



In the year 1928 (B.E. 2471) I went upcountry to visit my mother and stayed on as a Pali teacher at Wat Beung temple in Roi Et Province until I received the news in 1929 (B.E. 2472) that a Library and Pali School were being established in Vientiane, which lead me to visit Vientiane according to my original intention. I went together with several friends: Phra Maha Rak (from Bane Khunta in Vientiane, who is now the head monk of Nong Khai ) who at that time had gone to study in Bangkok and had reached level three maha; Phra Maha Reung from Meuang Selaphoum; and the mor lam singers Bunnak, Sawai, and Thorngphoum who used to ask me to write their songs. In Vientiane at that time, the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, which had established offices in Hanoi, Vietnam, was conducting research on the revival of religion, customs and traditions, ancient artifacts and sites and the study of Buddhism in Indochina, especially Laos. In addition to excavating and restoring Phra That Luang and Vat Phou Champassak, they had established a Library and a Pali School, which they assigned to Chao Phetsarath, the cousin of the King, as Director from 1929.

Nya Pho Maha Keo (a level three maha who had studied in Bangkok) was the teacher at the Pali School, which was housed in the old Hor Kham (the current Presidential Palace), but after teaching for only one year, he retired to live off his pension since he was already very elderly. The Library asked Chane Boua (Phranya Namsena) to make a collection of palmleaf manuscripts from various temples, but besides this there was no one with enough knowledge to conduct research or to teach Pali. When Nya Pho Maha Keo retired, Phra Khru Lak Kham, the Abbot of Vat Sisaket who was also the head monk of the province at the time, had Phra Maha Rak teach at the Pali School in his place, but after teaching for a short time there was a dispute and he also left and crossed to stay in Nong Khai in that same year. I had disrobed in the same year, because Nya Khru Lak Kham did not like Thammayut monks (I was a Dhammayut monk) and I applied to work with Chao Phranya Luang Meun Louk Thao (Phuy Panya) who at that time had the title Phranya Srinakone Loke, and with Phranya Namsena. However, Chao Phetsarath, who had the power to appoint me, was away at a meeting in France, and so in the mornings Phranya Srinakhone Loke asked me to go to write in the Civil Servants' Club next to Vat Hai Sok temple, with a salary of 15 kip per month, until Chao Phetsarath returned. The book that I wrote was a poem of the tales of Thao Teminya Kumane Thao Maha Sanok and Thao Souvannasane. In 1931, Chao Phetsarath returned from France and I was able to have an audience with him and he accepted me as a civil servant, starting with a daily allowance of one kip (2526 kip per month).

When Venerable Maha Rak had left in 1931, there was no teacher at the Pali School, and so Chao Phetsarath arranged for me to take his place. The Pali School, which had been established in the time of Nya Pho Maha Keo, still had no textbooks or firm curriculum and had not yet been arranged into levels or have any examinations, since it had only been established

for two years. So I set to work to arrange levels and prepare a curriculum, and by the end of the year, I had organised examinations and the awarding of certificates. At the same time, Chao Phetsarath appointed me to also work with him in a library, called the Phouthapanditsapha or Buddhist Institute Library, presided over by him, and with many committee members such as Maha Keo, Tanh Suphanh, Tanh Le Ky Reuang, Nya Pho Phimmasone, Nya Pho Meuang Khong, and Phranya Srinakhone Loke (Phuy Panya), and with myself as Secretary. In addition, we established an Art School in Vat Chanh temple, with Thit Phou as teacher for 7 or 8 students. The first of these art students, who is still very skilled, was Thao Chanmee or Xamnan, who decorated the [Victory] Monument or Patouxai (opposite the old National Assembly building).

I was married for the first time in 1931 to Nang Keo Ta of Bane Ou MOUNG, and we had three children: a daughter Amara, who died at the age of four; a son Kitsana, who also died at the age of four; leaving our only remaining daughter Manlika. After our divorce in 1939, I remarried with Mali in the same year and we have a total of 14 children, all of whom still survive, showing that Mali is a woman who is very capable in raising children. I had to abandon my family many times for long periods, but Mali was very responsible in looking after the children and has always been sincere.

While establishing the school, I wrote various textbooks: Pali Grammar in four parts, Part One of Lao Grammar, The Novice's Training, Buddhist Teachings Parts One and Two, and Monks' Discipline Part Two, which are the curriculum for monks and novices, and translated the chanting book, printed in one volume, for use in Vientiane.

At that time the Pali School was divided into three levels, with about 50 students, but only one teacher. I wrote books at night, and some evenings I taught monks and novices, and took on many extra pupils without thinking of expenses for teaching. I taught alone until the third year (1933) when Maha Noi came from Ubon to help, and later on in 1936/37 some Lao students who were officially sent to study in Cambodia at the time the Pali School was first established, before I came to teach (in 1929), returned and worked as replacement teachers. From that time on, the Pali School expanded to many provinces and various towns and has further prospered up to the present day. When the other teachers came, I was appointed Head of the School and also taught Pali. While I was Head of the Pali School I not only taught and wrote the Pali textbooks, but also contributed to Lao language textbooks for use in secular schools, which at the time were the responsibility of M. Souphanh Blanchard de la Brosse, and in addition I helped to edit a book on the Life of the Buddha, which Phuy Panya translated into Lao from M. Louis Finot's book, for use in the Pali School curriculum.

Due to the Lao language not having enough letters to write Pali, there was the difficulty of whether to teach Tham script, which is laborious to write and also difficult to print. So the Committee of the Buddhist Institute Library approved an increase in the number of letters in the Lao alphabet to accord with the Pali, by selecting additional Pali and Sanskrit characters. As a result, in 1933 Chao Phetsarath asked me to write the first part of a Lao Grammar using the full set of Lao characters according with the Pali alphabet, and used these characters to cast printset in Cambodia and print the textbook that I wrote.

In 1933 I went to Luang Prabang with Chao Phetsarath during his annual break from government service and saw an old copy of the Suriyayatra text, which was in poor condition. This book was the property of Chao Maha Uparat Bunkhong, the father of Chao Phetsarath, and when we returned to Vientiane, Chao Phetsarath asked me whether I had ever calculated a calendar. I replied that I had never calculated one myself, but that I had learnt a little about the method of calculating the [Lao] New Year, and so he entrusted me with the Suriyayatra text to make a calendar together with him. From that time on, Laos has made its own calendar□ whereas previously it was necessary to wait for the Thai or Khmer calendars, which would then be copied. This production of the first Lao calendar had a lot support and help in making calculations from Nya Pho Bunnak Souvannavongs, who at that time was the Permanent Secretary at the offices of the A.I. (Administration Interministre), and from Chao Phetsarath. When we were sure of the principles for calculating the calendar, Chao Phetsarath also asked me to teach them at the Pali School.

Since I entered the civil service with Chao Phetsarath, His Highness gave me his protection and treated me as a confidant, and I accompanied him to many places to fish and hunt and shoot crocodiles and tigers deep in the forest, to the point that I also bought a hunting gun.

During the year 1940, a dispute arose between the French in Indochina and the Kingdom of Siam, which in brief resulted from when during World War II the Siamese saw that the Axis countries (with Germany, Italy and Japan as leaders) would defeat the French, and Luang Phibun Songkhram, the Siamese Prime Minister, announced that they had joined the Axis. When the war had gone on for a little longer (in 1940) it appeared that France (the old empire) had lost its own freedom to Germany, and so the Siamese submitted a proposal to the French government which in essence said, "if the French government is unable to take care of Indochina, especially the territories of Laos and Cambodia, then please return them to Siam, because these lands were governed by Siam in the past from whom the French seized them by force." The Siamese sent someone to contact Chao Phetsarath, who expressed to the Thais that, "if the Siamese will take back the Lao land, don't enclose it as part of Siam as with the Isahn, but please maintain it as a protectorate." As a result of this, myself and many of my friends contacted the Siamese according to Chao Phetsarath's plan, and he made me the main operative in these communications together with many assistants, such as Dr. Thorngdee, Thao Tham Xayasithsena, Thao Bouachanh Inthavongs, Thao Khambay Philaphandeth, Thao Bong Sisatanakun, Thao Chanthali Bannavong, and Thao Udone Xananikone. On the Siamese side, Luang Phibun Songkhram sent General Sawai Saenyakorn who at that time was a Major, to be the Palat of Nong Khai Province (the deputy provincial governor) in order to communicate with the Lao side, because General Sawai was a nephew of Chao Phetsarath. But the actions of Chao Phetsarath and my group could not escape the watchful eye of the French and finally they moved to arrest me after Siam declared war with the French on the 7th of January 1941. At the time that fighting broke out between the French and Siamese, the offices of Chao Phetsarath were moved to Phone Hong. I did not go with them, but moved out to stay in the fields on the edge of Bane Lak Hinh village . One night while staying there, troops under French control went to encircle the area and capture me, but I was aware of this beforehand and fled under cover across the Mekong to Thailand, and in the following days 43 of my companions also crossed over to join me, including Thao Oune Xananikone, Thao Udone and Thao Tham for example. My wife and two small children, our son Somkhith and daughter Dara, who at that time was only

six months old, were arrested and detained in Mahosot Hospital. When the war had calmed down, they were released and crossed over to look for me in Siam .

When the war between the Siamese and French had calmed with the help of Japanese persuasion, my group was sent down to Bangkok and I went to work at the Thai National Library, in the section for research of traditional literature, especially of the Lao of Vientiane and of Chiang Mai. Thao Tham and Thao Boua Chanh worked in the Propaganda Department, while all the others worked for the Railways Department.

By the 8th of December 1941, the Japanese forces had pressed through Thailand in order to fight Burma and India, which were British colonies, and the Thai National Library was afraid that if a big war broke out, then the library might be blown up (by the Allies that were attacking the Japanese) and the old books of which many had not yet been researched would be lost. As a result, all the old books made from mulberry paper and palmleaf were collected for safekeeping in over 300 wooden cases and transported in a large boat to be placed under my care at Wat Apasornsawan temple in Thonburi Province. While staying there I discovered copies of the poems Thao Hung Thao Cheuang, Inthinyan Sone Louk and many other stories. I had time to copy only Thao Hung Thao Cheuang and Inthinyan Sone Louk. When I had read the story of Thao Hung Thao Cheuang, I saw that it was one of the most important works of Lao literature. The first few pages of palmleaf manuscript were missing, but according to the accompanying notes or colophon, it had been taken from Xiang Khouang Province [in Laos] at the time of fighting the Haw (around 1887). I printed it in Thai script (because there was no Lao script) and it was first published for dissemination in 1943, with support from Chao Khun Somdet Phra Maha Viravongs for free distribution at the funeral of Chao Khun Sasanadilok who had been my teacher when I studied in Ubon. During the same period I rewrote the Vessantara Jataka for recitation or reading in sermons, and the Uranka Nidana (the story of the That Phanom stupa) to be published in song form by the S. Thammaphakdi Printing House. From reading and researching the literature of the story Thao Hung Thao Cheuang, I realised that all Lao poetry is in seven syllables rather than eight, that is that each line has only seven words. Besides each section having seven words, there can be an additional two or four prefixes and suffixes, making Lao poetry seven or nine or eleven syllables. In the Pali text Kaphya Saravilasini, this type of poetry is called kap vissumali. When I saw this, I wrote a textbook for the composition of Lao poetry, which was called “How to write Vientiane Poetry” so as not to offend Thai ears , for the first time naming the style of poetry in Thao Hung Thao Cheuang or Sinxay as vissumali poetry. One thousand copies were printed in the first edition, which was the first book of its kind, and this book has remained the textbook for writing Lao poetry up to the present day.

In 1942, when the Japanese had passed through Thailand, I requested to be transferred from the Library to the Propaganda Department and later on asked to move up to stay with the Region One Propaganda Unit in Nong Khai Province.

From the beginning of the time that I went down to stay in Bangkok, I met and became acquainted with many politicians from Northeast Thailand, such as Thao Thorngin Phourithat, Thao Teang Sitthitham, and Thao Chamlorng Dao Reuang who were well known throughout Thailand at that time. Most of these meetings were for discussions and consultations on political matters.

When I went to live in Nong Khai (at the end of 1943), owing to my salary being too little for my use (250 baht per month) and an increase in family members – our son Pakian, besides which there was my eldest daughter Manlika [from a previous marriage] and many other relatives who came to live with us – together with the state of war, all food and household goods were hard to come by and expensive. My wife had to buy cotton to spin and weave cloth and make our clothes, and whenever I was able to catch many fish, we made pa som pickles and pa daek [fermented fish] to sell. Besides this, I still had revenue from writing kone lam verses which I sold to mor lam singers. At that time, I received 10 to 20 baht for each composition and many people came to learn to sing, which provided enough extra income for food and raising the family.

At the same time, Thailand had an internal conflict since 1942 when the government with Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram as Prime Minister declared itself an ally of Japan and made war with the Allies (Britain, America, France, Russia and China). A group of people with Pridi Phanomyong, the [disposed] Regent of the country, had established the underground “Free Thai” movement to resist the Japanese who they saw were already weakening. Seeing this situation, in 1944 I crossed over to Vientiane with Nai Forng Siththitham to consult with Chao Phetsarath about the political situation, but His Highness was away in Luang Phabang, and I was only able to meet with Chao Savangvathana, who at that time held the position of Crown Prince. We presented questions about restoring national independence, but Chao Savangvathana was not interested and replied that in the end it depended on what the Superpower countries arranged. Nai Forng and myself were disappointed and lost faith [in him], and so we went back to Nong Khai empty handed.

By March of 1945 the Japanese forces had taken the Kingdom of Laos and declared it an independent country within the wider Japanese sphere. So the Isahn politicians mentioned above came to persuade my group of Lao expatriates to work together to get rid of the Japanese through political means by establishing a freedom movement in Laos, and to cooperate with the Free Thai [movement] in the Isahn to resist the Japanese. In doing this, we were counting on assistance from the Superpowers as promised on the 11th of February 1945 in the provision that “when the war is over, all colonised countries throughout the world will be independent.” We met to discuss this for the first time in the house of Thao Bouachanh Inthavong in Nong Khai and agreed on the name “Lao Issara” Group in order not to repeat the name of the Free Thai Movement in Thailand. With this hope, we worked together with the Superpower alliance to resist the Japanese. I traveled with Thao Oune Xananikone to Sakol Nakhorn and Nakhorn Phanom to make initial contact with Thao Singkapo (General Singkapo Sikhot Chulamani) to have him join us, passing many thousands of Japanese soldiers along the way.

Later, on the 15th of August 1945 Japan surrendered to the Allies and we held a meeting to find a peaceful way to realise Lao independence. The Group decided that we should consult Chao Phetsarath, because the others were not up to the task, such as Chao Savangvathana for example. So the Group arranged for myself, Police Major Bunmee Panyatip and Colonel Bong to punt a boat up the Mekong from Nong Khai to Bane Si Chiang Mai, and then cross the river and wait to meet Chao Phetsarath along the road to Luang Phabang, as arranged by His Highness. However, he did not come out to meet us, but sent Chao Souvannaphoumma,

because at that time the Japanese had not yet withdrawn from Vientiane. After meeting with Chao Souvannaphoumma, we entrusted him with a message to convey to Chao Phetsarath for His Highness to make a document requesting independence from the Allies in his position as Regent of Luang Phabang and as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Luang Phabang at that time .

Chao Phetsarath made a document in the name of the Regent of Laos asking for independence which he submitted to the Allies through the American representative Col. Holiday who was the leader of the Free Thai movement in Nong Khan Khu Military Camp, Sakol Nakhorn, and Captain Win, an Englishman who was the leader of the Free Thai movement in Nong Khai Province. An additional copy was submitted to the Thais through the Governor of Nong Khai by Colonel Bong and myself. When this was done, we crossed back over to Vientiane and set up the “Lao Allies” office, to communicate with the Allies and to engage in politics. Since no one in our group ever been involved in politics before because they were all of lower rank, and no important people were making any movements, the group asked me to bring together the Isahn politicians such as Nai Thorngin, Nai Forng, and Nai Chamlorng to help with our ideas and activities. I went to meet Nai Forng in Ubon, but he could not come because he was a Member of the Thai National Assembly, so he had Nai Amphorn, who was not a Member to come in his place. Nai Amphorn and myself traveled from Ubon to Mukdaharn at the same time that the Japanese soldiers were crossing the Mekong back into Thailand, and from Mukdaharn we walked a distance of 48 kilometers to Nakhorn Phanom because there were no vehicles. While we were walking, along the way to Vientiane (we took a vehicle from That Phanom), we thought up the design of the Lao flag which is in use up to today. From then on I was involved in establishing the Lao Issara government and the declaration of national independence on the 12th of October 1945. In this Lao Issara government, I was appointed as Advisor to the Ministry of Education (I refused the position of Cabinet Minister), a Member of the National Assembly, a founding Committee Member of the Laos is Lao Society (LPL), and compiled the first Lao Constitution in collaboration with Nai Amphorn, based on the Thai Constitution.

The Lao Issara government operated until the 23rd of April 1946, and broke up when the French recaptured Vientiane and other provinces. One faction of Lao soldiers retreated to China under the leadership of Thao Souma Meuang Khote, and I fled back to Nong Khai as before. When fighting broke out in Vientiane, everybody looted anything that was French, or from the government, to the extent of detaching the doors and windows from houses to sell. But I did not take even as much as a sesame seed.

Thailand held a national election for National Assembly Members in that same year, 1946, and with the support and encouragement of my friends, I stood for election in Khon Kaen Province where I won the popular vote, but not the election, since I did not campaign widely enough and did not have funds to do so. For this election, the deposit was 400 baht, and additional costs for photographs, but I had only 15 baht. This 400 baht was paid by supporters and then the deposit was returned to me.

In 1948, the Thai government announced the arrest Isahn politicians such as Nai Teang, Nai Thorngin, Nai Chamlorng, and Nai Forng, and also ordered my arrest for interrogation because I was acquainted with them and was always coming and going for private meetings with them.

Since I knew beforehand that the police were coming for me, I crossed straight away back to Vientiane (in December 1948). At that time, Laos had received independence under French leadership and had established a National Assembly since 1947. I went to work in the National Assembly as a secretary until 1951 when I moved temporarily to the Ministry of Interior and then to the Department of Religious Affairs. From 1952 I was stationed in the Ministry of Education and was made a founding member of the Literature Committee, comprising five people, and the secretary for literature from then on, as well as being a teacher of Lao literature at the Lycée Pavie for many years. Since coming to the Ministry of Education I have had time to study and research palmleaf documents which had accumulated here since the time that the Chanthaburi Buddhist Institute was established.

In the year 1954, I stood for election as National Assembly member for Vientiane Province in the National Progressive Party, but without success, and later on when the Literature Unit became a Department I was still the Head of one unit until I retired to live off my pension in 1963 and later be an Advisor to the Royal Academy. In 1973 I worked under special contracts at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and from 1974 at the Ministry of Education to write the teachers' handbooks for high schools until 1975.

After the country was liberated on the 2nd of December 1975, the new government placed its confidence in me as Technical Advisor to the Committee for Scientific and Educational Research, at the Education Ministry.