

SĪBŪRAPHĀ AND SOME UPS AND DOWNS IN A LITERARY CAREER

by

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Kulāp Sāipradit, or "Sībūraphā" as he is perhaps better known, is one of the most important figures in the Thai literary world of this century. His claim to fame is threefold: his novel, Lūk Phū Chāi (A Real Man), first published in 1928, is often cited as the first Thai representative of the genre; he was also one of the first Thai writers to use fiction as a vehicle for social and political criticism; and as a journalist, he edited many of the most important daily newspapers in the early 1930s, as well as himself launching a number of magazines and a daily paper. But the popularity, success and influence which Sībūraphā achieved at an early stage of his career, were even from the beginning marred by setbacks. Some of his early ventures into publishing were to prove financially disastrous; he frequently ran into trouble for what he wrote, both with newspaper owners and the government; he was imprisoned twice, the second time on a charge of treason; and he eventually felt obliged to spend the last sixteen years of his life in exile. Recent years, however, have seen a revival of interest in Sībūraphā. While his earlier, more romantic works have enjoyed a steady popularity from the time when they were first written, the change in the political climate in the last decade has brought many of his later, more "political" writings - both fictional and non-fictional - back into circulation. His later short stories in particular, appear to have been reprinted several times - more than a quarter of a century after they were first written. Taking as their main themes social injustice and contemporary political issues, these stories have played a part in influencing a new generation of more socially aware writers. The main part of this paper will be devoted to a more detailed look at some of these stories.

Brief biographical details

Sībūraphā was born in Bangkok in 1905. He attended the prestigious Thepsirin School, and what little is known of this period of his life suggests that he came from a reasonably comfortable background. While he was at school,

he became interested in writing and journalism, and it was in this profession that he was to make a living, albeit at times a rather precarious one, for most of his life. On leaving school, he went to work on the Sēnā Sū'ksā magazine issued by the Department of Military Education. Here, it seems, he first began to develop a dislike for the military, apparently for their condescending attitude towards civilians working for them. He nevertheless reached the position of Assistant Editor before deciding to sit for the translator's exam at the Mapping Department. He duly came out on top, but was to suffer another reversal at the hands of the authorities, who, it is said, relegated him to second place because his family background was not quite acceptable. From this time onwards, Sībūraphā turned his back on the chance of a secure career in government service and instead pursued his own journalistic leanings. He soon rose to the position of Editor of Thai Mai, one of the largest Bangkok dailies of the period. However, he managed to offend the owners of the paper with an article entitled "Humanism" and was forced to resign. After some months of free-lance writing for a number of different Bangkok papers, he was invited to assume the editorship of Prachāchāt, a new paper launched in the wake of the 1932 coup. But despite its influential backers, Prachāchāt was not immune from the ire of the authorities; the paper was subjected to temporary closure on at least two occasions in 1933, and in 1936, Sībūraphā, by now disillusioned with the results of the 1932 coup, resigned in protest at continued government censorship of the press and interference in editorial policy. Following a year's study-leave in Japan, Sībūraphā launched a new daily paper, Suphāp Burut in 1938, using the same name as his short-lived but apparently successful magazine of almost a decade earlier. With his own mouthpiece, he no longer had to fear offending the sensibilities of newspaper owners. He was one of the few who dared to criticise the government over the Indo-China