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SUBHEADLINE: He had a way with words _ so much so, he coined quite a few
which are still in use today

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Objects from daily life often become so common they go unnoticed and may
even be tossed out once they have been used.

Words are the same. One uses them, misuses them sometimes, manipulates them,
exploits them, hurls them at others ... in short, one takes them for granted.

Yet certain words, like certain familiar objects, have not always been
around. There were times when one had to make do without them, such as the
very obliging word borikan (Thai for ``service''), or the now
bellowed-all-over-the-place seriphap (``freedom''), or the ever up-
to-date pathiwat (``revolution'') or pathiroop (``reform'') ...

These words just didn't spring up one morning on the pages of our
dictionaries as if by magic. They have their own story, depth and
raison
d'etre.

These particular words were the brainchild of an eminent scholar and
great
diplomat, whose 110th birthday is marked today _ the late HRH Prince
Wan
Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh.

Throughout his life, taking over from what a few monarchs and princes
had
done in their own time, Prince Wan coined around 300 Thai words,
which are
now mostly in common use _ from Australia's Khon puen muang
(``Aborigines'')
to khob khet (``zone''), going through samakhom (``association''),
thanakhan
(``bank''), borisath (``company''), khrobkhrua (``family''),
songkhram
(``war''), and so many more.

In a speech given at the Siam Society on March 26, 1970, Prince Wan
explained: ``I came back to Thailand from Europe in 1919 when word
coining
was coming into vogue, due mainly to the necessity of establishing a
Thai
version of the Civil and Commercial Code after the English draft of
the book

was ready. Even before that, however, owing to Thailand's entry into World War One, King Vajrivarudh felt the necessity of coining some words such as seriphap haeng thale for 'freedom of the seas.'

'To coin a word is to put it into circulation with a stamp of authority ... But however high the authority may be, a coinage will not gain permanent currency unless it has the sanction of the genius of the language. Of course, criticism is inevitable and coiners of words must be prepared to face critics,' Prince Wan said.

But it seems HRH Prince Wan consistently had the answer for everything and the right explanation to back his proposals as he left a long list of terms behind him, which have now gained widespread public currency.

'The sound and rhythm of the word are most important. For the word 'culture', I at first used the Sanskrit form of phrutthitham, which was rather heavy and even I myself was not satisfied with it. Then one day, as I was writing an article, the Pali form of watthanatham came to me and I knew that it would catch on and it did,' Prince Wan said.

The word borikan ('service'), which Prince Wan had seen on a sign put up in a small village on the way to Bang Saen not long after he had coined it, came as one of his first 'very pleasant surprises' in the field of coinages.

The economic terms upasong ('demand') and upathan ('supply') were long-lingering brain-teasers _ it took Prince Wan 14 years to coin them

The word molapit ('pollution') was the last term coined by Prince Wan before he passed away in 1976 at the age of 85.

The legacy left by the scholar prince in the field of philology is a method now still used at the Royal Institute a quarter of century after the demise of the prince.

Explaining the method, Prince Wan had said: 'Scholars who appreciate the precision of terms have suggested that I compile a dictionary, coining words as I go along, but I have refused because that is not the correct method ... Coining words cannot be done at the will of the coiner; the coinage must have not only the meaning required but must lend itself to uses required in

various contexts and must have a form acceptable to the genius of the language.'

He continued: ``The correct method is, I think, the one at present adopted, namely that those concerned with the use of terms in a particular subject should get together and draw up their proposed equivalents in the Thai language and then submit them to the Royal Institute for review. The Royal Institute has a standing committee of languages experts, who together with the representatives of those concerned, will determine the final version and publish it in its name. In this way, the technical terms used in a profession or branch of knowledge will be standardised and the Thai language, as a whole, will thereby be enriched.'

To mark today, the 110th anniversary of the birth of HRH Prince Wan among other events, a seminar is being held at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts. The whole day seminar is entitled ``110 Years of the Late Prince Wan''.

Assoc Prof Amara Prasithratsint, director of Chulalongkorn's Institute of Thai Studies and a member of the word-coining group at the Royal Institute, commented: ``Among the facts I admire the most about HRH Prince Wan were his profound knowledge of linguistics and philology as well as his authentic fondness for languages. He would see the language as a dynamic entity, nothing static. His attitude was really great and very modern for his time, that one has to constantly keep up with the language, with the globalisation, and that one needs a balance between modernisation and conservation.'

Prince Wan's approach to language as a living body remains topical in our open societies, confronted to an increasing degree by the melting pot of dialects and languages.

``A language is a reflection of the society. As our country is changing so rapidly, so does the language. Some people are afraid that we may lose control of our language, which could be also pictured as a child growing too fast. But instead of blaming especially young people for damaging the language by using too many English words, linguists and authorities concerned would be better off sitting down and thinking about how to shape our language, how to trim it. Perhaps we should do as the Japanese and thus

'Siamese' more English words,' Assoc Prof Amara said.

But if most consider the legacy of Prince Wan in the field of Thai literature and philology as momentous _

he was listed in 1991 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) among the calendar of great personalities of the world as Thai Great Diplomat and Scholar _ it seems nothing compared to the streams of praise his name arouses in old-time political and diplomatic circles, in Thailand as much as abroad.

Amid Prince Wan's most outstanding achievements was his election unanimously as President of the United Nations General Assembly at the Eleventh Session (1956-1957). He was the first and only Thai national to have ever held such a prominent position.

This particular ``stormy'' Eleventh Session under Prince Wan's chairmanship had to deal with two very critical world issues, the dramatic events in Hungary and on the Suez Canal _ ``two explosive matters'', as some put it.

In handling sensitive issues, Prince Wan was acclaimed for his impartiality, coolness and remarkable tact.

These unique features would draw Sir Anthony Eden, a former British Prime Minister, to write at the end of the first Seato Conference in 1954: ``Your smooth and timely but firm guidance has had an essential part in the success for the work we have done. I notice even the birds sitting inside the Dome stop singing to listen to what you say.''

A few decades later, on the occasion of the centennial of Prince Wan, Arsa Sarasin, Thailand's former Minister of Foreign Affairs would write: ``Prince Wan's pre-eminent talents at the United Nations in that difficult year brought great honour and enormous pride to the Thai nation as a whole. The name of Prince Wan drew boundless respect throughout the world.''

On the occasion of his 72nd birthday, friends from all over the world sent praises. Prince Wan was referred to in turn as ``a true man of peace'', ``one of the best United Nations Presidents of the General Assembly, respected and admired by all those who knew him'', ``a man of inspiring

friendships, a person in the highest sense' ...

Thus Prince Wan's remarkably effective degree of humour, fineness, wit and his conciliatory nature became his trademarks and most effective weapons.

One of his widely-reported sayings came within the scope of a very tense debate on disarmament in the Political Committee, at the climax of the Cold War. It followed a remark by Soviet delegate and USSR Foreign Minister Andrey Vyshinsky, trying to turn to his advantage Prince Wan's invariable smile.

As reported in Witthayathat Phra Ong Wan (Prince Wan's Academic Vision), a book being released today by the Naradhip Bongsprabandh-Worawan foundation:
`Mr Vyshinsky turned to Prince Wan and said: See Prince Wan agrees with me, he is smiling. On the point of personal explanation, he said he had to utter a word of caution: `It is dangerous to interpret my smiles, because I always smile.'`

No doubt it is his smile which will outlive him, at least in the heart of his beloved and only daughter, MR Wiwan Worawan. Warm memories of cherished moments unfold as she speaks, giving life to Prince Wan's legendary attributes of loyalty, gentleness, humility and altruism.

`All through his life, Prince Wan had shown his loyalty to His Majesty the King, Her Majesty the Queen, the Royal Family and the Monarchy. He told my brother MR Wibunkiat and myself to serve Their Majesties with utmost our abilities and dedication. My father spent his whole life working devotedly of his country. Whenever there was a conflict, he tried to solve it with national interests in mind,' MR Wiwan explains.

She remembers, with vivid emotion, the countless tender gestures her father had for his family.

`Despite his numerous duties, he remained a very warm family man. You can rarely find someone as kind-hearted and thoughtful. He was very close to my mother Princess Wan and deeply in love with her until the day he died.

`Once in a poem he wrote, he credited my mother for `inspiring him all

through his life to perform good deeds'. Whenever he would be away for more than 10 days, he would ask us to join him,' MR Wiwan said, recollecting images of her father flying from Thailand to attend her bachelor of arts graduation ceremony at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, in the US, as well as paying close attention to her whenever she was ill, and many other things.

``He always used to do things by himself, never using other people. He would take us to the movies, buy the tickets himself, do his own shopping for his toiletries ... He was very down-to-earth and would never go for any extravaganza. I never heard him saying any nasty words to anyone, all throughout his life.''

She is now 68. Her elder half-brother, MR Wibunkiat Worawan, succumbed to cancer some 35 years ago.

Golf, cello and ballroom dancing were amongst Prince Wan's favourite pastimes.

Yet they were no match compared to Prince Wan's lifetime passion: books and writings.

As Prince Wan himself explained : ``It was at that time (the Change of Regime in 1932), too, that I became active in coining words. I saw that what was happening was not just a change of government but a fundamental change in the way of life of the Thai people; it was, in fact, a revolution like the French Revolution and I wanted to explain all that to the Thai people. So I started a newspaper, the Prachachat _ Nation, and I was at once confronted with the necessity of coining new words, because, in order to get to the people and get at the people, we cannot use English words, which have not penetrated into our system. If we can get hold of a Thai word, all the better, but if we can't, we can have recourse to Pali and Sanskrit words which have come into our language.''

His closest relatives would not beg to differ. Prince Wan's most precious and cherished valuables were his books, in the company of which he could spend entire days and which surrounded him throughout his life. He accumulated them from his student days to the day he died.

``His books were very precious to him. We could absolutely not touch them,

or else we had to put them back exactly in the same place and in the same position," says Wanphen, an assistant who has been working with the family since she was seven and who first served Prince Wan's mother in their residence on Sukhumvit Soi 20.

"Prince Wan would spend so much time in his library, for hours, sometimes for days in a row," Wanphen, or Pen, says, adding that she owes her good writing and reading skills to the kindness of the late prince.

"He would treat everyone equally. He would never give orders nor hurt others by saying harsh words."

"We, his family, are holding a religious ceremony (today) at Wat Mongkut Krasathiyaram where Prince Wan's ashes are kept along with other descendants of King Rama IV," MR Wiwan said.

Other events will take place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities, and the Royal Institute, among other _ hopefully will his model of behaviour and good governance will continue to inspire.

HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn said, concerning him: "In my opinion, these typical characteristics of His Royal Highness are also the typical behaviours glorified in Thai traditions and culture, which Thai youths should follow. That is to say, they should thirst for knowledge and enjoy searching for it ..."

About Prince Wan

HRH Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongs-praband, a descendant of King Rama IV, was born in Bangkok on August 25, 1891. He was educated at Suan Kularb School and Rajvidyalai (King's College) until the age of 14, when he was awarded a King's Scholarship to further his studies in England.

He spent the following five years at Marlborough College, where his performance in the Modern Side was of such high quality that his English masters sought the permission of the Superintendent of Thai students to allow the young Prince Wan to apply himself to the Classical Side as well.

He left Malborough in 1910, having won altogether 17 different prizes, and

went on to Balliol College, Oxford. After graduating from Oxford with Second Class Honour in History, Prince Wan went to the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques, Paris, to study diplomacy.

There, he distinguished himself again and graduated with a first prize, the culmination of a continuously outstanding scholastic record. Many academic honours were to follow, among them several honorary doctorate degrees including one from his alma mater, Oxford University.

Prince Wan began his professional career as a Third Secretary at the Royal Thai Embassy in Paris in 1917. He returned in 1922 to the Foreign Office in Bangkok, where he worked under Prince Devawongsa. In 1922, Prince Wan was appointed Adviser to King Rama VI.

In 1924, at the age of 33, he was promoted to the rank of Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and was responsible for negotiating several important amendments to political and commercial treaties with Western powers. He was sent to Europe again in 1926 as Minister accredited to the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium.

During that period, he also served as head of the Thai Delegation to the League of Nations, where he was active in a number of important commissions as member, vice-president and president.

Prince Wan returned to Thailand in 1930, to accept a professional chair at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. The 1932 Revolution did not in any way disrupt Prince Wan's multifarious activities; he was among the few members of the Royal Family to take an active part in the shaping of the country in the early democratic rule.

He continued for the next 30 years to serve his country in a number of important diplomatic missions, some of the notable milestones being negotiations with Japan in 1943, participation in the Seato Council and the Bandung Conference (where the Prince was elected Rapporteur) and negotiations leading to Thailand's admission to the United Nations.

In 1947, Prince Wan was appointed Thai Ambassador to the United States. He was concurrently Thai Ambassador to the United Nations, serving on a number of commissions. His association with the United Nations culminated with his

election, by unprecedented unanimity, as President of the General Assembly at its Eleventh Session (1956-1957).

To turn to Prince Wan's home service, one may recall his appointment as deputy prime minister in 1969, an office which he held for many years. He was Rector of Thammasat University from 1965 to 1970.

In 1970, Prince Wan was appointed by His Majesty the King to attend the World Expo in Osaka, Japan.

After that, he was recalled to serve the nation when His Majesty the King appointed him President of the National Congress, from which emerged the Legislative Assembly that was responsible for the drafting of the 1974 Constitution.

Prince Wan's association with the Siam Society was a long and fruitful one. He was President of the Society from 1944 to 1949, and again from 1969 until his demise in 1976.

His late Royal Highness spent a happy retirement marked by intellectual vigour. Besides his leadership of the Siam Society, he served as President of the Royal Institute from 1973 to 1976 until his last days (an office which he had previously held from 1934 to 1947).

HRH Prince Wan passed away on September 5, 1976 at the age of 85.

* Excerpts from The Centennial of HRH Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh, Thai Great Diplomat and Scholar, 1991 issued on the 100th anniversary of his birth