

Phraya Aharn Borirak's Biography (Pheung Chouto)

Phueng Palad Toon Chalong (Palad Toon Chalong is equivalent to today's permanent secretary position) was perhaps the only Palad Toon Chalong in position who was granted the civil service position but not the noble rank.

Phueng was born on March 11th, 1861, year of the rooster. His family was one of the long-standing clans with ancestors living back in the Ayutthaya Era as seen in the family tree provided in the first page of this biography. He was the youngest of the fourth children. Being the smallest boy in the family, his siblings used to tease him about being a mama boy and how he would always run around chasing chickens. At the age when the children of most noble family should know how to read, he didn't really pick up on anything academic related. His aptitude when he was young was in music. He was playing the major Ranad (a traditional musical instrument) in Piphat band (a kind of ensemble in the classical *music* of Thailand) that his grandfather, Phraya Montheinban (Bua), ran. He was an animal enthusiast, raising creatures such as doves and pink birds to Betta fish and needlefish, but not much of a scholar. My mother who was his older sister told me that her youngest brother didn't begin his study until he was a teenager. But he was a fast learner and could write well and had a beautiful handwriting. He developed such a nice handwriting even before he could learn how to read. Normally, a person's love for book starts at a young age but for someone who spent his day running after chickens and paid no mind to books, it was a great surprise to see him study and put in the effort that later enabled him to work in gradually progressing government posts where books were undoubtedly crucial to the job descriptions. He worked as a secretary, accountant and later a permanent secretary, and the special consul overseeing the provincial court under the Ministry of Justice, to a judge working under the King's jurisdiction. He was appointed the agricultural consul who took care of the issuing of land title deeds for the Ministry of Agriculture. He was also the author of the book printed as a part of this notebook. Reading through his writing, you can see how he had been studying and memorizing a lot of things as he gradually collected different information and proofs before writing the book. Come to think of it, this isn't something that could be expected from someone who had just started reading at relatively older age. In terms of his interest in animals, as a blood relative and a friend who had been closed to him for several decades, to my recollection, I don't remember him being interested in those hobbies. Knowing him as an adult, I couldn't have imagined what he was like as a child.

At 18, Phueng became a chamberlain serving under King Rama 5. Pledging allegiance to the King was considered monumental particularly for those who had never served in the royal court before. It was the first time for him to be wearing a frock coat. Since the frock coat would be worn only once for the ceremony, it was normal for one to borrow from someone else. I wasn't born nor did I grow up in the time when Chong Kben (lower body, wraparound cloth) and frock coats were popular, hence, the lack of appreciation in the

fashion. But the generation gap has always been one of the main reasons why younger people find past fashion trends somewhat excessive and outdated. The same perception will definitely happen with the people in the generation younger than mine. However, a country that refuses to grow is the country that cannot develop. It's the same thing with people. Only the uncivilized, savage people remain unchanged in the way they dress.

Four years later, Chaophraya Pasakornwong (Pon Boon-nag) offered Phueng an opportunity to take a leave from his service to pursue his education in England, and provided him all the financial supports. Lady Plean Pasakornwong is Phueng's half-sister, and both of them were the children of Chaophraya Pasakornwong.

Studying in abroad in England, even for people in this contemporary generation, has always been perceived as way for one to move up the social class ladder. Many thinks of knowledge as something that can be easily absorbed over time. Surely, knowledge is a good thing and it is made available for those with enough financial and intellectual ability. The importance, however, lies in the person's time and effort to attain knowledge, for it will not just conveniently find you.

At the time when Phueng was bound to England, not many Thai students knew English before their experience studying oversea. Phueng was just like most people if not even a bit disadvantageous compared to other students since he was in England for only two years. The relatively brief period he spent there did, however, allowed him to attain a satisfying level of English language.

When it comes to the knowledge in the English language, there were different types of Thai people with varying degrees of proficiency. There were those who didn't know anything and there were those who could deliver verbally but with inferior reading comprehension. Then there were the people who could read and write well but not that fluent in speaking. And there were the ones who with all-rounded skills in both communication and literacy.

Phueng realized when he was in England that knowledge wouldn't just effortlessly find and stay with him. He tried to learn as much as he could. But with the two-year duration that he had; it would be impossible to master all the language skills. He, however, made the best use of his time there and learn to read English textbooks, which would come in handy when he came home and started working as a civil servant, as well as his recreational learning, which later gave birth to this very book.

Phueng returned from England in 1885. His first position as a government official was under the Department of Orchard Treasury and the Budget Department of the Ministry of Treasury. He was also the secretary of the Department of Thai Customs. Forty years ago, there weren't that many people who knew English, which explains why he was working in so many positions simultaneously. Today, there is a number of government officials with two different positions, but they don't pay for both jobs. But back then; a person with 2-3 positions could receive salary for all of his posts.

In 1889, Pheung was appointed the secretariat of the Ministry of Agriculture with a monthly salary of 120 THB. He was still working as a secretary at the Department of Customs and received THB 80 salary. At the time, Chaophraya Pasakornwong was both the Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Director of the Department of Customs.

The Department of Customs has always had its own office building whereas the Ministry of Agriculture's building was constructed way later. Nowadays, young people see all the large buildings that belong to the Ministry of Agriculture and they can't imagine what it was like before. They would be dumbfounded to know that only 35 years ago, the Ministry of Agriculture was operated from a house of a high rank nobleman who was assigned the minister. When Chaophraya Ratanabodin (Rod) was appointed the minister, the ministry was operated inside his residence. When Chaophraya Rattanathibet (Poom) took over the post, the ministry was relocated to his house. At the time when Chaophraya Pasakornwong became the minister, the ministry's headquarter was moved to his residence, and expanded the operating ground to the nearby temple. The minister's house served as a workplace for the government officers of different ranks. The place was used to keep accounting and other documents as well as equipment, host court hearings of legal cases and jail cells. Although his house was spacious enough to accommodate the Ministry's operations and a small place of detention, the court needed to be set up at one of the pavilions inside Prayoon Temple. Come to think of it now, it wasn't exactly the most ideal location.

Since it was common for most high rank government officials to use their homes as the operation ground, Chaophraya Pasakornwong, despite having his own office at the Department of Thai Customs, also preferred working from his own home. With that, he could manage his own working hours. He could work when he had free time in the morning, afternoon, even late at night or until dawn. There were times when he would work with his secretary and sub-ordinates until late hours, and sometimes all the way to the crack of dawn and even the evening of the next day. Such intensive working hours were something that most found to be mindboggling but Chaophraya Pasakornwong was blessed for being the easiest sleeper. He liked to work lying down and would fall to sleep right then and there if he was drowsy (there weren't that many mosquitos back then). He would wake up and immediately resume his work. The people who worked with him said that after a while of dozing off, he would wake up and remember where things were left off. For example, if he was reading out something to his sub-ordinates, and he fell asleep, once he woke up, he could precisely continue from where he paused without any need to go over. His secretary and sub-ordinates even had to take turn in sleeping. With the office operated from Chaophraya Pasakornwong's home, the person who was the accountant of the Ministry of Agriculture and secretary of the Department of Customs had to be someone who stayed in the same house as him, and all the while, making time to check in at the Department of Customs to keep the workflow uninterrupted.

Chaophraya Pasakornwong left both his posts at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Thai Customs and reassigned as the Minister of Ministry of Education in 1892. Chaophraya Surasak Montri (Jerm Saengshouto) took his position as the new minister of the Ministry of Agriculture. It was around that time when Phueng left his job as the secretary of the Department of Thai Customs and was appointed the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture His initial salary in the new position was THB 360 before it was later increased to THB 400 a month, which was the amount the high ranked permanent secretary was receiving at the time.

The title Phueng Palad Toon Chalong (Pheung, the permanent secretary) existed only for a short period of time. In 1893, he was granted the rank of a commissioned officer and appointed Phraya Prachacheepboriban and later promoted to Chaophraya Prachacheep Boriban in 1896 (the title Phraya Aharn Borirak was given to him after he retired from his governmental post).

In late 1896, the Minister of Agriculture was dissolved and merged as a part of the Ministry of Treasury. Some of the departments were relocated to be under other ministries. For instance, the collection of rice field tax and most of the duties were operated under the Exterior Revenue Unit (The Ministry of Interior) and the Department of Internal Revenue (Ministry of Metropolitan Administration), the Department of Public Harvests was moved to stay under the Ministry of the Royal Household. Phraya Ahran Borirak (his title at the time was still Phraya Prachacheep Boriban) was appointed to work under the Ministry of Justice. He served as a Special Commissioner, overseeing the operations of provincial courts and working under Krom Luang (Prince (of the third rank)) Ratchburi Direkrit. I did not know the extent of Phraya Ahran Borirak's background in law but I assumed that having worked with superiors and colleagues of extensive knowledge and experiences must have increased and sharpened his wisdom. When he was managing the establishment of provincial courts, he was appointed the judge of the Criminal Court. He later re-established the Ministry of Agriculture in 1899 and was relocated back to oversee the issuing of land title deeds, which was a fairly new system. His contribution laid the ground for the country's land title deed management.

Issuing land title deeds was a crucial matter and Phraya Ahran Borirak was the governmental official who established the system in Thailand. The land title deed systemization and registration were initiated when Chaophraya Tawate Wongwiwat (M.R. Lhan Goonchorn na Ayutthaya) was the minister of the Ministry of Agriculture. A dispute erupted in a community where people were fighting over the ownership of rice fields, which were part of a large plot of public land. The then minister intended to resolve the conflict by issuing a legal proof of the land. He discussed the matter with Prince Damrong Rachanuphap, who at the time was the Minister of the Ministry of Interior and the former director of the Survey Department. The prince was familiar with Mr. Giblin, an Australian man working at the survey department. Presumably, Mr. Giblin must have told the prince about a foreigner named Torens who came up with a land title deed registration method that was highly efficient and had been used everywhere in Australia. In Prince Damrong

Rachanuphap's opinion, Mr. Torren's method seemed highly applicable to Siam. Chaophraya Tawate Wongwiwat assigned Phraya Ahran Borirak and Mr. Graham, who was the consultant of the Ministry of Agriculture and Mr. Giblin from the Survey Department to take a deeper look into the Torren method. The thorough study led to the rearrangement of the details into Thai language, which would later be presented to Chaophraya Tawate Wongwiwat. After a considerable discussion, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap suggested that while the idea Phraya Ahran Borirak proposed in issuing new land title deeds would be usable but the process in itself was too much of a hassle at the time since it meant that the entire country would be forced to adopt the new system. His suggestion was that they should launch a pilot project in one sub-district to see how it would work before developing the system to be used countrywide. Bang-Pa In sub-district was chosen for it could be easily commuted to from Bangkok, hence more convenient to monitor. Chaophraya Tawate Wongwiwat agreed to the suggestion and presented it to the King, who gave the approval to commence the land title deed registration in Bang-Pa In. Phraya Ahran Borirak who was the most knowledgeable about the Torren method was assigned as the pilot project's supervisor. He set up an office inside a building within the Palace's perimeter and began working on the registration and issuing land title deeds. While there were two different departments, each operating the registration and issuing, they initially share the same office building. Prince Damrong Rachanuphap usually took an extended trip to Bang Pa-in, and he was a tremendous support in the pilot project. It was a few days ago that he expressed his admiration for Phraya Ahran Borirak's incredible contribution in the project and how greatly it had benefited the country.

Phraya Ahran Borirak oversaw the land title deed registration and issuing until 1905, before he was later appointed the special land inspection commissioner, working under the Ministry of Agriculture. He stayed in that position until his retirement and was later granted his pension from the King for his service. He retired with the title Phraya Prachacheeb Boribarn and over a year later he was granted the new title Phraya Ahran Borirak in August 1911. During his service, he was appointed an advisor to the Monarchy of Thailand in 1899 and received two rank insignias in 1899 and 1908, respectively.

Phraya Ahran Borirak travelled overseas several times. He visited Europe, India's Matras and Bombay. He joined the Siamese ambassadors on their trip to Japan. Travelling to Phuket to oversee the establishment of a provincial court required one to travel to Singapore and Penang. Since there was no train to Phuket at the time, going there meant that one had to take a longer route to get to the province.

Phraya Ahran Borirak was a man who never rested on his laurels and always had new ideas for the development of the country's civil services. When he saw a problem, he would try to figure out solutions and wrote personal letters to ministers of different ministries or even the King himself. There was one time that King Rama 6 had his personal secretary write a reply to Phraya Ahran Borirak's letter.

“His Majesty the King wishes to for his message to be notified that regarding your letter and suggestion about..., the King was well informed about the matter and appreciates your concern and good intention as a senior governmental official who has been attentive to the country’s current affairs

“The issue is indeed a serious matter and has been conferred with the Minister of the Ministry of... and...The matter will be thoroughly discussed and soon go into the chancellor meeting. I believe the most suitable outcome will soon be delivered.”

Phraya Aharn Borirak’s aforementioned suggestions to which the King corresponded via his letter were made after he had retired. Although even when he was still actively working, he had been consistently forward about proposing his insights and opinions. For instance, when the Ministry of Agriculture was dissolved into a part of the judicial branch, Phraya Aharn Borirak spent his free time writing his views and opinions on irrigation system and free seed distribution. At times, proposed in his letters were not only opinions and suggestions but also proper project proposals and drafted acts for the King to look into. King Rama 4 once replied back to Phraya Aharn Borirak’s proposal through his secretary that ‘the letter was well received and will be carefully considered. Since some of the ideas are something His Majesty the King already had in mind, and while the proposed suggestion might not be the most appropriate solution, rest assured that your opinions will not go to waste.’ The response reflected how much the King valued Phraya Aharn Borirak’s advises.

Despite relentless endeavor, experiences, intelligence and well intention, it was understandable that a person who already retired and out of the loop would not be able to provide on-point speculations and solutions regarding the state’s internal affairs. From someone who no longer worked for the government, giving precise judgments and analyses on every matter was practically impossible. Phraya Aharn Borirak had always been eager to contribute his knowledge and experiences to help the country. Nevertheless, despite his intention and ability, being a retired governmental officer meant that he no longer have access to details and information of the state’s internal affairs. The longer he was into the retirement, the less efficient his judgment had become. As he got older, his interest in the state’s affairs grew wary over time. But to stop him from not using his intelligence entirely would go against his nature. His thoughts went into writing, and this notebook was one of the results.

Phraya Aharn Borirak had been interested in books and writing since he was younger with history being his favorite genre. He was once appointed a board member of Siam Society but he was incredibly busy with his governmental works, and didn’t contribute much to the association. His love for history led him to look deeper into historical archives. With his professional background in law, he leaned towards the use of legal approach when reexamining dates and historical documents, which is something that the readers of this publication will later learn from his writing.

Phraya Aharn Borirak wrote this book before his health problem became more severe with the intention to print the book as a memory and give it to the relatives and friends on an auspicious occasion. Unfortunately, his illness was too much to resuscitate and he passed away on February 11, 1923, causing the publication of the book to come to a halt.

Lady Phad Aharnborirak wished to publish the book and give it to the guests who came to her husband's funeral. She discussed her desire with me for I am someone who has long been aware of the book's existence, and I could not agree more the idea. The content of this book is completely sited and while some may doubt the legitimacy of the sources or disagree with some of the author's opinions and understandings, I think we can all agree that he wrote it with great attentiveness, and insights that are both analytical and detailed. I cannot say anything else but praise him for the remarkable endeavor he put into writing this book.

When I read the draft of the book before the manuscript was sent to the publisher, I found several misspellings and advised Lady Phad to have Phraya Phak Dee Naruebate edit the book (including this short biography that I wrote) so that it would follow the Ministry of Education's standard. Phraya Phak Dee Naruebate is one of Phraya Aharn Borirak's close acquaintances so when Lady Phad asked for this favor, he gladly accepted. He took the responsibility of contacting a printing house and corrected all the misspellings. Phraya Phak Dee Naruebate's generosity should be appreciated for the conception of this book.

If this book by any means motivates readers to enjoy the knowledge it provides, the wife, children and grandchildren of Phraya Aharn Borirak would like to dedicate whatever merits this well-intentioned act may bring to Phraya Aharn Borirak (Pheung Chouto). If in any way, all the good deeds and prayers reach him, we hope he finds peace and happiness, wherever he may be.

Pramoun Road
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Phraya Aharn Borirak (Pheung Chouto)'s Biography
Written by Rajani Chamcharas, the Prince Bidyalongkorn (N.M.S)
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