

### 3. EXCERPTS FROM: *SOME EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS OF SENIOR STATESMAN PRIDI BANOMYONG (1981)*

[Interview of Pridi and Phoonsuk by Chatthip Nartsupha, Kanoksak Kaewthep, Kanchana Kaewthep, 10 April 1982]

PRIDI: Chaophraya Yommarat, who wrote that piece [an excerpt from the cremation volume of Nai Siang, Pridi's father] and whose old name was Pan, came from Suphanburi. He went into the monkhood as a novice and monk at Wat Hong (Thonburi). He studied Pali and passed the theological exam then left the monkhood. He entered government service as a teacher of Thai language at the Suan Kulap school, which was attended by several sons of King Rama V. King Rama V conferred on him the title of Khun Wichitworasan. Later he sent four of his sons to study in England, namely Phraongchao Kit-tiyakonworalak (Kromphra Chanthaburi Narunat), Phraongchao Raphi-phanthanasak (Kromluang Ratchaburi Direkrit), Phraongchao Prawitwatanodom (Kromluang Prachin Kittibodi) and Phraongchao Chiraprawatworadet (Kromluang Nakhonchaisi Suradet). The king commanded Khun Wichitworasan to accompany them in the post of their Thai teacher.

Later Khun Wichitworasan moved to become secretary at the Thai embassy in London, and advanced his rank in stages until he became chargé d'affaires. Then he returned to Siam to work in the Ministry of the Interior as monthon commissioner (*samuha thesaphiban*) of Nakhon Si Thammarat and was granted the title of Phraya Sukhumnaiwinit. Subsequently he was appointed minister of public works, and then minister of the capital, with the title Chaophraya Yommarat. Later in the Sixth Reign [1910–25] the Ministry of the Capital was merged with the Ministry of the Interior and he was appointed minister of the interior. He asked to resign at the start of the Seventh Reign. Later King Rama VII abdicated the throne and the Assembly passed a resolution for the government to invite Phraongchao Ananda Mahidol to ascend the throne in succession. But as he was still in his minority, the Assembly passed a resolution to appoint a Regency Council of three persons of which one was Chaophraya Yommarat.

As Chaophraya Yommarat has written, the paternal grandmother of Nai Siang was also my great-grandmother, and had the same mother and father as the paternal grandmother of Phraya Chaiwichit (Kham na Pombejra). Let

me explain that Phraya Chaiwichit (Kham) was the father of Phoosuk, my wife. My wife and I are thus related. We are descended from the same great-great-grandparents.

My great-great-grandparents had a daughter Pin who was my paternal great-grandmother. She married Nai Kok, a Chinese merchant from the Tang (Tan) lineage (sae). They had several children including my paternal grandfather, Koet. He and his wife had several children including my father, Siang.

My great-great-grandparents had a second daughter called Bunma who was the paternal grandmother of Phoosuk. She married Phra Phithak-theptani, previously called Duang, who held the post of assistant governor of Ayutthaya. Together they had several children including Phraya Chaiwichit Sitthisattra (Nak) who was the paternal grandfather of Phoosuk. He and his wife had several children including Phraya Chaiwichit Wisitthammathada (Kham), Phoosuk's father.

Phraya Chaiwichit Sitthisattra, previously called Nak, was Phoosuk's paternal grandfather. At the time he held the rank of Luang Wisetsali, he was posted as attaché at the Siamese embassy in London. On 8 January 1885, he joined with three brothers of the king, a prince, an official of the London embassy, and six from the Paris embassy—in total eleven people—to petition King Rama V to change the absolute monarchy to a form which they called a “constitutional monarchy”, transliterated from English. At that time, nobody had thought up the Thai word to translate *constitution*. In the petition they referred to a monarchy whose power is limited by the term “limited monarchy”, transliterated from English.

King Rama V did not agree to change the system of government as they petitioned. Yet when Luang Wisetsali returned to Siam, he explained to his close family members that, according to what he had seen, the governmental system with a parliament was beneficial for the people. My father was one of those who heard this account, and he related it to me in outline at the time I was an elementary student. After Luang Wisetsali returned to Siam, he served in the Ministry of the Capital, and was promoted in rank and position until he became Phraya Chaiwichit Sitthisattra and governor of Ayutthaya.



From the time I first have memories, the domestic situation of the family descended from my paternal grandfather was what today would be called “comfortable”. It could be compared to the class which modern academics call “middle bourgeois”. But my paternal grandparents were not modern capitalists. Rather, they were part of a feudal mode of production of a type called gentry [*kahabodi*—literally, a man of property] according to the social divisions of the feudal time (see my book, *The Impermanence of Society*).

My paternal grandparents had several sons and daughters who shared the inheritance. Some preserved their status as gentry. Some lost their capital and became petty capitalists. My father chose to become a paddy farmer and suffered the fate of paddy farmers. This had an impact on the family. I saw that my parents were not well-off. And when I went to live with my father, I saw the neediness of farmers in general.

Whatever the economic status of my parents' family, it was a family that acted strictly according to Buddhist teaching. I was aware of this from the time I have memories.

Later I went through all the levels of the school system and went on to study in France, where I experienced bit by bit the economic and political situation of both Thailand and foreign countries.

Ask what else you want to know.

CHATTHIP: Have you even done paddy farming?

PRIDI: Yes. It's better if you first know the background. Let my wife read something.

PHOONSUK (reading): Nai Siang, Pridi's father, did not want to enter government service because he liked adventure. So after he had married Pridi's mother and had a first child, Nai Siang went to do logging around Phraphutthabat, an area where forest fever was common. At that time, logging was not worth it because of the fever, so he switched to planting rice at Tha Luang, where one uncle called Phung (Khun Prasoet) had already settled. At that time there was no irrigation.

PRIDI: Have you ever been to Tha Luang?

CHATTHIP: Tha Luang where there are factories?

PRIDI: Back then, there was no cement factory, no dams. The place was called Tha Luang [royal landing] because it means the landing for the king. From old times there was a road cut from Tha Luang direct to Phraphutthabat, a distance of one *yo*t [sixteen kilometres]. When I was still tiny it was called the road of the foreigner with two pipes. The tambon was called Tha Luang. Later, when kings went to Phraphutthabat, they went from the place now called Tha Rua [boat landing]. Previously there was a road there which Sunthorn Phu wrote about. But most went up to Phraphutthabat by elephant. Later that road disappeared. Kromphra Nara secured a concession to build a small railway from Tha Rua to Phraphutthabat.

PHOONSUK (reading): At that time there was no irrigation. The rains failed two years in a row, and there was no output from paddy farming. Nai Siang went to tell his troubles to Chaokhun Chaiwichit (Nak) to have him find some work to feed his family. Chaokhun had already resigned from government service for several years. He advised that if Nai Siang liked adventure, he should go to clear new land around amphoe Uthai which then was a grassland for elephants. He suggested to get Nai Ho, Siang's elder brother, to go along too. And he would allow his own youthful son, Khun Daeng (who later entered government service as Luang Pranityothakit), to go and clear land and chase away the elephants too. The three would share the cleared land among them. The three agreed with Chaokhun's advice. After they had cleared the land and battled elephants until the herd withdrew from the area, they divided up the land. Khun Daeng staked his claim around Lamdaeng, Nai Ho and Nai Siang around Lamchamaek. But the elephants still gave them constant trouble, especially when the rice shoots were growing well. Whole herds of elephants came to eat the rice that had been planted. Later government established amphoe Wang Noi, and the area of Lamdaeng and Lamchamaek, which had been under amphoe Uthai, was transferred to amphoe Wang Noi. Later the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company dug a canal to the area which Daeng, Ho, and Siang had cleared and claimed. The concession which the government gave the company included a provision that in any area where the company dug a canal, the company could claim forty *sen* [*sen* = forty metres] of the land on each bank. But where people had already staked claims to this land, the company allowed them to retain the right in return for paying a fee of four baht per *rai* to cover the cost of digging the canal. To retain property rights over the land that Daeng, Sun, Ho, and Siang had staked, Chaokhun Krung (Phraya Chaiwichit, Nak) paid the company on their behalf for about two hundred *rai* each. Nai Siang had many ideas about improving the method of paddy cultivation. Whenever he had an idea, he went to Bangkok to consult Chaophraya Yommarat. As the latter stated in the history of Nai Siang, Nai Siang was a person with interests. Pridi got to know various ideas which his father had about paddy cultivation.



PRIDI: Let me tell you about the basis of the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company. At that time, in the areas of the Chaophraya river valley which were distant from the river, there was still vacant waste land. King Rama V granted concessions for digging canals to various capitalists besides the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company. One who took a concession was

Phraya Banlu. When the canal was dug, the land thirty or forty *sen* wide on each bank belonged to the owner of the company digging the canal. The whole Rangsit plain, which is now prosperous, was really a grassland with elephants. In 1920 when I received a government scholarship to study in France, before leaving Siam I went to the house in Ayutthaya and still observed elephants among the paddy fields. I can remember their silhouette, and mostly I saw them in pairs. When the rice grain was forming, many of them would come. The Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company had three main shareholders: Phraongchao Saisanitwong; his eldest son, M.R. Suwaphan; and Phra Patipat Ratchaprasong, who was a German [actually Austrian] called Müller. But whoever had already staked a claim, like my father and uncles, had to chase away the elephants. I was still young but it was like this. To claim land lying vacant you had to battle the elephants. When the company had dug the canals, the land on both sides became the company land. Prior claimants paid a "land registry fee" of four baht a *rai*. That was the story. My father already had land there, but cultivating two hundred *rai* alone was too much. So in some years he rented out. At first he cultivated it by himself. He had five or six water buffaloes. I can remember they were all stolen. Paddy farmers had lots of problems including buffalo theft.

CHATTHIP: Please tell about the situation of paddy farmers you saw in the central region.

PRIDI: The term "central region" must be more specific. The central region is really very extensive. You must know the distribution of good and poor land. After you have listened to me, you must go and investigate again. In the old times, in order to know whether the paddy land was good or bad, and how poor the people were in any tambon, you looked at what type of land tax was collected, whether it was *kuko* or *fangloi*. *Kuko* land meant that however much land you owned, for instance ten *rai*, they collected land tax from you for the full ten *rai*. For *fangloi*, they collected according to measurement [of the extent cultivated] at the time. The *kamnan* had the duty of *sena*, of measuring how much land each owner had each year. *Kuko* was divided into grades one, two, three, and *fangloi* into grades one, two, three, four, and five. I recall that for grade five usually you paid one *salung* [= 1/4 baht] for each *rai* measured. For land not cultivated there was no payment. In Wang Noi, the tambon where my father was, he paid at grade five because the land was not very good. If you dug a well, the soil was very acid. So to collect water for the dry season, you had to dig a well just half-deep. The water was brackish. The paddy land in the amphoe around Ayutthaya was *kuko*, because in the rainy season water from the north flowed down and flooded it. The land was not damaged except in a really bad flood. Another

thing you needed to know about was rice strains. Paddy farmers used strains which rose with the water.



PHOONSUK (reading): Before Pridi went to study in France, there gradually arose in him the knowledge and consciousness that it was appropriate to change the system of government in which the king was above the law to one in which the king was within the law. This consciousness arose in stages as follows.

While Pridi was studying in elementary level, he once heard his father talking with farmers who were complaining about their difficulties in making a living. His father told the farmers how he had heard Chaokhun relate that in England there was a parliament, that is, an assembly, for which the people chose the representatives. Whoever had any serious problem could assign his representative to appeal to the government. At that time Pridi was still a very small child and so had no interest in such things. Only later could he recall this.

Later when Pridi had entered secondary school and had to study geography somewhat more broadly, together with the history of the world in outline, the teacher taught that governmental systems could be divided into three types, namely

1. king above the law, known as "absolutism"
2. king within the law of the land
3. leaders elected by the people, known as a "republic" (at that time, translated into Thai as *prachathipatai*; later after 1932 the word "republic" was translated into Thai as *satharanarat*). A council of ministers governed the country with the approval of parliament.

Pridi came to know about methods of government from these outline headings.

Then in Ro. So. 130, or 1912, there were two important events which made Pridi interested in changing the system of government in which the king was above the law.

First, the newspapers constantly ran exciting news stories about the war in China between the Kuomintang (Kek Meng, in the Taechiu dialect) under the leadership of Sun Yat Sen and the Manchu imperial court. Some progressive teachers followed this news and analysed for the students which side was winning or losing each day. This made Pridi and other interested students enjoy this news. In Ayutthaya, Chinese of the Kuomintang made publicity by renting a room in the Hua Ro market as a reading room, and by distributing pictures of the fighting to those interested. The Chinese opera which was performed regularly by Chinese artistes at Wat Choeng (Wat

Phananchoen) changed its plays to suit the times by being about the Kuomintang and the imperial armies. The audience enjoyed this. Not long after, the Manchu imperial side had to concede defeat. A progressive teacher told Pridi casually that absolutism was already finished in China, leaving only Russia and Thailand. The teacher did not know in which of these two countries absolutism would come to an end first.

Second, at the end of 1912, news reached Pridi's house in Ayutthaya that some military officers along with some civilians had been preparing to change the absolute monarchy to a form in which the king is within the law. But before they launched the attempt, the government arrested them, tried them before a special court, and found them guilty of a serious crime. Pridi took a great interest in this news, because he saw that Siam had the Ro. So. 130 group who were patriotic and courageous enough to attempt to end the absolute monarchy, but just one person in the group had betrayed them to the government. Pridi tried to enquire from knowledgeable people about the Ro. So. 130 group with great sympathy.

Later in 1915–16, Pridi went to help his father with paddy farming before he entered the law school of the Justice Ministry. As noted in the second chapter, Pridi experienced the realities of life.

PRIDI: That is, I had finished secondary school. Usually one could study anywhere. But I was only fifteen. I could not enter the public administration school. So I went off to the fields for a time to be of some use. Once I was seventeen or eighteen, I entered the law school.

PHOONSUK (reading): This was a lesson to teach Pridi about the difficulties and deprivation of the peasants.

In an area of about one million *rai* of rice fields under the Siam Land, Canals, and Irrigation Company, 60 percent of the peasants were tenants. This was different from other localities where tenants were fewer, and different from localities where people cleared waste land and staked claims to ownership.

PRIDI: In the amphoes Sena, Bakhai, Rop Krung, Bang Pa-in near to any rivers and canals, we can see many houses built of wood.

PHOONSUK (reading): Whether farmers owned their land or rented from someone else, they all had to face the deprivations noted in the next paragraph below. But the farmers who rented were saddled with the burden of paying rent to the owner in the form of money or rice. Many landowners exploited them.

In the dry season, farmers who were far away from canals which had water all year round lacked drinking water for people and animals. In the rainy season, farmers experienced risks such as too little rain for planting, too much rain ruining the rice plants, enemies of the young rice plants such as those the farmers call *plia* [aphids] which eat and destroy many plants, and death in epidemics of the water buffaloes which are an important source of draught power. The farmers could not help themselves. Their output did not match the labour they put in. At the start of the next season, they had to borrow money from those who had some to invest. They had to pay a high rate of interest, and if they faced the same events in the following year, the debts piled up. Government could not help.

Robbers were everywhere. There were people who made a living from stealing farmers' buffaloes to claim ransom. Farmers had to borrow to pay the ransom, which increased their debts. Government could not help.

In any year when the farmers had enough rice, they still had to sell the paddy to a merchant who took advantage of them in weighing, measuring, and pricing.

If they sent the rice to a rice mill, the mills had a trick to fool the farmers. They did not charge a fee to mill the rice but instead took the husk, chaff, and broken rice. Most farmers were happy not to have to pay a milling fee. But in reality the mills took advantage of the farmers by setting the machines to increase the amount of chaff which went to the mill, so that the mill made a large profit.

In any year many farmers died from epidemics.

Farmers faced many other kinds of deprivation which showed that farmers received no help from government. Yet farmers had the burden of paying poll tax. If they had no money, they had to do *corvée* for fifteen to thirty days a year. They also had to pay land tax. Hence Pridi told the farmers that the officials, who claimed that farmers were the backbone of the nation, spoke without seeing that the farmers' backbone was already broken. This was what Pridi had experienced by mixing closely with the farmers. He recalled the lesson of his teacher and the events noted above: that if Siam had a parliament—that is, an assembly of representatives elected by the people to appeal to the government to solve the problems and improve the lot of the people—it would overcome the people's difficulties.

PRIDI: This was my experience. Next I will talk about what I found when studying at the law school.

KANOKSAK: May I ask an additional question? In the written history about how you saw that the farmers were cheated by the rice mills, did you hear it from the farmers or see it yourself?



PRIDI: In my account above, I did not use the words “the farmers were cheated by the rice mills”. Rather I conveyed the meaning “the rice mills had many ways to take advantage of the farmers”. The farmers knew this but they went along with it because of the convenience. I saw it for myself. Once I went with my step-mother to take two measures (*krabung*) of paddy to mill. The mill owner did not want to offend and so returned two measures of milled rice. But this was special. The mill owner had added rice of his own to make up the two measures. But ordinary farmers would get only one and a half. The farmers knew about this, but the consciousness had not yet awakened in them. As I have said, and they themselves said, milling rice uses up time, so let the mill do it. The mills made a lot by exploiting lots of people just a little bit. You must understand. Milling rice yourself takes a lot of time. Hence I like the way Mao Zedong told the students that if they did not work with their hands themselves, they would not know the life of the farmers. It’s the truth. If you don’t take the paddy to the mill, when you want to eat rice, you have to mill the paddy yourself and then process it further before it is rice you can eat. Alternatively, big farmers have special mortars to mill the rice. Farmers eat a lot of rice. If they have to mill their own rice, it takes a lot of time. Better to give it to the mill, because it is more convenient. I’ve read some articles written by some people after 6 October [1976] who picture life in the jungle as very easy and convenient. I think this is different from how I experienced it before I had to leave Thailand because of the coup of 8 November 1947. However, let me repeat that my answers about the situation of Thai farmers were based on my own experience which created a consciousness in me before the time I went to study in France. As to whether Thai farmers today are being exploited by the rice mills or not, I have not had the opportunity to see for myself.

PHOONSUK (reading): In 1917 Pridi became a student at the law school in the Justice Ministry. At that time, the law school taught civil and criminal law which were mostly private law. But in courses on judicial procedure and on civil and criminal court proceedings, the teachers had to talk about people who had special rights outside the power of the courts of justice for the people in general, namely:

1. If royal relatives from the level of Momchao upwards committed a criminal offence, the court had the power to send the case to be considered by the Ministry of the Palace and to be judged by the king. This differed from the people in general who came under the criminal court. If the king found a royal relative guilty of a criminal charge, he would be imprisoned in a place belonging to the Ministry of the Palace known as *sanom*—not the jail. He would not be put in irons, but the officers would just leave the fetters on a pedestal inside the cell. In addition, even though the criminal law

code of 1908 nullified many old criminal laws, it did not nullify the old law under which a male commoner having sexual relations with a noble lady of level Momchaoying and above, was held to be a criminal offence liable to imprisonment not exceeding seven years.

2. Nationals under the jurisdiction of countries which had unequal treaties with Siam had special rights in criminal and civil law. If they committed a civil or criminal offence the courts of justice did not have the power to try them. The plaintiffs or prosecutors had to sue them in the consular court of that foreign national. Apart from Europeans and Japanese, Asians from the colonial territories of the West and Japan had the same special rights. Many Chinese understood this and sought the benefit of coming under the jurisdiction of a foreign power, because some countries' consuls sheltered them when they broke Thai law. If the Thai police made an arrest, the consuls made the prosecutor lodge the case at the consular court, and often decided in favour of those under their jurisdiction.

PRIDI: My teacher, even though he was an upcountry teacher from Ayutthaya not Bangkok, was a progressive type. I suspect he may have been influenced by the Ro. So. 130 group.

CHATTHIP: Do you think your teacher got his thinking from the Ro. So. 130 group more than from the Kuomintang group?

PRIDI: The Ro. So. 130 had the nickname of "Thai Kuomintang" (*Thai meng*). But before that group could exist you had to have people return from overseas who had been persuaded to think about changing the government.



### ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION ABOUT THE THINKING BEHIND THE ECONOMIC PLAN FOR SIAM

[Pridi often insisted on his right to insert extra material into transcripts of interviews which were to be published. In the following insertion, he clearly wanted to clarify the connections between his personal experience, his education, and the outline economic plan which appears in part 2.]

My thinking that Siam should have an economic plan did not arise suddenly and was not based on guesswork without any economic theory.

I have already referred to the state of Thai society and how I found from my own experience that the people faced economic deprivation, lacked political rights and freedoms, and were under the power and influence of

several capitalist countries. Before I went to study in France I had the idea to study and research further on how to improve the situation of the people.

When I had the government scholarship to study law in France, although I was already a barrister in Siam, I was only twenty years old. So my teacher advised me to study at the university from the beginning level like French students following the curriculum of the law faculty (*Faculté de Droit*). The curriculum was different from that in Siam and in the Anglo-Saxon countries. At the time of the French Third Republic (*3e République*, 1870), French law faculties taught only private law and constitutional law like many Anglo-Saxon countries. But later the government of the French Third Republic expanded the curriculum of the law faculty. On top of private law they added economics on grounds it was the foundation of society. They also added several departments of public law on grounds these were the superstructure of society.

So I studied Economics 1 in the first year and Economics 2 in the second year of the law degree course. In the third year for the Licence degree I studied fiscal law and labour law as well.

As I was interested in economics, once I had passed the examination for the doctorate of law in jurisprudence, I took a further examination for the advanced diploma in political economy (*Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures d'Economie Politique*) which included advanced economics, history of economic theory, law and science of public finance, law and science of labour. So I studied many parts of the economic system including the socialist economic system about economic planning.

So the consciousness arose in me that Siam should have an economic plan which followed the science of socialist theory and which took into account the local situation and contemporary state of Siam as I had experienced it and as it was changing further during the time I was studying.

Hence I drafted the economic plan and presented it to the friends who joined together to create the People's Party in Paris.