Bangkok's Bunnag Lineage from Feudalism to Constitutionalism: Unraveling a Genealogical Gordian Knot

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Abstract—Long before the royal edict of 1913 prescribing Thai surnames, generations of Bunnag notables, not yet carrying that cognomen, played a commanding role in Thai political, economic, and social affairs. From the start of the Bangkok era in 1782 to the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932 the Bunnag nobility passed through more than five generations, rising to unprecedented prominence and then waning under an upsurge of royal power followed by constitutional leveling. This article reviews that generational sequence through a résumé of the Bunnag family's complex genealogy, a veritable Gordian Knot of family ties set in a fast-changing society. In the interests of simplicity, it focuses on the most eminent family members, their careers and filial, fraternal, and factional relations, accompanied by passing reference to the history of their Khlong San stronghold, as an approach to deciphering the place of the Bunnag lineage in Thai political and social affairs over the course of the Bangkok era. In the process, an opportunity is afforded to review some of the institutional foundations of Thai elite culture under the ancien *ré*gime and probe, from the Bunnag perspective, some of the political dynamics associated with the kingdom's ongoing transformation from feudalism to monarchial absolutism to constitutionalism.

No proper political, economic, or social history of the Ratanakosin period (1782-1910, or as some would have it, 1782-1932, or even 1782-present) can be written without due consideration of the role played by the Bunnag lineage.[2] At the height of Bunnag power in the 19th century, for instance, the Bunnag lineage was commonly referred to as "the Family of the Other Bank" (the right bank, as the river flows), a turn of phrase that proudly, perhaps even pretentiously, compares the Bunnags and their stronghold in Bangkok's old Khlong San district with the royal family ensconced within its left-bank Ratanakosin citadel.

[1] This brief genealogical account of the Bunnag lineage and its place in modern Thai history originated as a lecture presented at the Siam Society on 5 February 2007 that was introduced by H.E. Dr. Tej Bunnag, former Foreign Minister of Thailand. Thanks are due to Chris Baker, Tej Bunnag, Puli Fuwongcharoen, Patrick Jory, Simon Landy, John Loftus, Michael Montisano, and Matthew Reeder for their constructive comments and other assistance in the preparation of this article, though the exposition and all views expressed rest with the author.

[2] Decades ago, David K. Wyatt recognized that fact in his classic paper entitled "Family Politics in Nineteenth-Century Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1968, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 208-228, which this article revisits.

Under conditions of untrammeled polygyny and virtually unrivalled power and wealth, the Bunnag family grew exponentially over the course of the Bangkok era. Its pervasive, politically-charged, royally-connected marriage alliances quickly came to resemble a veritable Gordian Knot, a Thai elite patronage pattern described elsewhere, in a more recent context, as a "network monarchy" featuring "an entangled spider's web of kinship networks," "a labyrinth of family ties." [3]

Senior Bunnag noble ranks, by generation

	Highest ranks attained		
Bunnag generation	*Somdet chaophraya*	*chaophraya*	*phraya*
First generation		1	
Second generation	2		
Third generation	1	6	10
Fourth generation		1	24
Fifth generation		2	20
Sixth generation			7
Total	3	10	61

Source: Derived from Doeanchai Khoman, et al., ed., *Saraek sakun bunnak* [The Bunnak Family Tree] Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1999.

The exceptional role played by the Bunnag family in Siam's 19th-century political and social life is suggested by its dominant place in the government apparatus.[4] No other noble lineage came close to producing as many ministers or other senior officials; no other noble family entered into as many prestigious royal and noble marriage alliances. At the highest levels of the nobility, the Bunnags accounted for three of the four *somdet chaophraya* (ministers of princely rank) in Thai history,[5] plus a total of ten *chaophraya* (officials of ministerial rank) and sixty-one *phraya* (officials of director-general or provincial governor rank). Over the course of the Ratanakosin period, a number of Bunnag women married into the royal family, including its princely Chatrakun, Aphakon, Phanuphan, Boriphat, Suriyong, Sawadiwat, and Rachani lines, among others; even larger numbers of Bunnag men and women intermarried with the Chuto and Saeng-Chuto, Singhaseni, Amatayakun, Wongsarot, Bunlong, Komarakun na Nakhon, Sucharitkun, and many other royal-related noble lines. Furthermore, the

[3] Yoshinori Nishizaki, "Birds of a Feather: Anand Panyarachun, elite families and network monarchy in Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2020, vol. 51, forthcoming; Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *Pacific Review*, 2005, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 499-519.

[4] All basic Bunnag family genealogical and biographical data, unless otherwise noted, are derived from Doeanchai Khoman, et al., eds., *Sakun bunnak* [The Bunnag Lineage], Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1999; and Doeanchai Khoman, et al., eds., *Saraek sakun bunnak* [The Bunnak Family Tree], Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1999.

[5] The only other *somdet chaophraya,* appointed during the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782), was Somdet Chaophraya Maha Kasatsoek (Thongduang), who later rose to become King Rama I.

Bunnags provided the Grand Palace with an unparalleled number of daughters, of whom at least twenty-five rose to the rank of royal consort (*chaochom*); six of them achieved royal motherhood (*chaochom manda*), contributing four princes and twelve princesses to the Chakri Dynasty.[6]

Figure 1. Bunnak (*Mesua ferrea* Linn), or ironwood, is a deciduous hardwood tree, indigenous to Thailand, bearing a delicate, fragrant four-petaled flower sheltering a cluster of yellow stamens.

In a world where service to the feudal state (*moeang*) was the crucial means to power and wealth, it is telling that formal rank and title, more than such criteria as competence and commitment, identified the individual's and the kindred's place in society. The first five Bunnag generations of the Bangkok era – the focus of the present article – were led by an uninterrupted sequence of Bunnag nobles holding high state office. Those ministers and directors-general were far from being the family's sole luminaries; they were merely the most prominent within a much larger hierarchy, which extended down through the ranks of the nobility to the *nai*, those without government appointments, bordering on commoner status.[7] Although it is commonly suggested that the peak of Bunnag power came with the more than four-year occupancy of the Regency by Chaophraya Si Suriyawong (Chuang) during the minority of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), it actually emerged much earlier, with the 1854 royal proclamation of King Mongkut (Rama IV), "giving full authority to Ong Yai [Dit Bunnag, Minister of Trade and Foreign Affairs], Ong Noi [That Bunnag, overseer of the Ministry of the Capital], . . . and Chaophraya Srisuriyawong [sic] [Chuang Bunnag, Minister of War, better known as the Kalahom]. They had power to issue any order without seeking the king's approval, [though the king indicated that] he would appreciate being informed of any important decision so that he could act accordingly."[8]

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[6] No comprehensive record survives of the contribution of Bunnag daughters to the Front Palace (the viceroy's seat), nor does this article detail the contributions of Bunnag daughters to other princes' households (contributing a bevy of Bunnag-related royal grandsons [*mom chao*]), or the scores of intermarriages between the Bunnags and other noble lineages (resulting in a wide dispersion of nobles carrying maternal Bunnag pedigrees).

[7] Social status within the Bunnag family aligned closely with the Thai feudal nobility's ranking system, which derived from a military hierarchy of ancient derivation. At the risk of oversimplification and some distortion, that hierarchy's senior military/civil ranks can be compared, for heuristic purposes, with their approximate Western military equivalents as follows:

Thai/Western military/civil staff hierarchy	Comparative Thai/Western military forces hierarchy
Chaophraya – general/minister	*Kong thap* – division (10,000+ troops)
Phraya – brigadier general/dept director	*Kong* – brigade (3,000-5,000 troops)
Phra – colonel/division chief	Small *kong* – regiment or battalion (1,000 troops)
Luang – major-captain/section manager	*Mu* – company (50-100 troops)
Khun – lieutenant/bureau head	Small *mu* – platoon (25-50 troops)

[8] Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2004, p. 32, citing Thai National Library, Fifth Reign, R5 243/15. It should be further noted that ministerial appointments carried broad jurisdiction, often stretching far beyond such nominal functional titles (used for convenience in translation) as "war" and "trade."

The core lineage: Bunnag chaophraya and senior phraya

PROGENITORS

Persian community

CP Mahasena (Sen) …-1767?

FIRST GENERATION

CP Akha Mahasena (Bunnak), 1737-1805

SECOND GENERATION

Bunnak sons

SCP Prayurawong (Dit), 1788-1855

SCP Phichaiyat (That), 1791-1858

THIRD GENERATION

Dit sons

SCP Si Suriyawong (Chuang), 1808-1883
CP Thipakorawong (Kham), 1830-1871
CP Phanuwong (Thuam), 1830-1913
CP Suraphan Phisut (Thet), 1841-1907
CP Phasakorawong (Phon), 1849-1920
PH Montri Suriyawong (Chum), 1820-1866
PH Wongsa Phonphusit (Mek), 1821-1889
PH Rachanuwong Rachinikun (To), 1822-1870
PH Aphai Songkhram (Nokyung), 1823-1866

That sons

CP Si Phiphat (Phae),1819-1887
PH Woraphong Phiphat (Yaem), 1823-1861
PH Isaranuphap (Iam), 1823-1902
PH Kalahom Rachasena (Cham), 1826-1898
PH Nana Phitphasi (To), 1834-1887

FOURTH GENERATION

Chuang son

CP Surawong Waiyawat (Won),1828-1888)

Iam son

PH Phaibun Sombat (Det), c.1855-1930

Thuam sons

PH Rachanupraphan (Sudchai), …-…
PH Rachanupraphan (Thui), …-…

Thet sons

PH Suraphan Phisut (Thian), 1863-1921
PH Rachanupraphan (Thui), …-…

Chum sons

PH Montri Suriyawong (Choen), 1846-1915
PH Suriyanuwat (Koet), 1862-1936

Nokyung son

PH Akha-rachanat Phakdi (Thawat), …-…

FIFTH GENERATION

Won sons

CP Surawong Wathanasak (To), 1851-1909
PH Praphakorawong (Chai), c.1850-1888
PH Rachanuwong (Lek), 1854-1925

Det son

CP Phichaiyat (Dan), 1875-1946

Choen son

PH Montri Suriyawong (Wichian), 1867-1939

Sources: Derived from Doeanchai Khoman, et al., eds., *Sakun bunnak* [The Bunnag Lineage]. Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1999.

Notes: [Bracketed items] = Highest-ranking ministerial or departmental posts attained.
SCP = Somdet Chaophraya; CP = Chaophraya; PH = Phraya

Within the Thai feudal elite, parentage was the primary determinant behind the royal award of rank (*yot*), title (*bandasak*), and status (*sakdina*), with competence (*phumpanya*) taking lower priority. As a basic framework – excluding the cacophony of individual variations and exceptions – the ruling class was divided into two distinct social strata. Rank and title within the royal family were *ascribed* (inherited) according to a complex rule of declining descent; among the nobility, on the other hand, they were nominally *prescribed* (achieved or earned), though that ability-based ordering consistently reverted to the royal system's criteria of parentage and lineage in practice.[9] Over the first five generations of Bangkok's Bunnag lineage, for instance, nearly every eldest son of every eldest son of every Bunnag *chaophraya* attained his father's rank, and often his title, irrespective of his aptitude.

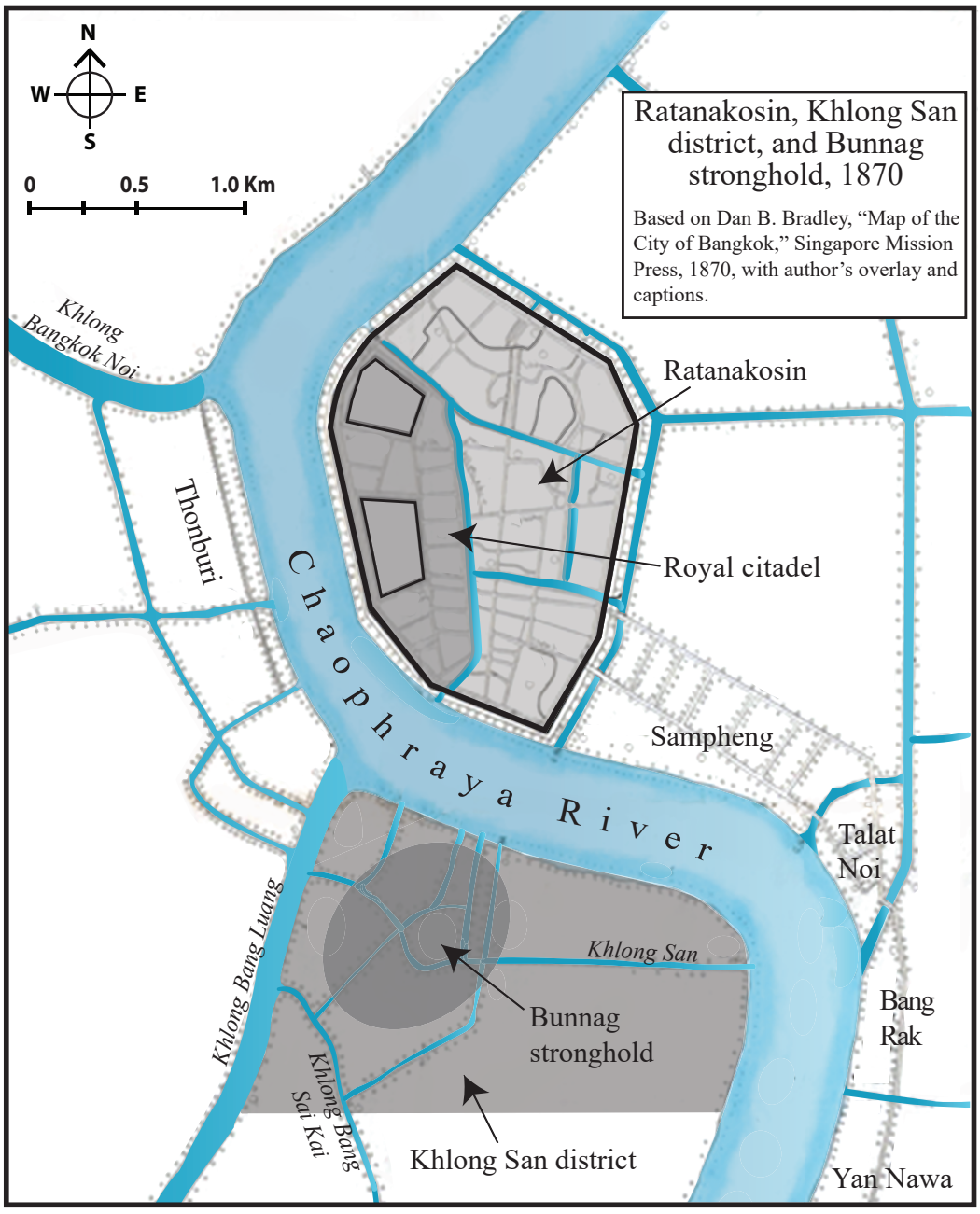
Over the course of the Ratanakosin period, Siam was engaged in an extraordinary transformation from a feudal polity toward a centralized, bureaucratic nation-state, from a mercantilist to a capitalist economy, and from a sharply stratified society to incipient egalitarianism.[10] In that process, the ancient privileges of hereditary status were gradually giving way to the obligations of personal proficiency. Even within the royal family, new opportunities for senior political appointment were being distributed increasingly, albeit hesitantly, on the basis of competence. Despite that measured modernization, the shadow of decentralized feudal power continued to hover over the centralizing Siamese state, which is why it is possible to speak of the Bunnag family's enduring 19th-century command over the government's trade, foreign affairs, and military portfolios as a longstanding "bureaucratic fief."[11]

Nowhere is that family ascendancy portrayed more vividly than in the Bunnag stronghold, the isolated land tract facing the cross-river Ratanakosin citadel that was allotted to the Bunnag nobles by successive kings. Any feudal fief worthy of the name

[9] Robert B. Jones, *Thai Titles and Ranks: Including a Translation of Traditions of Royal Lineage in Siam by King Chulalongkorn*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Department of Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Program, Data Paper Number 81, 1971.

[10] "Feudalism" is here referred to in the objective meaning of the Annales school (e.g. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, London: Routledge, 2014 [1940]) rather than in the Marxist sense popularized by the Thai left (Craig J. Reynolds, *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1987). As I have discussed elsewhere (Edward Van Roy, *Siamese Melting Pot: Ethnic Minorities in the Making of Bangkok*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2017, pp. 239-244), the thesis that modern Thailand's origins lie in a "feudal" past has been contested, though a number of sweeping Thai histories approaching Siam's modern political evolution from different perspectives travel parallel paths toward its implicit confirmation. As an additional note often overlooked, Thai feudalism (often misleadingly referred to as *sakdina* by scholars of Thai history) differed significantly from its European variant in stressing control of manpower over control of land or rice-land, *na*.

[11] David K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969, p. 45.



would, of course, have had a physical as well as a functional dimension.[12] In that regard, the Bunnags offer a conspicuous example. In its physical form, the Bunnag family fiefdom was situated along the Chaophraya River's right bank directly downstream from Thonburi. At the peak of its power that fiefdom, popularly known as the Khlong San district (*yan khlong san*), stretched from Khlong Bang Luang to the Khlong Lat Ya extension of Khlong San, opposite the left bank's walled capital reaching down through the Chinese quarters of Sampheng and Talat Noi to the Western precinct of Bang Rak. The concentrated cluster of Bunnag residential estates was situated at the fiefdom's core, within an easy river crossing of the Bangkok citadel and the Grand Palace. The process by which that stronghold waxed and eventually waned provides substantiating evidence of the family's storied history, which is related in the following sequence of generational biographies.

The first generation

Bunnak, the Bunnag lineage founder,[13] though himself a Thai Buddhist, was a direct descendant of Ayutthaya's Shia Muslim nobility, stemming from its 17th-century primogenitor, Sheik Ahmad (Chaophraya Bowon Rachanayok), of Persian origin. Bunnak's father Sen (Chaophraya Mahasena), one of the many senior officials of that distinguished lineage, served as Ayutthaya's last Minister of War. For arcane political reasons, Sen converted from Islam to Theravada Buddhism during Ayutthaya's final decades.[14] He apparently lost his life during the city's 1766/67 siege and destruction, and

[12] Royal award of senior rank and title was accompanied, as a general rule, by the grant of a landed estate. A quaint example is provided by Anna Leonowens upon her ennoblement by King Mongkut for her tutoring of the royal children. The document issued for that purpose recognized her as "*Chow Khuoon Crue Yai*" along with a bequest of land and "the number and description of the roods of land pertaining to it . . . . in the district of Lophaburee and Phra Batt" (Anna Harriette Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court: Being Recollections of Six Years in the Royal Palace at Bangkok*, Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1970 [1870], p. 123). Similar but much more valuably situated land endowments accompanied the appointment of Bunnag nobles to high office, though the documentation is lacking. Thus, the Bunnags' Khlong San stronghold came into being.

[13] Although identical in spoken English, the personal name "Bunnak" and the surname "Bunnag" are here distinguished in written English to clarify identification. The lineage name "Bunnag," with that English spelling included in the original document of award, was conferred by royal favor in 1913 following the Sixth-Reign law mandating Thai surnames (Thep Sunthonsarathun, ed., *Nam sakun phra rachathan 6*,532 sakun [Royally Awarded Surnames, 6,532 Lineages], Thonburi: Duangkaew, 1995, pp. 12-13, 24). The conspicuous anachronism of referring to the 19th-century "Bunnag brothers" is nevertheless used in this article as a matter of convenience.

For simplicity, all references to Bunnag family members, after their initial identification by rank and title, refer to them by their personal names. In taking this unpretentious approach, no disrespect is intended. To accommodate Western norms of pronunciation, all names and titles (with some exceptions based on popular usage) are transliterated along phonetic lines.

[14] Chaophraya Thipakorawong, *Chotmaihet prathanuang sakun bunnag* [Records of the Forebears of the Bunnag Lineage]. Bangkok: Phrachan Printing, 1970 (cited in Julisphong Chularatana, *Khunnang krom tha khwa* . . . [Nobles of the Western Trade Department, . . .], Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Fine Arts, 2007, pp. 248-249).

With Bunnak's conversion, the Bunnag branch of the Sheik Ahmad lineage integrated readily into the Thai Buddhist ruling elite at the cost of distancing itself from its ancestral Shia Muslim community. Nevertheless, the ancient Bunnag family connection continues to be esteemed by both the Bunnags and the

in the aftermath most of the rest of his family was carried off into Burmese captivity. Bunnak somehow avoided that fate and in the wake of the Ayutthaya defeat found his way to Thonburi. Disfavored by King Taksin, he sought sanctuary at the home of his childhood friend Thongduang (Chaophraya Chakri, later Rama I). There he met and married Nuan, the younger sister of Chaophraya Chakri's wife Nak (later Queen Amarin).

With the rise of his brother-in-law to the Throne in 1782 as Rama I, founder of the Chakri Dynasty, Bunnak's fortunes rose dramatically. The new king appointed him Director of the Royal Pages Department with the title of Phraya Uthaitham. Accompanying that post, he was awarded a prestigious residential compound within the Bangkok citadel directly behind the Grand Palace and alongside the palace of Princess Narinthon Thewi (Ku, the king's half-sister), backing on Wat Pho (later Wat Phra Chetuphon). In 1785 he was elevated to Chaophraya Yomarat, Minister of the Capital, and then in 1793 to Chaophraya Akha Mahasena, Minister of War, replicating his father's former title (plus "Akha") and function. Upon his death in 1805 his wealth, including the family's well-situated mansion, passed to his sons Dit and That.

Figure 2. Bunnak (Chaophraya Akha Mahasena); imagined representation

The second generation

Bunnak's sons Dit and That – here referred to as the Bunnag brothers – occupied from birth a privileged place in the Thai social order. Through their mother Nuan they were maternal first-cousins of Rama II, though many years his junior. They were thus regarded as lesser cousins and loyal companions of Rama II's senior son Prince Chesada Bodin (Thap), their age peer. As close kin to the royal family, the sons of a *chaophraya*, and of recognized probity, they were much favored at court, ensuring their prospects for advancement to high office. Based on their shared kinship, age, and aptitudes they maintained a lifelong friendship with Prince Chesada (later Rama III). Dit, in particular, forged a close personal bond with the prince during their joint coming-of-age ordination stay at Wat Phlap (later Wat Rachasitharam). In the following years they collaborated in forming an "alliance of convenience" with Bangkok's leading Chinese junk merchants in outfitting a number of highly profitable trade voyages between Siam and China.[15]

Neither their father's death in 1805 nor Rama I's death four years thereafter

surviving generations of that Shia lineage, who carried the noble rank and title of Phraya Chula Rachamontri into the 20th century and retain that surname today (Julisphong Chularatana, "The Shi'ite Muslims in Thailand from [the] Ayutthaya Period to the Present," *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, 2008, special issue no.16, pp. 37-58).

[15] Wyatt, "Family Politics," p. 220; Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, Cambridge, MA: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977, p. 181.

slowed the Bunnag brothers' steady rise through the ranks of the nobility. In fact, the brothers thrived under Prince Chesada's increased power as royal overseer of the Harbor Department (*phu kamkap krom tha*) and later as overseer-in-chief of the entire government (*phu samret rachakan*) in the years following the accession of his father as Rama II.[16] In 1813 Dit was promoted to a directorship in the Royal Pages Department as Phraya Suriyawong Montri, and That was not many years later appointed to a parallel post in that department as Phraya Si Suriyawong. All that threatened to come crashing down in 1818, however, with the brothers' abrupt eviction from the Bunnag mansion to indulge Rama II's decision to expand the Grand Palace by extending the rear palace wall toward Wat Pho.[17] It can be speculated that the brothers were staggered by the entirely unforeseen expropriation of their paternal estate, demolition of their noblemen's mansion, and damage to their reputation and aspirations.

It was Prince Chesada's support in that family crisis that saved the day. In his capacity as de facto Minister of Trade and Foreign Affairs (here abbreviated to "Ministry of Trade" for convenience), he merged his administrative ambitions with the brothers' immediate concerns to engineer their appointment as dual directors of his envisioned cross-river royal trade depot, consisting primarily of dockage, warehouses, staff quarters, and directors' residential compounds.[18] There, they would be responsible for the Trade Ministry's management of port operations, monopoly trade, and tribute-trade.[19] That posting would require their cross-river residential relocation to the Khlong San riverside, remote yet readily accessible to both the royal citadel and the Sampheng commercial harbor. If it was the king who had the final say in the brothers' reassignment and relocation, it was doubtless the prince who guided him to that decision. It is possible, in fact, that the brothers' removal from their Bangkok home was the very spark that inspired Prince Chesada to conceive of the new trade depot and arrange their assignment as its dual directors in the first place.[20] How else to explain their dramatic move from the center of power to the edge of nowhere, an area occupied by little more than a loose string of Thai riverside fishing hamlets and Chinese junk landings, a move of no more than a mile but, in the context of the day, a departure tantamount to social exile.

Dit was assigned as the trade depot's director of port operations, followed in 1822 by his elevation to Chaophraya Phra Khlang, Minister of Trade, while That was appointed

[16] Chaophraya Thipakorawong (Narimon Thirawat and Nidhi Eoseewong, eds.), *Phra rachaphongsawadan krung ratanakosin rachakan thi 2*, [The Royal Chronicles of Krung Ratanakosin, the Second Reign], Bangkok: Amarin, 2005 [c.1870], p. 20.

[17] Ibid., p. 70.

[18] In the absence of adequate documentary evidence on that portentous event in the royal archives, which did not register internal ministerial proceedings, emphasis has been placed here on the logic of the circumstances, interpreting the opaque facts of chronology and geography and splicing the gaps.

[19] Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, pp. 140-159, 181-185.

[20] Under Siam's feudal administration, ministers and lesser functionaries regularly diverted a significant portion of government revenues into their own coffers. That traditional practice was aggravated under the lax control exerted by Rama II. With his centralization of the Trade Ministry's key operations under the Bunnag brothers' management along the Khlong San waterfront, Prince Chesada, as the government's overseer-in-chief and well-known for his economic acumen, sought to remedy the significant fiscal shortfalls that had been troubling the Second Reign (Ibid.).

his junior partner as Director of the Merchandise Warehouse Department, with the title of Phraya Si Phiphat.[21] There, along the Khlong San waterfront, they built neighboring residences using the timbers and other materials salvaged from their dismantled citadel mansion. Prince Chesada's intimate collaboration with the Bunnag brothers carried over into his reign as Rama III, and over the full course of his twenty-seven-year rule the brothers continued to serve as his most trusted subordinates.[22] Their continuing collaboration was a major instrument toward ensuring the Third Reign's impressive contributions to Siam's territorial, manpower, and fiscal strength. Its rewards allowed the brothers to be counted "among the richest men in the kingdom,"[23] vindicating the audacity of their initial establishment of the royal trade depot along the desolate Khlong San waterfront. The strong ties between the Bunnag brothers and the throne persisted beyond the Third Reign into the Fourth. Only in the Fifth Reign, as a later section will elaborate, did the unique alliance between their sons and the Throne begin to splinter as King Chulalongkorn sought to aggrandize his power toward an absolute monarchy.

Dit

Figure 3. Dit (Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Prayurawong); imagined representation

Among his early duties as Minister of Trade, Dit supervised the construction of several major transport canals, a series of river-mouth fortifications, and some thirty warships to help defend the kingdom's maritime frontier. It was perhaps that military leaning that in 1830/31 saw Rama III appoint him "Acting" Minister of War while allowing him simultaneously to retain his position as Minister of Trade,[24] making him one of the most powerful nobles in Thai history. In that dual role he served as the kingdom's principal diplomat at several treaty negotiations with Western powers while also overseeing, and on at least one occasion personally heading, several military expeditions against neighboring states. Beyond those adventures, he is famously held to have been instrumental in orchestrating the elevation of Prince Mongkut in 1851 to the Throne as Rama IV, a maneuver in which he had been well schooled during the accession of Rama III some three decades

[21] Like many other long Thai appellations, this title (actually Phraya Si Phiphat Ratana Kosa) is here abbreviated for convenience.

[22] The close relations between the king and the brothers in situations requiring difficult decisions under conditions of personal discretion are well portrayed in Cyril Skinner (trans.) and Justin Corfield (ed.), *Rama III and the Siamese Expedition to Kedah in 1839: The Dispatches of Luang Udomsombat*, Clayton, Vic, Australia: Monash University, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993. Luang Udom Sombat was himself a subordinate of That.

[23] Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984, p. 53.

[24] Chaophraya Thipakorawong, *Phra racha phongsawadan krung ratanakosin rachakan thi 3* [The Royal Chronicles of Ratanakosin, the Third Reign], Bangkok: Royal Thai Government, Department of Fine Arts, 1934 [c. 1870], p. 43.

previously.[25] In recognition of his crucial support, the newly crowned King Mongkut (Rama IV) awarded him that year the exalted title of Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Prayurawong, and Dit then resigned his command of the War Ministry in favor of his son Chuang (Chaophraya Si Suriyawong), retaining only the Trade Ministry.

By the time of the Bowring mission of 1855 Dit was an old and ailing man; though unsympathetic to the proposed treaty's free trade provisions, he left the treaty negotiations to his more liberal-minded son Chuang and died a few days after the conclusion of the negotiations. Beyond his public, political achievements, Dit fathered nine children by his major wife Chan and another fifty-two by a bevy of minor wives. Six of his sons rose to the rank of *chaophraya* and nine rose to *phraya*, setting a firm foundation for the ascendancy of his line to the peak of the nobility for the remainder of the 19th century.

That

While Dit devoted most of his attention to military and diplomatic affairs, his younger brother focused on fiscal and commercial matters. As Director of the Merchandise Warehouse Department he worked closely with Bangkok's Chinese merchant community over the course of the Third/Fourth Reigns in negotiating the troublesome conversion from royal monopoly trading to tax farming as the kingdom's principal cash income source. While that fiscal transformation was managed with spectacular success, his shrewd administration gained him a tarnished reputation as a major beneficiary, first from the monopoly profits garnered through his control of the export trade and then from the monopsony profits spun off from the tax-farming system.[26]

Figure 4. That (Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Phichaiyat)

In backup to Dit's preoccupation with other state business, That sometimes acted as his surrogate in the conduct of diplomatic and military affairs. He also was called on repeatedly to mobilize, finance, and oversee Chinese coolie contingents in the construction of public works in and around Bangkok, including palaces, temples, and transport canals, and the development of urban and agrarian land tracts. For his role in securing the ascension of Rama IV to the Throne, he was conferred in 1851 with the princely title of Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Phichaiyat and was accorded oversight over the Ministry of the Capital in addition to his existing power base within the Ministry of Trade.

With the abolition of the viceregal institution in 1886, the Front Palace archives were evidently destroyed, erasing all but anecdotal information of That's achievements in building patronage ties with the Third- and Fourth-Reign viceroys. Little is thus known of his collaboration with the Front Palace monopoly trade and tax-farm administration,

[25] William L. Bradley, "The Accession of King Mongkut," *Journal of the Siam Society,* 1969, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 149-162.

[26] Hong, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 38-74 (on the royal monopoly trade), 75-110 (on the tax-farming system).

his sons' careers as Front Palace officers, his daughters' successes as Front Palace ladies-in-waiting and consorts. What is clear, however, is that the unfortunate early deaths of the successive viceroys led to recurring stress on the career prospects of That's heirs.

That's business ties with the Chinese trading community also went unrecorded. His tax-farm dealings were largely private undertakings that earned him great profits.[27] Bangkok's Taechiu (Chaozhou, Teochew) community leaders Niam *sae* Tia (Phra Si Songyot, better known as Chaosua Niam) and Choen *sae* Koh (Phraya Phisan Supaphon, better known as Chaosua Choen) were among his closest commercial collaborators. With their support, he is said to have exploited his command of the Royal Warehouse Department: "[He was] notoriously interested in the existing system, by which production, commerce, and shipping were placed at the mercy of the farmers of the various revenues, who paid the price of their many and vexatious monopolies either to the Royal Treasury, or to the high officials through whom those monopolies were granted."[28]

Quite aside from any concerns for the kingdom's continued independence and any sympathy for the Chinese merchant community's well-being, it was surely his personal financial interests that led him to be "rather forward in his objections" to the royal monopoly system's abolition at the 1855 Bowring Treaty negotiations.[29] In the wake of his opposition to King Mongkut's trade liberalization efforts, he and his successor, his son Phae, were severely penalized in the following years by the reallocation of a number of their tax-farming interests in favor of Dit, Kham, and their close associate Prince Wongsa Thirat-sanit, the chief supporters of that policy.[30]

At the family level, That fathered twelve children by his major wife Noi and an unrecorded additional number by minor wives. His son Phae attained the rank of *chaophraya*, and another four sons were elevated to *phraya*.[31] The tragic death of his eldest son Sanit (Phra Suriya Phakdi) in 1838 plus the premature death of his third son Yaem (Phraya Woraphong Phiphat) in 1861 truncated his lineage ambitions and did much to diminish its later prominence in the Bunnag family tree.

Fraternal relations

It is perhaps not too bold to say that, among Siam's ruling elite, elder sons were doted on while their juniors were merely tolerated.[32] The strained fraternal ties arising

[27] The old saying that "ten merchants are not equal to the patronage of one nobleman" (Sarasin, *Tribute and Profit*, p. 218, citing Prince Damrong Rachanuphap) may well have been aimed specifically at the lucrative patron-client relationships formed between That and his many Chinese business associates.

[28] Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1857], vol. 2, p. 227.

[29] Ibid., pp. 289-290.

[30] Mead, *Rise and Decline*, pp. 32-33.

[31] His daughter Samli was accepted as a consort of King Mongkut and bore five daughters, one of whom, Princess Sukhuman Marasi, became a queen of her half-brother, King Chulalongkorn, and bore Prince Boriphat Sukhumphan, founder of the Boriphat lineage.

[32] A near facsimile of primogeniture appears in the superior ranks, titles, functions, and privileged inheritance portions that were regularly allotted to eldest sons and sons of senior wives in Thai elite society. Like many other Thai elite social institutions, that convention emulated the timeworn Chinese patriarchal system, in

out of that systemic marginalization may well have been an early source of That's lifelong disaffection. Dit's relations with That suffered an irreparable reversal in 1830/31 when, in an act of unprecedented audacity, he declined the king's offer of appointment as Minister of War, which would have required him to vacate his profitable post as Minister of Trade. In an equally surprising conciliatory response, the king allowed him to continue as Trade Minister while simultaneously serving as "Acting" Minister of War.[33] To assuage That's disappointment – as he had been anticipating promotion to the Trade Ministry upon Dit's transfer to War – the king offered him the Ministry of the Capital, a far less powerful post. With temerity matching his brother's, That declined that promotion in favor of retaining his less prestigious but far more remunerative position in the Merchandise Warehouse Department. The brothers' strained relations were further magnified with the 1838 execution of That's eldest, highly-regarded son and presumed successor Sanit, an event in which Dit was suspected to have played a pernicious role. Sanit was executed following a trial on charges that he had engaged in a flirtation or affair with a royal consort (who was also executed).[34] Dit's rumored concurrence with the charges, or at least his alleged failure to contest them with vigor, are said to have provoked That's lasting umbrage. All that is not to gainsay that questions of financial impropriety or the inequitable sharing of financial gains were a contributing factor in the enduring fraternal resentments.

Physical and social distancing dramatized the brothers' strained relations, the former symbolized by the canal that divided the brothers' respective zones of habitation and the latter by the temples that served their separate factions. To demarcate their respective residential tracts, a narrow canal initially called Pak Khlong San and later dubbed Khlong Talat Ban Somdet was dug between the brothers' estates from the river to Khlong San, extending on from there to Khlong Bang Sai Kai. Its initial insignificance was soon transformed with the canal's widening and deepening to allow the shipment of construction materials for Wat Phichaiyat, which cut across the canal's path to leave the waterway's tail end, flowing to Khlong Bang Sai Kai, little more than a drainage sluice, still observable today. Increasingly, Khlong Talat Ban Somdet took on the metaphor of a moat (just as Khlong San served as a moat backing the entire Bunnag stronghold), bordered on That's side by a line of warehouses plus a pair of Muslim and Chinese buffer villages walling off That from Dit on the opposite shore.[35] The moat symbolism was later

contrast to the bilateral kinship practices and looser seniority norms of the lesser social orders. The many Thai folk tales lauding loving fraternal relations – suggesting that such idealistic parables served as a necessary cautionary guide – are exemplified by the Ramayana account of Rama ("Phra Ram") and his younger brother, Lakshman ("Phra Lak") (Frederick B. Goss, "'*Anucha*': The Younger Brother in *Ramakien* and Thai Historical Narratives," *Rian Thai: International Journal of Thai Studies*, 2008, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 26-51).

[33] Thipakorawong, *loc. cit*.

[34] Thipakorawong, *Phra racha phongsawadan . . . rachakan thi 3*, pp. 76-77; Kukrit Pramoj, Khrong kraduk nai tu [Skeletons in the Closet], Bangkok: Dok Ya, 2000 [1971], pp. 91-93. The execution of that ranking Bunnag family member appears to have been regretted by later kings, as suggested by the elevation of one of Sanit's surviving daughters to a consort of Rama IV, another to a consort of Rama V, and a third in marriage to a royal family affiliate later promoted to chaophraya.

[35] The villages were Toek Daeng (a Shia merchants' settlement and its Kuwat il-Islam Mosque) and Ban Talat Hailam (a small Hainanese fishermen's settlement and marketplace featuring Sanchao Po Soea).

fortified with the construction of a Dutch-style drawbridge allowing restricted cross-canal passage along the brick roadway (later known as Thanon Somdet Chaophraya) paralleling Khlong San.

Complementing that physical separation were the two tracts' contrasting signature temples, Wat Prayurawongsawat (founded as Wat Prayurawongsaram in the Third Reign and renamed in the Fourth Reign) and Wat Phichaiyatikaram (founded as Wat Phrayayat in the Third Reign and renamed in the Fourth Reign).[36] The essential social functions performed by those temples and their monastic brotherhoods were, as elsewhere, to meet the pastoral, ritual, and educational needs of their lay communities; they served, in essence, as an affirmation of the sense of community itself.[37] Yet, these paired temples – sponsored by two contiguous branches of a single elite lineage, built simultaneously and located fewer than 200 meters apart – suggest a social distancing between their respective congregations.[38] Several additional contrasts between these two temples suggest a social estrangement between their respective congregations. First, Wat Prayurawong was staffed by monks of Siam's traditional Mahanikai order while Wat Phichaiyat aligned itself with the royalist Thammayuttika sect founded c. 1830 by Prince Mongkut, the future Rama IV – the monks of the two denominations being distinguishable in the details of their doctrinal rigor and ritual practice (most publicly visible in their monastic attire), though remaining united in their common adherence to the tenets of Theravada Buddhism.[39] Second, a massive chedi (reliquary monument) was built at Wat Prayurawong c. 1860 to enshrine the cremains of Dit, while Wat Phichaiyat around the same time was embellished by a triad of giant *prang* (commemorative monument) in honor of That. Third, Wat Phichaiyat was designed with a pronounced Chinese stylistic infusion, reflecting the contributions of That's many Chinese business associates. Wat Prayurawong, on the other hand, was renovated in ornate Gothic/Victorian style early in the Fifth Reign (destroyed during the Allied bombings of the Second World War), in keeping with the architectural preferences of King Chulalongkorn.[40]

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[36] As with other long Thai appellations, these temple names have been abbreviated in subsequent references for convenience.

[37] Jane Bunnag, *Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Monastic Organization in Central Thailand*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 51-85.

[38] A congruent contrast is evident between another pair of Bunnag family temples, Wat Buppharam and Wat Anongkharam, built nearby, contemporaneously about a decade later under the principal sponsorships, respectively, of Than Phuying Chan, senior wife of Dit, and Than Phuying Nong, senior wife of That. Like Wat Prayurawong and Wat Phichaiyat, those two temples were distinguished from one another in their contrasting Thammayut and Mahanikai sectarian affiliations, though in the opposite direction (for reasons too arcane to dwell on here).

[39] Over the years, several efforts at Thammayut-Mahanikai coexistence at Wat Phichaiyat proved unsuccessful. In 1942, however, during a period of heightened Mahanikai-Thammayut sectarian tensions and political agitation, the abbot of Wat Phichaiyat and his monastic entourage converted to the Mahanikai Order; since then Wat Phichaiyat has been officially listed as Mahanikai.

[40] On the parallel histories of the two temples, compare "*Prawat wat prayurawongsawat worawihan*" [History of Wat Prayurawongsawat Worawihan], in Phra Khru Phisan Sorawuni (Chakrawut), et al., eds., *Prinyanuson chalong priantham 9* . . . . [Graduation Ceremony Celebrating the Attainment of the Ninth Level of Monastic Studies . . . .], Bangkok: Wat Mahathat Yuwarat Rangsit, 2015, pp. 45-60; and *Prawat wat phichayatikaram worawihan* [History of Wat Phichaiyatikaram Worawihan], in Phra Wisuthiyan Methi, et al., eds., *Katanyu kata wethitakhun* [Gratitude to an Elder], Nonthaburi: Akkhara Printing, 2020, pp. 18-38.

Lastly, with the turn-of-the-century popularization of elite educational endowments as a path to public education (and royal favor), Queen Sukhuman Marasi (a granddaughter of That)[41] of the Fifth Reign sponsored the Sukhumalai Girls' School at Wat Phichaiyat, founded in 1907, while King Chulalongkorn's senior consort Chaokhun Phra Phrayurawong (Phae, a granddaughter of Chuang)[42] sponsored a revival of the defunct King's College boys' school, occupying the former estate of Chuang (Chaophraya Si Suriyawong) directly behind Wat Prayurawong, as the Soeksa Nari girls' school. A parallel pair of competing schools was established by the respective Bunnag branches at Wat Buppharam and Wat Anongkharam around the turn of the 20th century, as public education in temple-based schools was popularized.[43]

In sum, the Bunnag brothers' fraternal disputes and the physical factional distancing that they engendered led to a lingering alienation between the Prayurawong and Phichaiyat branches of the Bunnag nobility – the former determined to preserve its preeminent place in the Grand Palace and the military, the latter staking its future on affiliation with the Front Palace and the Chinese business community. In fact, Dit and That appear rarely to have undertaken any major projects in collaboration – their joint support for the elevation of Prince Mongkut to the Throne being a striking exception – and intermarriage between their respective lines, in contrast to the many marriages within each, long remained infrequent.[44]

The third generation

Over the course of the Fourth Reign, a new generation of Bunnag brothers came to the fore with the departure of Dit and That. Under their administrative dominance, King Mongkut served a relatively benign term of office. By the start of the Fifth Reign, "the Bunnag family had become so entrenched that it was the young king who was under its patronage, and not the other way 'round."[45]

King Chulalongkorn campaigned throughout his reign to reverse that political imbalance.[46] An initial, uncharacteristically overt step to that end, immediately following the Regency period (1868-1873), was his purge of the Bunnags' control of the Ministry

[41] See Footnote 31.

[42] See Footnote 71.

[43] See Footnote 38. Yet another girls' school was founded in 1907 as the endowment of Than Phuying Phan, Chuang's consort in his old age, on the site of her mansion along Khlong Ban Somdet. That school was later converted to a teachers' training college, which survives today as the Ban Somdet Chaophraya Rachaphat University (Nantha Withawuthisak et al, *100 pi ban somdet chaophraya: Sathaban rachaphat ban somdet chaophraya* [100 Years of Ban Somdet Chaophraya: Rachaphat Ban Somdet Chaophraya University], Bangkok: Amarin, 1996).

[44] Although isolated cases of marriage took place between Phichaiyat women and Prayurawong men over the course of the first five generations, none appear to have occurred between Prayurawong women and Phichaiyat men, reflecting the family pecking order.

[45] Hong, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 112; cf. Ian G. Brown, *The Creation of the Modern Ministry of Finance in Siam, 1885–1910*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p. 14.

[46] Mead, *Rise and Decline*, pp. 58-60; Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994, pp. 85-92.

of Agriculture with the removal of Phraya Ahan Borirak (Nut), Minister of Lands, and several of his minions. Nut was the eldest son of Chaophraya Pholathep (Long) and Khunying Nuam (or Muang), one of Chuang's many half-sisters, and had been promoted to *phraya* and installed as minister in 1869, soon after Chuang's appointment as Regent. Nut was sacked on grounds of embezzlement of land tax proceeds – exactly the sort of excessive retention of revenues that had troubled earlier reigns, but that had rarely before been confronted. He was dismissed from office, stripped of his title, and imprisoned.[47] That initial *cri de guerre* sounded by the king in the passion of youth was followed by a decades-long series of more measured royal actions aimed at thwarting the Bunnag hegemony.

One of those actions was the division of the old Trade Ministry into two independent entities, a Foreign Office and a much-diminished version of the old Trade Ministry incongruously named the Great Royal Treasury Department (*krom phra khlang maha sombat*). Those two agencies were headed, respectively, by the two third-generation Bunnag family heads, Chaophraya Phanuwong (Thuam) and Chaophraya Si Phiphat (Phae), respectively representing the Prayurawong and Phichaiyat family branches. Not long thereafter, the king "persuaded the leaders of the powerful Chinese secret societies [tax farmers and their contingents] in Bangkok to renew in him the oath of allegiance they had first sworn to Sri Suriyawong 10 years before during the Regency . . . ."[48] That was a necessary step to his centralization of the tax-farm administration (particularly its periodic tax-farm auctions) under a newly established independent Finance Office, which proceeded systematically to strip Phae's department of its traditional earnings.[49] A major adjustment in the Phichaiyat line's financial affairs followed, comparable to its earlier adaptation subsequent to the abolition of the royal monopoly trade, leading to increased emphasis on private investments and careers in the rapidly professionalizing civil service.

During the following decade, the retirement of Thuam (1885) and the death of Phae (1887) led King Chulalongkorn to place the Foreign Affairs and Treasury Departments under the direction of two of his younger half-brothers, Princes Thewawong Waropakan and Narathip Praphanphong, respectively. At the same time, the death of Won (Chaophraya Surawong Waiyawat) in 1888 opened the way for the king to further consolidate royal control with the assignment of his younger full-brother,

[47] "*Sarup lamdap kan soep sakun trong khong nai det bunlong*" [Summary of the genealogy of Mr. Det Bunlong], in *Anuson nai ngan phra rachathan phloeng sop sasatrachan phiset det bunlong* . . . [Commemoration of the Royally Sponsored Cremation of Professor Det Bunlong . . .], Bangkok: 2010, p. 46. In a dramatic revelation of the Bunnag connection to this case, the investigatory committee uncovered a number of irregularities, including the fact that Nut "had taken liberties in distributing the state's rice to his family and to his patron, Somdet Chaophraya [Si Suriyawong]" (Mead, *Rise and Decline*, p. 59, citing Thailand, National Archives, R5 S 5/9 (K-B)).

[48] Nigel J. Brailey, "The Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement in Western Laos, 1859-1892," doctoral dissertation, University of London, 1968, p. 258, cited in Chaiyan, *Rise and Fall*, p. 88 (brackets in the original).

[49] Brown, *Creation of the Modern Ministry*, pp. 14-18, 21-22, 40 (fn. 3), 41 (fn.19). As with other knowledgeable studies on 19th-century Bunnag-Crown relations, Brown submerges the Bunnags' inner social relationships and departmental directorships under the penumbra of its senior elder, the Minister of War, leaving the misleading impression that all Bunnag wealth was controlled by that one personage, thereby obscuring, among other things, the continuing economic independence of the Phichaiyat branch.

Prince Phanuphan Wongworadet, to head the Ministry of War, effectively ending the longstanding Bunnag ministerial lineage.

Chuang

Chuang (Chaophraya Si Suriyawong) rose in his father's footsteps to become the most eminent of the Bunnags. As a young man he was one of the first Third-Reign nobles to study English and engage with Bangkok's small Western community. Carrying the junior rank and title of Chamoen Waiworanat, Chuang served as a directing officer in the Royal Bodyguard and saw active duty in the early 1830s as commander of a battalion of marines in a naval assault on southern Vietnam. He innovated the construction of Western-style sailing ships and presented Siam's first locally built square-rigger to Rama III in 1835, followed by the construction of many more sailing ships and steamships for the royal fleet in later years.[50] Raised to the rank and title of Phraya Si Suriyawong late in the Third Reign, he supported his father and uncle in securing the 1851 royal succession for Prince Mongkut. Consequently, at the outset of the Fourth Reign he was promoted to Chaophraya Si Suriyawong, Minister of War – which came to be considered equivalent to "prime minister" during his tenure – succeeding his father in that post, though his father stayed on as Minister of Trade.[51]

Figure 5. Chuang (Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Si Suriyawong)

As his ailing father's successor-in-waiting, Chuang played a leading role at the Bowring Treaty negotiations of 1855. His British counterparts saw him as a leader of the "progressive faction" among the Siamese negotiators and considered him "a most sagacious man, towering far above every other person whom we have met . . . ."[52] The key issue brought to the negotiations by the British was the final abolition of the lingering royal trade monopoly and its replacement with a uniform three-percent tariff.[53] Working in close concert with King Mongkut, whose liberal trade views he shared, Chuang's success in overcoming the conservative faction's opposition to that provision had a profound influence on the kingdom's future. He struggled to cope with the far-

[50] Chuang's accomplishments in square-rigger construction at Chanthaburi and later steamer construction at the Khlong San and Yannawa shipyards led to him being known as "father of the Siamese navy" (F. Holm-Peterson, *Windjammers Under the Old Elephant Flag: Notes About the Old Siamese Merchant Navy 1824-1900*, Troense, Denmark: The Maritime Museum, 1979, p. 42, citing Samuel Smith, *Siam Repository*, 1873).

[51] Chaophraya Thipakorawong (trans. by Chadin Flood), *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign (B.E. 2394-2411)*, Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1965-1973 [c. 1870], vol. 3, pp. 555-558.

[52] Bowring, *Kingdom and People* vol. 2, p. 282; also see p. 304.

[53] Thipakorawong, *Dynastic Chronicles, . . . the Fourth Reign*, vol. 3, pp. 95-96.

reaching international, domestic, and family consequences of that transformative policy decision for the rest of his career.

King Mongkut assigned Chuang and his brother Kham to serve as the chief architects of his vision for Bangkok's expansion and modernization.[54] Chuang's initial assignment was to oversee the city's spatial expansion with the excavation of the Phadung Krung Kasem Canal and construction of its line of fortifications – plus the right-bank inclusion of the Pong Pachamit Fort demarcating the Khlong San district and its Bunnag fief. At the king's behest, he visited Singapore in 1861 to observe the British approach to public administration and public works. That inspection tour foreshadowed the construction of Bangkok's first thoroughfares, with two-story plastered-brick shophouse lines strung alongside for royal rental, the establishment of Bangkok's first constabulary, and the first faint glimmerings of a municipal civil service. Those forays into urban development, however, were left to Kham for further action as Chuang's interests shifted to Siam's western seaboard provinces, which he and some of his brothers fashioned into a vast provincial Bunnag family fiefdom.[55]

As Siam's foremost power broker, Chuang masterminded the 1868 succession of Prince Chulalongkorn to the Throne. His additional stage-management of the appointment of Prince Wichaichan, eldest son of Phra Pin Klao (the Fourth-Reign "Second King"), as the Fifth-Reign viceroy established him as the new viceroy's patron.[56] In the process, he ensured his own appointment as Regent during the new king's minority (1868-1873). He took advantage of his tenure in that august political station to appoint a number of his brothers, his son, and several nephews to senior government office, and to reward his friends and chasten his adversaries. "Oral tradition has it that one of the granddaughters of . . . Caophraya [sic] Si Suriyawong (Chuang), once asked him, 'Grandfather, why don't you become king?' He is said to have replied, 'Why should I bother? I have everything a man could desire.' He was only too right."[57] Upon the expiration of his term as Regent, he received the valedictory title of Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Si Suriyawong, retired from government service, and moved to Ratchaburi, where he died a decade later.

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[54] To facilitate that assignment and to assist him in his other duties, he presented Chuang and Kham with a pair of well-appointed estates along the outer bank of the city moat, Khlong Ong Ang, within an easy carriage ride of the Grand Palace; they appear to have used those facilities for most of their tenure as offices rather than as primary residences (Nathawuti Sutthisongkhram, *Somdet chaophraya borom maha si suriyawong*, Bangkok: Sangsan Books, 2008 [1980], pp. 145-146).

[55] That provincial extension of Bunnag family wealth-generating control did not go unnoticed by King Chulalongkorn. "The dislodging of the Bunnag nobility from its command of political power at the top went hand in hand with the dissolution of the localized structures of power which were the power base of the Bunnag nobility" (Chaiyan, *Rise and Fall*, p. 90). See also Michael Vickery, "Thai Regional Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1970, pp. 863-881, and Rujaya Abhakorn, "Ratburi, an Inner Province: Local Government and Central Practice in Siam, 1868-1892," doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1984, pp. 196-203, 249-262.

[56] That maneuver contributed to the continuing tensions between the young king and the Bunnag family head, culminating in the 1873/74 Front Palace Incident – in effect, it is generally said, a failed coup attempt – and the abolition of the viceregal institution and initial dismantling of the Front Palace itself in 1886 shortly after the death of Prince Wichaichan.

[57] Wyatt, "Family Politics," p. 224.

On the family front, Chuang led his generation and the next to unparalleled power and prosperity. As Dit's eldest son and heir to the land tract over which he held sway, Chuang played a crucial role in orchestrating the transformation of the upper Khlong San riverfront from an obscure Trade Ministry enclave to the celebrated Bunnag stronghold with the founding of numerous family estates, among them his own centrally placed, sumptuous "Ban Somdet" palace surrounded by a crenelated wall as befitted his princely (*somdet*) status, situated along Khlong Khanon between Wat Prayurawong and Khlong Ban Somdet. Radiating from that family citadel, the Bunnags' exuberant political aggrandizement could scarcely have had a more provocative effect on King Chulalongkorn. Yet, Chuang played but a limited role in perpetuating the Bunnag lineage, restricting himself to a single wife, who presented him with one son and three daughters (though he maintained a childless consort after his wife's death). With few offspring of his own, he proved to be a generous *pater familias*, appointing many of his brothers and their sons to high office. However, he appears to have taken no initiative toward resolving the family's factional frictions, which – had he done so – might have served him and his kin well as a continuing safeguard against the predictable royal backlash to his unprecedented aggrandizement of power.

Figure 6. (from left) Kham (Chaophraya Thipakorawong); Thuam (Chaophraya Phanuwong); Thet (Chaophraya Suraphan Phisut); Phon (Chaophraya Phasakorawong)

Other third-generation Bunnag family luminaries

Kham (Chaophraya Thipakorawong), the ablest of Chuang's younger brothers and his principal associate in office, succeeded his father as Minister of Trade with the title of Chaophraya Rawiwong, later upgraded to Chaophraya Thipakorawong.[58] As a devout Buddhist he supported Prince Mongkut's efforts to reform Thai monastic practice and teachings through the Prince-Monk's establishment of the Thammayut Order. With Chuang he played a key role in promoting Mongkut's ascension to the Throne.[59] As king, Mongkut relied on Kham's expertise in the planning and construction of Bangkok's first thoroughfares, improved bridges and shophouse rows, and various other urban development projects. With Chuang, Kham negotiated the Fourth Reign's successive treaties with the Western powers. Another lasting legacy was his preparation

[58] Thipakorawong, *Dynastic Chronicles, . . . the Fourth Reign*, vol. 3, p. 2.

[59] Ibid., p. 56.

of the royal chronicles of the first four Bangkok reigns as well as several other historical and religious tracts. Behind the scenes, Kham sought to reconcile relations between the Prayurawong and Phichaiyat family factions, without palpable success. As an exception to the vaunted Bunnag fecundity, he produced no offspring of his own.

Among the many other notable third-generation Bunnags, three additional younger brothers of Chuang dominated the Prayurawong wing. Thuam (Chaophraya Phanuwong) was the most colorful of those brothers. With the rank and title of Chamoen Rachamat, he served as a deputy envoy with an 1857-1858 embassy to London in follow-up to the Bowring mission of 1855.[60] Upon his return he was posted to Phetchaburi province as Deputy Governor and was subsequently transferred back to Bangkok to serve with the Ministry of War. In 1869 he was unexpectedly raised to Minister of Trade with the title of Chaophraya Phanuwong. Four years later the Trade Ministry's fiscal functions were stripped from his control, evidently on grounds of malfeasance, and transferred to Phae (Chaophraya Si Phiphat), leaving Thuam in charge of the Ministry's residual foreign affairs functions. He retired from active government service in 1885 on grounds of ill health, moved in 1888 to the downstream garden retreat that Chuang's son Won had built for his own convalescence not many years before, and he died there in 1913.[61] He had twenty-five children, of whom six sons attained the rank of *phraya*, though none gained lasting distinction in the changing political climate of the waning Bunnag decades.

A second brother, Thet (Chaophraya Suraphan Phisut), long presided over the Bunnag family's vast western seaboard fiefdom stretching across Phetchaburi, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram, and Nakhon Chaisi, first as Governor of Phetchaburi Province and later as High Commissioner of the Ratchaburi Circle (*monthon*). The delicate political interplay between the successive kings and the Bunnags over control of the resources and revenues of that regional satrapy was played out, ultimately, in the design of a new provincial arrangement known as the *thesaphiban* system (later the *changwat* system) to bring the provincial governments firmly into the national fold.[62] In its early phase, the imposition of sovereign control over the Bunnags' provincial fiefdom was symbolized by the construction of a series of royal vacation palaces that served to remind the people of their true sovereign.[63] In addition to Thet's provincial residences, where he maintained many of his twenty-nine consorts, he and his major

[60] The head of that mission, Thuam's elder brother Chum (Phraya Montri Suriyawong), died less than a decade later, prematurely ending a promising career with the Trade Ministry and opening unexpected opportunities for Thuam's career advancement.

[61] The government acquired that garden estate from his heirs for conversion to the Somdet Chaophraya Hospital, which remains at that location to this day.

[62] Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam 1892-1915*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977.

[63] While ordinarily viewed as no more than royal retreats and architectural adventures, the hilltop Phra Nakhon Khiri Palace (Phetchaburi town, Fourth Reign), Phra Ram Rachaniwet Palace (Phetchaburi town, late Fifth Reign), and Maroe Khathayawan Palace (Phetchaburi's Cha-am township, Sixth Reign), as well as the Sanam Chan Palace (Nakhon Pathom town, Sixth Reign), additionally served as politically purposeful, physically and financially imposed royal intrusions into the Bunnag provincial stronghold (Ross King and Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra "A Tale of Three Palaces: Heritage and Interpretation," in Ross King, ed., *Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Thailand: Memory, Place and Power*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2017, pp. 48-67).

wife and adult sons spent much time at their estate in the Bunnag family's Khlong San stronghold, in close proximity to the royal center of power. Although he long suffered from narcolepsy, Thet managed to sire sixty-two children. His many sons and grandsons included a number of provincial governors; two of them, Thian and Thiam, in sequence succeeding to his title and governor's functions at Phetchaburi with the rank of *phraya*. Seven of his daughters were accepted as royal consorts during the later years of the Fifth Reign.[64]

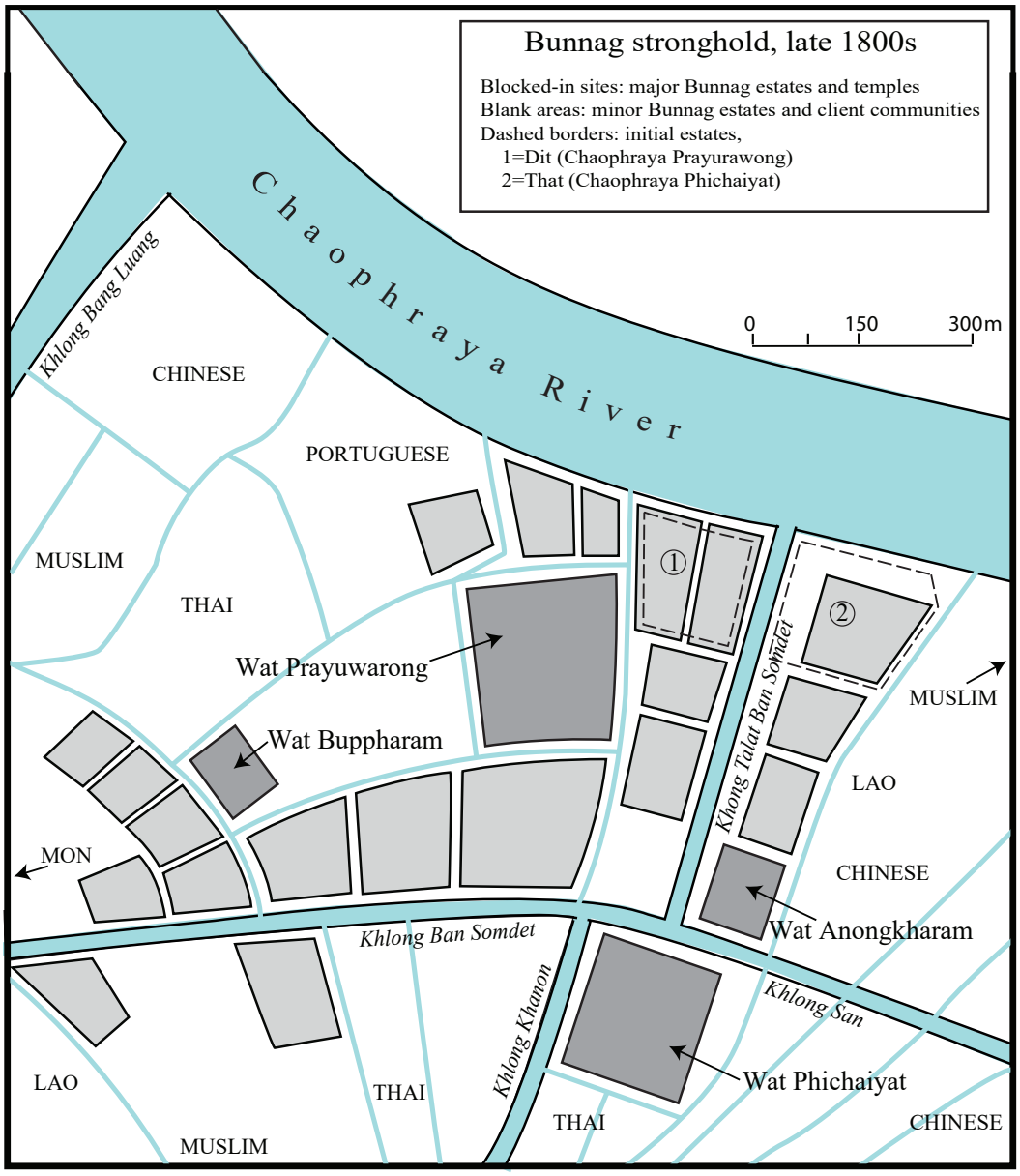
A third prominent brother, Dit's youngest son Phon (Chaophraya Phasakorawong), was one of King Chulalongkorn's most even-tempered and warmhearted companions and one of his most conscientious ministers, though not one of the most effective in the results of his work. In the 1860s he joined the first group of noble youths sent abroad for study. Upon his return he was appointed Personal English Secretary to King Mongkut and then Private Secretary to King Chulalongkorn. In 1873 he was promoted to head the Royal Pages Bodyguard Regiment with the title of Phraya Phasakorawong and then in 1887 was transferred to the post of Director-General of the Customs Department, followed in 1888 by promotion to Minister of Lands and then in 1892 to Minister of Public Instruction with the title of Chaophraya Phasakorawong. With that eclectic career to his credit, he took early retirement from government service in 1902 after bitter disagreements over educational and religious policy issues with several of the king's uncompromising brothers.

On the Phichayat side of the family divide, Phae (Chaophraya Si Phiphat) assumed the role of family elder following his father's death in 1857. As Phraya Si Phiphat, he was appointed to head a treaty ratification embassy to Paris in 1861[65] and then spent the remainder of the Fourth Reign and early years of the Fifth as his father's successor in directing the remains of the old Merchandise Warehouse Department, which had been diminished, in the wake of the Bowring Treaty, to little more than a tax-farming administration office and tax-in-kind and tribute collection agency for receipts from outlying provinces and dependencies. With the division of the old Trade Ministry upon the excision of the foreign affairs component in 1873, he was promoted to head the reduced ministry (now the "Great Royal Treasury Department") as Chaophraya Si Phiphat for the remainder of his career, though he was effectively sidelined with the transfer of most of its former tax farming functions to the newly-formed Finance Office.

Following a different career path, several of Phae's younger brothers rose to senior Front Palace posts during the Fourth and early Fifth Reigns. Among them, Iam (Phraya Isaranuphap) rose to head the Front Palace Trade Department. In an exceptional move, he married a daughter of his father's Chinese business partner Chaosua Niam (Phra

[64] The life of Thet's daughters among King Chulalongkorn's 153 consorts is examined in Leslie Woodhouse, "Concubines with Cameras: Royal Siamese Consorts Picturing Femininity and Ethnic Difference in Early 20th Century Siam," *Women's Camera Work: Asia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2012. Available at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7977573.0002.202

[65] In the French Foreign Office documents of the day, he is referred to as "phra Siphiphat Rajikosa Thipusi," "superintendant des revenus de l'État" (Dominique Le Bas, "La venue de l'ambassade siamoise en France en 1861," *Aséanie*, vol. 3, 1999, p. 96), a functional attribution considerably in excess of his actual mandate.



Si Songyot), Sampheng's wealthiest landowner.[66] Upon the 1886 death of Prince Wichaichan, the Fifth-Reign viceroy, Iam was set adrift but weathered the storm in style as Chaosua Niam's son-in-law.[67] He moved into Niam's Chinese compound in the midst of the Sampheng district, which he eventually inherited along with much other Sampheng property that he and his heirs developed into marketplaces, entertainment centers, and multi-story commercial property. His brother Cham (Phraya Kalahom Sena), who headed the Front Palace War Department, had a less prosperous destiny, and his lineage faded away.[68] Yet another brother, To (Phraya Nana Phitphasi), like Iam, married the daughter of a wealthy Chinese merchant (name unknown) and moved downriver to her home at Banglamphu Lang, situated directly cross-river from his Bang Rak office as Director of the Customs Department.

The fourth generation

Chuang's son Won (Chaophraya Surawong Waiyawat), serving in the Royal Bodyguard with his father's former rank of Chamoen Waiworanat, was dispatched to Paris in 1861 as associate envoy to his older, Phichaiyat-branch kinsman Phae.[69] After his return, he led several naval forays to suppress piracy along the southern coast and was then placed in command of the royal yachts and gunboats. In 1867, as Phraya Surawong Waiyawat, he returned to Paris as royal envoy to negotiate a Cambodian rapprochement. The French Consul at Bangkok at the time opined that "I . . . do not think the King [of Siam] could [have chosen] a man more contemptible and more an enemy of any French interest," whereas another French official privy to the treaty negotiations countered that he found Won to be a "man of superior intelligence with a sincere sympathy for France."[70]

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[66] Iam and his Sampheng-born descendants Det (Phraya Phaibun Sombat) and Dan (Chaophraya Phichaiyat) provide a remarkable example of the inter-ethnic consequences of That's patronage of Bangkok's Taechiu business community.

[67] His reduced standing in the nobility following his separation from government service and socially inappropriate Sampheng marriage and residency were probably major factors in his 1895 defeat in a court case contesting his ownership of a valuable Yannawa waterfront property (a former Front Palace shipyard) that he claimed had been bequeathed to him by the Fourth-Reign viceroy (Phra Pin Klao, otherwise known as the Second King) in recognition of his administrative services. Failing to produce documentary evidence, he was not supported in his claim by the king, nor was his word as a *phraya* accepted by the court as sufficient surety (Phanni Bualek and Aphinya Nonnat, "*Wat phraya krai*" [Wat Phraya Krai], *Moeang Boran*, 2013, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 55-56). The site's subsequent reversion to the Crown provided a convenient opportunity for the Privy Purse soon thereafter to rent out the land on a long-term lease to the East Asiatic Company. The site survives today as the Asiatique riverfront shopping center and amusement park.

[68] Two Prayurawong-line sons, Mek (Phraya Wongsa Phonphisut) and Nokyung (Phraya Aphai Songkhram), also held Front Palace office under the Fifth-Reign viceroy, but their livelihoods in the wake of the viceroy's death and abolition of the viceregal institution were secured by their powerful Prayurawong family connections, and their lineages survived.

[69] The French Foreign Office records of the time refer to him as "*phra* Navaï," describe him as "Chef du conseil formé des fils du roi, des ministers et des grands du royaume" and as "le fils de minister de la Guerre également Premier ministre qui est le chef du parti opposé à la France," and speak of him as an accomplished naval officer (Le Bas, "La venue de l'ambassade siamoise," p. 96).

[70] Both quotes are contained in Thipakorawong, *Dynastic Chronicles, . . . the Fourth Reign*, vol. 3, p. 218, citing Pensri Duke, *Relations entre la France et la Thailande (Siam) au XIX^e siècle d'après les archives des*

Such mixed assessments seem to have shadowed Won throughout his life.

At the outset of the Fifth Reign he was appointed Minister of War with the title of Chaophraya Surawong Waiyawat and in that capacity played an instrumental role in developing Siam's modern military, a rather thankless task in view of the vastly superior might and relentless colonial menace posed by the Western imperial powers at that time. In 1885, suffering from advancing illness, he moved for convalescence to a rustic garden tract far down Khlong San, and he died there in 1888. Compensating for his father's paucity of wives and offspring, he took solace in his family life by siring sixty-five children by his two major wives and twenty-one consorts. One of his sons rose to *chaophraya* and seven to *phraya*, and three daughters became consorts to Rama V.[71]

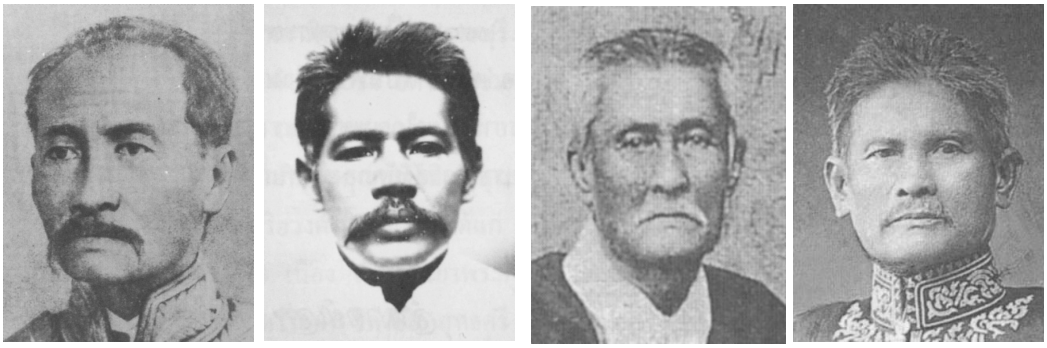


Figure 7. (from left) Won (Chaophraya Surawong Waiyawat); Koet (Phraya Suriyanuwat); Iam (Phraya Isaranuphap); Det (Phraya Phaibun Sombat)

Most of the fourth generation's other senior nobles served as department heads in the Trade and War Ministries or as provincial governors. Two stand out as worthy of particular note. The first was Det (Phraya Phaibun Sombat), who rose to head the Trade Ministry's Excise Department (functional successor of the defunct tax-farming system) and worked his way up to the position of Deputy Minister of Finance in the reformed (post-1892) government. As the eldest son of Iam (Phraya Isaranuphap), he inherited a broad swath of central Sampheng and gained local fame for resisting the

Affaires Étrangeres, Bangkok: Librairie Chalermnit, 1962, p. 51.

[71] The case of Won's eldest daughter Phae provides an instructive example of Bunnag-royal intermarriage. She entered the Grand Palace, as did many a nobleman's daughter, at puberty for her "finishing school" education. There, in 1868, she bore a daughter by Prince Chulalongkorn (the future Rama V). She subsequently bore two further royal daughters, but no sons, which truncated her line, as the king's daughters were held too senior in rank to wed anyone inferior to a king. As palace women, the widow and her spinster daughters lived out their years in secluded luxury. In the Sixth Reign, around age 60 and well after the death of all three daughters, she was promoted to the distinguished rank and title of Chaokhun Phra Prayurawong, possibly for no reason more important than her remembered kindnesses to Prince Wachirawut (later Rama VI) during his shy, quiet, unassuming childhood years. She was given leave to retire to her ancestral estate in the former Bunnag stronghold as patron of the Soeksa Nari School, which continues in operation there to this day.

In addition, two of Won's other daughters produced royal lines. His daughter Mot became a Fifth-Reign consort and bore Prince Aphakon Kiatiwong (founder of the Aphakon lineage) and Prince Suriyong Prayurawong (founder of the Suriyong lineage). His daughter Maen became a consort of King Chulalongkorn's younger full-brother Prince Phanuphan Wongworadet and bore three children all of whom were promoted to senior (*phra ong chao*) royal rank. One of them, titled Princess Chaloemkhet Mongkhon, married King Chulalongkorn's son Prince Yukhon Khamphon (founder of the Yukhon lineage). The Bunnag lineage, through those and other of its daughters, thereby reinforced its place vis-à- vis the Chakri Dynasty.

installation of a stretch of Yaowarat Road through his property (1891-1900) and for his mediating role in the quelling of Chinese tax riots (1910). He later joined the stream of residential relocations to the city's eastern suburbs with a mansion in the gardens along the Hualampong Canal between Surawong Road and Silom Road. He fathered a total of seventeen children, including one *chaophraya* and three *phraya*. In an act redolent of the lingering Bunnag family factional tensions, he opted at one time to use Isaranuphap as his surname.

The other notable fourth-generation personality was Koet (Phraya Suriyanuwat), son of Dit's son Chum (Phraya Montri Suriyawong), who excelled as Siam's first modern economist. Upon his return from overseas studies in the 1880s he was assigned to the Ministry of Interior. In 1887 he was transferred to the recently established Foreign Office as economic counselor and then ambassador posted consecutively to Siam's London, Berlin, and Paris embassies and there negotiated several major railway loans. In recognition of that success and others he was recalled to Bangkok and in 1906 was appointed Minister of Finance. He then arranged the conversion of the opium tax farm to a government monopoly, but the political furor raised by his further proposals to centralize many of the government's scattered fiscal operations within the Finance Ministry led to his resignation in 1908. Adding insult to injury, Koet's radical treatise and other writings on Thai economics were long suppressed.[72]

The fifth generation

Only two fifth-generation Bunnags managed to approach the stature of their forebears. Their careers spanning the 19th/20th century divide symbolized the end of the era of Bunnag eminence and marked, to all intents and purposes, the end of the Prayurawong-Phichaiyat factional divide. The first of those fifth-generation luminaries, To, the eldest son of Won (Chaophraya Surawong Waiyawat), joined the first contingent of nobles' sons sent for overseas studies. Following his return, he entered upon a military career in his father's footsteps, rising in due course to commander of artillery with the title of Phraya Siharat Dechochai and ranking military officer in an expedition into Laos against Ho marauders. In 1888, however, his career path was diverted with his appointment to head Siam's newly established Military Academy. As an adjunct to that unconventional posting the king awarded him an extensive Bang Rak land tract for his commercial development. Its main throughways, appropriately named Surawong Road (originally Suriyawong Road and then Suriwong Road) and Decho Road, lined with two-story Western-style rental houses, opened in 1898 to great success (though he refused to abandon his Khlong San estate for that fashionable left-bank district). Two years later, To was promoted to Deputy Minister of War, under Prince Phanuphan Wongworadet, with the title of Chaophraya Surawong Wathanasak. As a quid pro quo for the king's earlier Bang Rak land grant, his grandfather Chuang's celebrated Ban Somdet estate was

[72] Phraya Suriyanuwat, *Naksethakit khon raek khong moeang thai* [The First Economist of Thailand], Bangkok: Thai Watthana Phanit, 1980; Yuangrat Wedel and Paul Wedel, *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: A History of Revolutionary Ideology in a Traditional Society*, rev. ed., Seattle, WA: Kindle Store (Amazon.com), pp. 50-57.

then returned to the Crown, an act that in hindsight may be considered to have heralded the start of the Bunnag stronghold's decades-long dissolution.[73] To died in 1909 without having achieved his lifelong ambition to succeed his father and grandfather as Siam's "prime minister," but having had the consolation of siring twenty-seven children, of whom six sons rose to *phraya* and one daughter became a Fifth-Reign consort.

In sharp contrast to To's lineage-based military career and its ultimate disappointments, the other eminent fifth-generation Bunnag, Dan, eldest son of Det (Phraya Phaibun Sombat), set off in 1897 on an independent, civilian career path with a local law degree and appointment as a journeyman prosecutor in the Civil Court. [74] He climbed steadily to the rank of Prosecutor General in 1908, was raised to the title of Phraya Krithikan Koranakit, and in 1919 rose to Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal. Clearly in line for higher office, he was promoted to Chaophraya Phichaiyat in 1924, and when the anticipated vacancy opened in 1926, he was appointed Minister of Justice. However, for mysterious reasons – avowedly on grounds of failing health – he resigned that prestigious position in 1928. It has been suggested[75] that his career became enmeshed in the rising tensions between the ruling elite – bent on maintaining their power and emoluments – and the bureaucracy – focused on efficient administration and social justice – as epitomized by increasingly acrimonious conflicts over budgetary deficits and monarchial legitimacy. In consequence, he was shunted aside for "lack of adequate consideration to political sensitivities" in his responsibilities for court proceedings and judicial findings.[76] In 1931, however, he returned to regular government duty (without salary under the government's severe austerity program) to head "the moribund Ministry of Agriculture."[77] Then, little more than a year later, some two months after the coup of 24 June 1932, he was appointed to unexpected, unsought membership in the recently formed National Assembly. And then, as a respected legal authority straddling the royalist-reformist divide, he was elevated to President of the

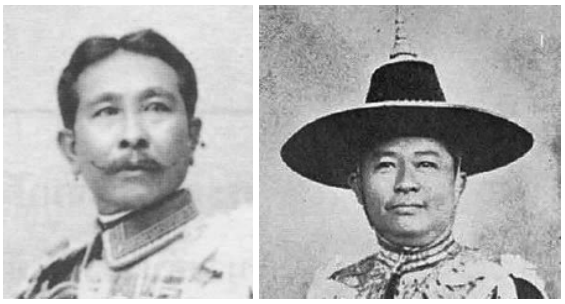


Figure 8. (from left) To Bunnag (Chaophraya Surawong Wathanasak); Dan Bunnag (Chaophraya Phichaiyat)

[73] It remains a moot point whether the return of that land grant to the Crown was a voluntary act or imposed under the royal right of eminent domain (Tomas Larsson, *Land and Loyalty: Security and the Development of Property Rights in Thailand*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012, pp. 31-34, 52-57). Although a seemingly intractable conundrum, the broader ramifications of that issue extend to the expropriation of large swaths of the Bunnag stronghold for public purposes under the successive governments of the post-1932 constitutional monarchy.

[74] "*Prawat [chaophraya phichaiyat]*" [Biography (of Chaophraya Phichaiyat)], in Damrong Rachanuphap, *Thiaw Moeang Phama* [Travels in Burma], Bangkok: printed for the royally sponsored cremation of Chaophraya Phichaiyat (Dan Bunnag), 1946, pp. (2)-(14).

[75] Thai legal scholar (anonymous), personal communication, 2019.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 107.

Assembly. In that capacity, he had the distinction on 10 December 1932 of formally receiving Siam's first "permanent" constitution, signed by King Prachatipok, from the king's hands at a grand ceremony convened in the Ananta Samakom Throne Hall.[78] That liminal moment in Thai history symbolized the ambivalent, conflicted tenor of the time – and encapsulated Dan's own career – in its studied effort to reconcile the opposing impulses of monarchism and democracy, a tension that persists in Thai society to the present day. In January 1933 he again retired from government service – again ostensibly for health reasons.[79] He died in 1946, with only one of his seven sons having risen to senior noble rank.

Coda

The 1932 constitution, which proclaimed the end of the absolute monarchy,[80] was followed a decade later by a decree declaring the abolition of the nobility (though citizens already holding noble ranks and titles were permitted to retain them for the remainder of their lifetimes).[81] All that was accompanied by a statute abolishing polygyny,[82] which had traditionally used women as the honeyed binding force to secure the Bunnags' position within the ruling elite.[83] That bloodless legislative revolution formally ended Siam's feudal nobility, and with it the Bunnag family's privileged status lapsed to ordinary citizenship.

However, the family's active political participation and public service has persisted. In the coup's immediate aftermath of royalist-republican strife, "members of the powerful Bunnag family were active on both sides,"[84] though it is apparent that the majority, with their continuing blood ties, marital links, economic interests, and ideological preferences, sided with the royalist cause. Yet, many adapted quickly to the changed circumstances, playing prominent roles in the long series of post-1932 governments. For instance – sampling here only the governmental ranks – Tom Bunnag (Phraya Aphiban Rachamaitri), son of To (Chaophraya Surawong Wathanasak), served

[78] As presiding officer of the National Assembly, Dan received the signed constitution from the enthroned king and then led a solemn procession to the royal plaza for a public viewing of the signed document. Phraya Manoprakon Nithithada (Kon Hutasingh), also a judge and serving as Chairman of the Committee of the People (de facto Prime Minister) had a few minutes earlier formally presented the document to the king for his signature. The densely symbolic drama of that event is evoked with graphic precision in Thanavi Chotipradit, "From 24th June to 10th December: The Political Life of the Ananta Samakom Throne Hall in 1932," *Na Jua* [Gables], vol. 13, 2016, pp. 10-37.

[79] As an additional, nongovernmental career, Dan served as a member of the board of the Siamese Red Cross from 1925 to 1939, presiding as its Secretary General from 1932.

[80] Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam, 10 December 1932.

[81] Announcement Regarding the Abolition of Ranks, 9 May 1942.

[82] Family Law, Civil and Commercial Code, 1935, Article 1445.3, 27 May 1935.

[83] That motif has been largely relegated to footnotes in the preceding pages in representation of the subordinate position assigned to women within Siam's feudal society, but in referring to half the population it surely deserves more than footnote status in the Bunnag family's history. Nevertheless, polygyny was already well on the wane among the ruling elite by the 1930s owing to Western cultural influence, the abandonment of concubinage by Rama VI and Rama VII, and the nobility's slipping wealth and power.

[84] Batson, *End of the Absolute Monarchy*, p. 248.

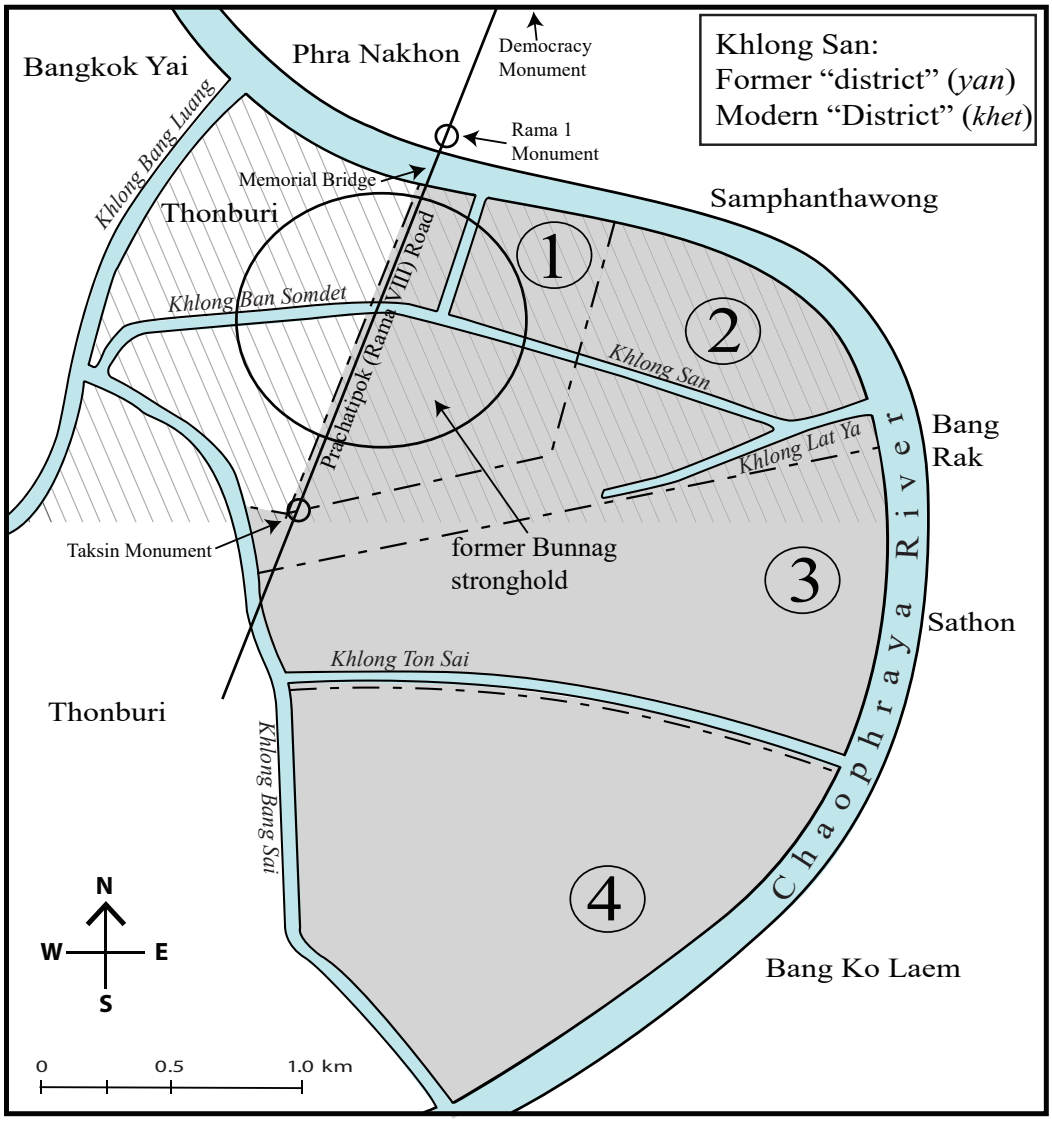
as the new regime's first Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs and then as its second Minister of Foreign Affairs; Doean Bunnag, grandson of Det (Phraya Phaibun Sombat), served as an appointed member of the National Assembly during 1935-1946 and as its President in 1946, and additionally as Minister of Education and Commerce 1942-1947 and Deputy Prime Minister in 1947; Prachuap Bunnag was appointed as a member of the National Assembly in 1932 and served as Minister of Public Health in 1947; Krachang Bunnag (Luang Suriyaphong) was appointed to the Senate in 1946; Banchob Bunnag was appointed Minister of Defense in 1992; and Tej Bunnag, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Tom (Phraya Aphiban Rachamaitri), served as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs between 2001 and 2004 and then as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2008.[85] Today, the Bunnags remain one of Thailand's most distinguished lineages, though their remembered links to the feudal past have faded.[86]

The transformation of the Bunnags' political, social, and economic position within Siam's Sixth/Seventh-Reign cultural paradigm shift is confirmed by the physical dissolution of their Khlong San stronghold. First, a number of the old Bunnag properties reverted to the Crown Property Office (after 1935 the Crown Property Bureau) during the closing decades of the absolute monarchy or were expropriated by the successive post-1932 governments for public purposes. Second, many of the remaining Bunnag holdings were converted to commercial use through sale, rental, or direct investment. That process was complemented by a growing exodus of Bunnag households to the newly fashionable eastern Bangkok neighborhoods of Surawong and Silom and then Phahonyothin and Sukhumvit. Much of the vacated area was infiltrated by elements of the Thai, Chinese, Mon, Lao, and Malay/South Asian client communities bordering the former Bunnag tracts, augmented by petty-bourgeois arrivals from the Bangkok periphery. The net result was the submergence of the stronghold's former tapestry of opulent mansions, set within a lush, canal-watered locale, beneath a sea of concrete today occupied by a maze of nondescript commuter neighborhoods and high-rise condominiums interspersed by major thoroughfares and mass transit links.

Concurrently, the former Bunnag fiefdom's political contours have been obliterated with the dissection of the old Khlong San "district" *(boriwen* or *yan*) between a new pair of municipal "Districts" (*amphoe* or *khet*) inappropriately named "Thonburi" and "Khlong San." The old district comprised natural clusters of settlements with a shared

[85] A last hurrah of the old nobility was heard in the Senate appointed in 1946. That legislative body included nine Bunnags -- Tan (Phraya Chaisurin), Anusonthi (Phraya Song Surarat), Phong (Phra Nithi Naiprasan), Sawat (Phraya Siharat Dechochai), Tin (Phraya Suphan Sombat), Tiam-surawong (Phraya Surawong Wiwat), Tao (Phraya Suriyanuwong Prawat), Krachang (Luang Suriyaphong Phisutthiphae), and Tom (Phraya Aphiban Rachamaitri, who served as that Senate's Vice President) – not to mention a number of other members affiliated with the Bunnags through mother or marriage. The dissolution of that Senate with the 1951 change in government marked the end of the old nobility.

[86] Despite its social leveling and physical dispersal over the course of the 20th century, the Bunnag family has continued to celebrate its collective heritage and demonstrate its solidarity with periodic gatherings at Wat Prayurawong and Wat Phichaiyat, as well as at Ayutthaya's tomb of Sheik Ahmad and at the statue of Somdet Chaophraya Borom Maha Si Suriyawong at his namesake Rachaphat University, among other sites of remembrance (Tej Bunnag, personal communication, 2020). Clearly, the factional divisions of a former era have long been resolved and largely forgotten.



Old Khlong San district (*yan*)
New Khlong San District (*khet*)
① Somdet Chaophraya Subdistrict (*khwaeng*)
② Khlong San Subdistrict (*khwaeng*)
③ Ton Sai Subdistrict (*khwaeng*)
④ Bang Lamphu Lang Subdistrict (*khwaeng*)

sense of community and social/functional complementarity; the new District has been formed by the metropolitan authorities as a matter of administrative convenience, with little consideration for local communal sentiments – and certainly without consideration for the old district's cultural history or heritage. The new Khlong San District merges a large part of the old district along with the old Ton Sai and Banglamphu Lang districts stretching far downriver. With that administrative reorganization, any remaining sense of the Bunnags' former fiefdom has vanished, with virtually all reference to the former Bunnag presence other than some residual canal and street names and the surviving Bunnag-sponsored temples having slipped away. The area's new cultural paradigm stresses its integration into the larger metropolitan fold and the new narrative of Thai constitutional nationalism.

In fact, a compelling new national political imagery has emerged. A new axis extends from the Great Circle (Wongwian Yai), with its heroic statue of King Taksin (facing downriver not to appear to be assaulting Bangkok), up Prachatipok (Rama VII) Road, over the Memorial Bridge (Saphan Phut), and past the imposing statue of Rama I to the Democracy Circle (Wongwian Prachathipatai) with its monumental representation of the 1932 constitution. That spear's-throw from Thonburi to Bangkok offers a remarkable metaphor recapitulating the nationalist legend of the capital's political history from start to present.[87] It presents a revisionist historical evocation that studiously disregards the feudal realities of the Thai past and, more specifically, the inspirational role of Rama III and implementational role of the Bunnag brothers in bringing the Bunnag lineage and its Khlong San stronghold to prominence in the halcyon days of Bangkok's ancien régime.

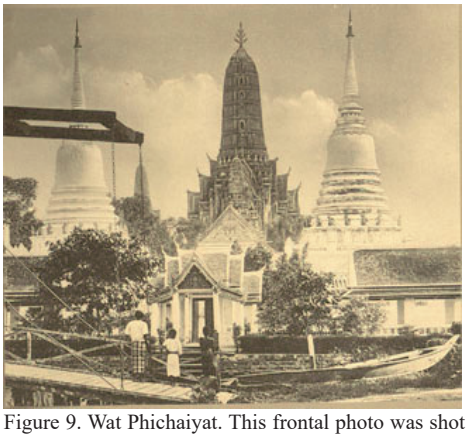


Figure 9. Wat Phichaiyat. This frontal photo was shot by Karl Doehring c. 1906 from across Khlong San near its Khlong Talat Ban Somdet confluence. Along the left side is the Dutch-style drawbridge that crossed the Talat Ban Somdet "moat" separating the Bunnag stronghold's Prayurawong and Phichaiyat reasidential tracts.

[87] "A legend is an attempt to explain the inexplicable; emerging as it does from a basis of truth, it is bound to end in the inexplicable" (Franz Kafka, "The Rescue Will Begin in Its Own Time," *The New Yorker,* June 29, 2020, p. 53).