

# 1. THE BANOMYONG FAMILY

## 1

On the north bank of Khlong Muang, almost one kilometre to the west of the corner of the ancient palace wall (in Ayutthaya), there is a *wat*. Elders have passed down the story that a wet nurse of one of the kings in the Ayutthaya period was the builder of this *wat*. This wet nurse was named Phrayong (the name of a tree called in Pali, *Piyongku*). At that time, the Ayutthaya townspeople pronounced the word for wet nurse (*phranom*) as *phanom*, dropping the “r”; and wrote it as *phnom*, dropping the vowel. This is similar to the way that *khaphachao* is used instead of *kha phra chao* [a formal version of “I”]. The Ayutthaya townspeople pronounce many words without the “r”, and write them without the vowel. As for names with several syllables, the townspeople like to use only the first syllable or the last, for example calling someone named Phrayong as Yong. The wet nurse Phrayong was known among the people of Ayutthaya as Phanomyong. Hence the *wat* was named Phanomyong after the person who built it. The name of the *wat* with this spelling was passed down through several generations. Around 1923, someone spelled the name of the *wat* slightly differently giving a different meaning from the historical name.

When nurse Phrayong or Phanomyong had completed building the *wat*, she went to worship at Phraphutthabat and Phraphutthachai in Saraburi district, and established a *chedi* as an offering to the Buddha on top of a hill about ten kilometres south of Phrachai hill. People call that hill Phanomyong hill (and over the years, some people have written the name this way).

Nurse Phrayong or Phanomyong established a house on the south bank of Khlong Muang, opposite Wat Phanomyong. Her descendants established houses there and in the area close to the *wat*. After some time had passed, her descendants were not always able to trace back the line through several generations, but there was one thing binding them together: these

descendants believed Wat Phanomyong was the *wat* of their ancestor. Even those who moved to settle far away came to make merit at the *wat* whenever they had the opportunity.

In particular, the land on which nurse Phrayong's house was built was passed down as inheritance through many generations to Nai Kroen who was born there at the time that the army of the king of Burma invaded Ayutthaya in 1767.

Nai Kroen's father was the head of a unit in the Thai army which opposed the Burmese army at tambon Sikuk. He lost his life fighting there. By the time Nai Kroen's mother heard the news of her husband's death, the army had approached even closer to the city. She took Nai Kroen and some other relatives to board a boat and quickly paddled and poled out in the direction of the Pasak river to a relative's house at tambon Tha Luang in Saraburi district. They reckoned this was far from the city which was the target of the enemy. They stayed there with relatives until King Taksin led the people to drive the Burmese army out of Ayutthaya. Nai Kroen's mother took Nai Kroen back to the home in front of Wat Phanomyong. The home had been destroyed by the soldiers, as had other people's houses and various *wats* in the city.

On the land Nai Kroen's mother built a house of bamboo to occupy temporarily. She made various sweets to sell. The sweets had a delicious taste and became known among the townspeople as "the sweets from the house in front of Wat Phanomyong". Nai Kroen's mother's skill in making sweets was passed down to her descendants who made a living this way for several generations.

The group of families who had lived in the vicinity of Wat Phanomyong before fleeing from the Burmese army came back to their old homes after the army had been driven out, so the area close to the *wat* revived as a market again. Nai Kroen's mother expanded her trade, so that she was able to build a wooden house on the same land. She was a leader in contributing money and inviting close relatives and other people of religious mind to rebuild the destroyed ordination hall (*ubosot*) of Wat Phanomyong on the foundations of the old one, to build a teaching hall (*sala*) and monks' quarters (*kuti*), and to invite monks from other *wat* to come and reside at Wat Phanomyong.

When Nai Kroen was twenty years old, he entered the monkhood at that *wat* for over ten seasons and became the abbot before leaving the monkhood.

After leaving the monkhood, Nai Kroen married Kaew, the daughter of the head of the orchestra of tambon Suan Prik. They had four daughters: Pin, Bunma, Sap, and On.

Pin married Kok sae Tang and had two sons, Koet and Tua. Their des-

cendants moved their domicile out of the old house, and were given various surnames by officials, but one group of descendants had the surname Phanomyong.

Bunma married Phra Phithakthepthani (Duang), the assistant governor (in that time officials still held that Ayutthaya was the “old capital” of the Thais and so called the post of governor of this district “governor of the capital”). Their descendants took the surname “na Pombejra”.

Sap married a Chinese man and had two sons, Ruen and Phung (Khun Prasoet), and three daughters, Suk, Phuak, Chan, and others who did not marry.

## 2

Nai Kok sae Tang, who was the paternal ancestor of the Phanomyongs, was born in 1794 in Etang village, Thenghai district (which translates as the sea of peace) in the Shantou region of China. His ancestors had moved from the Hokkien region to establish Etang village, not far from Hai Huang tambon. Nai Kok arrived to “depend on the mercy of the king” of Siam in 1814. The records of the sae Tang ancestors of Etang village state that Kok was son of Seng, Seng was son of Heng, and Heng went to Siam when Seng was still small. Heng’s mother was the aunt of Tae Ong—the name which Taechiu Chinese use for King Taksin of Thonburi. Heng died helping Tae Ong to fight the Burmese. Seng sent his son Kok to trade in Siam.

The ancestral memories and historical events concerning Heng, grandfather of Kok, are as follows.

Heng entered Siam in the reign of Suriyamarin [1758–67, the last king of Ayutthaya] and stayed with Chinese relatives of Taksin in the vicinity of Khlong Suanphlu (at that time an area where Chinese resided).

The Burmese king sent an army to invade the kingdom of Siam and was able to destroy and scatter the opposing lines. When he moved his forces up close to the city, the king of Ayutthaya commanded officials responsible to gather many people into the city to defend the city walls. On that occasion, a number of Chinese including Nai Heng volunteered to join with the Thai people in this endeavour. Thai officials placed these Chinese in the army commanded by Phraya Tak [Taksin].

As the Thai side had no defence lines left outside the city wall, the Burmese army could surround the city completely and use big guns to bombard it. Phraya Tak saw that this situation—together with the fact that the king was not behaving according to the “ten ways of a king” and was weak in defending the country—meant that Ayutthaya was in danger. Phraya Tak encouraged the Thai and Chinese soldiers under his command to break

through the Burmese cordon, gather up Thai people in the countryside and in the main towns of the east, and establish a new people's army to save the independence of the Thai nation.

The family of Nai Heng in China received no news from Nai Heng for several years, because after the fall of Ayutthaya the passage of junks between the Taechiu region and Siam was interrupted for a time. After Phraya Tak had been raised up by the Thai people as the head of state of the Thai nation, and had moved the capital of the Thai nation to Thonburi, he allowed resumption of sea trade with China. Through a sea captain, Nai Heng's mother sent a letter which honoured the king of Thonburi, expressed happiness that he was king of the Thai nation, and also asked for news of Nai Heng. The king replied that Nai Heng had lost his life in the service of the king fighting the enemies of the Thai nation. He made a grant of bullet money to Nai Heng's family.

Nai Heng had a son called Seng who was born in China only a few months before Nai Heng travelled to Ayutthaya. Nai Heng's mother resolved that once Nai Seng was old enough, she would have him travel to Siam to serve the king of Thonburi. But then there was a change of dynasty in Siam. So Nai Seng did not come to Siam, but made a living as a farmer in China. Nai Seng married and had several children including a son called Kok.

When Nai Kok was twenty years old, his parents' efforts to earn a living were going very badly. Nai Kok's father hence sent Nai Kok to "depend on the grace" of the Thai people. Before he left, Nai Kok's father gave him as a legacy one *tamlung* [= four baht] of the bullet money mentioned earlier, with the instruction that he could use that money only as an investment for making a living. One February day during the Second Reign of Rattanakosin [1809–24], the junk carrying Nai Kok from China reached Bangkok. Nai Kok stayed in Bangkok not long before travelling to Ayutthaya to settle and make a living.

Nai Kok knew how to make flour from fermented rice, Chinese-style sweets, bean curd, and fermented soybean. So he exchanged the one *tamlung* of bullet money which he brought with him for the silver and cowries used as money at that time, and used this as capital for making fermented rice and fermented-rice flour for sale. Gradually he sold more and more. As he desired to expand his business more widely, he borrowed some money from relatives to add to the money he himself had made. He bought a floating house and moored it in the vicinity of the market close to Wat Phanomyong. He was able to expand his trade further by also making Chinese-style sweets, bean curd, and fermented soybean. Before long Nai Kok was able to repay the loan to his relatives completely and still had money left which he used to lend to others. The status of Nai Kok hence changed from a small capitalist to a medium capitalist in the provincial centre.

Once Nai Kok had the status of a medium capitalist, he married Pin the daughter of Nai Kroen. To the union he brought a bride price, his capital, and his floating house. Nai Kok moved the floating house from its old site and moored it in front of Nai Kroen's house opposite Wat Phanomyong.

Nai Kok and Nang Pin jointly expanded even further the business which both had carried out earlier. They made both Chinese and Thai style sweets and invented several new varieties.

Nai Kok adjusted himself to suit his new situation and the culture of Nang Pin's family while preserving his Chinese lifestyle and culture where this did not conflict with Thai lifestyle and culture. Nai Kok was a religious man. He adhered to Buddhism in the Thai style, and was a monk's attendant in Wat Phanomyong. Besides making merit at Thai festivals, Nai Kok still performed ceremonies to remember his ancestors at Chinese New Year and at the autumn festival.

Nai Kok and Nang Pin had slaves (*that*) as workers, in keeping with the situation of people who had surplus money in those days. But because they believed in Buddhism, they gave many of their male slaves their freedom by having them ordain into the monkhood. This method of liberating slaves was passed down to the sons and grandsons of Nai Kok and Nang Pin during the period that the slave system was still in force.

Nai Kok passed away from old age. Nang Pin arranged the cremation according to Thai custom, and placed the ashes in a graveyard near Nai Kok's house. Not long after, Nang Pin passed away.

Nai Kok and Nang Pin had two sons, Nai Koet and Nai Tua.

Nai Koet married and remained in the house in front of Wat Phanomyong which he received as legacy. When Nai Tua married, he moved to build a house about four hundred metres away from the house in front of Wat Phanomyong.

Nai Koet was born during the Third Reign [1824–51]. When he was still small and had just learnt to crawl, he fell from the floating house into the canal. Both parents together with others in the house helped to dive in and pull him out. Nang Pin, the mother, hence called this son Bunkoet [literally: merit-birth], meaning that merit had helped this child to be born. Nai Kok, the father, approved of this name, but later liked to call this name by only the last syllable, Koet.

Nai Koet studied Thai at the abbot's quarters in Wat Phanomyong. When he was twenty, he went into the monkhood at Wat Phanomyong for one season, and then left the monkhood to help with his parents' business.

Later Nai Koet married Khum, daughter of a trading entrepreneur in tambon Phra Ngam, Wisetchaichan district (now an amphoe).

Nai Koet and Nang Khum inherited the business from Nai Kok and Nang Pin and expanded it even further. They improved the quality of the

sweets in many ways, and improved the making of bean curd and fermented soybean by hiring a teacher from China to instruct their children. The improved fermented soybean was called by the townspeople as sweet fermented soybean. The method of manufacturing this Ayutthaya fermented soybean was passed down to some relatives of later generations. Nai Koet and Nang Khum had the status as capitalists and owners of slaves to an even greater extent than their parents.

Nai Koet was interested in music, which was a cultural legacy passed down from his mother's ancestors. He had a string orchestra and one of his sons was trained in music.

Nai Koet passed away in his old age. After the cremation, Nang Khum and the children arranged the building of a small Chinese pavilion beside the wall of the *ubosot* of Wat Phanomyong, and placed the ashes there.

Nai Koet and Nang Khum had eight children, namely

1. Nang Faeng
2. Nai Huat
3. Nai Chun
4. Nangsao Nguai
5. Nai Chai
6. Nai Ho
7. Nai Siang
8. Nang Bunchuai

Some of the sons of Nai Koet and Nang Khum married and separated to set up house in other tambon and provinces. Nai Huat set up house near Wat Choeng. Nai Chun set up house near Wat Samwihan, and later moved in front of Wat Monthop. Nai Chai moved to tambon Paknam, Bang Phutsa, Singburi. Nai Ho moved to Loi island near Wat Saphan Klua.

Nang Faeng and Nang Bunchuai, daughters of Nai Koet and Nang Khum, were married and had floating houses which their husbands brought and moored at the house in front of Wat Phanomyong.

Nai Siang went to do logging and paddy farming in another amphoe but his family stayed in the old house.

Nangsao Nguai did not get married. The siblings agreed that she should inherit the house along with Nai Siang, and should continue the parents' business.

Those who married and established separate households each made a living with the capital shared out from the parents. Some were able to develop their capital. Some were unable to increase their business and hence declined from the status of the parents. Some were rich for a time and then declined. As for the business which Nai Koet and Nang Khum had once done, the children were unable to develop or maintain it. It gradually declin-

ed as others offered more competition, as the vicinity of Wat Phanomyong lost its character as a market, and as Khlong Muang became silted up. Later government established the monthon government office at Chankasem palace and the centre of government offices sprang up in that vicinity. Also government established a new market at Hua Ro, and the gambling den moved from its old site beside Wat Phanomyong to the Hua Ro market. This made the vicinity of Wat Phanomyong lose its character as a market. Making a living for those still in the old house thus became gradually more and more difficult.

## 3

Nai Siang was born in 1866. He studied Thai and Pali at Wat Salapun, wrote several short poems, practised music, and had special skill on the alto fiddle (*so u*), treble fiddle (*so duang*), and harmonica.

When he was twenty, he entered the monkhood at Wat Phanomyong for three seasons.

After he had left the monkhood, he married Lukchan, daughter of Luang Phanitphatthanakon (Bek) and Nang Phanitphatthanakon (Lek Kitchathon).

After marriage, someone advised Nai Siang to join government service because he had quite a basis of book learning. But Nai Siang liked a free life, so he studied vaccination against smallpox at the office of Dr Adamson (who later received the rank as Phra Bambatsappharok). He passed the certificate, and administered vaccinations to many people. Later he went to do logging in the vicinity of Phraphutthabat, which at that time was infested with malaria. Nai Siang could not ward off this disease, and so had to give up the forest business at great financial loss.

Later Nai Siang and Nang Lukchan went to do paddy farming at tambon Tha Luang. But because there was drought for two years running, there was no output and he became a debtor of others. So he quit paddy farming.

Nai Siang then cleared some empty land at tambon U-tapao at a time when the grasslands in that vicinity had wild elephants. This was before government established amphoe Uthai Noi (now amphoe Wang Noi). Nai Siang planted paddy in the cleared area, and had to fight with the elephants which came to create problems by eating the rice plants. The paddy farming was not successful because some years there was drought and some years heavy flooding. Also there were pests which bothered the rice plants. Then the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company, which had a concession from the government to dig canals, dug a canal to the area where Nai Siang had cleared his land. Nai Siang had to pay the company a rate for digging

the canal. He had no money of his own so had to borrow from others to pay the company. This brought Nai Siang debts on top of those he had already. Because the paddy farming was not successful, the status of Nai Siang changed from a small capitalist in the city to a peasant with small capital in the countryside who was becoming poorer with increasing debt. Nai Siang had to fight with poverty for several years until the government's South Pasak irrigation project expanded to the area of Nai Siang's paddy fields. This helped Nai Siang to recover to be a peasant with small capital in the countryside.

While he was in the countryside, Nai Siang had another wife called Pui.

Nai Siang had six children with Nang Lukchan, namely

1. Nang Tharathonphithak (Kep)
2. Nai Pridi
3. Nai Lui
4. Nang Nitithanpraphat (Chun)
5. Nang Noeng Limpinan
6. Nai Thanom

Nai Siang had two children with Nang Pui, namely

1. Nai Athakittikamchon (Klung)
2. Nang Nom Tamsakun

#### 4

In 1913, over thirty years after Nai Koet and Nang Khum had passed away, the law to introduce surnames was enacted. At that time most people in the main provincial towns and the countryside had little interest in applying to register themselves as required. Hence the amphoe officials thought up surnames and registered them according to their own convenience.

Because many sons of Nai Koet had moved away from the old home to other amphoe and provinces, the amphoe officials in the tambon where they had set up house established surnames for them. Some of Nai Koet's grandchildren who were on military service were given surnames by their commanding officers.

Nai Siang was told by the village headman (*phuyaiiban*) that officials had thought up a surname for him. He saw that this surname had no connection with his ancestors. So he went to pay his respects to the monastic head of the province of the time, Phra Suwanwimonsin. He asked the monastic head to give him an appropriate name, and to advise one of his pupils, who had the post of thinking up surnames for the amphoe around Ayutthaya (now the amphoe Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya), kindly to amend the name that he had



been given before. The provincial monastic head knew the story of Nai Siang's ancestors well. Hence he told Nai Siang that he should use the surname Phanomyong. Then he sent someone to bring his pupil from the amphoe, and told him to advise the amphoe office to give Nai Siang the surname Phanomyong. This man approved and arranged for the amphoe office to give Nai Siang the surname Phanomyong.