

PART I: BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

1. The Banomyong Family
2. The Royal Grant of the Surname Na Pombejra
3. Excerpts from: *Some Experiences and Opinions of Senior Statesman Pridi Banomyong* (1981)
4. Excerpts from: *Concise Autobiography of Nai Pridi Banomyong* (1983)
5. Commentary on Administrative Law (1931)
6. Lectures on Administrative Law (1932)



Marriage of Pridi Banomyong and Phoonsuk na Pombejra, 16 November 1928

INTRODUCTION

LIFE

Pridi Banomyong was born in Ayutthaya on 11 May 1900. He was a brilliant student, completing his secondary schooling two years ahead of time and law school one year before the minimum age (twenty) for induction as a barrister. In 1920, he won a scholarship from the Justice Ministry to study law in France. He topped the class on comparative law. He became a leader within the small Thai student community in Europe, and in 1926 was almost sent home for challenging the Thai ambassador in Paris over the payment of allowances. In 1927, he returned to Siam with a doctorate in law and a diploma in political economy. He entered government service in the Ministry of Justice, had a short spell working in the courts, then transferred to the law-drafting department. Over the next four years he compiled a volume of the civil code, taught at the ministry's law school, and initiated a course on administrative law about constitutions, the role of law, basic political economy, and political rights. He was promoted rapidly and, like all officials of a certain grade, received an official title—Luang Praditmanutham. In 1928, he married Phoonsuk, daughter of the distant uncle who was a leading figure in Ayutthaya and who had been a patron of Pridi's education.

WRITINGS

The first two pieces in this section—backgrounds on his and his wife's families—were written by Pridi while he was staying in China, and were printed as appendices in the second edition of the *Concise Autobiography* in 1992. The third piece contains excerpts from an interview conducted with Pridi and his wife Phoonsuk by Chatthip Nartsupha and two other Chulalongkorn University lecturers (Kanoksak and Kanchana Kaewthep) in Paris on 10 April 1982. The extracts which Thanphuying Phoonsuk reads during

this interview are taken from a longer version of the autobiography which has never been published. The *Concise Autobiography*, from which the extracts in the fourth piece are selected, was published shortly after Pridi's death in 1983. It was written in the style of notes, and that style is here reproduced in the English. The fifth piece is an article on administrative law published in a legal journal just nine months before the 1932 revolution. The last piece is the student handout for Pridi's lectures on administrative law at the Justice Ministry law school. The lectures break off abruptly just three months before the revolution.

PREFACE

The first three pieces offer a background to Pridi's life and career. They lay out Pridi's lineage with its mix of Thai and Chinese heritage. The maternal (Thai) side contributed a connection to the dynasty (through wet nursing) and a tradition of Buddhist merit-making. The paternal (Chinese) side contributed a migrant flair for enterprise and adventure. The account suggests that such Thai-Chinese blending was commonplace in Ayutthaya—a city which for four centuries had combined roles as the capital of a warrior kingship and as one of the most cosmopolitan and thriving ports of Asia.

In some ways, Pridi constructs his own background as a micro-study of one and a half centuries of Thai history. Both the Thai and Chinese components of Pridi's lineage are introduced during the warfare attending the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767, the year zero of modern Thai history. Both sides of the family joined with King Taksin in the first efforts at reassertion and regeneration. Through the hard times of reconstruction following, the Banomyong family survived and prospered by the manufacture and sale of sweets (the paternal inheritance) and by Buddhist good works and elite official connections (the maternal inheritance). They reached the status of provincial gentry but still lacked any significant degree of economic security. They were sustained by the transfers of money and human resources within the extended family. This insecurity, combined with the adventurous streak in the genes, drew Pridi's father into the expanding rice economy which came to dominate Siam at the close of the nineteenth century. Finally the family made the crucial investments in education when the opportunity opened up at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Through these writings, Pridi presents himself as heir to traditions of immigrant Chinese enterprise, networking in the official elite, and Buddhist merit-making. Onto this he adds his personal experience of the peasant economy, and of the expanding horizons of education in Thailand and overseas in the early years of the twentieth century. Finally he establishes his

connections to dissent through the role of his wife's grandfather in the 1885 petition to King Chulalongkorn, and through his youthful fascination with the Kuomintang and the Ro. So. 130 movement of 1912.

The first of Pridi's academic writings on law appeared in June 1921—an article on the study of law in France sent back from Paris. It already showed his interest in the political aspects of law by dealing with legislation concerning the French president and ministers. After his return to Siam in 1927, he turned out a stream of commentaries, collections of laws, and legal articles. The two pieces included here date from shortly before the 1932 revolution and are among the best known. The first article may appear at first sight as a rather dry recitation of existing Thai law on national institutions of government. But the hidden meaning in the article is a rhetorical question: is this it?

The rhetorical answer is found in the following piece, the notes on Pridi's lectures on administrative law. Pridi invented the course—the first given on such a subject in Siam. Into the course, he crammed human rights, comparative government, and a touch of political economy. On the one hand, we see something of the evolution of ideas which Pridi clung to throughout his life—the importance of the state, the primacy of human rights, and the crucial role of law as the guarantee of rights and freedoms. On the other hand, we get some flavour of a course which was part teaching, and part political recruitment.

NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF NAMES

The first two pieces generate some confusion over the English spelling of names. According to the Royal Institute's system of transliteration, Pridi's last name should be Phanomyong, and this spelling is used below in the first piece when referring to the *wat* from which this last name derived. But Pridi used the form Banomyong, which approximates closer to the pronunciation in spoken English.

Similarly, the place from which his wife's family derived their name transliterates according to the Royal Institute system as Pom (fort) Phet (diamond). But when King Rama VI granted this last name to the family, he wrote "na Pombejra" in English, and the family members have generally retained this form.