุดวิชา สังคมศึกษา 5 (ประวัติศาสตร์สำหรับครู) หน่วยที่ 1-5 (22432), กรุงเทพฯ: สาขาวิชาศึกษาศาสตร์, มหาวิทยาลัยสุโขทัยธรรมธิราช, 2529. หน้า 55-56.

Tradition of Phongsawadan History Writing

⊙ Ayudhya Period

- 1680 Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Luang Prasert [The Luang Prasert Chronicle of Ayudhya] was compiled by order of King Narai.

⊙ Rattanakosin Period

< The Reign of King Rama I >

- 1795 Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Phan Chantanumat [The Phan Chantanumat Chronicle of Ayudhya] (Choem) was compiled.
- 1807 Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Somdet Phra Phonrat [The Somdet Phra Phonrat Chronicle of Ayudhya] was compiled on the basis of Choem version.
- 1807 Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Siam [The Chronicle of Siam / The British Museum Version] was compiled. Its contents are based on that of Choem and Phonrat versions.

< The Reign of King Rama III >

- 1850 Phraratchaphongsawadan Sangkhep [The Abridged Chronicle] was written by the monk-prince Paramanuchitchinorot by order of King Rama III.

< The Reign of King Rama IV >

- 1855 Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya chabab Phraratchahatlekha [The Royal Autograph Chronicle] was written by Kromluang Wongsathiratsanit (a half-brother of King Mongkut).

(1863 Phra Phonrat version was printed.)

< The Reign of King Rama V >

- 1906 Phongsawadan Yonok [History of the North] was written by Phraya Prachakit Konchak.
- 1907 Luang Prasert version was discovered, and took place of Phra Phonrat version.

< The Reign of King Rama VI >

- 1914 The Royal Autograph Chronicle was first published.

2. Phases of Modern History Writing

2.1 Introduction of Socialist Ideas

Nationalist ideology flourished through the modernization process under King Rama VI was later emphasized again during the regime of Field Marshal Praeg Pibunsongkhram. In the 1950s, the government was greatly successful at initiating a nationalist sentiment. The King's position was solidified and he became the head of the state and the administration centered in Bangkok.

One of the advocates of nationalism was Luang Vichitvatakan, who became the driving force behind the creation of this myth.¹⁹ According to Reynolds, a prominent Thai historian, it is worth noticing that Luang Vichitvatakan united two elements, namely, the monarchy and the nation state in his arguments.²⁰

While nationalist ideology was strengthened as stated, there were some sub-streams of history writing. One of them was the socialist idea spread in the 1950's among journalists, writers, and ex-students overseas. Paradoxically, Marxist ideology is similar to nationalist history in the sense that it traces the footsteps of Thai people back to the past, before Ayudhya period. But its point of view is different. According to Marxist theory, Thai society was transformed by the

¹⁹Dhida, Tanman and Tanman-History in the Study of Local History, pp.91-92.

²⁰ เคิร์ก เจ เรย์โนลด์ส, "โครงเรื่องของประวัติศาสตร์ไทย - ทฤษฎีและการปฏิบัติ" ใน ไทยคดีศึกษา: รวมบทความทางวิชาการเพื่อแสดงมุทิตาจิต อาจารย์หันเอกหญิงคุณนิออน สนิทวงศ์ ณ อยุธยา, กรุงเทพฯ: อมรินทร์ พริ้นติ้ง กรุ๊ป, 2533. หน้า 110-111.

improvement of "the way of production," and the endeavors of the ruled of each era.²¹ History writing based on Marxist theory is represented by the work of Jit Phumisak. He discussed that history can be seen through the society and the people. The rise of socialist ideas induced the spread of interest in studying the ordinary people and, as a result, expanded the scope of Thai history study.²²

It is likely that the introduction of this new history ideology was a reflection of the social conditions during that period. One analysis indicates that social changes, especially economic growth, influenced the life-style of ordinary people. A group of the public gained a more influential voice than before, which brought history writing to the new stage.²³

2.2 Trends of Present History Writing

Over the past twenty years, Thailand has experienced rapid economic growth and industrial development. This has resulted in the rise of a middle class who have gained opportunities to receive higher education. Some received scholarships to study abroad for master and doctorate degrees, and later became professors in the fields of history, economics, political science, social science, humanities and so on. Some of these new intellectuals realized that the approach of a nationalist history did not manage to reflect all the phases of Thai society. As Thai society becomes more complicated, they felt it

²¹ สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย และการใช้หลักฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์," หน้า 30-31.

²² Dhida, Tamnan and Tanman—History in the Study of Local History, pp.92-93.

²³ อรรถจักร์ สัตยานุรักษ์, "ประวัติศาสตร์สามัญชนก่อน พ.ศ. 2475," หน้า 174.

necessary to re-examine Thai history more carefully in order that the actual conditions and development of Thai society could be understood.

This led to the development of the study of local history.²⁴ In the first half of the 1980s, the study of local history became very popular in academic circles, though more often than not, it was led by historians from Bangkok, and not by those of local origin.

In addition, there has been an attempt to increase the use of various kinds of historical records. In particular, literary works have attracted historians' attention, as they are regarded as meaningful historical materials to prove some historical events,²⁵ and provide an insight into lifestyles of the times.

Although there are many fields of history, such as political history, economic history, philosophic history, social history and cultural history, these have some characteristics in common.

First, in the theory of these historical studies, the cause of any social change is neither a particular person nor a certain leader. They consider that such circumstances as the economic system, culture, technology have influential power upon people in the society. Second, they assumed that economic change is a fundamental cause of changes of other domains. Third, related to the first point, the history of the general public is the main concern of the study. Last of all, concerning the method of research, each field of present history studies regards it essential that the argument is based on reliable historical records.²⁶

²⁴ สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย และการใช้หลักฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์," หน้า 39.

²⁵ Dhida, Tannan and Tamnan-History in the Study of Local History, p.117.

²⁶ สายชล สัตยานุรักษ์, "การศึกษาประวัติศาสตร์ไทย และการใช้หลักฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์," หน้า 40-41.

3. Change and Continuity in Thai Historiography

In Thailand, the tradition of historiography in the court started in the 17th century with the initiation of phongsawadan writing and continued until the beginning of the Chakri Dynasty. History was first written in the form of the Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya (Phraratchaphongsawadan Krung Sri Ayudhya). It is neither the history of the common people nor that of the "whole country." (Actually, there was no conception of "country" or "nation" in those days.) The Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya is a centralist history of the court with the particular center being Ayudhya. The history of other cities and towns were out of its scope.

The tradition of the Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya was carried on during the new Chakri dynasty at the end of the 18th century. While it still mainly dealt with the history of Ayudhya, it also included the initial period of the Chakri Dynasty.

As mentioned before, the Royal Autograph Chronicle is the most historical work among various versions of the Royal Chronicle of Ayudhya issued during the Rattanakosin period. Consisting of two parts, which were written in different eras by different historians, and which stand for two elements of Thai historiography, namely conventionality and innovativeness.

In the meantime, a new type of historiography was being written, the phongsawadan Siam. It is important to remember that the phongsawadan Siam is not the title of any particular version. It is a general term which literally means "Thai history." Written as the history of the nation, its scope was widened to the whole country. Moreover, it is worth noticing that there was a shift in focus of this history, which was in line with the modernization process. Thai history, which had only regarded the ruling class with the king as a

center, was then reformed to become the history of the whole country and the nation. This was a remarkable change which took place in Thai historiography.

The introduction of the new educational system and the beginning of public education, together with the development of printing technology resulted in the spread of the phongsawadan Siam. History was then no more the heritage of the ruling class, but became the "common property" among Thai people.²⁷

However, in reality, Thai historiography still maintained its conventional characteristics, and the nature of Thai historiography was as centralistic as ever. Although there was the attempt not to focus on the history of the capital city, its main concern was still the center, while other cities, towns and the general public continued to be set aside. Consequently, when the capital was transferred, so was the core of historiography, from Ayudhya to Thonburi, and then from Thonburi to Bangkok, accordingly.

It is only recently that historians began to advocate the necessity of studying regional history, and even so, it has still not yet become the main stream. Or, perhaps it is more appropriate to say that the promotion of study on regional history coincides with the continuing dominance of centralist history.

²⁷ นิธิ เอียวศรีวงศ์, ประวัติศาสตร์รัตนโกสินทร์ในพระราชพงศาวดารอยุธยา, กรุงเทพฯ: สถาบันไทยคดีศึกษา, มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์, 2523. หน้า 73-74.