

## Foreward to the Third Edition

Pridi Banomyong wrote *The King of the White Elephant* during his fifteen year involvement in national and international politics between 1932 and 1947. Although Pridi was not a prolific writer, *The King of the White Elephant* stands out from his other works because it is presented in the form of a novel.

Writing a single novel may not have placed Pridi Banomyong among the ranks of professional novelists, just as directing one movie did not make him a famous movie director. Nevertheless, the classic feature of *The King of the White Elephant* lies in the fact that this work was not written by a professional novelist, but it was written by a statesman. One who wanted to portray to the world how a small country viewed peace through literature and film. The original manuscript of this novel was written in English and the movie was made with an English soundtrack.

Both the novel and the film were made in 1940 amidst the war that had erupted in Europe in 1938. The initial victory of the Axis powers lead to the exposure of Nazi-Facist ideology to Asia.

As for Siam, which had already changed its name to Thailand, the head of government and some members of the cabinet became sympathetic to the ideology of the Axis powers. Consequently, sentiments of extreme nationalism and

militarism spread throughout Thai society.

Pridi tried to resist the wave of militarism in every way possible in his capacity as a member of the government. For instance, founder of Thammasat University. Pridi unsuccessfully attempted to discourage Buddhist and political studies students from organizing a protest calling for the return of land in Indochina from France. In addition, he also pushed for the adoption of the Neutrality Act of 1939.

*The King of the White Elephant* is another attempt to attain the goals of neutrality and peace at both the national and international level. This historical novel does not only reflect Pridi's views on peace, but it clearly portrays his views on "war and peace" which are two side of the same coin. Naturally, Pridi desired peace or the absence of war as he had concluded at the end of the novel that 'n' *atthi santiparan sukhan* or "peace is the highest level of happiness for humans."

But when war is unavoidable, Pridi's position is clearly stated in this novel. That is, one must resist the aggressors to the very end. He still believed in a "just war," but at the same time he tries to limit the effects of the war so it will not affect the people, regardless of which country they belonged to Pridi believed that every person loved life, wants peace, and that war resulted from the actions of a small group of leaders who want power.

Therefore, when the European war spread to the Asia-Pacific region and became World War II, Thai military leaders allied the government with the Axis powers which had started the invasion. When Pridi was forced to leave the government and become the Regent, he fulfilled his objectives as outlined in the first chapter of *The King of the White Elephant* - the Thai Kingdom meant the land of the free. That is, Pridi, under the

pseudonym "Ruth" (which came from "truth"), became the driving force behind the underground movement for peace and the liberation of the country called "The Serithai Movement." The Serithai Movement joined forces with the Allied powers against the Axis powers.

In the end, it was apparent to the Allied powers that the Serithai Movement represented the peaceful intentions of the Thai people. Not only did Thailand emerge on the side of the victors but she also played an important role in bringing about world peace as evidenced by the proclamation of the Declaration of Peace on August 16, 1945 made by the Thai government under the royal auspices of His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol.

Even though *The King of the White Elephant* was written 60 years ago, as long as there are problems and wars at the regional and global level, the author's progressive concept of war and peace still hold true today.

*Project to produce media materials, for children and youths, in honour of Pridi Banomyong, Senior Statesman*

## Foreward

*“The King of the White Elephant”* was the first and only “novel” ever written by the late Senior Statesman Pridi Banomyong. It was perhaps the first Thai novel written in English.

Pridi was not a novelist and besides, he was very busy with many affairs of great responsibility to the nation. Nevertheless, he yet found time that he had little to spare writing the historical novel of vivid imagination.

He evidently did not write it for the sake of personal enjoyment, but rather for the purpose of advocating his noble concept on peace. To the Senior Statesman, peace was a rarity to be acquired through a “just war”. He made this point clear in some keywords in his novel, for example, “We do not fight against the people of Hongsa, but rather against aggression”, and ending the story with the Buddhist teaching “no happiness equal to peace”.

Pridi wrote the novel while he was the Finance Minister during 1939-1940 after his trip around the world in 1935 which prompted him to engineer the proclamation of Thailand's Neutrality Act. *“The King of the White Elephant”* carried his warning message of the imminent danger of another World War and of the imperative preparedness for encountering aggression. He chose English to convey his message to the Thai elites and other leaders in the region.

Both the writing of the story and the production of the film were complete in less than a year. *“The King of the White Elephant”* with original English sound - track was distributed both in Thailand and in some Southeast Asian countries just before the Pacific War broke out.

It is a blessing that the Thammasat Association of Los Angeles undertakes to publish the novel both in its original English and in its Thai translation as part of the celebration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Peace Declaration Day on August 16, 1945. The Peace Declaration was promulgated by Regent Pridi Banomyong in the name of His Majesty King Ananda Mahidol to nullify Thailand's involvement in the Second World War.

On behalf of the Pridi Banomyong Foundation, I wish to express my deep and sincere appreciation to the valuable effort of the Thammasat Association of Los Angeles. Such effort will certainly make the celebration at Thammasat University on August 16 this year more meaningful and truly memorable.

*Pronuek Banomyong.*

BANGKOK  
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