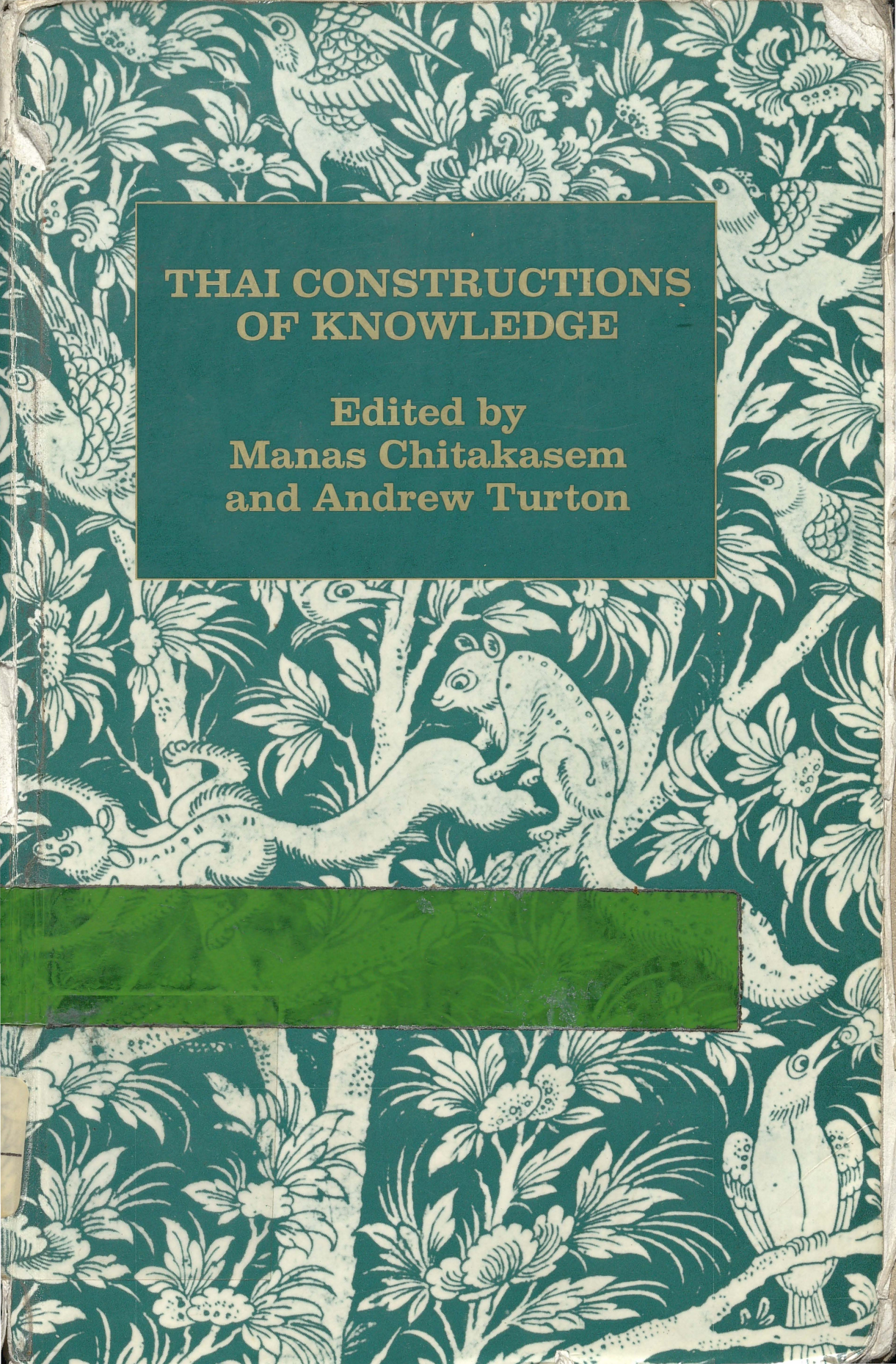

THAI CONSTRUCTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Edited by
Manas Chitakasem
and Andrew Turton

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Foreword

Thai Constructions of Knowledge is the outcome of a symposium held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in May 1988. It was a small and convivial gathering, as befits a symposium, but it was an important moment in the development of Thai Studies at SOAS, which now have a presence in almost all disciplines: Language and Literature, Anthropology, Art and Archaeology, Economic History, Geography, Law, and Politics. The symposium theme was convened to engage the interests of a multidisciplinary research group. Some of the guiding ideas and ways in which we did and did not follow them are treated in the following Introduction.

The original papers have all been considerably revised and reworked, taking account of subsequent research and the discussions that took place during and after their presentation. The quality of those discussions was due in very large part to the participation of those symposiasts who are not represented in this volume and of whom we are especially recognizant: Professor Nidhi Aeusrivongse and Dr. Viggo Brun whose papers provided much of the original stimulus; Dr. Ruth McVey whose critical review of the proceedings gave us directions and encouragement to revise and publish; Dr. Han ten Brummelhuis, Dr. Henry Ginsburg, and Dr. Jeremy Kemp, who acted as discussants; and Dr. Jonathan Rigg, our rapporteur. We were also glad to be joined by Professor Akira Takahashi of the University of Tokyo, who was visiting SOAS at the time, and Thai research students at the University of London: Uthong Prasasvinitchai, Charturee Tingsabadh, and Gawin Chutima. Unfortunately pressure of work prevented Professor Benedict R.O'G. Anderson and Professor Charles F. Keyes from joining us, though their contributions to Thai Studies are apparent in many places in this text.

We record our deepest regrets at the untimely death, shortly before the symposium of Dr. Klaus Rosenberg, who was to have attended, and our highest appreciation of his many fine scholarly contributions to our field of studies.

We acknowledge gratefully financial support for the symposium received from: The British Academy, The British Council, The Nuffield Foundation, Thai International Airways, and the SOAS Research and Publications

Committee. We also wish to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Royal Thai Embassy in London, and particularly H.E. Ambassador Sudhee Prasasvinitchai, for their help.

Many other people have assisted in the holding of the symposium and the production of this volume; thanks to them all, especially Martin Daly, Joan Torode and Irene Cummings.

Manas Chitakasem
Andrew Turton

STATE POETICS AND CIVIL RHETORIC

An introduction to 'Thai constructions of knowledge'

Andrew Turton

This book is about the production of thought and knowledge in Siamese/Thai contexts. It is not a history of ideas, as if these had an independent life of their own; nor is it a natural history of a culture, as if this was an organic growth, *sui generis*. It is concerned with what becomes interesting, useful and proper to know; with what limits are placed on investigation, experimentation, diffusion and reception; with how topics and discourses become authorised, constructed, regulated, supervised, and subverted.

The original symposium title - 'local and elite cultural perceptions in Thailand' - was deliberately broad and theoretically open, to allow participation by scholars from several disciplines, including those working at village level with contemporary oral culture, or with national archives and perhaps places in between. The spatial metaphor was soon abandoned however, as was the local/elite dichotomy. Indeed abandonment of dichotomies in general became a major theme of our discussions. The sense of plurality of 'cultural perceptions' however was retained by most contributors in what amount to strong arguments against the idea of a unitary, essential 'Thai' culture and the presupposition of fundamental cultural axioms or principles. Chatthip's notion of an 'inner core of Thai beliefs' challenges the newer consensus, but even the, at times essentialist, concept of 'communal [sc. Thai village] culture' turns out to be capable of more open and dynamic interpretation.

We encouraged treatment of quite diverse cultural subject matter, suggesting that the potential range might include: 'traditional "stocks of knowledge" (technological, economic, historical, legal, aesthetic etc.); specific "genres" of ritual, literary, artistic, or other texts and practices; both formalized and more everyday, commonsense modes of discourse. We proposed that there might be a 'common concern to investigate the construction, practice, dissemination, and interpretation of cultural forms in the social conditions of their emergence and existence; their sources and potentialities of creativity, change and articulation with other social processes. Whether or not papers were to focus on more 'elite' (orthodox, official, dominant etc.) or more 'popular' (including heterodox, autonomous, alternative etc.) cultural forms or discourse, we encouraged an investigation of relations and mutual effects as between various social

levels and contexts. Such relations might include ways in which exogenous influences had been adopted and transformed; ways in which oral and popular traditions had been selectively co-opted to become parts of literary, courtly, or official-national culture; or ways in which traditions, whether elite or local, might be said to have been invented, downgraded, suppressed, or abandoned.

In this final revised version based on our discussions and criticisms of earlier drafts, 'culture' has given way to a more theoretically focussed 'knowledge'. 'Construction' is a term that can take on several tasks. When applied to culture or knowledge it immediately directs our thoughts away from any idea of their given, or immemorial nature. It suggests the framing and architecture of thought, taking account of aesthetic as well as practical considerations; and in its grammatical and semantic usage, it directs attention both to the author's original combination of statements and to the receivers' construal and interpretation of them.

Knowledge can be thought of as a concept of power, as propositions which have effects. Several contributors make more or less explicit reference to the notion of 'discourse', especially as this has been developed by Foucault. It has to do with 'how language has materiality and is invested by relations of power' (Reynolds p. 29); it is a concept for the way in which processes of ordering and of inclusion/exclusion operate to produce and authorise 'statements' which combine to form bodies of knowledge (and sometimes ignorance) or discourse. As Foucault's English translator says, by statement (*énoncé*) 'Foucault means not the words spoken or written, but the act of speaking or writing them, the context in which they are uttered, the status or position of their author' (Sheridan 1980: 99), and this includes the social sites and locations of the subjects of discourse and in which statements are made. 'Construction' directs attention to the human agency involved in the creation, dissemination, alteration and destruction of discourses. Power may enable as well as constrain and suppress knowledge. Knowledge operates through power - the media of power and power constructed media - and vice versa. This minimal conceptual schema provides a guide to much of what is common to the papers in this book.

Although the specific dates of texts and events discussed here range from 1875, the writing of *Nirat No'ngkhai* (Reynolds), to the Cabinet decision in 1988 to postpone the construction of the Nam Choan Dam (Stott), they are all in important senses about contemporary and indeed current social and intellectual debates in Thai society. This is most obvious in the case of papers by Stott and Chatthip on current environmental and development thinking, or by Hong, discussing the *Journal of Political Economy*, which started publication in 1981. Manas discusses three poets (Angkhan, Naowarat, Khomthuan) who are writing about present times, but are all deeply conscious of, and well versed in, historical codes of poetics; while Smyth examines the efforts of literary critics who are trying to establish the contemporary relevance of a writer (Kulap Saipradit) for whose genre, the novel, there is no classical authority, nor indeed was there any academic recognition in Thai universities until very recently. Brown is primarily

concerned with economic writing in the period of the late absolute monarchy, but it is the relevance of Phraya Suriyanuwat's *Sapphasat* and *Setthakit kanmu'ang* for a later generation, as evidenced in their republication in 1975-76 largely at Chatthip's initiative, that constitutes their special interest. In a similar way Nai Thim's *Nirat No'ngkhai* was revived by the first publication in 1975 of Jit Poumisak's 1961 essay. Reynold's 'Sedition in Thai History.....' also reflects on the continuing discourse on sedition and lese-majesty, with references to the imprisonment of Sulak Srivaraksa in 1984 and the circulation of anonymous leaflets in Bangkok in 1987.[1] The papers by Turton and Tanabe deal respectively with largely handwritten texts and an unwritten - albeit highly 'scripted' - ritual text. While ostensibly to do with popular and somewhat antique notions of 'invulnerability' and 'spirit cults' they both have an important bearing on current discourse of gender, male as well as female, of self and transcendence of self, and the social assertion of people in subordinate social positions. Like other papers they share current theoretical concerns, and are engaged to some extent in a task of 'recovery' or reassessment of what has been ignored or downplayed in dominant discourse.

Looked at another way, some of the papers refer back to texts, genres and bodies of discourse of great antiquity. Thus there is reference to ancient ascetic practices (*dhutanga*) of the forest-dwelling monks (*aranyawasi*), to such royally authored, or authorised, texts as the cosmology *traibhumikatha* of ca. 1345 (Stott), the treatise on poetics *cindamani* of ca. 1656-1688 (Manas), and the revisions of the *nirat* and *sepha* genres in the Second Reign (1809-1824) of the Rattanakosin period (Reynolds, Turton). These texts are invoked to show sometimes unexpected continuities and transformations as well as epistemological breaks.

A recurring theme is the Siamese response to influences from other languages and cultural regions. King Narai's *cindamani* may have been written or commissioned in response to French efforts to teach their language, and no doubt grammar and rhetoric, to Siamese children. And yet this manual makes a virtue out the use of words from neighbouring languages Mon, Khmer, and Burmese as well as Sanskrit and Pali. In 1913 King Rama VI expressed concern over the way the Thai language was becoming 'mixed with foreign idioms and new structures', most likely European and Chinese, and in the following year founded a 'Literary Club' (*samoso'n wannakhadi*) thereby 'inventing' the standard term for 'literature' which has persisted (Manas). The novel, especially in the hands of journalists, women, republicans, and socialists was to take longer to become inscribed into the canons of 'literature' (Smyth).

Phraya Suriyanuwat attempted to promote both a name (*sapphasat, 1911; setthakit kanmu'ang*, 1934) and a content for 'economics', combining both European ideas and analysis of Siamese conditions. But what was in effect more in the nature of general social criticism, was unacceptable to the

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[1] See also Reynolds' analysis of the 'seditious sign' and 'constructions' of the author Jit Poumisak and the feudal/saktina trope (Reynolds 1987).

absolute monarchy; the first volumes were banned in 1911. The teaching of the discipline 'economics' itself was prohibited at Siam's only university, founded as late as 1917, and named Chulalongkorn after the reigning monarch's father. The third volume appeared in 1934, two years after the end of the absolute monarchy and in the same year as the founding of Siam's second university, Thammasat, the University of Moral and Political Sciences. But it was going to be more than thirty years before the universities began to be, at least in part, radical and intellectually innovative institutions. To examine the beginnings of this period one would probably have to look, in the same manner that Hong looks at *warasan setthasat kanmu'ang (Journal of Political Economy - WSK)* at *sangkhomsat parithat (The Social Science Review)* a journal founded by Sulak Srivaraksa in 1963. This journal had been rather more external to university life; Sulak was one of the few prominent intellectuals at that time who were not government employees (*kharatchakan*) - not a few other dissenters were in prison (e.g. Jit Poumisak) or exile (e.g. Pridi Panomyong, Kulap Saipradit). It came under new editorship in 1969 and was influential in the years leading to the 'democratising' years 1973-75. WSK, whose contributors and editorial board include some members of *The Social Science Review,* was conceived by a group of Chulalongkorn scholars formed in 1978 after the decline and intellectual discrediting of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) which for some years had articulated the only alternative social and political movement approaching a nationwide status. While the military criticised the CPT for its non-indigenous (read: Chinese) leadership and ideas the Political Economy group placed renewed emphasis on precisely non-indigenous (but preferably not Chinese or Soviet) and previously scarcely known, bodies of knowledge, especially 'western' Marxism, the Frankfurt School, and various European and North American social scientists. The Journal contains numerous translations of non-Thai authors, the text is often freely interspersed with English words (usually in what we still call Roman script, a trace of a much older hegemony), and a feature of many issues is a serialised translation by the editor of a dictionary of English-language political economy jargon. There is a self-consciousness about this potential dependence. But for one thing this theory precisely stressed the importance of multiple and local forms of agency instead of universal structural determinations, of specific moral and political factors and local cultural traditions, and so on. As one author judged, in formulating the strategy of temporarily allying with the government they had learned from 6 October [1973] as much as .. from Urry's sociology' (Hong p. 112). Of particular interest is the way in which this group, in their search for a new intellectual genealogy, consciously attempted to form a 'school' (*samnak*) or 'lineage' (*sakun*) from their relatively secure base within Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Economics and Social Research Institute. In this they went beyond the Journal itself in organising meetings, debates and political interventions.

The first five papers deal with literary and economic discourse, and while

arguments about freedom of trade and freedom of versification may seem worlds apart, both areas of discourse turn out to be about critical views of society, of social and economic wellbeing. Perhaps it is not hard to see that debates about human survival, contentment and pleasure should always have an aesthetic and moral as well as a basically material edge. The institutional basis for the discussion of economics, of contending schools, outside the world of business and government ministries themselves, is by now well established. The following two papers deal with two areas of discourse which have not yet gained the academic and institutional dignity of 'Economics' or 'Literature' in Thailand. These are namely 'Development' or development ideology, developmentalism (Chatthip), and 'Ecology' or environmentalism (Stott). The former is of greater seniority, dating in Thailand from the late 1950s and what retrospectively has been called Marshal Sarit's 'developmental authoritarianism'. 'Development' (*khwam phatthana*) in some respects assumed the discursive mantle of 'civilization', a term which like another former academic discipline, rhetoric, we use rather more cautiously than formerly, but which still in Europe crops up in the titles of university Chairs and Faculties of e.g. 'History and Civilisation'. Both concepts share the dilemma of reconciling universal and local (Siamese, Thai, national etc.) standards and values. But in the sense used here by Chatthip - development thinking and practice in the NGOs (non-governmental organisations: those so to say outside the official development world of the National Social and Economic Development Board and its partners) - the development debate and its discursive underpinnings are virtually coeval with the newer environmentalism, dating from say the mid-1970s.

It is entirely appropriate that there should be a paper on 'development' alongside ones on History, Literature, Economics, Political Economy and so on. These terms, though contested, all can variously refer to: real conditions and processes in the world, and to ways of knowing them, whether as ideology or science, as professional disciplines within or outside the academy. Each tends to have a fairly full complement of basic concepts of: order, change, agency, autonomy, purpose, morality, wellbeing and so on. 'Development' has almost begun to supersede some other disciplines or parts of them, becoming a master trope, a master discourse with its theory, practice and institutional location. It is not just that it has become the name of another university department or degree course; it is a contender for universalistic status as megatheory and megaprocess. In this it jostles with other old and new contenders, other *sastra* and discourses, such as: cosmology, dharma, nature/natural science, evolution and so on.

The promotion of *wattanatham chumchon* as a kind of development ideology, or 'school of thought' (Chatthip) again brings together culture and economy, which are never far apart in the Thai language; thus *phatthana* and *watthana* both connote personal and social development (*phatthanakan, watthanakan, watthana sayam, phatthana phrathet*) towards moral and general prosperity. *Watthanatham* ('culture') then takes on a more specialist, and one might risk saying alienated, sense. Stott quite

specifically documents and analyses stages and influences in 'the creation of a Thai environmentalist discourse', within which moral and aesthetic considerations have some weight.

If development and environmental discourses are new and still trying to convince, those which are the subjects of the papers by Tanabe and Turton belong to ancient knowledge (*boran*)which has the authority of custom. If they had to be assigned to one of the generic classifications of 'manual' (*tamra*) knowledge suggested by Brun (1990) these would be *latthiphithikam* (rituals) and *saiyasat* (magic) respectively. However, rituals of the generic 'ancestor' (*phi pu ya*) type, including *phi meng*, are precisely among those ordinary (*thammada*) kinds of belief and practice which do not figure in the manuscript manual traditions. The invulnerability (*kham, khongkraphan*) syndrome makes use of the *tamra* tradition of validation and dissemination (including contemporary printed versions), and also parts of the Buddhist manual text tradition. But as in all 'manual sciences', as Brun calls them, the greater part of the knowledge is acquired outside any written form of discourse. Indeed much of this knowledge, and I now refer to both 'Invulnerability and local knowledge' (Turton) and 'Spirits, power, and the discourse of female gender' (Tanabe), is not only unwritten, but 'understated' in the senses proposed by Fardon (1990: 6-7). This is to say that they are 'doxic propositions' (Bourdieu 1977), embedded, deeply inscribed in behaviour and implicit in many elements of the culture, which are rehearsed through socialisation. They come to be, as it were, second nature, and to constitute self-evident experience of the world. It is as likely to be acted and danced out in ritual performances and physical tests, as much as it is uttered verbally. It borders on 'unstatable' knowledge, ineffable experience which the knower knows, say, during contemplative practices or trance, or for which only the poet may find words.

Although Turton does not primarily develop the theme of masculinity as such, his paper should provide, as Tanabe's does explicitly for female gender, a source for considering gendered Thai constructions of knowledge of self and ways of transforming, even perfecting or transcending self. For these are overlapping, 'crosshatched' discourses. We should not expect completeness; as Tanabe says 'The Northern Thai discourse on female gender is esentially a construction of diverse and inconsistent representations'. To some extent both the 'Invulnerability' and 'Gender' discourses can be seen as hierarchically subordinate to a vast discourse on power. This is shown within the *phi meng* ritual, in Tanabe's interpretation, by the way spirits, which at the outset are specific ancestral spirits, and have a strong female bias, come to represent, as the ritual progresses, 'transcendental authority' above and beyond gender differentiation and the powers of living kin.

It is possible to argue that the less explicit, the less verbalised, a body of knowledge is, the less examined, the less discussable, and therefore the less contestable it is. One would expect, though this is a challengable assumption, that discourses of gender would not be likely to offer themselves for continuous questioning; and though 'secondary' discourses

on power show it is an 'essentially contested notion' (Fardon 1985: 8; Lukes 1978: 634-35; 1974: 9) particular claims to power are likely to be resistant to challenge. Most of the papers in this volume however deal with conscious attempts at innovation in the critical 'construction of knowledge', with more or less open challenges to orthodoxy or with creative use of orthodoxy such that it 'subverts the social order even as it upholds it' (Reynolds p.) or like the *Journal of Political Economy* which 'operates within the conditions of a social formation of which it is an integral part, and which it aims to dislodge' (Hong p. 112). To consider the effects and limitations of power, we need to ask where these challenges came from, what discursive constraints or enablement they met on the way

In the first reign of the Bangkok period, poets and literary scholars were organised, at the King's command, to form a royal 'department of writers' (*krom alak*) (Manas). Nai Thim, who wrote *Nirat No'ngkhai* at the age of 28 while on the military campaign itself (Reynolds), had a powerful noble patron who provided him with employment as a writer. The patron was very close to the court, at a time when court and 'government' were not yet as differentiated as they became by the end of the century; his daughter became a concubine of the King. Nai Thim, we are told, was of humble origin but was later ennobled. His patron was able to save him from execution for lese-majesty, which General Chuang Bunnag had demanded. The three early writers on economics (Brown) were all very senior officials: Prince Bidya (Bidyalankarana, pseud. No' Mo' So') - who we come across again writing about literary genres (Manas, Turton) - was a senior royal prince; Caophraya Thammasakmontri (pseud. Khru Thep) published *setthawitthaya kret* during his time as Minister of Education (from 1915-1926), and Phraya Suriyanuwat was Minister of Works and Minister of Finance between 1905 and 1908 before he published his first economics treatise. Brown suggests the importance of external influences on the latter two. 'Khru Thep' spent two years in England as a student and was strongly influenced by Fabian socialism; Phraya Suriyanuwat had five years English medium schooling in Penang and Calcutta and spent 1887-1905 in diplomatic posts in Europe, especially London and Paris.

With the end of the absolute monarchy there are changes in the social locations, and status, of writers and intellectuals as we would expect, but some interesting similarities (including the use of pseudonyms as *noms de plume,* a widespread practice which we have nowhere seen addressed). Angkhan, in 'A Poet's Testament', redefines a poet's role, breaking with conventions of patronage and religiosity (Manas). The universities at first are not the engine- houses of debate, but rather various clubs, societies, journals, and educated people in senior administrative and political positions. Journalism was an important new niche for the literary writer and social critic, and Kulap Saipradit (pseud. Siburapha), from the late 1920s, is a prime example. In his case it seems that too much may be read into the possibly radicalising experience of studying political science at Melbourne University in 1948 (Smyth). We mentioned earlier the changing importance of the universities in the production of innovatory intellectual

debate from the late 1960s. This also coincided with the very rapid rate of increase in the university sector generally, in the size and social importance of a new middle class, especially in Bangkok, and with a corresponding number of students going abroad to study for higher degrees. In some respects this can be seen as a continuation of the practice of leaving the function of providing the higher stages of the university education of young Thai people to other countries (especially English-speaking ones), rather as a small, and perhaps ex-colonial country may be content to leave the conduct of its higher levels of legal jurisdiction to another land. What was once the conscious purpose, in educating first the royal princes, certainly remains the no longer so generally intended or desired effect, namely the introduction and replenishment of a great many 'non-indigenous' ideas. A large number of those scholars who contributed to *sangkhomsat parithat* and later *warasan setthasat kanmu'ang*, had but recently returned with higher degrees from Europe, the USA, Australia and elsewhere. Some of the contributions were written from abroad, and are accorded appropriate bylines, for example Kancana Kaewthep's piece on the Frankfurt School which was sent from Paris.

From the early 1970s it has been common for intellectuals and writers to occupy several, so to say discursive positions, for example university lecturer, journalist, political activist and so on. From about 1978 the field of action of the 'non-government development organisation' or 'development NGO' began to expand greatly and provide multiple networks in which social, economic, and cultural ideas were debated, with close reference to the practical experiences, of both the poor and those who intervened professionally to help them. If the scholars of *warasan setthasat kanmu'ang* said in effect after 1978 'back to the library', the NGO community had said 'back to the people'. Some shuttled between library and 'the field' (*phak sanam* rather than *sanam luang*). The participants in these development debates - many of whom are named or characterised in Chatthip's paper - included a few senior officials (Dr. Prawet Wasi for example), professionals such as medical doctors and lawyers, Christian priests, some university lecturers, development workers from the 'NGOs', including many former student activists, and a number of local, especially village leaders to whom the Gramscian term 'organic intellectuals' has been applied. This was, and remains, very much a social world of networks and coalitions, albeit on a national, regional and sometimes global scale, rather than big institutions or co-ordinated movements. But though they started small and tended to think small at first, promoters of the new development discourse - varied of course but generally non-official, alternative, more 'appropriate', popular, grassroots and so on - have ambitious aims to enlist the sympathy and support of the middle classes, and to influence national policy and the official sector (Chatthip). Many also aimed to involve the Buddhist *sangha* in development work and argued for the importance of Buddhist knowledge in development circles, notably Prawet Wasi. Increased participation of members of the *sangha* in secular debates and programmes of action, has proceeded in parallel and in combination with

other social developments since the early 1970s. Stott gives an account of how ancient traditions of 'forest monks' are being rethought in the context of current environmentalist concerns. Stott's case emphasises the transformation of an 'elite' perspective on the environment, specifically middle class and urban, but also aristocratic. There is a warning too in his conclusion that perhaps this may result in precisely too 'elitist' an approach, a romantic and consumerist appropriation of the forests, which in highlighting a certain value of 'nature' ignores or downgrades the problems of the agricultural countryside.

At the start of this project we probably expected to place greater emphasis on the local/popular/subaltern side of a local/elite divide. As it happened we dealt largely with written, and printed, texts produced by rather specialist 'cultural producers' who were all rather close to, if not of and for, elite circles. As Nidhi Aeusrivongse said in the symposium, the true talent and voice of the people is likely to be foremost in oral and improvised speech. One might imagine that 'liberties would be taken' (a nicely apt English phrase) usually out of earshot of even local elites. Occasionally this language is overheard by sympathetic ears and recorded as examples of the resilient wit, wisdom and humour of the people. In these pages the anthropologists come closest to recording what urban and middling and upper class sort of people are hardly aware of, notably Tanabe's highly focussed account of an unrecorded and scarcely verbalised ritual scenario. Nai Thim - 'himself...no subaltern, but he has chosen in *Nirat No'ngkhai* to be the subalterns' historian' (Reynolds p. 30) - documents the plight of the conscript soldiers and luckless Lao girl I-Phum; Phraya Suriyanuwat expresses sympathy for the economic situation of the rice farmers; Naowarat celebrates peasant struggles in courtly convention, and the 'community culture' promoters extol 'local culture' and 'popular wisdom'. But by and large this was not an exercise in 'recovery' of subaltern discourses, of discovery of the extent and ways in which 'subaltern' practices 'stand outside and momentarily escape the construction of dominant discourse' (O'Hanlon 1988: 219). It is true that the 'community culture' school strenuously asserts a large area of autonomy and far from momentary existence for the popular, but we only glimpse the content here.

This subaltern/elite dichotomy is one which these papers tend to regard as an unhelpful working concept. We need to 'decentre' both terms, if as O'Hanlon - whose brilliant review of 'Subaltern Studies' coincided with the preparation of our symposium - puts it 'histories and identities are necessarily constructed and produced from many fragments' (1988: 197). This is echoed by several contributors. Tanabe (p. 183) rejects the assumption of 'fundamental principles' in culture - and especially Davis' claim that superior/inferior relations are 'the fundamental structure of Northern Thai ritual and reflect[s] the underlying structural principles at work in Northern Thai society' (Davis 1984: 22) - and stresses the multiplicity, inconsistency, heterogeneity, and dispersal of northern Thai sources of knowledge and representations of gender. Turton (p. 176) speaks of a 'continuing dialectic between the moral and immoral, elite and

popular, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic polarities' characteristic of the 'invulnerability' syndrome. If these general statements are valid, how much more should we expect ambivalence in individual experience and social stance? Nai Thim, in Reynold's new narrative, can stand almost as a type case of untypicality 'a figure of real ambiguity and contingency. He is not a fixed identity. He can celebrate power in one breath and hold it in contempt in the next.' We can recall too Bamrung Bunpanya's insistence on the need for a popular alliance - within the decentred NGO movement - with the middle class, even though 'external' culture is capitalist and alien (Chatthip). The precariousness, and practical difficulty of living out theoretical positions is captured by Hong in her discussion of the concern of WSK intellectuals at the 'new' military's ability to appropriate elements of radical discourse, and at the ease with which ruling elites could co-opt academics as advisors.

The notion of discourse refers to the way in which power intervenes to construct the agenda and rules of procedure for social debates, for the construction of knowledge. It refers to more than just language and speech; though if language is put in context, understood as statements, understood as also absence of things said, written and discussed, and stretched to its physical limits, then we would return to a full sense of language as coextensive with social intercourse; discourse and language would become very close again. The ancient term rhetoric, the knowledge and art of persuasive speech and writing, captures much of this sense of language/power. There are, if you like, extremes: at one end very language-based rules of poetics, and at the other the excommunication and even physical execution of a person for saying the wrong thing. The terrifying simultaneity of these extremes is shown in the case of Nai Thim and his poetic account of a Siamese military campaign in the North East in 1875. Reynolds calls 'state poetics' that specialist branch of elite control of who may say what, how, where, when, and to whom. It is a term which merits wider reflection and usage. As far as we know, Nai Thim did no more to express his views of the campaign than to write a poem, a poem which is at least as much a celebration of sovereign and Siamese power as it is a critical account of the human cost and misery. However he did publish it in printed form (about 500 copies) three years later. And he was saying the wrong things in the wrong language. One of the King's chief criticisms was that it contained excessive and vulgar language (*yapkhai*); it strayed too far from the formal and conventional to the referential and realistic; it was read as a 'mutinous message'. General Chuang Bunnag, the campaign commander, recommended execution for lese-majesty (*min pramat*); the eventual sentence was confiscation of the poems, 50 strokes of the lash, and eight months imprisonment. An attempt to publish again in 1926 was also prohibited; a censored version was published in 1955. Kulap Saipradit was imprisoned for two lengthy periods (1942-44 and 1952-57) for his political views and writings in general, rather than for specific texts, and spent the last years of his life in exile in China (Smyth). The three poets discussed by Manas all use 'vulgar' words but within strict conventions; the political

commitment of Naowarat and Khomtuan to 'art for life' seems not to have incurred state censorship. The sensitivity of 'state poetics' has shifted ground: political language in a context of public education and organisation has been the more recently perceived subversive threat, especially in the early years of the growth of the development NGOs (see for example Turton 1984: 42ff).

As well as discursive constraints and restrictive practices, there are rewards and successes to record. The most common, and somewhat ambiguous reward is posthumous publication and acclaim; being given ancestor status in a new intellectual genealogy. We also hear of SEA Write awards to writers (including all three poets discussed by Manas) and Magsaysay awards to honour and hearten the bold and incorruptible (including Dr Prawet Wasi, who joins in that number Dr Puey Ungphakorn and Tongbai Tongpao amongst many). Even the law of lese-majesty has become publicly discussable, albeit in the distinctly Farang-Siamese context of the Siam Society, founded 1904 (Reynolds). And alternative development and environmentalist discourses are becoming established in a way scarcely imaginable much more than ten years ago.

The papers in this volume have offered rather unorthodox kinds of texts as subjects for the examination of certain aspects of Thai social history, what we have termed 'Thai constructions of knowledge', namely: novels, poetry and literary criticism, magical texts, meditation practices and village rituals, the discourse surrounding environmental and devlopmental campaigns, as well as pioneering academic journals and early treatises on economics. But we have not looked at them as texts; rather, we have trespassed beyond the hermeneutic circle into the more historical and open-ended world of discourse. We also moved away from a residual structuralist attraction to oppositions or dichotomies. We started with some *a priori* oppositions of our own: local/elite, centre/periphery, court/popular, male/female, power/impotence, legitimate/illegitimate, attraction/repulsion and so on. We met a number of more concrete oppositions which were insistent within the texts or discourses examined: indigenous/non-indigenous, autonomy/cooption, convention/innovation, art for life/art for art, *mu'ang/pa* etc. We also came across some proposed forms of transcendence, particularly, and perhaps inevitably, in mystical ideas and practices and in poetry. But most repeatedly and insistently, we encountered plurivocality and multivalence, a highly differentiated array of positions and stances by cultural producers, who if not originators of discourse were nonetheless nodal figures in its dissemination. We found ourselves in a 'crosshatch of discourses', a felicitous phrase in Reynold's paper which became a mascot of the symposium.

If some areas of discourse were more crosshatched than others, then to my mind one of these was certainly the indigenous/non-indigenous zone, which we have already traversed lightly. Careful reading will reveal that this is one theme in every paper, more dominant in some than others. It raises the question of how constant the 'Thai' in our title can be; changing historical 'Thai' contexts everyone will allow, but how much is constant,

how far is this 'Thai' 'a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity' (Marx 1973: 107)? There is occasionally the idea that there is something quintessentially, aboriginally Thai, which subsequent exogenous influences will penetrate and variously strengthen or vitiate. But what, and when and where etc., was this? Was it before contact with Mon-Khmer languages, Brahmanical influences, Buddhism, Burmese overrule, Chinese traders, capitalism, Christianity, printing, constitutionalism, socialism, English-as-a-world-language ....? Chatthip and his subjects come closest to an essentialist view of 'Thai' (communal) culture; and counterarguments are bound to come up against charges of universalistic, or alternatively eurocentric, hegemonic pretensions. Viggo Brun seems to be defining some fairly specifically Thai characteristic features of the manuscript traditions:

> all the traditional bodies of knowledge are fragmented, incomplete and heterogenous. In fact, no Thai manual on any subject claims to be *the* original and complete one (except the Tripitika). On the contrary, it is recognized by everyone that losses, fragmentation, external additions and copying mistakes have been occurring all along (Brun 1990: 54).

This of course begs the question as to whether there is an original copy (read 'communal culture' for example) which has been lost, fragmented or added to (or can be 'recovered') if this has indeed been happening 'all along'. Brun also refers to redundancy as a prominent feature: 'the tradition comes up with many answers to the same question'. It probably is the case that the manuscript tradition and weight of earlier and certainly non-European, educational styles, still influence contemporary writing and scholarship in Thailand. For example numerous western scholars and writers have been irked by the difference in respect for copyright and the convention of attribution; Brun, however, refers to the inverse duty to copy, by the pupil and next generation teacher, as 'the ideal transmission of knowledge' in the Thai tradition. Something of this is captured in Brown's description of Prince Bidyalankarana's *talat ngoentra* which 'draws very closely, as the author indicates in his preface, on a slim introductory text, *Cash and Credit* by D.A.Barker ... The opening eight chapters of Barker's volume are reproduced ... partly in precis, commonly in full or near-full translation. Barker's final two chapters ... are ignored. In their place he provides a single chapter ... ') (Brown pp. 92-93) On the other hand, some three or four decades ago (largely western) academic paradigms reflected the values of those times in regarding as 'traditional' and not universal such Thai features as loose structuredness, variability and unpredictability of behaviour, lack of industrial time sense, lack of sytematicity and regulation, not to mention lack of respect for authors. Now, in a post-modern, post-microchip, global culture, such features as heterogeneity, decentredness, dispersal, fragmentation, and the death of the author and so on are held to be attributes of the real world or at least appropriate concepts for grasping the way things are going.

However, it is possible to conceptualise a 'specifically Thai' (or any other national-ethnonym) which is not necessarily an 'inherently or essential Thai'. All the papers in this volume, their authors as much as their author-subjects, address issues of connections and disconnections between knowledge and experience in Thai historical milieux and contexts at various social levels - more or less local, and more or less expert - and in turn between them and external and possibly universal knowledge and frames of reference. And they do this, in a contemporary situation, where it is both possible and neccessary. Necessary, because of the loss of intellectual direction after the period 1973-78 (Hong) and the need to chart new genealogies. Possible, because of the considerable growth, during the past two decades, of what we may call 'civil society' *vis-à-vis* the state and its 'apparatuses'; a specific social formation within which there seems to be much greater discursive freedom than in most other South East Asian countries. This is a freedom, part won, part conceded, for what we might term civil rhetoric as against 'state poetics'; and if the overtones of polite and civilian as well as non-state discourse/power are allowed to resonate, so much the more appropriate.

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SEDITION IN THAI HISTORY
A NINETEENTH-CENTURY POEM AND ITS CRITICS[1]

Craig J. Reynolds

INTRODUCTION: SEDITION IN THAI HISTORY

The charge of sedition, signified in English by an Anglicized French term, lese-majesty, has become more frequent as the incumbent Thai king's reign has lengthened and experienced the stresses and strains that one might expect of a constitutional monarchy sharing the political stage in the late twentieth century with a series of military and civilian regimes. Although King Bhumibol Adulyadej has given no indication that he will abdicate in the near future, his very mortality raises the question of his successor and therefore of the future of the monarchy, making comment on the institution particularly delicate. Each year the authorities charge a handful of people with lese-majesty in what is interpreted as an accusation of disloyalty not only to the monarchy but also to the national Thai government.

Because of the way it relates sovereign power to speech and writing, lese-majesty raises questions about the relationship between power and language. The charge is levelled at someone for saying something in public, as in the case of a former cabinet minister who said that if he could choose to be born, he would prefer to be born in the Grand Palace (FCCT 1988:162). Or it is levelled at an author for remarks about the monarchy in print, as in the 1984 case of Sulak Sivaraksa, a well-known essayist and social critic (*The Nation* 1984). In a more recent case, leaflets were distributed at busy Bangkok intersections in December 1987 sullying the name of the Crown Prince (Sukhumbhand 1988). These leaflets, circulated by 'Thai Patriots' and other groups, attacked the integrity of the Crown Prince by alleging impropriety in his minor wife's education credentials: such behaviour, the

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leaflets warned, threatened 'to destroy the monarchy'. As is sometimes the case in Thai radical politics, criticism was made here in the name of defending and strengthening the monarchy, but such fugitive printed material that circulates comment on the royal family can be, in any case, quite virulent and derisive. Produced by crude printing technology, this fugitive material resembles in the vehicle of its dissemination if not in its content the underground and subversive *samizdat* literature of the Soviet Union.

The ruling elite, and palace officials in particular, are mindful that prosecution of the crime of lese-majesty tarnishes the country's image in the eyes of foreign governments and human rights organizations. In October 1987, as if to prepare the way for more lenient treatment of those charged with lese-majesty, one of the king's private secretaries gave an interview to a Thai journalist suggesting that prosecutions for lese-majesty would gradually diminish and might very well disappear altogether if the country were ever going to progress satisfactorily to a democratic form of government. Then in November 1987, in an amnesty just prior to the king's sixtieth birthday, a prominent political prisoner charged with lese-majesty was granted a royal pardon and released (*FEER* 1987), a case along with others that had been publicized world-wide by Amnesty International. The interview by the king's private secretary sparked a roundtable discussion on the lese-majesty law in the criminal code involving a Privy Councillor, a noted human rights lawyer, and many distinguished legal scholars at the Siam Society on 1 December 1987, a mere four days before the king's birthday (*Pacarayasara* 1987). This kind of public debate on an issue of such sensitivity was unprecedented in Thai history.

Just how the crime of lese-majesty has been used in the twentieth century to protect the monarchy, or by extension its supporters, or to silence opponents of military regimes, or to maintain public order has not, so far as I know, been an object of serious academic study, perhaps because lese-majesty is a subversive discourse and a sensitive issue that threatens to cross the thin, sometimes invisible, and constantly shifting line separating academic pursuit and political action. I am proposing here not so much to excavate the deeper roots of lese-majesty in an earlier period of Thai cultural and political history as to set out some terms in which lese-majesty might be discussed. The terms I would suggest include poetics, the construction of knowledge, the authority for cultural production, and the way in which political legitimacy was signified in the Thai state a little over one hundred years ago.

Although free of direct colonial rule, the Thai state in the nineteenth century was undergoing changes very similar to states elsewhere in South East Asia that had become colonial possessions in European empires. Local environments, which had been relatively autonomous, were being drawn into the orbit of the centre politically, culturally, and economically. These local environments consequently became more fragmented, heterodox, and linked to larger networks, particularly the international economic network, than had been the case in premodern, precolonial times (Chatthip 1984;

1986). Moreover, the power of the centre was increasing at the expense of the local. As McVey puts it, 'this was not simply a matter of transferring power from one centre to another, but of an increase in the power available to any centre at all' (McVey 1978:12).

Along this line of argument, I do not believe it would be an exaggeration to say that the nineteenth-century Thai state must be viewed as a colonizing state whose expansion to secure territory and thereby realize its own geobody compromised the relative autonomy of its provincial outposts and former tributary states. From a Lao perspective, for example, Thai expeditions against the Ho bandits in the last quarter of the nineteenth century would certainly look like colonialist manoeuvres and encroachments (Chaiyan 1984: chaps. 2, 3; Thongchai 1988:352). In the least successful cases, the attempted extension of central authority resulted in the compulsory cession of tributary states to France and Great Britain. From hindsight, historians living in the Thai nation-state have termed such forced cession as 'loss' of territory, an anachronistic perception because before the nineteenth century the central Thai state did not have a clear sense of itself as a bounded entity with a fixed perimeter (Thongchai 1988 : chap. 7). How could it 'lose' what did not clearly belong to it, at least in modern, i.e. European, cartographic terms? The very effort to reach and permanently hold these distant territories, at first by armed force and mapping techniques and later by reformed public administration, is an excellent illustration of how the centre could wield greater power than ever before.

Other major changes were taking place in the nineteenth-century Thai state in terms of social and class relations. Economic change and the introduction of new technology, particularly the printing press, created new occupations and vocations, new kinds of local environments, new groups, new voices, and new modes of thought that began to interact with the centre and the elite in unexpected and provocative ways (Sathian 1982: 62-63). Producers of knowledge began to move outside the court and the monasteries, creating a problem of how knowledge was to be authorised and testing the boundaries and conventions that separated commoners from the aristocracy. Struggles broke out for rights and privileges between the aristocracy and the more outspoken of the new voices (Reynolds 1973; Reynolds 1987: 10-11). In one incident, a poetic account of a military campaign to the northeastern frontier in the mid-1870s invited the wrath of a Bangkok nobleman who levelled the charge of lese-majesty - a direct attack on the monarch as the sovereign power of the state - at the poet and called for his execution. In the end, the king agreed there had been an offence but desisted from executing the poet and instead had him flogged and imprisoned, a humiliating if not death-dealing punishment.

As the suppression and censorship of the poem in question, *Nirat No'ngkhai*, has for Thai intellectuals today come to symbolize conflict between writers and the state, persistent reflection on the incident has spawned a distinguished historiography. In a long essay on the poem written in 1961 while he was a political prisoner, the poet and scholar Jit

Poumisak analyzed all the documents on the case he could find. His study placed *Nirat No'ngkhai* in a lineage of literary works that had challenged the standards of literary value upheld by the pre-modern, feudal ruling order, and most historians of political literature rely on Jit's interpretation of the poem (inter alia, Bamrung and Chusak 1980: 184-85; Rungwit 1982), an interpretation I will evaluate below. In the mid-1970s Thai critics rediscovered an interest in social realism, and Jit's work along with that of other writers and critics of the 1950s was unearthed and reprinted (Sathian 1982: 417-61). Jit's study of *Nirat No'ngkhai* was published for the first time in 1975 along with the Fine Arts Department's censored edition of the poem and reprinted in the same year (Jit 1975). Among the historians to pay serious attention to *Nirat No'ngkhai* is Natthawut Sutthisongkhram who in 1962 told the story of the 1878 suppression of the poem (had he known of Jit's as yet unpublished work on the poem?), producing a fuller account fifteen years later, in both cases with the interpretation in terms of class and ideology favoured by Jit filtered out (Natthawut 1962; 1977). I want now to reopen the lese-majesty case of *Nirat No'ngkhai* as an opportunity to investigate how the composition, publication, and suppression of Nai Thim's poem illustrate the relationship between power and language in the nineteenth-century Thai state. I suggest that what is at stake in this case is a challenge to the theory of literature and reading endorsed by the state. I call this theory of literature and reading 'state poetics'.[2]

THE POEM, ITS AUTHOR, THE GENRE

The author of *Nirat No'ngkhai* was Nai Thim Sukkhayang (1847-1915), a man of humble origins who by the end of his life held the noble title of Luang Phatthanaphongphakdi (Damrong 1955). His father, a petty trader, put his son in the care of a nobleman, Caophraya Mahintharasakthamrong (Pheng Phenkun), who provided patronage and, eventually, employment. Nai Thim was ordained as a monk and spent three Years at Wat Ratchaburana, a monastery along the river where his father moored his trading boat, disrobing in 1870. Thereafter, until Pheng died in 1894, Nai Thim served as a resident writer in the entourage of the elder nobleman.

Pheng Phenkun, himself a man of apparently humble birth judging from the absence of a family history in his official biography, was a kind of 'foster son' and attendant of King Mongkut from the age of twelve, making his way up the ladder of ranks by means of his diplomatic and military skills (Fine Arts Department 1969). So trusted was the nobleman that Mongkut summoned Pheng to his bedside as he lay dying in 1868. Along with other senior noblemen and princes loyal to Mongkut's branch of the royal family, Pheng helped the boy-king Chulalongkorn survive the 1868 accession and the Front Palace coup attempt in 1874 and was rewarded in

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[2] Natthawut and Jit both reproduce many of the primary materials, and these are of great advantage to any historian studying the incident today. Wherever possible, I have consulted the primary materials myself, in which case I have provided a citation.

that year with the highest noble title of *Caophraya*. Natthawut says that Chuang Bunnag, the Regent from 1868-74, bitterly opposed this promotion, thus highlighting personal differences and rivalry that would later explain the course of events involving the poem (Natthawut 1962: 1333-5).[3] Archival evidence suggests a more complex relationship between the two men. Chuang had backed Pheng's appointment to a key manpower post in the early part of the reign (Kullada 1988). But certainly Pheng was close to the young king, just as he had been close to the late king. He was both a Councillor of State and a Privy Councillor in Chulalongkorn's early efforts to formalize broader elite participation in royal decisions. Strengthening these ties of service and loyalty in adversity was a marriage alliance: Chulalongkorn took Pheng's daughter as one of his concubines. This knot of reciprocal obligations between Pheng and the royal Chakri family that had built up over two reigns is seen by all historians of the incident to explain not only the leniency that Chulalongkorn showed Nai Thim but also the vehemence with which Nai Thim's poem was criticized by Chuang Bunnag, the minister who stood to lose a great deal if Chulalongkorn were to become powerful independent of Bunnag influence.

Nirat No'ngkhai was composed during a military expedition to the distant northeast frontier at No'ngkhai in 1875 - to the 'boundary' of the Siamese state *(krung)*, says the first line of the poem (NN 1955: 1/1). Directed from the capital by Chuang Bunnag and led in the field by Pheng Phenkun, the expedition to No'ngkhai took place only a few months after the crisis of the Front Palace coup attempt had ended, Chuang and Pheng having taken opposing sides in the dispute. The campaign of the mid-1870s was the least successful of three efforts (the others were in 1884-85 and 1885-87) to suppress marauding Ho bandits who had made their way into the Lao states from China and were molesting and plundering the local people (Forbes 1987). The identity of the Ho - were they remnants of the Taipings? - has yet to be established satisfactorily: the few Ho who actually appear in *Nirat No'ngkhai* seem to be hapless figures caught in a military sweep (Jit 1980: 248-51). Yet another poem about these expeditions was composed in 1887 (*Nirat Tangkia* [Tongkin]), notable for its detailed descriptions of Saigon, Haiphong, and Hanoi, though it has never enjoyed the notoriety that has surrounded *Nirat No'ngkhai* (Manas 1972: 166).

The sequence of campaigns against the Ho was serious for the Bangkok court because of French designs on western Indochina. The territory of what was to become the Siamese nation-state was not yet defined, let alone secure, and French intervention was a likely consequence if the Bangkok court could not pacify the Mekhong principalities. The purpose of the campaigns, as with other skirmishes elsewhere on the fringes of the realm, was to eliminate ambiguity about sovereignty as much as to quell a

[3] Natthawut also here alludes to an unpublished study of Pheng Phenkun's involvement in the case that presumably explores the incident in greater detail (1962: 1349). I do not know if this study still exists.

nuisance rebellion (Thongchai 1988: 342-43). The Lao country on both sides of the Mekhong River thus had considerable strategic rather than economic value; the Lao economy had fallen behind the economy of other parts of Thailand more affected by the international, European-organized trade (Wilson 1987: 175). What the Bangkok court wanted of the Lao states was allegiance, not booty or commodities.

The expedition was something of a disaster, however, not least because other Thai-led troops already in the northeast reached No'ngkhai and subdued the Ho before the army from Bangkok could rescue the endangered town. But for the Thai troops conscripted to march and fight, the expedition was particularly disastrous, because it was conducted at the peak of the rainy season, leaving Bangkok when the rivers were swollen with water and the jungle rife with fever. Along the forested pass up to the plateau and the northeastern gateway town of Korat, the rainy season was the malaria season. In telling the story of the campaign, the poet reports the grievances of the foot soldiers, their crowded camp conditions, their inadequate food supplies, their apprehension of the jungle and the ferocious Ho, and their fear of illness and death. As he says sardonically when the army is still at Saraburi, the cunning Ho would kill off the Bangkok soldiers by fever rather than force of arms, a remark Jit Poumisak thought was particularly galling to Chuang Bunnag because it made him out to be more stupid than the bandits (Jit 1980: 191; NN 1955: 15/18-19). Before the army even entered battle there were more than 100 deaths from malaria and food poisoning (NN 1955: 56/17-18). And so nervous about the Ho were the soldiers that upon hearing gunfire while still many days march from No'ngkhai they scrambled to prepare to fight only to find that they had mistaken villagers holding a midnight religious festival for an enemy attack (NN 1955: 44/1-16).

A straightforward chronological narrative, *Nirat No'ngkhai* is virtually a diary of the expedition's fortunes, and it thus identifies itself as belonging to the genre of poetry known as *nirat*. Alongside each date appear place-names and a description of their distinctive natural and cultural features. The poem takes on the character almost of a word map of the route to the besieged city, a travelogue in verse. In April 1988 I retraced the path of the march along the railway as far as the troops had ventured and found the poem to be a reliable guide to the stations from Saraburi to Khorat: Kaeng Khoi; Hin Lap; Muak Lek; Chan Thuk; Si Khiw; Sung Noen: Kut Chik. The jungle on either side of the deep cut through the escarpment leaves no doubt even today of the hazards that faced the armies and trade caravans that had travelled this well-worn but forbidding route to the northeast by elephant and ox-cart before the rail line was constructed.

Apart from the poetic rendering of place-names, *Nirat No'ngkhai* has another element prescribed by Thai literature manuals for the *nirat* genre, namely, the place-names en route remind the poet of his loved ones back home (Manas 1972: 148, 157). A *nirat* poem should encompass 'movement and separation' (Wenk 1986: 182). The probable futility and danger of the venture before him make Nai Thim yearn all the more for his spouse, his

kin, and his friends. Thorn Bush Swamp (Kut Phak Nam), for example, stimulates his imagination to compare the pain of separation to a thorn in his heart; if only he could see his lover, the thorn would drop away (NN 1955: 39/9-12). To ease his melancholy while walking through a forest just before Thorn Bush Swamp, he works his way through twelve lines of tribute to the *wan* family of plants, a virtuoso performance that should earn him an honorary membership in the *Wan* Society of Thailand devoted to the identification and study of these medicinal aids (NN 1955: 37-38).[4] Throughout, the novelty of new places, new things to eat, and new ways of life to learn of is offset by the ache of separation from his familiar surroundings and loved ones. Such Thai terms as *awo'n* and *alai*, which appear frequently in the poem, render this emotion of yearning and worry for loved ones far away. Alienation of place and person is thus built into the fabric of this kind of poetry, a genre whose themes oscillate between homesickness and the living reality that is pressing itself against the poet's senses.

The *nirat* genre was much changed by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, largely as a result of the verse of Suntho'n Phu who composed a great many *nirat* (Manas 1972: 151-52; Wenk 1986). In fact, there developed during the course of the nineteenth century two distinct types of *nirat*. One, written usually in *khlong* verse, was closer to the Ayuthaya *nirat* and emphasized separation and yearning: the other, written usually but not always in *klo'n* verse, arose from the merging of *nirat* and *phleng yao* (Nidhi 1984: 200-02). This second, hybrid type of *nirat*, which sometimes had no reference at all to separation from loved ones, took the form of a travelogue, a documentary account *(cotmaihet)* of a journey. Although there are some exceptions in which the poet indulges in fantasy, the *nirat* enjoys a reputation for realism that stems from a concern to record the natural and social landscape actually seen and experienced during the journey (Jit 1980: 168). Jit Poumisak described this evolution of the *nirat* as moving from 'subjective romanticism' to 'naturalism' to 'realism' (Jit 1980: 170-71). It is worth noting that *Nirat No'ngkhai* marks itself in the first line as belonging to this second, hybrid type, as the poet announces that he is going to provide a documentary account of the story of the journey to No'ngkhai (NN 1955: 1/1). And the theme of separation and yearning appears throughout the poem with almost predictable regularity.

The start of the expedition to the northeastern frontier was auspicious enough. A flotilla of boats embarked from Bangkok on 22 September 1875, replete with music and pomp, blessed by aged Brahmins blowing conch shells, and bid farewell by the general who directed the expedition, Chuang Bunnag, and by the king himself. A host of people witnessed the departure, including attractive young women who watched seductively from the river banks, an early test of the poet's resistance to temptation (NN 1955: 5/18-19). The boats made their slow journey up the Caophraya River through the

[4] Wan (ว่าน) is the name for a variety of plants some with tubers or rhizomes, some are edible or medicinal, some are used for sorcery and supernatural purposes.

provinces of Nonburi and Prathumthani to Bangpa-in and Ayuthaya, where Pheng paid homage to various historic and religious monuments. The Pasak River carried the expedition on to Saraburi, after which beasts of burden transported the army along the old trade route up to the Korat plateau (Chai 1979: 275-77). This route, which to a certain extent can be plotted according to an early nineteenth century indigenous map of central and northeast Thailand, was well trodden under the feet of previous Siamese armies sent to pacify the Lao territories (Kennedy 1970). The enormous effort to move the men and supplies from low-lying Bangkok to the Korat plateau may be gauged both from the duration of that part of the journey (two months) and the numbers of animals (170 elephants, 500 oxen, and innumerable horses), many of whom perished in the ascent to the Khorat plateau. The Lao world to the north and northeast had always taxed Bangkok's ability to provide logistical support in the mountainous terrain (Battye 1974: 61-62). And this was an army raised before the modernization of Thai military forces that would take place later in the century; the Ho campaign of the mid-1870s was being fought 'by the old militia under provincial and tributary state officials and chiefs' (Battye 1974: 211, fn. 7).

On the march up to Korat Pheng and his men performed meritorious works. The soldiers joined with villagers to repair the *chedi* at Wat Klang in Korat where they enshrined a tooth relic of the late King Mongkut; they enshrined another tooth relic at the ancient site of Phimai on the outskirts of Korat (NN 1955: 58-60; 82). These pious works were carried out with much gaiety and good will from the local people - Chinese, Thai, Mon, and Lao - who donated food and labour to the cause. To commemorate the occasion the Bangkok troops constructed a splendid pavilion and performed an episode of the Ramakian in masked drama *(khon)*. They displayed their theatrical skills again after Pheng was invited to cut the tonsure of the Korat lord's grandson (NN 1955: 68-69). In Saraburi, on the date of the death of his late king, Pheng had sponsored a performance of the Vessantara Jataka (NN 1955: 22).

I would like to make several points about the episodes I have described in *Nirat No'ngkhai* thus far. First of all, the style in which Nai Thim recounted the march to the northeast is very much the style of a royal progress. Although Pheng was a military man and senior statesman, his relationship with King Mongkut and his son, the young King Chulalongkorn, conferred on him a special status virtually equal to that of a prince (Jit 1980: 228). The acts of merit recorded by his poet, his generosity to indigent local people, his ability to organize food and shelter for hungry and weary soldiers, his personal attention to their health, his just decisions in arbitrating conflicts between the troops and local women and in suppressing bandits - all these are the virtues a loyal client expects of a protective patron, a retainer of his lord, or a loyal subject of a benevolent monarch. Through its imagery the poem tells us that this behaviour is esteemed and valued. Sovereign authority itself, as well as military leadership, is what is celebrated in this account. Second, I would say that while 'the local' reacts to 'the centre' in the person of Pheng and his army, what is being described

in the poem is more an instance of 'the centre' moving through 'the local'. The grandest display of virtue is through the example of Pheng, the field commander of Bangkok troops, and the most lavish construction of religious monuments is undertaken by means of his energy and resources. Pheng and his army are rather like a travelling exhibition of central Siamese culture. Only a few local customs creep into the text of the poem; here and there Nai Thim observes quizzically that northeastern ways deviate from Bangkok norms (eg. NN 1955: 69/13-16).

The counterpoint of this hymn to benevolent and decisive leadership and to the civilizing norms of court culture being propagated in distant provinces is a mournful wail of complaint and frustration at the folly of a campaign in the rainy season, against which the ancestors had always warned. 'The rainy season was no time to fight a battle,' Nai Thim says emphatically (NN 1955: 15/15). Time and again in dispatches sent to the field Chuang insisted that the expedition proceed - at one point he travelled by steamship up the river to make a personal appearance - even when it transpired that the object of attack, the main Ho force at No'ngkhai, had already been defeated. Indeed, the biggest battle scene described in the poem is not Pheng's army pitted agalnst the Ho but another general's rout of the Ho, and the fighting is not witnessed 'live' but reported as hearsay from a returned scout (NN 1955: 61-67). This battle stands for the real thing, as it were: it is the battle Pheng should have fought had not time and circumstance denied it to him. Still many days march from No'ngkhai, Pheng received a dispatch from the Bangkok command finally summoning him home. In the end, Pheng's mission did not require him to demonstrate the qualities of a warrior at all, and the main body of the army returned to the capital without having fired a shot.

From the first lines of *Nirat No'ngkhai* Nai Thim sounds the theme of resistance to this expenditure - the term 'waste' is outside the poet's frame of reference - of men, animals, and supplies. The debt slaves and bonded men levied by the generals to form the army did their utmost to avoid conscription, and the lesser nobility responsible for the labour power cheated the system by reporting that their charges had fled; they did not want to lose the labour power to a long military campaign. For every three men levied only two could be located, many of the missing having bought their way out of the obligation (NN 1955: 1-2). In the tributaries, when the lord of No'ngkhai levied Lao men to fight the Ho, the statistic was even worse: only one in three made it into the army (NN 1955: 62/15-16). The alternative to the army other than flight was either to pay the Ho protection money or to serve them 'like beasts of burden' (NN 1955: 62/1-4).

The conditions in which the soldiers march and bivouac on their way to the battle they will never fight are miserable. While they are still in the lower Menam valley at Prathumthani they spend the night in a flooded monastery, the men squeezed together onto the few available dry spots (NN 1955: 8/19-22). All along the route food and shelter are inadequate. Pheng's resources are soon exhausted, and the army must rely on the efficiency of Bangkok's communications and standing with local authorities to supply

them with rice and fish. Near Khorat the rice price has increased in anticipation of a hungry army (NN 1955: 41/15-18). Corrupt officials extort money from peasants and supply unhealthy oxen which are all skin and bones (NN 1955: 77/15-22). Planning for the expedition in Bangkok neglected warm clothing for the cold northeastern nights (NN 1955: 57-58).

Apart from recording the physical misery experienced during the ill-conceived campaign, Nai Thim also relates relations between the army and local peasants, particularly women. The young Bangkok soldiers womanize at every opportunity, forcing their way with Lao women around Saraburi (NN 1955: 18/10-13). Lao families had been brought to this area and resettled after Thai armies had conquered Vientiane in 1778 and 1779 (Wyatt 1963: 20, 30). When the army reached Khorat the *cao* feared that the soldiers would make off with his female retainers and posted a guard. Some women of menial status were put in chains to prevent their elopement - or was it flight from bondage? - with Bangkok troops (NN 1955: 70/9-16). Finally, the gates of the city were closed to keep women from being carried away, and any soldier found with a local woman was required to redeem or return her (NN 1955: 74/15-20). The incident that led to this measure involved a servant woman, I-Phum, who was identified as having delivered soldier's clothing to a concubine of the Khorat *cao* so she could dress up as a man and escape with the army. Instead of punishing the favorite concubine who instigated the ruse, the *cao,* incensed at disloyalty, had the servant flogged almost to the point of death. Eventually I-Phum disappeared, and as escape was difficult in the circumstances, Nai Thim muses that perhaps the *cao* had her killed (NN 1955: 70-74). As this is the only instance in the poem in which the name of a subaltern class person is actually given, perhaps it is in itself evidence of Nai Thim's belief that she had, indeed, been killed.

Such graphic accounts of human cost and human misery chart another terrain of experience and values quite different from the one I outlined above that pertained to Pheng's virtues as a leader and governor. With its simultaneous referents in elite and subaltern mentalities - simultaneous in the text of the poem - *Nirat No'ngkhai* is a crosshatch of discourses, the one displaying and celebrating the benefits of benevolent authority, the other demonstrating and criticizing despotic decisions. In performing this latter function, the poem signals human volition and human action that is not simply resentful but potentially destructive of authority - benign or despotic. In other words, *Nirat No'ngkhai* carried a mutinous message. The poem's critics early in Chulalongkorn's reign chose to acknowledge that message and interpreted Nai Thim's poem as an act of resistance to authority (Chakrabarty 1987: 33).

THE POEM'S CRITICS AND THE CHARGE OF SEDITION

When the poem was published in 1878 at a foreign press the Bangkok general, Chuang Bunnag, offended by Nai Thim's pointed remarks about the military judgement that had misguided the expedition, petitioned the king on 9 August 1878. He called for the poet's execution, citing cases earlier in the nineteenth century of minor officials who had offended military

authority and had been executed (Jit 1980: 182,203-4; Natthawut 1977: 429-30). These cases deserve to be unearthed and discussed, as does a case during the second Bangkok reign (1809-1824) when one of the king's half-brothers circulated a versified 'anonymous letter' *(bat sonthe)* defending his teacher, a high-ranking monk who had been charged and convicted of sexual misbehaviour. The prince, flogged until he confessed his authorship of the poem, died as a result of the interrogation, and courtiers found to be involved in the poem's production and distribution were executed (Terwiel 1983: 108; Thiphako'rawong 1961: 80-82). Poetry, even distributed anonymously, could be illicit. Nai Thim belonged to a class of authors whose material was sufficiently defamatory as to merit punishment by death. Chuang accused the poet of criticizing him for dispatching the troops in the wrong season and not showing compassion for the troops, of altering the king's name, of setting one faction against another, and of using extremely vulgar language (Chulalongkorn 1934: 257-58: Jit 1980: 182-88; Natthawut: 1977: 430-33). The sections of the poem cited by Chuang were presumably those censored in the 1955 edition, although Jit Poumisak decided that what remained provided clear enough indications of what Nai Thim had actually written (Jit 1980: 189ff). While the king agreed Nai Thim had committed an offence, he desisted from executing him, largely because of the identity of his patron, Pheng Phenkun, who had served Chulalongkorn's father so loyally and who had doubtless played a part in the poem's publication. Instead, the king had the poet given fifty strokes of the lash and imprisoned (Chulalongkorn 1934: 260). Four manuscript copies as well as 305 bound and 100 unbound copies of the poem were confiscated and presumably destroyed as ordered in a royal decree issued on 20 August 1878 and published in the Royal Thai Government Gazette (Chulalongkorn 1934: 311, 314-15; Jit 1980: 214-6; Natthawut 1977: 436-7; RKBS 1978). On the basis of a print-run of 500, Jit Poumisak surmised that very few copies had actually been sold and circulated.

After his release from eight months or so in prison Nai Thim returned to the entourage of Pheng Phenkun and rewrote a number of Thai literary classics - 'Rachathirat' and 'Sam Kok' among others - as plays which Pheng produced. He became controversial yet again in the early 1880s when he wrote an unauthorized drama about royal affairs, , provoking Chulalongkorn, who was confined to his sickbed, to write a parody ridiculing the script (Chulalongkorn 1972). After Pheng died Nai Thim served as a retainer looking after the financial affairs of Pheng's grandchildren (the king's children by Pheng's daughter), and he served in the Privy Purse. Towards the end of his life, when his literary abilities were in decline, he wrote for the marketplace to earn a living and educate his children (Damrong 1955).

While the narrative of *Nirat No'ngkhai* is certainly interesting enough on its own, and fertile material for Thai social history, I want to direct my remaining remarks to the terms in which the king and his officials judged Nai Thim of the crime of lese-majesty or *min pramat*, i. e. causing injury to the sovereign power. Lese-majesty literally means 'injured greatness'. *Lese*

comes from 'injury' in Latin, from which 'lesion' is also derived, and while the Thai-Sanskrit hybrid *min pramat* does not explicitly refer to bodily injury, the language describing the court's reaction to Nai Thim's poem carries a definite sense of injury *(chamcho'k)* to the king and his ministers. There is an affiliation between the king's name and his person, between his reputation and his body. A slur on the former is an assault on the latter.

> Those who called in question the prince's judgement, or doubted the merit of such as he had chosen for a public office, should be prosecuted as guilty of sacrilege.... By another law, it was determined that whosoever made any attempt to injure the ministers and officers belonging to the sovereign should be deemed guilty of high treason, as if he had attempted to injure the sovereign himself (Montesquieu 1914: 204-5).

In other words, a verbal attack on an officer or minister of the king is interpreted as an attack on the king himself. And this attack is tantamount to violation of the sacred. The law on lese-majesty is one of the ways the sacred qualities attributed to the king are defined and protected.

Article 7 in the criminal code of 1805, The Three Seals Law, lists eight kinds of punishment, including two kinds of execution, for persons convicted of lese-majesty (actually, *pramat min* in the 1805 code), although the documents on Nai Thim's case I have read do not refer explicitly to this law (KMTSD 1962: 11). But the term *min pramat* appears twice in the materials relating to the case, the king's diary and a proclamation of 1878 drafted by the king himself (Jit 1980: 182-84, 210-14; Natthawut 1977: 234, 236-37; RKBS 1878). The question before us at this point must be why the poem should be deemed such a threat to the king and his ministers that punishment by death was demanded in Chuang Bunnag's petition.

The proclamation of 1878 sets out the offences with which Nai Thim was charged: altering the king's name; 'upsetting' *(monmo'ng)* the king: making comments in vulgar language *(yapkhai)* about those who administer the king's affairs; and magnifying an event which had been troubling to the kingdom. The poem was said to be contemptuous of state affairs and military authority, and this behaviour, should it be imitated, would prevent military officers from leading their troops. In other words, the poem came close to inciting mutiny. When a person of rank sees one of his commoners *(phrai)* speaking beyond his station (lit. 'in excess'), says a document of 25 August 1878, he should take action to check the behaviour so that it does not dishonour members of the elite (Natthawut 1977: 438-39). Elsewhere, in his diary, the king recorded his opinions about Nai Thim's verse as poetry. While the king exonerated Suntho'n Phu from damaging the monarchy's name in poetry, he claimed that Nai Thim's poem had exceeded its form, it had gone beyond the *nirat* genre: 'This book is unlike all *nirat* in which the other poets pine for their wives and children and tell only about their travels. This *nirat* is in many ways excessive in what it says' (Jit 1980: 184; Natthawut 1977: 434).

Taken together, these remarks about the poem in the official documents suggest that Nai Thim had violated the cultural code, in this case a literary

form, and that there was something threatening about the poem. Moreover, the nineteenth-century accounts of the poem's suppressions are of interest in my investigation of the linguistic dimension in seditious activity. There were two distinct levels of language use in Standard Thai in the middle of the nineteenth century belonging to the elite and to the subaltern classes respectively, a linguistic situation that my colleague Anthony Diller proposes may be described as a kind of diglossia (Diller 1988). Certain aspects of the High-Low distinction meet the criteria for diglossia described some years ago by Ferguson. The High variety was certainly endowed with prestige, superiority, beauty, and rationality, though it remains for historians of Thai language to determine to what extent nineteenth-century Standard Thai can usefully be characterized as a genuinely split linguistic domain (Ferguson 1972). Such diglossia as existed was not simply a matter of convention but of enforcement as well, as may be seen from King Mongkut's numerous pronouncements on the 'correct' forms of language use. These included the proper way to write the names of kings, warnings against the use of idiomatic or 'low' speech, fines levied for using wrong language in royal petitions, proper spellings prescribed for monasteries and place-names, insistence on using correct prepositions, and significantly for Nai Thim and his poem, remarks about what little power the authorities had to control writing (Mongkut 1968: passim). The court's concern for the corruption of 'proper' speech by commoners intimates a more deep-seated concern that the vulgarization of high culture was but one weapon that might be arrayed against the ideology and institutions of the ruling elite (cf. Scott 1977: 11). One of *Nirat No'ngkhai*'s common motifs is the shouting or murmuring of the mass of soldiers, surging backwards and forwards, the kinetic energy of the mass translated into onomatopoeic sound. What thin line separated the collective din of *phrai* speech from the assertion of *phrai* will, especially at a time when everything from modern weaponry to printing technology would become more freely available to a freer labour force?

In the twentieth century the threat posed to the king's person by Nai Thim's poem has not yet died. *Nirat No'ngkhai* entered the official record again in 1926, in the second year of Prajadhipok's reign, when Prince Damrong received a request to republish the poem as a cremation volume. Damrong refused the request, saying that the government had no objection to reissuing the poem, as all the principals were deceased, but the decision of 1878 ordering the books destroyed still stood. The king did not intervene to say otherwise, and the poem went unpublished for another thirty years. It was not simply a slow-footed bureaucracy that was at work to prevent the poem's reissue. One official correspondent commented that 'the advantage of printing the book does not offset the damage that will be done' (NA 1926). The monarchy's apprehensions manifested in the documents of the 1870s were still very much alive in 1926. *Nirat No'ngkhai* was finally published again in 1955 only after certain offending but unspecified passages were removed, and it is this censored version, reprinted when Nai Thim and his poem were rediscovered in the mid-1970s and again in 1980, that, so

far as I can determine, I and all other critics have read (Jit 1975; 1980). Until *Nirat No'ngkhai* is found and published in unexpurgated form, a shadow of uncertainty must be thrown over any analysis of the poem. Jit Poumisak interpreted the scandal caused by *Nirat No'ngkhai* as resulting from conflicts within the ruling group between the field commander, Caophraya Mahin, who was Nai Thim's lord and patron, and the Bangkok general, Chuang Bunnag (Jit 1980: 189ff). Jit said that the poem was written very much within the feudal paradigm of the time. In a departure from the convention that literature be free from political concerns, the poem's composition was motivated by the factional struggles within the ruling class; hence it was political (Jit 1980: 178-79). In fact, the nineteenth-century court also saw the composition of *Nirat No'ngkhai* as determined by these factional politics to the extent that Nai Thim's interrogators encouraged him to implicate his lord, Pheng Phenkun, as the real instigator of the versified critique of the military debacle. But Nai Thim firmly denied that Pheng had in any sense 'ghost-written' the poem: he himself was the sole author (Damrong 1955). Jit Poumisak also identified another ideological element in Nai Thim's thought, namely, the social consciousness, liberalism, and sense of justice that would be characteristic of the new bourgeoisie. For Jit, the poem was thus a weapon of this new class (Jit 1980: 217-18).

STATE POETICS

Jit Poumisak's explanation of the incident in terms of the factional politics of the period certainly grasps the specific historical conditions of this controversy over what constituted proper poetry. In the 1870s the king was locked in struggle with the old guard. Chuang Bunnag was a kingmaker who now opposed the king's efforts to wrest power from him, and Nai Thim's lord and patron, Pheng Phenkun, was a kind of foster child of the Chakri royal family who was sympathetic to its long-term interests. *Nirat No'ngkhai*, even in the censored edition that we are allowed to read, communicates dissatisfaction with Chuang's obstructionist tactics in palace politics. But Jit's explanation, which emphasizes the limitations of Nai Thim's ideology rooted in a nascent middle class, bears all the hallmarks of an 'unsophisticated Marxist teleology, assigning value and significance in the extent to which consciousnesses are more or less "developed"' (O'Hanlon 1988: 207). There are other issues raised by this incident in the light of a vast neo-Marxist literature to which Jit Poumisak and others of his generation did not have access. I refer particularly to the debate, generated by Gramsci, Foucault and their commentators, on how power operates and produces effects, on hegemony, domination and resistance, and on 'that conventional division between politics and culture, the instrumental and the symbolic, which operates in society at large, and in elite historiography, to mask the real mobility of power' (O'Hanlon 1988: 216). Jit does not discuss the *raison d'état*, the exigencies facing the late nineteenth-century Thai state, that guided the course of events as Nai Thim was prosecuted and punished, preferring to see this as a mere instrument in the king's hands

for settling the dispute between Chuang and Pheng. Nor does he really account for the character of the poem which is at once loyal to authority and subversive of it. How did criticism of Chuang in the poem slide over into lese-majesty in the court's response? Why was Nai Thim taken to task for violating the *nirat* genre? How did we move from the nature of poetry to the authority of the state?

In the brief space left to me I can only outline these issues, one of which has to do with discourse, with how language has materiality and is invested by relations of power. Poetry, by its nature, thickens language. It draws attention to the formal properties of language, to imagery and to sound, and away from the referential function, though the referential function is always present to a greater or lesser degree. According to its ruling-class critics of the nineteenth century, Nai Thim's poem had moved away from the formal properties of language, and from its genre, and too close to the referential (Jakobson 1972). The referential function had been given more weight - the 'excess', as the king put it - than the poetic as allowed by the genre, though this was a genre that such poets as Suntho'n Phu earlier in the century had already much altered. The referents in this case were not only the political factions of the 1870s but also the living social body, the subaltern world of the conscripts called up to march on an ill-conceived expedition, the wretched living conditions they endured because the rainy season was no time to transport an army, and the probable death of I-Phum, the falsely-accused Khorat servant woman.

It would seem from this incident - and the literary criticism the incident has spawned in the twentieth century - that if the boundaries separating elite and subaltern domains are determined in part by the definition of what literary products are acceptable to the elite, then we can speak of 'state poetics'. By poetics I mean commentary on what poetry should be, how it should be read, and how it should function in society. In late nineteenth-century Thailand the place where high literature was produced, read, and discussed was the court and the residences of the aristocracy. The elite, centering around the court, prescribed and reproduced the conventions for poetry as well as for the dramatic and visual arts. The discourse that created these cultural products is what I am calling 'state poetics'. The way in which the nineteenth-century Thai state framed, articulated, and enforced a poetics became an issue that animated Thai literary studies in 1973-76 when critics began to argue about literature as a cultural product rather than as a repository of beauty, truth, rationality, and the sacred. This literary criticism of the 1970s, inspired by work that had been done in the 1950s, enunciated a theory of reading, a poetics, that challenged the 'state poetics' made visible in the suppression of Nai Thim's poem, a poem that in turn became an emblem of the struggle for a new poetics.

As is the case elsewhere in South East Asia where the 'theatre state' flourishes (cf. Geertz 1980), there is much in the semiotics of Thai power relations that makes power attractive. In fact, there is much in *Nirat No'ngkhai*, especially the poet's praise of his lord, that embraces the attractiveness of power and marks the poem as an elite document. Adopted

by power and beneficiary of its patronage, Nai Thim with his literary skills became a medium for its representation in language. But the poem is a complex of discourses, what I suggested earlier was a crosshatch of discourses. It subverts the social order even as it upholds it. Two points may be made about this crosshatch of discourses: at the level of the subject-agent, Nai Thim; and at the more theoretical level of domains of discourse. For the first, Nai Thim is a figure of real ambiguity and contingency. He is not a fixed identity. He can celebrate power in one breath and hold it in contempt in the next. He can sing hymns of praise to his lord in one verse and etch in fine detail the distress, disease, and death of the troops - the results of decisions made by power - in the next. In this second voice, he speaks for the mute foot soldiers whom élite historiography has silenced. Nai Thim himself is no subaltern, but he has chosen in *Nirat No'ngkhai* to be the subaltern's historian.

Domination, cultural or otherwise, can never be total. The dominant discourse never reaches everywhere; it never occupies all the space within its gaze (Turton 1984: 62). It follows that the world of the subaltern is only partially controlled and ordered by power. This line of thinking brings me to the second, more theoretical point about the crosshatch of discourses. Quite apart from any role the poem played in factional politics at the elite level, it contested the elite's philosophy and conception of the world. More to the point, the elite read the poem as a challenge to its philosophy and thereby made it into a chronicle of resistance. It is this contestation that Chuang and the king had to respond to and neutralize. I think this aspect of the incident can be seen not only in the charge of lese-majesty *(min pramat)* but also, and most particularly, in the language used to censor Nai Thim in Chulalongkorn's diaries, the proclamations, and other materials. Several of these documents, beginning with Chuang's petition quoted in the king's diary and repeated in the decrees, accused Nai Thim of using vulgar language *(yapkhai)* and upsetting the king, in short, of failing to show deference to the highest authority in the land. The same set of sources also accused Nai Thim of being irrational or confused *(fungsan)* - there have been such people in every reign, reported Chuang: all were punished - and said that his actions were disrespectful. This charge of 'irrationality', as well as accusations of untruthfulness and the insistence that Nai Thim's lord was really behind the poem's composition, were ways of denying the logic of Nai Thim's action. They were ways of denying his existence as a subject-agent who could think and speak for the mute foot soldiers. And this denial recognized the composition of the poem as an act of resistance on the part of Nai Thim not just to the command of the overbearing Chuang but to power itself. The most extreme denial of Nai Thim's existence would have been punishment by death, which he initially faced if the law had been applied to its fullest. Similar tensions and struggles are at work and life itself is at stake on another 'battlefield of symbol manipulation and language interpretation' where the ruling ideas of the ruling class prevail. In the Thai tradition of king-trickster tales, the brains and powerlessness of the trickster are pitted against the brains and power of the king. The official,

written versions always take care to kill the trickster in the end (Brun 1987: 89-91). The language used to censor Nai Thim could be displayed as a matrix of polar opposites, with the beautiful, the true, the rational and the sacred on one pole, as against the ugly (the poem transgressed the genre), the false (the facts were wrong), the irrational *(fungsan)*, and the profane *(yapkhai)* on the other. *Nirat No'ngkhai* does not sit squarely at the 'low' end of this matrix, however roundly Chuang, Chulalongkorn, and Damrong condemned it; some of its qualities clearly situate it at the 'high' end. What we seem to be witnessing in the *Nirat No'ngkhai* incident is a struggle over hierarchies and boundaries, a struggle for the terrain in some intermediary space between the court and the subaltern world (cf. Stallybrass and White 1986: 194). The monarchy, the élite, the court (the appropriate term depends on context) sought to establish protocols of language and conventions for genres as a way of coding its own social identity, an identity that was changing rapidly as each decade passed. In such incidents as the publication of Nai Thim's poem the ruling class experienced the limits of its control. Indeed, the outer limits of its very identity were being tested.

Embedded in a notion of the beautiful is a moral code and a code of behaviour that the ruling class needed to uphold if it was to continue in power. In the transgression of poetic conventions and in the rupture of the codes of deference, loyalty, and allegiance represented by Nai Thim's poem, conventions and codes through which the ruling class maintained its dominance, we can see the part that language and literature play in determining elite/subaltern boundaries. It is no less dangerous to the state today to have writers tampering with the 'proper meaning' of monarch (Reynolds 1987: 150-51). In prosecuting the case of *Nirat No'ngkhai* and its poet for lese-majesty, Chulalongkorn recognized how precarious and limited his own hegemony really was. Although the monarchy had no difficulty in resolving the case and was never in any way physically threatened by the disgruntled troops and their poet, the charge of lese-majesty levelled against Nai Thim stemmed from an anxiety about upholding the social and political order in its existing form.

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POETIC CONVENTIONS AND MODERN THAI POETRY

Manas Chitakasem

กรรลองโคลงเครง่ใช้	*ฉันทลักษณ์*	*My poetry strictly abides by poetical rules,*
ที่เอกทีโทพิทักษ์	*ถีถ้วน*	*All tone placements are rigorously observed.*
สัมผัสรับส่งศักดิ์	*สิทธิ์เสถ*	*With exact rhymes as my sacred devotion,*
ละบทละบาทล้วน	*ระเบียบเบื้องบาราณ*	*Each line, each stanza conforms to ancient convention.*

(Naowarat 1978 :109)

Literary tradition in Thailand is rich and rather complex. Classical literature has almost always been associated with poetry and until the arrival of printing technology in the mid-nineteenth century, literary production lay in the hands of the elite who had both the means and the education to devote to cultural and intellectual matters. In the old days poetry was composed exclusively by royalty, the nobility and their retainer poets, and the king himself was often an active participant. It was within the confines of this court-centred tradition that poetic convention took root, grew and developed into a form of knowledge essential to a poet's education.

The literary cultures of the elite *(munnai/cao)* in relation to the non-elite *(phrai/prachachon)* has been well researched (Nidhi 1984: 1-73). General distinctions between elite and non-elite literature can be made from certain dichotomies, such as the written versus the oral tradition; the urban *(mu'ang)* versus the rural *(chonnabot);* the court versus the country; complex and foreign verse forms *(rai, khlong, kap, chan)* as opposed to simple ones *(klo'n/phleng)* and so on. The court adopted the non-elite *klo'n* verse form during the late Ayutthaya period and once the *klo'n* was written down it became regularized, was elaborated and finally refined, perfected and popularized, so forming part of the literary convention by the end of the second reign of the Bangkok period.

This paper assumes that the poetic convention which now exists in Thailand is that constructed, consumed and treasured by the elite. It attempts to explain the essence and formation of the convention, the ways and means by which rulers and national leadership perceived, authorized, and promoted it throughout the course of history and, finally, to examine how present-day poets such as Angkhan Kanlayanaphong, Naowarat Phongphaibun and Khomthuan Khanthanu, are moulded and influenced by such a convention.

The earliest evidence of Thai construction of poetical knowledge can be seen in the first Thai text on versification, the *cindamani,* composed during

the reign of King Narai (1656-1688) during the Ayutthaya period, perhaps on the King's orders and in response to the French who were building schools to teach Thai children (Damrong 1932). Judging from the content, the purpose of the text was to teach a language which could ultimately be used in the reading and writing of poetry. The *cindamani* made reference to two texts, both of Indic origin, the *wuttothai (vuttodaya,* or exposition of metres) and the *kap sarawilasini.*[1] This indicates that the two texts were available and were used by poets and scholars before the composition of the *cindamani.* From these texts, rigid metrical rules and poetic diction must have been applied and aesthetic values formed. Mention of the texts also points to the fact that Thai metres had their source in Pali, and not Sanskrit, although most of the names given to the metres were Sanskritic ones. It is not known how the Thais were introduced to the *wuttothai* but since a large number of religious works had been borrowed from Pali it is likely that the Pali influence was not limited to the subject of Buddhism but that it also provided Thai with a group of metres used in Thai poetry. The six chapters of the Pali metrical treatise not only provided Thai poets with technical terms but also with two different types of metre, the *mattra phru't (matta-vutta),* metres regulated by time; and the *wanna phru't (aksara-gana vutta),* metres regulated by groups of three syllables (Fryer 1877).[2] The Thai made certain changes and adaptations to accommodate Thai linguistic requirements by adding the rhyme scheme and changing the concept of light and heavy syllables. Then they named the metres by a Sanskrit term *chan.* Although derived from Pali metres, the *chan* has developed into an indigenous Thai poetic verse form which adheres to the principles of Thai poetry and to the phonological principles of the Thai language.

As for the *cindamani* itself, the order in which its contents are presented indicates that priority should be given to acquiring certain types of 'poetic' vocabulary before one is able to read and write poetry. This is the *akso'nsap* section which deals with homonyms, synonyms and the high style vocabulary, mostly of foreign origins, which are listed alongside their Thai

[1] *Kap* is a rather confusing term in Thai literature. Here it simply means poetic composition which can be in *khlong, kap, klo'n* etc. Most Thai literary experts seem to contend that *kap wisalini* and *kap khantha* are the oldest Thai texts on versification. A scholastic and thorough study by Jit Poumisak seems to have shown quite clearly that the verse forms of the Thai-Lao are indeed the origin of Thai versification. Literary court scholars, including the author of *Chindamani,* experts in Thai Ministry of Education, Phraya Upakit Sinlapasan (the great grammarian), and King Rama VI, had misled their younger generation for centuries about the origin of Thai verse form. According to Jit their misunderstanding of the *khlong ha* was due mostly to their ignorance as well as their narrow mindedness towards the culture of the minority peoples living within the boundary of the Thai Kingdom. The basic problem is the bias and the superiority attitude adopted by the arrogant and complacent elite in the court (see Jit Poumisak 1981).

[2] According to Fryer, the Vuttodaya (Exposition of Metre) is the second metrical treatise written in Ceylon during the twelfth century by the Pali grammarian Moggallana, under his priestly title of Sangharakkhita Thera. It is the only work on Pali prosody extant, and is founded on the Vrittaratnakara (Ocean of Metres), a Sanskrit work on post-vedic metres by Kedera Bhatta. It contains 136 stanzas or portions of stanzas, divided into six chapters.

counterparts.[3] The author ended this section by emphasizing that 'all these words have been compiled by the learned poets in order to be used in all kinds of poetry' *(cindamani* 1979: 9). The next section places emphasis on the correct spelling, especially of words beginning with ฉ, ฬ, and ฮ followed by the correct usage of ไ and ใ in spelling. Pronunciation rules follow this section together with tone rules and the nature of sound production, the latter being discussed in great detail. The virtue of correct pronunciation is, explains by the author, like ambrosia sprinkling and delighting the heart *(cindamani* 1979: 29). The main part, and the longest of the texts, deals with versification. The author gives a list of the variety of *khlong* with examples quoted from literary works flourishing at the time. The author also includes various kinds of *khlong kon,* the 'encoded' poems which learned poets often composed to display their extraordinary talent, as well as to avoid monotony. The *chan* metres adapted from the Pali *wuttothai* are then listed with brief explanations. Although most Thai commentaries on the *wuttothai* mention the total of 108 metres (81 *mattra pru't* metres and 27 *wanna phru't* metres) only six are listed in the *cindamani,* and it is these six that are currently used in the poems written in the *chan* verse form (e.g. *samutthakhot, anirut, mahachat khamluang).*

We can say, then, that the *cindamani* is the first Thai text to lay down the basic foundation of Thai versification. It reaffirms the general belief that the fundamental concern of Thai poetry is the perfection and the suitability of 'poetic diction', often referred to in Thai as *phro', phairo'* or *sano'*. All three are words of Cambodian origin meaning melodious, euphonious, beautiful to listen to. A student who reads the *cindamani* is expected to learn to appreciate as well as to be able to create the proper aesthetic sound in poetry composition. To achieve this, he must build a store of appropriate poetic vocabulary - homonyms, synonyms, and high-style words deriving from many foreign languages (Pali, Sanskrit, Khmer, Mon, Burmese and Thai).[4] Then he learns to use this vocabulary with correct sounds and meaning, and to arrange and re-arrange the words according to the different verse metres prescribed in the text. This is particularly important because, in the old days and, indeed, until the introduction of printing technology, poetry was to be heard through recitation and singing rather than being read. In fact, the influence of this has pervaded Thai society where rhymes, reduplication, puns, compounding, alliteration and assonance can be found

[3] The majority of the vocabulary was made up of Pali and Sanskrit *(phasa makhot).* Other languages mentioned include Khmer, Sinhalese, Mon, Burmese, Lao and Thai.

[4] These sets of vocabulary would have formed a wealth of the so called 'poetical vocabulary' which a poet keeps in his storage and becomes handy for composition. A poet may create new sets and new combinations as he learns to master his arts and gains experience. The creation of pronoun epithets is a case in point. Prince Thammathibet, for instance, had created *no'ng kaeo, no'ng nang, nang kaeo, kaeo ta, nuan nang, nuan no'ng,* etc. By this technique of combining and pair switching many more pronoun epithets for a beloved woman can be used to fit the rhyme schemes required in poetry composition.

in many aspects of Thai life.[5]

The importance of rhyme is reaffirmed in the eighteenth century *cindamani,* written during the reign of King Bo'romakot (1732-1758). Although this text deals only with the use of the language rather than with poetry, it does explain the criterion of rhyming. The author explains that, in the old days, the rules of pronunciation were flexible and that a word could be pronounced in different ways. When this happened, the reader could decide to pronounce that word in such a way that it would rhyme with the word on the preceding or following line, depending on the rhyme scheme. It is, in fact, a statement on poetic licence, allowing a poet to change the pronunciation of a word to get the desired rhyme which is often rigidly governed by the rules of versification. The example given in the text is the word *ritthi* (ฤทธิ์) which can be pronounced *ritthi, ritthii,* or *ritthaa* (ฤทธิ์, ฤทธี, ฤทธา) *(cindamani* 1979: 186).

The date in which the first written *klo'n* appeared is not known for certain. During the early Ayutthaya period *klo'n* verse was not prominently used in court literature. Among commoners, however, rhyme-making has been the oral-aural expression and entertainment enjoyed by almost all odinary folk. More than twenty kinds of native songs have been recorded from different parts of Thailand.[6] The *klo'n* has always been popular among rural rhymsters.[7] These rural rhymes known as *phleng phu'n mu'ang* appear to be numerous varieties of *klo'n* verse and because of their oral tradition and transmission, together with their improvisation nature, the rhyme structures of these *klo'n* verses often show irregularity. Each syllable group in the rural *klo'n phleng* may have a number ranging from two to six. In order to satisfy the aesthetic requirement for *phairo',* the elite, after adopting it, slowly made improvements on the *klo'n,* increasing the number of syllables to eight or nine.[8] The existence of the *lakho'n* within the court of King Narai suggests that *klo'n* verse had assumed a prominent function in the court circle (de la Loubère 1969: 49). Moreover the *klo'n* had also been used for particular types of improvised songs of *Sakawa* and *Do'kso'i* which were popular among the kings, princes and nobles (Damrong 1918: 2-17).The Ayutthaya court adopted it in the eighteenth century and since then it has continuously gained popularity and respect. By

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[5] For example: Official slogans: เด็กดีเป็นศรีแก่ชาติ
Advertisement: จิบเดียวจับใจ
At the back of a bus: กระเดิบเข้าไปอีกนิด ต่อชีวิตให้รถเมล์

[6] See Montri Tramot (1963) and Anek Nawikkamun (1984).

[7] See, for instance, Bidyalankarana (1926). Two excellent works that discuss *phleng* and the origin of the *klo'n* verse are Jit Poumisak (1981) and Sujit Wongthet (1989).

[8] *klo'n paet,* a *klo'n* variety, which has a syllable group of eight, is the most popular and best known *klo'n* type.

the third reign of the Bangkok period, it had become extremely popular.

Suntho'n Phu, who wrote many *klo'n* poems, including several in the *nirat* form, is regarded as the master of *klo'n*. His creation of regular internal rhyme patterns has added a euphonic effect to the *klo'n* and these patterns are so regular that they are recognized as a trait of his particular *klo'n* verse. Suntho'n Phu's creation has become the 'model' for following generations of poets.[9]

The increased popularity of *klo'n* verse must have taken place some time during the reign of King Bo'romakot (1732-1758) when the *klo'n konlabot siriwibunkiti* appeared. This is a poem which deals exclusively with the *klo'n* verse form, constructing 86 different variations and, though it tells a story, its main purpose is to display the poet's special skills in creating variations of *klo'n*, thus proclaiming him as a true master of the art. The poem illustrates that the *klo'n*, at that stage, had become a well-developed verse form and had finally established itself in the written tradition of the late Ayutthaya period (*Chumnum tamra klo'n* 1961: 181-229).

During the first reign of the Bangkok period, Thai literature became part of the King's programme of cultural reconstruction and revival. Ayutthaya's court culture formed the model for Bangkok's shaping of its cultural destiny. The King called upon poets and literary scholars to form a committee, later known as *krom alak* (department of writers) to recreate literary works for the new capital. Together they produced classical work such as the *ramakian, inao, unarut* and *dalang*. The *nirat* (travel poem) composition was revived, with the King himself taking the lead, by composing *nirat rop phama thii thadindaeng*. This *nirat* poem provides the first travel poem, involving an expedition to war, and was written in the *klo'n* verse form. *Nirat* poems in *khlong* were also revived during this period. *Khlong kamsuan*, a *nirat* poem of the Ayutthaya period was regarded as the masterpiece - a model which great poets of this period closely imitated as they recreated classical *nirat* works of their own time.[10] If we consider, from the beginning of the Bangkok period, the preservation and production of poetry alone, we can say very simply that the completion of the *Ramakian* in full by King Rama I and his court poets was one of the most ambitious and, indeed, highly successful of those projects. The excess of 24,000 *klo'n* stanzas comprising the poem stand as the only complete version ever written. Some interesting questions can be raised about the implications of the King's choice of the *Ramakian* but as far as the

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[9] According to Angkhan, the famous internal rhyme pattern of Suntho'n Phu's *klo'n* (which has become so well loved by younger generation poets) was not really Suntho'n Phu's own innovation. The same rhyme pattern can be found in the text *siriwibunkiti* of the Ayutthaya period and is known as *konlabot mathurot wathi*.

[10] Such as *nirat tam sedet thap lam nam no'i* composed by Phraya Trang (Manas 1972: 135-168). The first two *nirat* poems by the great Suntho'n Phu, *nirat mu'ang klaeng* and *nirat phrabat* , were also written during this period.

construction of the Thai poetic convention is concerned, this version of the *Ramakian* has formalized some of the poetic constraints and structure of the *klo'n bot lakho'n,* making it much more easily understandable than the Thonburi version. The introductory phrases (*mu'a nan, bat nan, ma ca klaobotpai,* etc.) became standardized, and the pronoun epithet became regularized and meaningful (Bofman 1984: 155-171). Classical literary works from the Ayutthaya period served as the model of good literature. A common practice during this period was to use the story or content of an Ayutthayan literary piece and rewrite it as a means of preserving a literary heritage. The form, style and literary technique were supposed to be an imitation of the original, which was highly regarded as the work of a learned teacher (Duangmon 1989: 22-23). The transference of an Ayutthayan poetical convention to Bangkok can be said to have been most meticulous and total. Learned poets of the early Bangkok period rigorously adhered to the conventions laid down by the Ayutthayan sages. This was the age of *tam yiang khru* (follow the way of the teacher), *kawi khru* (poet as a teacher) *wohan khru* (wise words/language of the teacher) which must be respected and followed. This tradition is still strongly held, even today (Wo'rawet 1960: ii).

It can be seen then that in order to legitimize its new authority and leadership, the elite had seek to link the new capital city with the glory of its past. Poetic convention was an essential form of knowledge of the past, the best of which needed to be revived, preserved, and authorized for the present and future generations. This aim was achieved by incorporating new elements such as religious, social, political and moral values into literary works. Phraya Trang's *nirat* poem, for example, added three dominant elements; the city, the army, and the King, in his poem. The invocation praised the virtue of the King, the happiness of the people in Bangkok, and the fame and splendor of the new city (Manas 1974: 82). King Rama I himself included in his own *nirat* composition, an account of the victory of his army over the invading Burmese. He ended his *nirat* poem with the royal pledge that he would protect his country and restore peace and happiness to the people, court officials, and also the ladies of the court (Manas 1974: 164).

King Rama II improved on Rama I's *klo'n bot lakho'n,* making it more refined, somewhat shorter and more suitable for performance. The *lila* (syllable group) of the *klo'n* was changed from a rather irregular pattern of 00 000 000 to the more regular 000 00 000 which eventually became the preferred *lila* of the poets of the younger generation (Kuo 1980: 27).

Attempts to preserve and elaborate the knowledge of the *chan* metre were made by King Rama III when he commissioned Prince Paramanuchit to compose poetry in the *chan mattra phru't* and *chan wanna phru't,* to be inscribed on the walls of Wat Pho. The prince produced 50 *mattra phru't* metres and 8 *wanna phru't* metres (*Chumnum tamra klo'n* 1961: 1-145).

The beginnings of modern Thai prose came during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868); and at the turn of the century (in the fifth reign), prose had begun to replace poetry as the favoured literary form. In order to

promote literature, history and archaeology, King Rama V established the *borankhadi samoso'n* in 1907. Its membership was drawn from the *cao nai* and high ranking officials, the majority of whom were members of the Wachirayan National Library. One of the Society's main responsibilities was to select and give approval to suitable texts - both classical and recently composed - for publication. Such books were to be printed with the royal seal of approval on the cover. The Society published several classical literary works of poetry, among them the fifteenth century *lilit yuan phai, khlong thawathotsamat* and *nirat Phraya Trang* , so making these classics available to a wider public. By 1913, Thais educated in the West began to return home with new ideas about writing and literature. King Rama VI, sensing the decline of Thai literary traditions, voiced his concern in March 1913 that the Thai language was being mixed with foreign idioms and new structures. With a lack of concern for the language, there could be no work that could be called literature (Trisin 1987: 29). The King created the word *wannakhadi* (literature) and commissioned Phraya Sisuntho'nwohan (Phan Talalak) to compose a poem*Inlarat khamchan.*

The King also founded the *wannakhadi samoso'n* in 1914 and, through it, he issued an act requiring literary works to deal with aesthetic values rather than be superficial entertainment. The *wannakhadi samoso'n* classified literary works into different genres, selected the best in each category and published them.[11] It aimed to promote good writing and one of its prominent members, Prince Bidyalankarana, formulated the following rules for composing poetry:

1) Use the exact number of *kham* stipulated in *chanthalak* for each verse type. In the *kharu* and *lahu* (light and heavy syllables), however, each syllable can be equivalent to one *kham,* or one light and one heavy syllable can also be equivalent to one *kham.*

2) Do not use syllables in positions where they have no meaning, such as *phaktra* พักตรา for พักตร์ or rittha ฤทธา for ฤทธิ์

3) Do not write words incorrectly, such as *nukun* for *anukun*

4) Do not repeat words with the same meaning in succession.

5) Do not use nonsense syllables.[12]

Chan metres have always been very difficult for most Thais to read, let alone write. Such an overriding concern for correct form and diction, based entirely on the written words, ignored the fact that traditional poetry-making in Thailand was for oral-aural consumption. Research has shown that the old *chan* texts, such as *samutthakhot,* composed during the reign of King Narai, were not supposed to be difficult and that they contain far fewer

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[11] A literary work which was approved and selected by the *wannakhadi samoso'n* would be certified and the best work would be presented with a *Wachirayan* medal as an honour. It was also interesting that among the ten books chosen as the best ones for the different categories, three were the King's own compositions.

[12] Quoted by Hudak (1981:85).

'foreign' words than might have been expected. The degree of correctness or adherence to the metrical rules must be judged by the way the *chan* sounds, rather than by the way it reads from the written word. Poets who really understand the nature of Thai poetry would be aware of such problems (Sumali 1986: 21-28). Jit Poumisak, for example, chose a *chan* metre called *ithisang chan* for his poem *'winyan sayam'* (Spirit of Siam); he wrote the following beneath the title of the poem:

> *kharu - lahu* : the principle of light and heavy syllables in this metre is based on the science of phonology not spelling of letters (Jit 1974: 27).

King Rama VI's concern for the correct use of the Thai language and over the decline of literature provided the impetus for a revival of classic works employing the *chan* metre, such as *inlarat kham chan, samakkhiphet kham chan, phranon kham chan* and *kanok nakho'n*. These works followed the old metrical rules rigorously, as well as creating a number of new metres. As a result, the *chan* became more sophisticated and more attuned to a highly educated audience. In some cases, the vocabulary used in the poems became so obscure that the author attached a glossary to his composition.[13]

In 1931 the *ratchabandittaya sathan* (Royal Academy), under the presidency of Prince Damrong, established the *samakhom wannakhadi* (Literary Association) to discuss and lay down guidelines on the subject of Thai literature. Those guidelines and the discussion were then published in the Association's monthly periodical. According to the guidelines, good poetic literature must possess the following qualities:

1) Strictly observes the correct rules of versification.
2) Contains good and outstanding substance.
3) Good rhyming.
4) Beautiful and melodious sound.
5) A meaningful piece of poetry, not just a string of words that rhyme.

It can be seen here that an aesthetic standard was explicitly stated as a required quality for good poetry (Duangmon 1989: 88)

The concern that poetry should involve the production of melodious sound while adhering to the prescribed forms received new support from the monthly periodical, *wannakhadi san*. It was issued by the Association of Literature, of which the Prime Minister of the time, Field Marshal Phibun, was president. Phibun made full use of Thai literature in his all-embracing political propaganda machine, to advertise his regime's policies and actions. Famous, able and willing scholars, academics, intellectuals, writers, poets and other supporters were mobilized or recruited to write for

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[13] Indeed it was such a pedantic undertaking that made the *chan* less and less popular. The *chan* metre became the property of the elite, the educated, and was only suitable for those who regard themselves as experts of Pali and Sanskrit languages. It is curious, however, that most, if not all, of the Sanskritic poems composed during this period were taken from English translations rather than the Sanskrit original.

the periodical, the first issue of which appeared in August 1942. The main aim of the Association was to promote and propagate Thai language and literature. Regular contributors, some of whom later joined the editorial board under the editorship of Prince Wanwaithayako'n, included such prominent names as Anuman Rajadhon, Wit Siwasariyanon, O' Bunyamanop and Thanit Yupho. The periodical had a regular column for poetry competitions and the winners were always those who composed in the *chan* metre. Articles regularly published in the *wannakhadi san* covered language and literary subjects together with a large number of short pieces and poems to persuade readers to follow the leader and to admire what he was doing for the country. However, literary discussions, written mostly by Wit Siwasariyanon, Cu'a Satawetin, O' Bunyamanop and Plu'ang Na Nakho'n, concerned classical work, ranging from the history of Thai literature, biographies of poets, to versification. For two years the periodical served as an influential instrument in shaping and constructing attitudes towards and knowledge of Thai literature. While the classical form was highly regarded the content was political with a clear aim to rally the people behind the regime.[14]

The insistence that *chan* is a superior verse form is surely mistaken. The fact that the *chan* verse form derived from Pali and Sanskrit has conferred sacredness upon it: it is prestigious, but unnatural, unattainable. From the late Ayutthaya period till the present day, *klo'n* has been one of the most widely used verse forms in written poetry, as well as being sung and improvised in many forms of entertainment in the Thai oral tradition. The enduring success of any verse form depends on its harmony with the nature of the language in which it is composed, and the *klo'n* has proven beyond doubt that it is in complete harmony with the nature of the Thai language. But the *klo'n* remains nothing more than oral, country, provincial and therefore 'common'.

It was not until 1949 that Atsani Phonlacan (pen names Si Intharayut, Nai Phi) began to challenge the official view of poetry composition. Writing in the *akso'n san* periodical, Atsani produced a series of articles on poetry composition and literature which were later collected in two books entitled *sinlapakan haeng kap klo'n* and *kho' khit chak wannakhadi* (Si Intharayut 1974: 53). Essentially, Atsani claims that Thai poetry, on the whole, does not accurately reflect life and society, either in content or in the form in which it is presented. He objects to the idea that poetry is merely a product of melodious sounds and adherence to form. Atsani compares the melodious sounds in poetry to the sounds of birds singing: the listener understands neither the bird nor the singing, and so the message is totally lost and forgotten (Si Intharayut 1974). Such views on 'literature for life and literature for the people' were shared by Udom Sisuwan (pen names,

[14] Phibun's wife, Lady La-iat, was a regular contributor to the journal who wrote many nationalistic poems. A special volume was devoted to the celebration of the leader's birthday when he was lauded for his virtue and wisdom as a leader.

Banchong Banchoetsin, Nai Sang), whose article, *du wannakhadi cak sangkhom du sangkhom cak wannakhadi* (Look at literature through society and look at society through literature) gave his readers a clear view of *sinlapa phu'a sinlapa* (arts for arts) and *sinlapa phu'a chiwit* (art for life) (Bancong Bancoetsin 1974: 63-64). Another promoter of *sinlapa phu'a chiwit* was Jit Poumisak whose books, *kawi kan mu'ang* and *sinlapa phu'a chiwit sinlapa phu'a prachachon* had great influence on young writers and poets. Jit and Atsani were themselves first class poets who had studied and experimented with poetical convention. Jit was also a great scholar who was knowledgable in both elite and non elite cultures. His poetry made use of elite conventional poetic forms as well as native country *phleng*. Verse forms that he used included *chan, kap, khlong, klo'n rai* as well as *klo'n phleng cho'i, klo'n phleng yao, phleng khorat* etc. *Khlong ha phatthana* is strictly Jit's creation. Atsani, on the other hand, is most respected for his composition in the *kap yani* verse form, which has had an immemse influence on young poets.[15]

We can now discuss the work of three prominent modern poets, who are regarded as representative of their time, to see how their poetry has been affected and influenced by poetical conventions. Angkhan, Naowarat and Khomthuan are SEA Write Award winners and are highly regarded in Thailand.

Angkhan Kanlayanaphong

Angkhan was born in 1923 in Amphoe Thungsong, Nakho'nsithammarat, where he completed his primary and secondary education. His father was a *kamnan* but later became a prison officer in Thungsong. Angkhan's love of poetry developed at the young age of eleven, when he was often asked by his mother, who loved poetry, to recite the *Ramakian* to her. Sometimes when he recited a sad part of the story he would sob, so much that his mother had to stop him from reciting. As a young boy, Angkhan enjoyed reading classical works, including *nirat phraprathom, kap ho' khlong* by Prince Thammathibet, *lilit Phra Lo, yuan phai* . Prose works that influenced him were the *Traiphum* and Prince Paramanuchit's *Phra Pathommasomphothikhatha*. After finishing secondary school, Angkhan came to Bangkok to study art at Phochang College before entering Sinlapakon University to study painting under Professor Sin Phirasi. He was expelled from the university after only two years because he painted a mixture of faeces and paint on the desks of some students who looked down upon him.

Angkhan then lived in poverty but consoled himself by painting and writing poetry. He entered the monkhood in 1959 and in 1960 became an

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[15] Si Intharayut, better known as *nai phi*, is highly respected by present day modern poets as a very knowledgeable and skilful poet, especially in composing poetry in the *kap yani* verse form. His famous poem is *isan* (the North East) which brings the harsh reality of the North East to the notice of the public in beautifuly written verse. His long poem *rao chana laeo mae ca* (We have won, mother) is also highly regarded.

assistant to a famous painter, Chu'a Hariphithak, working on murals in Ayutthaya, Phetchaburi, Sisatchanalai and Sukhothai. It was during this period that he learned to understand and love Thai art and painting. Angkhan did paint from time to time but, having no interest in money, his paintings were valued and sold for him by his friends and supporters like Sulak Sivaraksa and Thawan Datchani. His paintings are now valued in millions of baht, and are hung on the walls of the Prime Minister's Office and in many hotel lounges in Bangkok.

Angkhan wrote his first poem when he was in his fourth year at primary school. Sinlapakon yearbook published one of his poems in 1947 but it was not until 1963 that his poetry appeared in *Sangkhomsat Parithat* of which Sulak was editor. With Sulak's encouragement, the first collection of Angkhan's poems, *kawi niphon kho'ng Angkhan,* was published in 1964. Four other volumes then followed ; *lamnam phukradu'ng* (1969), *bang bot chak suan kaeo* (1972), *Bangko'k kaeo kamsuan* (1978), and *panithan kawi* (1986).

Angkhan's poems stunned the public, perhaps because they were so different and the public did not know what to make of them. Conventionalists criticized him for breaking the rules of versification (Duangmon 1989: 152), for using base or even obscene words and for his tendency to be repetitive in the use of certain vocabulary. Others praised him for the spiritual and philosophical quality of his poems which stimulated the mind of the reader (Suchitra 1987: 35-51) and some went so far as to say that Angkhan was a modern poet who could fully understand Thai poetical convention and make use of it in the present day situation. Indeed Angkhan is regarded as 'one of the poets who mark the turning-point of Thai poetry' (Bunlu'a 1971: 125-6).

Of course it would be easy to look at Angkhan's poetry as breaking with convention since his attitude towards the world is very different from that of ancient poets. Angkhan regards all things in the universe as equal, whereas the convention classifies both animate and inanimate things as good or bad, high or low, godly or earthly, king or commoner, heroes or villains etc. His attitude towards the world is explicitly expressed in his poem called *lok* (The World).

โลก		THE WORLD
โลกนี้มิอยู่ด้วย	มณี เดียวนา	The world does not consist of jewels alone,
ทรายและสิ่งอื่นมี	ส่วนสร้าง	Sand and other elements play their part,
ปวงธาตุต่ำกลางดี	ดุลยภาพ	All substance, high, middle, low, holds balance.
ภาคจักรพาลมิร้าง	เพราะน้ำแรงไหน	Its destruction is not caused by one single element.
ภพนี้มิใช่หล้า	หงษ์ทอง เดียวเลย	The world does not belong to golden swans alone,
กาก็เจ้าของครอง	ชีพด้วย	Crows live their lives and also own.

เมาสมมุติจองหอง	หึนชาติ	When ignorance, arrogance and immorality blossom,
น้ำมิตรแล้งโลกม้วย	หมดสิ้นสุขศานต์	Friendship evaporates, the world dies, and happines is gone.

(Angkhan 1976 : 35)

Equality is shown through the use of conventional dualism putting two opposing elements *mani* (jewels) and *sai* (sand), *hong tho'ng* (golden swan) and *ka* (crow)) in juxtaposition thus creating something quite unconventional.

In *wak thale* (Scoop up the sea), the use of conventional dualism can be seen even more clearly. Angkhan makes use of conventional elements such as objects, animals, earthly creatures as well as heavenly beings by switching around their roles and behaviour to show how perverse our world has become. Unpoetic or even rude words appear side-by-side with poetic vocabulary. This is truly a poetry for the mind rather than for the ear and for the head rather than the heart.

วักทะเล

วักทะเลเทใส่จาน	รับประทานกับข้าวขาว
เอื้อมเก็บบางดวงดาว	ไว้คลุกเคล้าชาวเกลือกิน
ดูปูหอยเริงระบำ	เต้นรำทำเพลงวังเวงสิ้น
กิ้งก่ากิ้งกือบิน	ไปกินตะวันและจันทร์
คางคกขึ้นวอทอง	ลอยล่องท่องเที่ยวสวรรค์
อึ่งอ่างไปด้วยกัน	เทวดานั้นหนีเข้ากะลา
ไส้เดือนเที่ยวเกี้ยวสาว	ชาวอัปสรนอนชั้นฟ้า
ทุกจุลินทรีย์อมีบ้า	เชิดหน้าไก่กินไก่กี
เทพไท้เบื่อหน่ายวิมาน	ทะยานลงดินมากินขี้
ชมอาจมว่ามี	รสวิเศษสุดที่จะกล่าวคำ
ป่าสุมทุมพุ่มไม้	พูดไพเราะปรัชญาลึกล้ำ
ขี้เลื่อยละเมอทำ	คำนวนน้ำหนักแห่งเงา
ใครวิเศษเสวยฟ้า	ใครอยู่หล้าเลาโง่เขลา
กาลสมัยมอมมินเมา	โลภเอาเดือดประเสริฐเอยฯ

SCOOP UP THE SEA

Scoop up the sea, pour it on a plate	Eat it with white rice.
Reach out to pick some stars	Mix them with salt to eat.
Watch the crabs and shellfish dance	Merrily dancing and singing nostalgic songs.
Chameleons and millepedes fly up	To eat the sun and the moon.
Toads ride on the golden palanquin	Floating around, touring heaven.
Bull-frogs also come along	Celestial beings flee to coconut shells.
Earth-worms court the nymphs	And sleep with Apsara in heaven.
Every amoeba and cell	Show their faces for doing well.

Gods are bored with heavenly abode
And praise that faeces has a taste
In the jungle, bushes and trees
And sawdust, in its sleep,
The wise take up abode in heaven
Our time is full of deception and craziness
They leap down to earth to eat shit
So delicate that no words can praise.
Can talk deep philosophy.
Calculate the weight of shadows.
Stupid fools remain on earth.
Let's indulge in desire and avarice.

(Angkhan: 1976: 98)

In fact Angkhan is a true admirer of the literary classics and has shown scepticism towards 'literature for life' (*Thanon nangsu'* 1986: 34). He would talk about and, recite from memory, beautiful passages from works of the great masters such as *yuan phai, kamsuan siprat, taleng phai, kap Nang Loi* and poems by Prince Thammathibet. He studied classical texts on versification with thoroughness and passion. His understanding of classical literary masterpieces appeared to be total (Sulak 1986: 31). The verse forms he used are conventional *(chanthalak boran),* such as *chan khlong, klo'n, kap ho' khlong, kap yani.* Angkhan created his poetry through a knowledge of convention to which he often adhered but, at the same time, tried to find freedom by creating his own poetical identity through manipulating and modernizing certain rules within the framework of the convention (Phitthaya 1977: 37-52). According to Angkhan, the number of syllables prescribed by convention can sometimes be ignored. He preferred to write the *klo'n* with any number of syllables ranging from two to nine. This freedom is necessary as the poet needs to bring the imagination into play by employing a more arresting imagery. Angkhan believes that poetry is a natural, spontaneous expression of life, like the waves in the sea or the movements of nature, and so the poet cannot pretend to agree with the strict rules of versification. Although the quality of *phairo'* is maintained, modern readers will certainly demand something more than just the euphonic effect of poetry. This does not mean, however, that the poet ignores the rules of convention or creates his own rules. For Angkhan, who has studied deeply the convention which he regards as the Thai heritage, the basic structure of the form is observed but the minor interior arrangements may be manipulated and altered (Suchitra 1984: 76). Angkhan's favourite literary genre is probably the *nirat* (travel poem). The larger part of his poetical works is patterned on the model of the *nirat.* These works are *Lamnam Phukradu'ng, Bang bot chak suan kaeo* and *Nirat Nakho'n Sithammarat.* These poems illustrate clearly Angkhan's attachment to the classical *nirat* convention which originated during the early Ayutthaya period, was revitalized during the first two reigns of the Bangkok period and was then developed to survive to this day (Manas 1972: 135-68). The theme of the *nirat* poetry is love-longing expressed when the poet suffers a separation from his loved one. Natural objects and phenomena often served as love stimulants to intensify the feelings of love-longing and separation. Angkhan makes use of the idea of a travel poem, retains the idea of separation and love-longing, and brings in the role of nature but in a new, modernized way. Angkhan's beloved is no

longer praised for her physical beauty. She is no longer a sex object, and the poet does not long for all the love and happiness that his beloved was able to give him during their union, which was often elaborately expressed in the conventional *nirat*. Angkhan's woman is intellectually and spiritually satisfying. The poet's expression of longing in the stanza below should illustrate this point.

ลิ้นนางก็อย่างคมดาบกรด	Your tongue is as sharp as the sword blade
รสถ้อยคำล้ำแก้วกวีศรี	That utters sweet words, more precious than poetry.
วาจาสามารถฆ่าจินตกวี	Words that may strike a poet with a fatal wound
ให้ตายลงที่แทบเท้านาง	And at your feet, my love, he submits his life.

(Angkhan 1969 : 71)

This is a *klo'n 8* stanza, and according to strict convention, each line should contain 8 syllables. But here Angkhan creates a *klo'n* stanza with seven syllables in the first line, eight syllables in the second, nine syllables in the third, and seven syllables again in the fourth line. All compulsory rules concerning external rhymes are strictly observed and appropriate alliteration and assonance are beautifully created for internal rhymes - enough to make the stanza *phairo'*. Apart from the irregular number of syllables, Angkhan does not introduce any new departures in prosody. He gratefully accepts technical convention but refuses to follow convention in his view of the beloved. He insisted on an appropriate analogy for the liberties to be taken with accepted formulae . It is probably for this reason that some of his critics complain that his verse is too loose and unorthodox.

In *panithan kawi* (A Poet's Testament), Angkhan declares that being a poet is his life and that he writes poetry to salvage the soul (Angkhan 1976: 32). This declaration is quite a departure from convention. In the old days, poets who worked under the patronage of the king and nobility dedicated their work to honouring their patrons or to show their devotion to religion. Here is the first time that a poet defines his role and announces his highest ideals. Angkhan writes poetry to last the age *(chua fa din samai)* and he flies to the land of dreams to find pure sacred poetry from heaven *(so' thip thii sawan)* and return to earth bringing happiness to all *(phu'a lok kasemsan)*. The poet's life is sacrificed for learning and writing poetry. All substance in the world and the universe is the source of the poet's knowledge and he recognizes that each and every element in existence possesses a virtue of its own where a poet, and indeed, a man, can gain worldly wisdom. Angkhan's powerful message, then, is that man should love and value all things in nature, be it trees, grass, sand, sun, moon, dew, worms or even faeces and filth.

ข้าน้อยมีครูอยู่ทั่วฟ้า	MY TEACHERS ARE ALL OVER THE SKY
ข้าน้อยมีครูอยู่ทั่วฟ้า	My teachers are all over the sky

เดือนดาราแจ่มจ้าสวงสวรรค์	The bright moon and sparkling stars in heaven
เล่าเรื่องราตรีที่มหัศจรรย์	Teach me the mysterious wonders of the night
โลกต่างๆนั้นกุจเพชรพลอย	When other worlds around glitter like jewels.
ภูผาสอนให้ว้าเหว่วิเวก	Mountains give me the lesson of solitude
ปุยเมฆฝึกใจลอยไปละห้อย	Fleecy clouds train my desolate heart to float along.
เรียนรสหนาวจากน้ำค้างย้อย	I learn the taste of coldness from falling dew,
มิ่งขวัญสร้อยเศร้าราวกลางคืน	When my soul is so sad like the night.
สายน้ำเซาะหินรินรินร่ำ	Through rocks murmur ever flowing streams
ชวนเจ็บช้ำแผลฝันสะอึกสะอื้น	Inviting hurtful pain of sobbing dreams.
พระกามเทพปลุกจนตื่นฟื้น	Cupid rouses me to wakefulness,
สอนพิษปืนเกษรเสาวคนธ์	Teaches me the poison and nectar of love.
แม้แต่ดอกหญ้าป่ากระจิริด	Even the smallest wild flowers are constant friends
เสมอมิตรบอกวิชาอาถรรพณ์	Enlightening me with profound wisdom.
พยายามเรียนไปทั้งไกวัล	I shall try to learn the edifice in its entirety
ถึงวรรณศิลป์ทิพย์ทั้งชีวี	Devoting my life to pure sacred poetry.
ตำราวางไว้กลางแหล่งหล้า	The text of earth's centre
ฝึกศึกษาพิจารณาด้วนถี่	I learn and thoroughly pursue
ลืมคืนวันเวลานาที	Careless of days, nights, minutes, time.
ผลีวิญญาณแก่การเล่าเรียน	My soul sacrificed to learning.

(Angkhan 1969: 101)

A favourite word used in Angkhan's poetry is ทิพย์ meaning 'excellent, sacred, pure, divine', and it is often used in combination with other lexical forms to create an extraordinary power to the poet's expression. Research has shown that ทิพย์ occurs with words conveying the meaning of poetry and the arts, feelings and emotions, and philosophical and religious ideas (Suchitra 1987: 42-44). The poet's vision, therefore, is to create divine, conditions on earth by giving his life to composing pure, sacred poetry creating an aesthetic appreciation of the arts and nature which ultimately would bring love and peace on earth and in the universe. Angkhan wrote *panithan kawi* (A Poet's Testament) again, in 1986 which became the title of the collection of poetry that won him the SEA Write Award in that year. In this poem, he reaffirms the poet's vision and commitment even more strongly. Angkhan sees man as the spoiler of love and peace because of his greed and crazy violence. He wrote:

เรามิใช่เจ้าของอวกาศ	We do not own outer space and sky
โลกธาตุทั่วสิ้นทุกสรวงสวรรค์	Or any substance in the universe.
มนุษย์มิเคยนฤมิตรตะวันจันทร์	Men create no sun nor moon
แม้แต่เม็ดทรายนั้นสักธุลี	Nor sand, not even dust.
แย่งแผ่นดินอำมหิตคิดแต่ฆ่า	But men savagely fight and kill for territory
เพราะกิเลศบ้าหฤโหดสิงทรากผี	Like devils, out of greed and cruelty.
ลืมป่าช้าคุณธรรมความดี	Death and goodness are forgotten
เสียศรีสวัสดิ์ค่าแท้วิญญาณ	Principle, purity and true spirit, gone.

(Angkhan 1986: 22)

The poet regards his work as *kuson sinlapa* (charitable art), thus relating it to Buddhist ideals. He is ready to sacrifice *nivarna,* the highest possible human salvation, so that he could remain on earth as a fossil to insure peace and happiness there.

จะไม่ไปแม้แต่พระนิพพาน	No nirvana for me, I do not wish to enter
จะวนว่ายวัฏฏะสังสารหลากหลาย	Remaining in the realm of existence I shall wander.
แปลค่าแท้การาจักรมากมาย	To sharpen my mind among multitudes of stars
ไว้เป็นบทกวีแก่จักรวาล	And out my poems will flow for the universe.
เพื่อลบทุกข์โศก ณ โลกมนุษย์	To relieve sorrow in the human world
ที่สุดสู่ยุคสุขเกษมศานต์	Making it a joyful place to live in.
วารนั้นฉันจะป่นปนดินดาร	Then my body will mix and fix with the earth there
เป็นฟอสซิลทรมานอยู่จ้องมอง	As an enduring fossil keeping a watching stare.

(Angkhan 1986: 23)

Naowarat Phongphaibun

Like Angkhan, Naowarat Phongphaibun came from up-country. He was born in 1940 in Amphoe Phanomthuan, Kanchanaburi, where he had his primary and secondary education. His love for poetry started in the home because his father was a book collector who loved reading literary classics and sometimes even wrote poetry on the walls of the house. Naowarat also loves music and is an accomplished flautist.

Naowarat came to Bangkok for higher education and in 1959 entered Thammasat University to study law. He spent seven years before graduating in 1965. It was at Thammasat that his poetry began to come to the attention of the public. He joined the *chumnum wannasin,* a literary club of the university, where he wrote a large amount of poetry.

Naowarat has always been regarded as a serious poet who adheres to convention and whose work continued to develop. His poetry, especially the earlier works, are said to be 'soft and sweet' - like the poetry of Suntho'n Phu. Indeed, Naowarat is most meticulous about making his

poetry sound *phairo'*, by careful choice of words. Like conventional poets before him, he learnt the *akso'n sap* by studying and reading the work of the old masters, from where chosen passages registered in his memory, ready to be recalled time and again. When he read *lilit Phra Lo'* and *nirat Narin*, for example, he recalled that every word had sound and every *wak* (a hemistitch) had rhythm - so beautiful that he immediately remembered the stanzas concerned (Naowarat 1989: 22). His first collection of poems, *khamyat* (sweet words), which was published in 1969, contains beautifully sounding poems that delighted nearly everyone. In this collection, however, we sense that, although Naowarat was clearly a fervent classical conventionalist, his deep-rooted country upbringing had impressed upon him a great deal of country songs and rural rhymes. Variety of rural *phleng*, such as *phleng mae si, phleng ru'a, phleng kiao khao*, are incorporated into the texture of many of the poems in this collection.

There had been recognition of the importance of 'oral poetry' since 1927 when Prince Damrong, as President of the Vajirayan National Library, commissioned Luang Thammaphimon (Thu'k) to compile a text of versification called *Prachum Lamnam* which contained examples of oral verses later to be studied and used by poets of the younger generation, including Naowarat (Thammaphimon 1971). As a country boy, Naowarat had admired the songs in *likay* (folk opera) especially the courting songs sung by the heroes. His writing about his nostalgic appreciation for the *phleng* ranges from the country *sepha* to the traditional singing performed by the Fine Arts Department (Naowarat 1989: 15-19). Many of Naowarat's poems in *khamyat* employ the technique of imitating or quoting the country *phleng* at the beginning in order to set up the main themes; the rest of the poem continues with the accepted classical conventional form. For example, in the poem *mae si*, a well known country *phleng, mae si*, is quoted:

mae si eoi mae si suai sa yok mu' wai phra na mae si eoi
khon khio chao to' thang kho' chao klom chak pha khu'n chom
chom mae si eoi

This quotation from the oral *phleng* sets the scene for the main poem which is written in a *klon 8* verse form.

choen chao ma lo'm wong song mae si
mae ya mi mon mo'ng leoi no'ng eoi
phi ca ro'ng rap khwan an choen choei
hai mu'an kheoi tae khrang chao yang yao.....

Then came 14 October 1973 when students rose against the dictatorial government of Thanom-Praphat. Naowarat became very much involved with the student movement and, having witnessed the students' struggle, he became more and more sympathetic towards their cause. His poetry began to emphasise social and political consciousness. Adhering to

conventional forms, Naowarat's poetry continued to be written and read. His special gift, coupled with his knowledge of convention, enabled him to compose beautiful but socially conscious poems. In *athit thu'ng chan* (Sunday to Monday) which appeared in 1973 following the great student uprising, Naowarat made use of the tradition of the epic *khlong* of the Ayutthaya period. Following the *lilit yuan phai* convention, which was written in praise of King Trailok for his victory over the Northern Kingdom, the poet set out to describe the events that took place from Sunday 13 October to Monday 14 October 1973, eulogizing the events as a victory over dictatorial rule, corruption and injustice (Naowarat 1974). This poem shows that a poetical convention, which was so securely constructed, can be passed onto the younger generation. Modern poets like Angkhan and Naowarat found that their knowledge of poetical convention was essential to their vocation. It served to legitimize their position and prestige as learned poets; and so they continued to make use of those forms with a more modern and relevant content.

Naowarat continued to show social and political concern in his poems. The *klum wannakam phinit* (Literary Scrutiny Group), which was formed by the *Lok nangsu'* literary periodical to study short stories and poetry in Thai periodicals (it has been active since the mid 1970s), often picked Naowarat's poems. In 1981 alone, three of his poems were chosen and one of them, *Khamen klo'm luk,* received the 'best poem of the year' recognition (Phailin 1981: 172). Here again the form is strictly conventional but, in content, Naowarat has moved beyond the context of Thailand to address the questions of senseless war, killing, and man's inhumanity to man, which are more universal concerns. The poet received a most prestigious honour for poetry when he won the SEA Write Award in 1980 for his collection *phiang khwam khlu'an wai* (Mere Movement). This collection contains 44 socially conscious poems some of which are drawn from current events which appeared in the newspapers. One of the poems, *phleng khlui nu'a thung khaw* (Flute Song over the Ricefield) uses a well known country rhyme as a quotation at the beginning to set the theme of the poem, thus bringing the significance of the past folk hero into play along side the present social and political situation. The hero here is Khun Tho'ng, who went out to fight for right and freedom, was killed and never returned home. The poet uses this heroic scene as a symbol of Thai farmers now fighting to hold their land when absentee landlords sought to drive them out. This poem is worth seeing in full as it illustrates how a modern poet links an oral form of poetry with performed elitist convention, by making his flute sing the oral part on his behalf.

เพลงขลุ่ยเหนือทุ่งข้าว	FLUTE SONG OVER THE RICEFIELD
วัดเอ๋ยวัดโบสถ์	*Wat Bote oh, Wat Bote*
ปลูกตาลตะโหนดอยู่เจ็ดต้น	*Temple of the Seven Palms*
เจ้าขุนทองไปปล้น	*Khun Thong has gone to war*

บ่านฉะนี้ไม่เห็นมา ฯ"	*And still has not come home.*
ขลุ่ยข้าคร่วญหวลโหยระโอยโอด	My flute laments and wearily cries
พิโรโรธนาการสะท้านพร่ำ	The sound shakes with quiet grief and anger.
เป่าคำหอมเหินลิ่วขึ้นปลิวฟ้า	My notes float to the reaches of the sky
แล้วทอดช้าเฉื่อยฉ่ำประจำยาม	And tirelessly linger, sweetly and slowly.
พอพระพรายชายพัดก็ชักชื่น	The wind blows and the notes follow
ทุกด้อยคำย้ำยืนไม่ขื่นขาม	Each one insistent, strong and brave.
"ทุ่งนี้ นานี้ มีนาม	*This field, this plain, are mine*
ของหวง เขตห้าม อย่าข้ามกัน	*Guarded, Forbidden, No Trespassing.*
ข้าวงาม น้ำดี ทุกปีมา	*Every year good rice, good water*
แผ่นดินข้า ข้ารัก หนักมั่น	*My land - I love it deeply.*
ปู่ย่า พ่อลูก ผูกพัน	*From my grandparents to my children*
เหงื่อกู ทั้งนั้น ที่ในดิน"	*Their flesh and blood are on this land.*
ใบข้าวพริ้วระเนนเป็นคลื่นข้าว	Rice plants billow and bend like waves of rice,
ใบตาลกราวกรากลมระงมดิ่น	Palm leaves crack sharply in the wind
กระท่อมค้อมคร่ำคร่าอยู่อาจิณ	Where a weathered hut resolutely stands,
หอมกลิ่นข้าวใหม่มาจางจาง	The smell of new rice drifts in the air.
คดข้าวใส่ห่อไปรอรับ	Cooked rice is wrapped and waiting for him.
ขุนทองเจ้าจะกลับเมื่อฟ้าสาง	Khun Thong's coming back at dawn.
เพลงขลุ่ยแผ่วครื้นสะอื้นคราง	The flute softly cries and sobs.
ไม่มีร่างไม่มีเงาเจ้าขุนทอง	There's no trace of Khun Thong.
ตะวันรุ่งเรื่อแรงจนแดงเลือด	The day dawns blood red,
แผ่นดินเดือดคุน้ำก็คล้ำหมอง	Scorches the earth and clouds the water.
เพลงขลุ่ยขาดห้วงท่วงทำนอง	The notes of the flute stopped short.
เสียงตะโกนกู่ก้องมาไกลไกล	A call echoes from far away.

(Naowarat 1980: 55-56)

Khomthuan Khanthanu

Khomthuan Khanthanu, the youngest of the three poets here, is from a different mould. He grew up in the urban surroundings of Thonburi and went to the prestigious Suan Kulap secondary school in Bangkok before entering Thammasat University to study journalism. Unlike Angkhan and Naowarat, poetry was not nourished in his home; Khomthuan did not learn to love poetry from childhood. His poetical career began rather late in life, at Thammasat University when he wrote a love poem which was published in the *Sisayam* magazine. While studying at Thammasat,

Khomthuan was very much part of the student movement which led to the uprising of October 1973. He joined the *klum wannasin* (a literary group) at the University just before the October uprising, and it was through this group that he associated with many young and politically progressive students. He recalled that writing a poem on love did not go well with his character and temperament, which preferred something tough, harsh and exciting. He later became an admirer of the poetry of Nai Phi and Jit Poumisak, poetry of the *sinlapa phu'a chiwit* school, which had an immense influence on him (Khomthuan 1987 : 55 - 56). It was under the inspiration of 'art for life' generated by Nai Phi and Jit, coupled with the social and political ideals held by progressive students, that Khomthuan read classical poetry, first for practical purposes but later because he was fascinated by it. In *Samnu'k khabot,* a collection of Khomthuan short stories and poems published in 1980, he experimented with a variety of classical verse forms, including the *khlong ha, chan, rai, khlong* and *klo'n*. In 1983, his collection of poems entitled *nattakam bon lan kwang* won him the SEA Write Award. It has become clear, from these two collections, that Khomthuan is a social critic, and all his poems appear to fall into the category of the poetry of hatred, written in conventional forms with highly charged and intensified feelings. But his poems are in no way inferior to those of Angkhan and Naowarat in so far as artistic quality is concerned. Khomthuan's poetry does not lack artistic values. On the contrary, it has a unique artistic quality. Khomthuan is a phenomenon - a master of language and a great manipulator of classical convention. What is extraordinary about Khomthuan's poetry is that it gives satisfaction from its realistic choice of the social ills it attacks, matched by boldness of expression, the sharp but crude, even vulgarized language. Such success must have defied many critics of the 'art for life' literature. Khomthuan now writes regularly in *Sayam rat sappada wichan*. In his poetry column, *banthu'k bon thang phan,*[16] he continues to experiment with classical verse forms, including the *konlabot* (encoded poetic verse), explaining, and instructing his readers how to write poetry.

Khomthuan also explores the possibilities of employing a variety of rural rhymes to arouse awareness and to express concern about the plight of the poor farmers in rural Thailand. In *khon kho' fon* (Asking for Rain), for example, Khomthuan uses the rural verse form known as the *hae nang maeo,* sung in the rain-calling procession which takes place whenever drought is imminent.

Khomthuan regards himself as a revolutionary poet who declares his intent to use poetry to fight his enemy. In *kham prakat* (A Vow), he wrote:

เพราะรักการก้าวเดินเผชิญโชค	For the love of stepping out to venture
เพื่อจะเปลี่ยนแปลงโลกที่ดีกว่า	And change the world for the better

[16] The name of this column has recently been changed to *lamnam tai samnu'k* (poetry of subconsciousness) where Khomthuan continues to experiment with classical form .

รู้ว่าหนทางใดที่ได้มา	Knowing that on the road we tread
ต้องเสียเลือดและน้ำตาที่ตกนอง	Tears will flow and blood will be shed.

In the concluding stanza the poet declares:

ขอให้ผู้รู้เห็นเป็นพยาน	Those who read this, my witness be
ถึงชีวิตวายปราณไม่โอนอ่อน	Till death one shall see, no compromise from me
ทั้งสัตว์ปลอมเข้าป่าสัตว์นาคร	To all creatures, in the city and in the jungle,
ขอประกาศต่อกรอหังการ	In defiance, I vow to fight and struggle.

(Khomthuan 1980: n.p.)

This is a break from convention, but like Angkhan, Khomthuan defines his role as a poet. Here the poet devotes his life to the struggle for justice in society, using poetry as his weapon. The poet sharpens his weapon by studying the literary works of the great masters, and has become fascinated by the richness of those works. The most prestigious and formidable metres in which to compose have always been the *chan*. Khomthuan, however, finds this challenging. He devoted much time to learning the secrets of the *chan* metres, trying to discover its weaknesses and strengths; then he experimented by creating ten new *chan* metres of his own (Khomthuan 1988 : 9 - 10). *Chan* has now become Khomthuan's most familiar weapon which he uses with great effect. The poet prefers to use *chan* for the emotional effect it generates. The *satthunlawikkilit chan 19* for instance, provides a forceful rhythm, like a speaker clenching his fist or banging on the table while making a speech to bring home his points and to catch the attention of his audience. While employing the conventional *chan* metre, Khomthuan has broken away from convention when it comes to poetic diction. As a revolutionary poet, Khomthuan was able to create new sets of *akso'n sap* to communicate with his modern audience (Khomthuan 1987: 48-49). One of his critics wrote:

> We ought to study the manner in which symbols are used in Khomthuan's poems, especially his use of *pak, tut, khi, lu'at, fai* (mouth, bottom, shit, blood, fire) (Sukanya 1980: 43).

But to Khomthuan, these non-poetic words are part of his *akso'n sap*, which he uses repeatedly in his poems regardless of the verse form. Even the words *phai lom* (to break wind) can be made poetical when woven into the prestigious *chan* metre.

สัทธุลวิกกีฬิตฉันท์ 19

บนทางที่ระคะด้วยกระสืออสุรกาย
เปลือยตัวตะโกนขาย ชรม
บนทางที่ทุรชาติประกาศประลุอุคม
การณ์เพียงจะผายลม พิเรน

บนทางที่ทุรชนสลอนตะลอนตระเวณ
บิดเบือนและบ่ายเบน คดี

Sat thun la wik ki lit chan 19

On the road full of evil devils
Who yell and sell their naked souls Noisily.

On the road where rogues rally round announcing
Their ideals, falling foul like breaking wind Perversely.

On the road where wicked brutes go about
Distorting, deviating and abusing Principles.

(Khomthuan 1983: 15)

Thai poetic convention can be seen as being formed by the combination of 'foreign' influences, particularly Pali and Sanskrit, and the poetic nature of the Thai language. Whereas the elite found their models and inspiration from Pali and Sanskrit texts, the oral rhymes prevalent among the common people continued to develop and found their way into the written tradition in the late Ayutthaya period and have since gained popularity over the 'foreign' verse forms. The elite continued to regard the Pali metre, *chan*, as more prestigious, and efforts were made to promote it. It is the nature of the Thai language, however, that ultimately governs, selects and adapts the *chan* by, importantly for one thing, adding rhymes to the form. All three modern poets, Angkhan, Naowarat and Khomthuan, have found the conventions an essential part of their education, and have made use of them in their inventions. Indeed, knowledge of poetic convention in Thailand is so effectively promoted that the success of a modern poet depends on his ability to make use of such knowledge.

The process of construction of poetic knowledge still continues. Modern poets, being aware of the possibilities provided by the convention, make use of them to create 'modern convention'. The formation of poetic convention is a continuing process which embraces the past, the present, as well as the future.

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1987 *Phatthanakan kan su'ksa khonkhwa lae wicai wannakhadi thai.* Bangkok: Khana Akso'rasat culalongko'n mahawitthayalai.

Vajirayan Library
1961 *Chumnum tamra klo'n.* Bangkok.

Wo'rawet Phisit (phra)
1960 *Khumu' kamsuan siprat.* Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

SIBURAPHA
THE MAKING OF A LITERARY REPUTATION

David Smyth

> Many people have asked me why I have written so frequently about Siburapha. I would like to state here that Siburapha is the 'great teacher' of Thai literature, widely recognised both in Thailand and abroad. Martin Seymour-Smith in his *Guide to Modern World Literature*, Volume 4, refers to, and praises Siburapha more than any other writer in Thailand
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> (Rungwit (1979a: n.p.).[1]

In Thailand the novel does not enjoy the same literary prestige as in the West. Although popular in Thailand since the 1920s, it has only recently begun to be regarded as a serious literary genre, worthy of a place in the educational curriculum and histories of literature, and granted official recognition through national literary competitions and awards.[2] Literary criticism dealing with the novel and individual novelists, therefore not surprisingly remains a rather neglected field. Thai writing on the novel is largely confined to biographical essays and lists of major works; there is only a handful of original studies of the genre and a few books devoted to individual authors - and these often disappear from circulation once the first print run has sold out.[3] Despite this, it is clear from existing textbooks, magazines, journals and literary histories, that there is a degree of consensus among Thais about which authors and which works merit inclusion in the 'canon' of 'The Thai Novel'. In many instances such consensus reflects little more than the uncritical acceptance of the opinions of earlier critics, textbook writers and literary historians. Kulap Saipradit, or

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[1] It is ironic that the most knowledgeable and prolific writer on Kulap should cite a carelessly written third-hand summary by a western writer not familiar with Kulap's works in support of his own admirable endeavours.

[2] The novel was not included in the undergraduate Thai literature syllabus at Chulalongkorn University until 1968. Mattani (1978: 55) records that a reading list of fifty-two novels compiled by the Thai Department at Thammasat University and circulated among new students in 1963 was strongly criticised by some writers and lecturers who felt that the novel was not sufficiently academic to merit inclusion in a university curriculum.

[3] At the time of writing, three major genre studies - Suphanni (1976), Trisin (1980), and Sathian (1981) - are all out of print.

Siburapha (1905-74) however, has been a rather different case, his outspoken leftist political views having had a major influence on the way his literary achievement has been perceived. This paper looks at Thai critics' identification and evaluation of his major novels and the fluctuations in his reputation over the last three decades.[4]

Kulap's initial literary success in the late 1920s occurred against a background of a fundamental change in popular taste.[5] A prolific output of competently crafted novels - six in two years - and a string of top editorial jobs on Bangkok newspapers and magazines established him as a prominent figure in the Thai literary world long before he reached the age of thirty. Increasing involvement in political journalism during the 1930s restricted his creative writing; two novels written during this decade, *Songkhram chiwit* (The War of Life) and *Khang lang phap* (Behind the Painting), nevertheless proved particularly popular, and have continued to be reprinted regularly ever since. In the late 1940s Kulap was one of the most prominent authors of a new, politically-conscious style of fiction which under later military régimes, disappeared from circulation; when resurrected in the more liberal climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this later fiction had a marked influence on many writers and intellectuals of the new generation.

Today, Kulap is generally regarded as one of Thailand's most important novelists; textbooks on literature usually acknowledge his pioneering role in the development of the novel and mention not only the 1930s 'classics' but also his later overtly political fiction. Literary magazines, such as *Lok nangsu'* and *Thanon nangsu'* have, over the last 10 years or so, featured a number of articles about his work; and in the mid-1980s the publishers Do'k Ya began a major paper-back edition re-print of many of Kulap's earlier novels as part of a series to preserve old works of literature.

Perhaps the most authoritative and detached assessment of Kulap's fiction appears in Trisin Bunkhaco'n's important study of the novel, *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai (2475-2500)* (The Novel and Thai Society, 1932-57), published in 1980. In this, she discusses five of Kulap's novels at some length and concludes by summarising the importance of each in the 'development' of the Thai novel, thus:

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[4] For biographical information on Kulap in English, see Siburapha (1990).

[5] As one observer of the literary scene of the period was to note: 'Seven or eight years ago, you will probably recall, we used to like reading western novels that had been translated into Thai. Real Thai novels were hardly ever written, even to the point where some people wrote Thai novels using western heroes and heroines in order to appeal to readers. But nowadays it is the exact opposite; now we prefer Thai stories to western stories. This being the case, various monthlies nowadays are doing an about-turn so as to please their readers: that is, they are searching like mad for Thai stories to publish ... But finding real Thai stories is not so easy'. (Luang Saranupraphan, qouted in Suphanni (1976: 179).

Luk phuchai (A Real Man)

... a clear development in the Thai novel ... [it] put forward ideas which stressed intellectual development as well as offering emotional development, which was different from novels prior to this period, which had placed more emphasis on emotional development (Trisin 1980: 38).

Songkhram chiwit (The War of Life)

First, ... it was the starting point of a humanitarian consciousness [in the Thai novel] ... Secondly ... it was the beginning of criticism of conditions in Thai society ... Thirdly .. it revealed a new trend of Russian influence in the Thai novel (Trisin 1980: 79-82).

Khang lang phap (Behind the Painting)

The major role of *Khang lang phap* in the development of the novel ... lies in its portrayal of the restricted life of a woman in the old society who has to face the modern world, an encounter she loses, and with it her life. Even though there was nothing new in presenting the life of a woman oppressed by customs, the idea of having the woman from the old society confront the new world in order to portray the 'death' of the values of the 'old world' embodied in the novel form, can be regarded as a further step in the development of the Thai novel (Trisin 1980: 127-28).

Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik (Until We Meet Again)

First.. it was a new wave, bringing the *novel for life* in to the mainstream of the Thai novel ... Secondly ... it created a change in the presentation of the novel, which mainly dealt with love between a boy and girl, towards a broader kind of love, a love for mankind and especially the poor ..Thirdly ... it played a part in pioneering new techniques in the Thai novel ... *Siburapha* was reasonably successful in assimilating the content which both reflected the problems of society and proposed solutions to the problems, by using the two characters Dorothy and Komet (Trisin 1980: 320-28).

Lae pai khang na (Look Forward)

... another step in the development of the *novel for life* ... an attempt to record social and political changes (Trisin 1980: 413-17).[6]

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[6] This study was originally submitted as a master's degree thesis to the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, where the author now teaches. Senior academics in the field of Thai literature have, shown a noticable reticence to publish work on the novel; in some cases, heavy teaching and administrative duties are an inhibiting factor, but in others, the feeling remains that the Thai novel is not quite respectable. At present, most of the research on the novel and novelists is being carried out by graduate students, notably at Chulalongkorn and Srinakharinwirot (Prasarnmitr) Universities. Trisin's study, unfortunately out of print at present, was a bold pioneering work which laid down a clear chronological and thematic framework for the Thai novel; it quickly became an important source for textbook writers compiling volumes on modern literature, and with few scholars apparently working in the

Trisin's very positive assessment of the importance of Kulap's work stands in marked contrast to the writings of P. Watcharapho'n, one of the earliest chroniclers of the Thai novel, who, less than two decades earlier, had almost completely ignored Kulap's existence; in three volumes of literary biographies, embracing over a hundred authors, he confined himself to only the most fleeting reference to Kulap - and then only at second-hand.[7] One explanation why P. Watcharapho'n so blatantly ignored Kulap is that the appearance of his literary biographies coincided with the Sarit era and what has since become known as the *yuk thamin* (Dark Age) of Thai literature, when many writers were imprisoned while others simply stopped writing. Kulap, who was in China heading a cultural delegation at the time when Sarit seized power, sought asylum in Beijing, rather than return home to certain imprisonment. He was subsequently labelled a 'dangerous person' by the new régime, and few wished to risk incriminating themselves by being associated even with his name; years later a friend and contemporary of Kulap gave some hint of the anxieties felt by Thai writers when he recorded how, in his own book on the Thai literary scene, 'references to *Siburapha* had been *sneaked* in' (Yot 1976).[8]

The death of Sarit in 1963 eased the climate of fear in which writers and publishers had operated - or consciously ceased to operate. In the latter half of the 1960s the *Phadungsu'ksa* publishing company undertook a major re-issue of many of Kulap's early novels and short stories, most of which dated back to the late 1920s and early 1930s. But the author of these romantic stories, remained an elusive figure, the introductions neither revealing the identity of the man behind the pseudonymn, *Siburapha,* nor offering any details about his life. [9]

Yet by the mid-1970s, Kulap had become one of the best-known writers in the country; his later writings, including the 'political' fiction of the 1950s as well as essays and articles were now readily available, while introductions to these reprints often included a brief biography of Kulap. Interest in him was at a height in 1974 when he died in Beijing. His death prompted numerous articles and reminiscences in newspapers and

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same field, it is likely to remain an important and influential source in the study of modern literature for many years.

[7] P. Watcharapho'n (1973 2nd ed.; 1st ed. 1962; 1963; 1966). The first of these volumes includes a chapter on the *Suphapburut* group, but references to Kulap within the chapter are confined to lengthy quotes from a colleague of the period, R. Wutthathit.

[8] The book he was referring to was Yot (1963).

[9] The editor of the *Phadungsu'ksa* series and author of the introductions was Yot (1963). He later wrote several articles for newspapers and magazines about Kulap and claimed that the *Phadungsu'ksa* initiative was a deliberate attempt to ensure that Kulap's name was not forgotten.

magazines, several of which were immediately re-published in a commemorative volume (Carat 1974).[10]

Kulap's transformation from non-person to literary hero began in the changing political climate of the late 1960s.[11] A youth movement, increasingly vocal in its opposition to the government, was also beginning to look for inspiration to an earlier generation of liberal and progressive writers, many of whom had been imprisoned on charges of communism in the 1940s and 1950s, and whose works had since been either proscribed or were otherwise not readily available As one of the most prominent and outspoken figures of that earlier generation, Kulap proved a favourite among student groups, who found in his later work an eloquent voicing of their own ideals; sponsoring publications of his works, became both an expression of their own political sympathies and a focus of their group solidarity.[12]

Kulap's major appeal was to young progressives and liberals. At much the same time, however, rather less radical scholars were beginning to take a serious academic interest in the novel, and in particular, its origins and early development in Thailand. While some of these writers felt little sympathy for the political views expressed in Kulap's later fiction, they readily acknowledged his importance in the literary scene of the late 1920s and early 1930s and the enduring worth of certain of his novels. As a result of these two very different sources of attention, there are some sharply contradictory evaluations of Kulap's fiction recorded by literary critics and historians of the 1970s; thus, for example, while Kulap's last two novels, *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* and *Lae pai khang na* have been described respectively as Kulap's 'best exotic novel' (Rungwit 1979a: 42)[13] and his 'most important (fictional) work ... one of the very few good novels Thailand has produced' (Witthayako'n 1973: 68). Neither work appears on lists of Kulap's fiction in a university textbook published in 1974 (Cu'a 1974: 35-36) and a volume on literature produced by the Department of Fine Arts,

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10 An almost identical set of essays was reprinted in 1985, under the title, *Ramlu'k thu'ng Siburapha doi phu'an ruam khuk 2495 lae sahathammik* .

11 For good accounts of the political and intellectual climate of the 1960s,,see Morell and Chai-anan (1981) and Anderson and Mendiones (1985).

12 Reynolds (1986) describes an identical process in the resurrection and promotion of Jit Poumisak:
The search for [Jit's] life and the discovery of his work between 1973 and 1976 were part and parcel of an unearthing - a kind of cultural excavation of Thai literary and cultural history after World War II ... His life/work and that of other progressive writers of the 1950s touched a nerve in the Thai youth movement and the pursuit and discovery of that life/work became one of the activities around which the movement cohered.

13 Rungwit is comparing the work with *Khang lang phap.*

in 1982, as part of a series commemorating the Rattanakosin Bicentennial (Krom Sinlapako'n 1982).

Much of the credit for resurrecting Kulap in the early 1970s goes to a tiny handful of writers and intellectuals, the most prolific and influential of these being Rungwit Suwannaphichon and Sathian Canthimatho'n. Both were interested in winning more serious literary recognition both for the novel in general, and, more specifically, for politically-committed literature. Rungwit played a major role in making Kulap's later short stories available, while his biographical introduction to later editions of the selected short stories was reprinted on at least half-a-dozen occasions, and became one of the major sources of information on Kulap's life. In 1979 Rungwit republished a collection of his essays on Kulap in a single volume, entitled *Siburapha: si haeng wannakam thai* (Siburapha: the Jewel of Thai Literature). Sathian's works were broader in scope, but his portrayal of Kulap's life and his verdicts on Kulap's novels, particularly, the importance of the later works, were almost identical to those of Rungwit (Sathian 1974; 1981).

Like much Thai writing on the novel, however, it was the novelist's life rather than the works themselves which became the main focus of Rungwit and Sathian's attentions; the novels were seen as stepping stones for plotting the development in his political thinking. The mutually reinforcing biographies that they constructed presented Kulap's career prior to the end of World War II, as a catalogue of clashes with newspaper owners and government censors: his acrimonious departures from the editorship of *Bangko'k kan mu'ang* and *Thai mai* between 1930 and 1931; the temporary closure of *Si krung* in 1931 for printing Kulap's article, entitled *Manutsayaphap* (Humanitarianism);[14] the disillusioned departure from *Prachachat* in 1937; government attacks on and the eventual suppression of his serialised history of the 1932 coup, *Bu'ang lang kan patiwat,* when it appeared in *Suphapburut* in 1941;[15] and his arrest and imprisonment

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[14] The article entitled *Manutsayaphap,* although never reprinted, nor seen by many younger writers on Kulap, has nevertheless become a part of Siburapha 'lore'. A former colleague of Kulap claimed a few years ago that the article was not particularly outspoken and that Rama VII had himself expressed interest in it and subsequently even approached Kulap, through intermediaries, about editing a newspaper for him. After secret negotiations an audience with the King was arranged for 27 June 1932 at Hua Hin Palace; but three days before this, the coup took place which brought an end to the absolute monarchy in Thailand, and the project was aborted (Phayom 1978: 49).

[15] *Bu'ang lang kan patiwat* was based largely on interviews with Phahon, the nominal leader of the 1932 Coup Group who had been replaced as prime minister by Phibun Songkhram in 1937. The narrative is punctuated with frequent references to the idealism, integrity and qualities of leadership of Phahon. Kulap responded sharply, in the pages *Suphapburut,* to government criticisms that publication was premature and might upset some groups or individuals. After an escalating controversy, during which several members of the Assembly wrote to Phibun expressing concern about the government's reaction, Phibun finally issued an order forbidding publication of further instalments.

between 1942 and 1944, for his opposition to the government's policy towards Japan.[16] Whether consciously or not, they were effectively portraying Kulap as a 'radical' almost from the outset of his career, an image that, ironically, they did not wish to convey when it came to discussing Kulap's fiction of this same period. Information about Kulap's post-war years was more accessible, and Rungwit's and Sathian's 'biographies', further emphasised his dissident-radical credentials: he had been arrested and sentenced to a lengthy prison term for his involvement in the so-called 'Peace Rebellion', in 1952;[17] he had written articles on Marxist philosophy;[18] and his fiction from this period, especially the increasingly well-known short stories, was uncompromising in its portrayal of social injustice.[19] By the mid-1970s, despite - or perhaps because of - the rather bare information available, Kulap's life, as portrayed by Rungwit, Sathian and their successors, had come to be seen by many as a personification of the struggle for social justice in Thailand while the name *Siburapha* was often associated with epithets such as *Fighter for the People* and *The People's Writer* or linked with other prominent leftists as part of the process of constructing a radical tradition.

When it came to Kulap's literary output and importance, his 'progressive' promoters were primarily interested in his later, post-World War II work which, unlike his earlier novels, had not been included in the major reprint of his fiction by *Phadungsu'ksa* in the late 1960s. While Rungwit was active in the re-publication of Kulap's later short stories, it was

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16 Details of Kulap's 1942 imprisonment are frustratingly meagre. Two journalists were sentenced to life imprisonment (Pho'nphirom 1977: 66), but there is no mention of precisely what prompted Kulap's arrest, the charges against him, nor the sentence. Astonishingly, many of Kulap's friends and colleagues appear to have been unaware that he was imprisoned for a period during World War II. Rungwit and Sathian make only a fleeting reference to his imprisonment during this period. Lack of knowledge of this incident doubtless contributes to the general impression that Kulap only became 'radicalised' after his return from Australia, approximately eight years later.

17 The 'Peace Rebellion' of 1952 was essentially a government operation to arrest Thai members of the Peace Movement, which they regarded as a communist front. The Peace Movement was ostensibly a world-wide organisation set up in the late 1940s to campaign for the preservation of peace, nuclear disarmament and, later, an end to hostilities in Korea. Kulap was deputy chairman of the Thai branch. He was originally sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, but was released in 1957, in an amnesty to coincide with the twenty-fifth centennial of the Buddha's birth. For a good account of the Thai Peace Movement, see Wiwat (1985).

18 Kulap contributed a series of eighteen articles on Marxism to the 'progressive' monthly, *Aksonsan,* of which he was political editor. In 1974 six of these articles were reprinted under the title *Pratya kho'ng latthi maksit* , by the United Front of Chiangmai Students.

19 See Siburapha (1979). English translations of three of these stories - *Khon phuak nan,, Kho' raeng no'i thoe* and *Khao tu'n* - appear in Siburapha (1990).

another young writer, Witthayako'n Chiangkun, who offered the first major revaluation of Kulap's novels and their importance in Thai literature. Hitherto, Kulap's literary reputation rested largely on the continuing popularity of two novels written in the 1930s, *Songkhram chiwit* (1932) and *Khang lang phap* (1937). Both works had been reprinted several times and when *Phadungsu'ksa* re-issued a number of Kulap's other novels in the latter half of the 1960s, the reader was reminded on the title page, that the work was 'by the author of *Songkhram chiwit* and *Khang lang phap*.

Witthayako'n's article, entitled *Klap pai an nawaniyai kho'ng Siburapha* (Going back to read Siburapha's novels) appeared in the October 1973 edition of *Sangkhomsat Parithat* (Social Science Review). It briefly discussed, first, the well-known works, *Songkhram chiwit* and *Khang lang phap* and then, the later novels, *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* and *Lae pai khang na*.. It was the act of placing these two little-known works on a par with two established 'classics' for the first time, rather than what he actually had to say about them, that has given Witthayako'n's article a lasting importance in the shaping of subsequent perceptions of Kulap as a novelist. Indeed, Witthayakon's comments on the two later novels, today seem strikingly insubstantial and have to be read very much as products of their time, when classical literature was under attack as 'feudalistic' in some quarters, and Kulap and his work were emerging as icons of the Thai youth movement. Thus, while admitting that *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* in places sounded 'more like an article than a novel', Witthayako'n nevertheless suggested that it might profitably replace some of the old classics on the secondary school syllabus; and his assertion that *Lae pai khang na* was not merely Kulap's 'most important [fictional] work' but also 'one of the very few good novels Thailand has produced', was made despite the fact that he admitted having read only the first volume; indeed, he was probably unaware that even if he had read the second volume, the novel was still incomplete (Witthayako'n 1973: 68-72). What mattered was not Witthayako'n's reasoning but his final verdicts, and these were soon being quoted by Rungwit and Sathian, who were no less enthusiastic about Kulap's later works. Since Sathian and Rungwit had clearly researched Kulap's life in some depth, it is hardly surprising that their views were widely taken as authoritative, and echoed and repeated by numerous anonymous editors of reprints of Kulap's works. Those who disagreed with their evaluation generally kept quiet. Partly this was because there is no tradition of literary debate and partly because they realised that the resurrection and revaluation of Kulap's later novels was part of a political debate in which discussion of literary and aesthetic qualities had no place.

So what are *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* and *Lae pai khang na* about and why did they suddenly begin to attract so much attention, so many years after their first appearance? *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* is a very short novel, running to little more than 100 pages in recent paperback editions; its brevity made it an accessible introduction to Kulap's ideas and later work and during the 1970s it was reprinted on several occasions. Set in

Australia, the story is narrated by Dorothy, an ordinary working girl, who becomes friendly with Komet, a wealthy young Thai studying in her country. In lengthy conversations, she learns of the injustice that exists in Thailand, and how he has reformed from his earlier hedonist ways as a result of the influence of the idealistic Nancy - who has since died.[20] The characters are not developed and the novel stands or falls by its ideas alone, a fact more or less acknowledged by Kulap and implicit in one critic's remarks shortly after the novel first appeared:

> When art encounters the hardship and suffering of the people, it is bound to lack the lingering sweet taste favoured by those who have long been the parasites on society. But that does not mean that the art is diminished. On the contrary, such art is more meaningful and offers us a tool for seeking out or leading us towards the truth of life (Intharayut 1979: 262).

But after the constraints of the late 1950s and 1960s, Kulap's uncompromisingly blunt comments - often highlighted in bold print by editors in the 1970s - on the lack of rural medical facilities, vast wage differentials, the partiality of the legal system, and the self-interest endemic in the civil service and the government, were, for those who shared his views, a welcome airing of fundamental problems and injustices within Thai society. In Nancy's ominous words to Komet, there was a message of optimism, that things would change:

> ...nowadays, there is no country which believes in justice that will allow people who do absolutely nothing to completely control what others have created. They might do in your country, but I'm warning you, my friend, injustice is being swept away from every corner of the world. It will be swept away in your country, too, and you may see it in your lifetime (Siburapha 1975a: 58-59).

Lae pai khang na is a rather less polemic work, which set out to provide a panoramic view of Thai history from the last days of the absolute monarchy. Originally conceived as a trilogy, the third volume was never written. Like *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik*, it makes the urban-rural gap in Thailand a major theme; but whereas in the earlier work the reader learns of rural hardship from Komet, a wealthy Bangkok resident studying abroad, Cantha, the hero of *Lae pai khang na*, is a native of the North East and has

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20 The narrative technique in *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* is almost identical to that of *Khang lang phap* , the story being told retrospectively by the narrator, while conversations are presented in direct speech as if they are occurring in the present. In *Khang lang phap* the technique works; in *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* it does not. The difference is the narrator, Noppho'n in the earlier novel, also being the main character, and the objectivity of his 'confession' subject to the reader's speculation. Dorothy, by contrast, is not intrinsically interesting, and her role extends little beyond feeding Komet the questions that will launch his monologues.

actually experienced at first hand drought, crop failure and fatal epidemics. The first volume, written while Kulap was in prison, is set almost entirely within an exclusive boy's secondary school in Bangkok and portrays the culture shock and discrimination to which Cantha is subjected, both at school and in the home of the nobleman whose son he is charged with 'minding' at school. The second volume is, by comparison, fragmented and episodic, and the abrupt ending clearly shows that it is incomplete. It takes up the story of Cantha and some of his former classmates, from the immediate aftermath of the 1932 revolution to the outbreak of World War II and portrays some of the alarming repercussions of the revolution, such as police raids on newspapers, arbitrary arrests and loss of jobs. Witthayako'n justified his fulsome praise of the work on the grounds of 'the author's skilful portrayal of a cross-section of Thai society and his creation of incidents to highlight the gulf within it' (Witthayako'n 1973: 68). If there were others who found *Lae pai khang na* tedious and repetitive in places, few in the 1970s were prepared to publish such a view. The novel thus tended to enjoy an inflated reputation, doubtless enhanced by the fact that many accepted and passed on the verdicts of Witthayako'n, Rungwit, Sathian and even the older respected and respectable critic, Rancuan Intharakamhaeng, without actually reading the work (Rancuan 1975).[21]

Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik, Lae pai khang na and the later short stories were quite reasonably regarded by critics as a major departure from Kulap's earlier fiction. The later work was recognised as being primarily a vehicle for ideas, with plot and characterisation now of minor importance. Kulap's introduction to the 1954 reprint of *Luk phuchai* seemed to confirm that his views on the role of the novelist had changed:

> ...the novelist's belief that he is portraying life realistically is something which needs to be considered. We think that we have portrayed life as it is, but it may not be the truth as most people see it: it may be the truth in the rich man's way of thinking, but it may be false and deceptive in the view of the poor beggar. Writers may feel quite certain that they have used their literary art honestly and sincerely in portraying life, and that they have no desire whatsoever to use their art as a means of giving pleasure to, or eulogizing the moral righteousness of any minority. But no matter how confident we are of our integrity, it may still be unable to prevent us from losing our way. Even though we have no wish to overlook the truth about the lives of the majority, we can easily do so without realising it.
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> When we abandon our old and firmly-held belief that the only function of the novel is to provide pleasure to the reader (because in fact, the novel has a much wider function and responsibility), when we realise that the novelist's attitude towards life and the world is an important factor in making his novel something of value or something worthless, something which creates good or

[21] As recently as 1982, a reprint of a well-argued criticism of *Lae pai khang na* by Sukanya Hantrakun (1982) prompted a long - and pedantic - rebuttal by Chaiwat Thoettham (1982). Sukanya's article had first appeared in *Sangkhomsat parithat*.

> harm for the people, when novelists correct their attitude to one which is in line with and blends with the aims and wishes of the people, and when we have really examined these problems and are prepared to welcome facts and new ideas in analysing and improving our attitudes, then we can escape from being lost, if we are lost (Siburapha 1954: 15-17).

The fact that the later work had long been out of print and not even mentioned - whether by oversight or tacit agreement - in the *Phadungsu'ksa* re-print also further set it apart from Kulap's other fiction.

Attempts to explain why Kulap's fiction should have taken such a departure usually describe his later works as reflecting a 'development' or 'step forward' in his thinking; some editors of his works, apparently unfamiliar with Kulap's early career, imply that he only became 'politicised' after studying political science at Melbourne University in 1948, while for others, it was simply a natural progression in his personal development, a broadening of perspective that came with age. Sathian alone, of Kulap's major promoters, pointed out that that there were other writers at this time saying much the same thing and in much the same way; but he stopped short of suggesting that this sudden flowering of radical fiction might have been the product of an easing of restrictions on freedom of speech rather than a spontaneous expression of uncontainable dissatisfaction by Kulap and fellow-writers (Siburapha 1979: 38).

Sathian, Rungwit and Witthayako'n were more concerned with rescuing and promoting Kulap's later fiction than analysing and re-interpreting earlier works that had long been available to the reading public. While it is perhaps not surprising that their enthusiasm for *Khang lang phap,* a romantic tragedy with little explicit comment on society, might be muted, it is difficult not to feel that they under-stated or even ignored the social and political criticism in *Songkhram chiwit*.

Songkhram chiwit is an epistolary novel with a strong thread of social criticism running through the romantic correspondence between Raphin, a lowly government official with literary aspirations, and Phloen, a young girl from a wealthy background who has fallen upon hard times. The novel falls into two distinct parts; in the first, amounting to nearly two-thirds of the book, the characters of Phloen and Raphin emerge as they describe their feelings for each other and various incidents in their lives that have made a deep impression upon them. But as the correspondence unfolds, the contrast between the two characters rapidly blurs, and the greater part of each letter becomes a vehicle for Kulap's comments on society. At one such point, Phloen recounts a cautionary tale about the fate of a young writer who had been a friend of her father's:

> He was a journalist. What he wrote was regarded as highly outspoken and this led to a cruel fate. He was charged and sentenced to eight years in prison for writing what the Supreme Court judged to be seditious articles. For many days people talked about the fate of this young writer. Some felt sorry for him, some felt he got what he deserved and some thought he was a fool. My father

> himself understood and sympathised deeply with the young man and was profoundly upset. I, too, felt sympathy towards him for his honesty... This writer is still in prison now. His youth is now dead and gone. Even if he were released, there is no way that he could thrive. Thailand doesn't encourage people to have faith in opportunity. Thailand only curses people who do wrong. Thailand is still sadly lacking when it comes to arousing sympathy and compassion among its people. Thailand cannot be a perfect country for as long as it lacks these things. That's what my father and his friends used to say when they talked about that poor man (Siburapha 1949: 244-5).

His other main targets include the extravagance and foolish vanities of the wealthy, the hypocrisy of Buddhists who calculate the return on their acts of merit, corruption within the civil service, the inadequacy of medical treatment for the poor and the mercenary ethics of the medical profession; in short, the very issues that were to recur in the stories he wrote almost two decades later.

It is only in the final third of the novel that external events begin to encroach upon the private world of Raphin and Phloen. Raphin's letters, previously full of noble sentiments and expressions of moral outrage, rapidly deteriorate into a series of desperate protestations of love and pathetic pleadings as Phloen coolly transfers her affections to a wealthy film-director and, just to make Raphin's agony even worse, she tells him she has deliberately been stringing him along, in 'revenge' for an earlier romantic disappointment she suffered, although she simultaneously - and somewhat confusingly for the reader - claims that she really loves only him.

Critics have had some difficulty in deciding how to interpret *Songkhram chiwit*. Reviewing the novel when it first appeared, Kulap's friend and fellow novelist, Malai Chuphinit, voiced the reader's confusion when he remarked, '*Siburapha* kills Phloen, the *ideal* of the story, in cold blood.'[22] More recently, it has been claimed that Kulap was inspired by reading Dostoevsky's *Poor People,* and in a counter-claim, that he wrote the novel in hasty response to a romantic rebuff.[23]

Whatever Kulap's motives, *Songkhram chiwit* represented a signficant change in his attitude to fiction. Whereas earlier novels such as *Luk phuchai, Man manut, Lok sanniwat,* and *Prap phayot* were written primarily to entertain, in *Songkhram chiwit,* his views on the role of the writer and the value of reading are more serious and explicitly stated, first in the words of Phloen,

> I'm waiting for the day when you become a writer. It's not wealth, I'm hoping for, but rather that you will be able to teach these people about the responsibilities appropriate to their standing as human beings (Siburapha 1949: 78).

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[22] Malai Chuphinit, quoted in Trisin (1980:73).

[23] Sitthichai Saengkracang, quoted in Rungwit (1979a: 24-25); Yot Watcharasathian (1979: 39-43). For a comparison of *Poor People* and *Songkhram chiwit* in Thai, see Phailin (1979).

and then through Raphin:

> Now I can tell you that I see what a tremendous benefit reading is. I don't think that for one moment that there is anything more worthwhile for us. I really love books. I love them passionately. They sow the seeds of humanitarianism in our feelings, which, surprising as it may be, is quite certain. I must try to write a book for the happiness and advancement of everyone (Siburapha 1949: 85).

Humanitarian(ism) has since become the catch-word for both conservative and progressive Thai critics discussing *Songkhram chiwit* : Cu'a Satawethin describes it as 'the first Thai *humanitarian* novel' , Rungwit, as '[illustrating] rather clearly the *humanitarianism* of Kulap Saipradit, and Trisin, 'the starting point [in the Thai novel] for a *humanitarian consciousness* ' (Cu'a 1974: 110; Rungwit 1979a: 10; Trisin 1980: 79). Kulap certainly does attempt to arouse our sympathy for the weak and oppressed in the case of the beggar and the Chinese rickshaw man; but the plight of the imprisoned writer and that of Phloen's neighbour, who loses his government job because he is too honest and then dies because he cannot afford proper medical care, are calculated to prompt a rather more angry response in readers. Quite simply, *Songkhram chiwit* is a much more outspoken work than most Thai critics have acknowledged. Writing on *Songkhram chiwit* has tended to focus on trying to explain Phloen's sudden *volte-face* or establish the extent of the Dostoyevsky influence (Rancuan 1965: 103-17; Witthayako'n 1973: 69; Cu'a 1974: 110-14; Phailin 1979).

Since it would not have required much ingenuity or twisting of the text to interpret *Songkhram chiwit* as a politically radical novel, the question naturally arises as to why Witthayako'n, Rungwit and Sathian did not pursue such a line in their promoting of Kulap. Such an interpretation would, after all, appear to complement their portrayal of Kulap's journalistic career at this time, with its clashes with newspaper editors and censors. There were two good reasons for not attempting such a revaluation. In the first place, *Songkhram chiwit* was a well-known novel, which clearly lacked the 'forbidden fruit' aura of the later fiction; arguing the political significance of the work might have detracted from the major purpose of resurrecting Kulap's later fiction. Secondly, and more significantly, critics have tended to view Kulap's literary development as a strictly linear progression; if he was to be presented as a radical novelist as early as 1932, then some awkward explaining might have been needed for the apparent 'regression' of *Khang lang phap*, Kulap's most popular novel, written nearly six years later, in which there is very little comment on

society.[24] By 'conceding' *Songkram chiwit* , Kulap's promoters were able to sustain the linear view of his literary development, with the contrast between *Khang lang phap* and *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* highlighting the 'step forward' and 'development' in Kulap's later work.

The contrast between *Khang lang phap* and *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* could hardly be greater. Set in Japan, *Khang lang phap* is narrated by Noppho'n, a Thai student studying in Japan. The story unfolds in flashback and tells of his youthful infatuation with M.R. Kirati, an older Thai lady from an aristocratic background, who is visiting the country with a husband, who in turn, is much older than her. Her return to Thailand and the passage of time soon cool Noppho'n's ardour; it is only some years later, after his return to Thailand, that he learns from the dying M.R. Kirati that his feelings had been reciprocated.

The novel is widely admired by Thais for its artistic and technical qualities, its merits being seen to lie in the characterisation, the careful construction of the plot, with its subtle ironies, the exotic setting and the use of language. In the character of M.R. Kirati, it is claimed, Kulap vividly evokes the stifling existence endured by a certain class of women in those days. But while most Thai critics have tended to see the novel as a straightforward love story, there is a radically different interpretation of the work, which first appeared in 1950 and was subsequently reprinted a number of times during the 1970s. In an essay entitled *Du wannakhadi cak sangkhom, du sangkhom cak wannakhadi* , Udom Sisuwan, writing under the pen-name, 'P. Mu'angchomphu', argued that M.R. Kirati and Noppho'n should be seen respectively as symbols of a fast-disappearing and useless class, and the rising commercial class which was replacing it:

> ...We may shed tears of pity for the unfortunate *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati, but at the same time we ought to hold back a little, and ask why *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati has to face such sorrow. Is it because of a destiny shaped by God? Of course not. It is society that does that moulding. If we compare the life of *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati with the state of the upper class ten years ago, when *Behind the Painting* made its appearance on the literary scene, then the tragedy of *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati amounts to a portrayal of the destruction of the upper class. The political star of the upper class (*sakdina*) declined in unison with the fading away of their life-style. The search of this class for new freedoms was similar to *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati's search for freedom, which ultimately ended in failure. What the upper class encountered was the same as *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati, that is, a sterile present, and a vanishing past. All of these images are embodied in the sterile and barren ideas of *Cao Khun* Atthikanbodi, her husband, who is approaching his sixties, and already old and out-dated. The struggle of the upper class is the same as the struggle of *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati ... The words, *'I die with no one to love me, yet content that there is someone I love'*, can be regarded as symbolizing the

[24] According to Yot (1979) Kulap wrote the novel purely and simply because he needed the money to build a house.

> thoughts of the upper class who were happy and proud in the past when they prospered well under the old system of farming on the backs of other people.
>
> As for Noppho'n, who becomes involved in *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati's life and plays a part in creating the tragedy in *Behind the Painting* , he is an individual appropriate to his time. From what *Siburapha* portrays, we can see that Noppho'n is dishonest. He builds romantic castles in the air and then destroys them in cold blood. It is not hard to find real people in society with the same character as Noppho'n, even nowadays ... The dishonesty of Noppho'n is the dishonesty of the *compradore* capitalist class which flourished after the end of the absolute monarchy. This class was concerned only with making profits, which is exactly Noppho'n's aim, for he is concerned largely with his own advancement. Any tenderness which occurred at Mitaké is destroyed and forgotten. The past is undesirable to Noppho'n; what he wants is the present.
>
> ... Just as Noppho'n cannot love and take *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati as his wife, when he is a young man with a bright future, and *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati is almost forty, old, and with no future, so, too, the *compradore* capitalist class who occupied the positions in society formerly held by the upper class, could not accept an old system to govern them. What Noppho'n or his class are constantly aware of is 'beauty', which *Mo'm Ratchawong* Kirati or the old society perpetuated; but appearance is transient and illusory, something that is easy to love and easy to forget.[25]

Udom's interpretation, original as it was, amounted to little more than a series of bold but unsubstantiated claims. Trisin, in *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai* ... attempts to add some textual evidence to support his argument, but generally, critics have not followed this line of interpretation.[26] Udom's essay is perhaps best understood in the context of the late 1940s and early 1950s, when Kulap was on the one hand experimenting with a socialist influenced fiction, aimed at raising readers' social and political consciousness, while on the other, enjoying much wider popularity as a writer of romances set among the elite by suggesting that there was rather more to *Behind the Painting* than first meets the eye, Udom was reconciling this apparent contradiction, making it acceptable for 'progressives' to like what was both a popular and exceptionally well-written novel.

Luk phuchai published in 1928, was one of Kulap's first novels. Despite occasional scenes in which Kulap's views on social inequality are expressed in no uncertain terms, promoters of his later works showed no interest in searching through this or other early novels for signs of an emerging

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25 P. Mu'angchomphu (1979) in Intharayut ((1979: 249-55). P. Mu'angchomphu is the pseudonymn of Udom Sisuwan, radical literary critic, journalist and former high-ranking member of the Communist Party of Thailand. He also wrote under the pseudonymn, Bancong Bancoetsin.

26 Sathian, Rungwit and Witthayako'n make no reference to Udom's interpretation of *Khang lang phap* nor does M.L. Bunlu'a Thepphayasuwan (1974), who devotes a whole chapter to the novel.

radical. Indeed, it is only since the appearance of Wibha's *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand* (1975) that *Luk phuchai* has come to be regarded as a major work. Wibha, in effect, did for *Luk phuchai* what Witthayako'n had done for *Con kwa rao ca phop kan ik* and *Lae pai khang na,* although her 'rediscovery' of the early work lacked the political motivation and missionary zeal of Witthayako'n and his fellow promoters. Wibha's study includes a lengthy summary and discussion of the novel which bestows a suitably academic interpretation upon the work, while simultaneously attributing to it a role of historical importance in the emergence of the Thai novel.[27] Since the appearance of her study, no serious writer on Kulap's fiction has felt able to ignore the work, in the way they might other novels of the same period, such as *Lok sanniwat* or *Phacon bap* or any of the others.

Essentially, *Luk phuchai* plots the romantic disappointments that befall Manot as he rises from childhood poverty to achieve a position of eminence and respect in society and, eventually, the promise of matrimonial happiness with the look-alike daughter of his first true love. With an over-ambitious time-scale, covering a span of thirty years in twenty-six chapters, detail is neccessarily selective, the most unified and convincing part of the novel being the middle chapters where Manot becomes successively captivated by poor-but-loyal Lamiat, rich-and-homely Ramphan and rich-and-flighty Apha. Unlike Suphanni (1976), however, Wibha sees *Luk phuchai* as rather more than a popular romantic novel:

> As its title implies the quality of being a gentleman and the story illustrates the qualifications of such a kind of man, one can see that the author was more serious in his imaginative writing than most of his contemporaries whose works normally evolved around the theme of melodramatic love, mystery or detection ...It is quite clear that Si Burapha, having felt dissatisfied with the social atmosphere in which he was living, proposed, not a new kind of society, but a new kind of hero, an altruistic self-made man. The formal structure of the society itself, as the author took it, whether he meant it or not, rendered promises to a man of integrity to become successful, respected and happy, regardless of his former economic or family background ... Because the novel was warmly welcomed, it meant that somehow the author's dream was shared by the reading public. It can be said then that, at any rate, *Luk phuchai* represented the dream of modern Thai youth. To ordinary people living their youth in the 1920's, the story of Manot's life, problems and success looked real, plausible and promising (Wibha 1975: 83-89).

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[27] It is even sometimes claimed that *Luk phuchai* was the first Thai novel. This view appears to originate from an over-simplification of Wibha (1975: 82-111) who merely takes 1928-29 as a convenient starting point for her discussion of the early novel, on the grounds that it was the period when the first works by three novelists who were later to become famous - Kulap, M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat and *Do'kmaisot* - appeared.

Much of what Wibha has to say about *Luk phuchai,* however, is open to challenge: the central part of the novel is precisely a melodramatic love story, as the author successfully strings the reader along, making Lamiat, Ramphan and finally Apha appear to be Manot's most likely future spouse; far from being a self-made man, Manot achieves success, in no small part, through the patronage of *Phaya* Manun; and Kulap himself claimed that he had written the novel with little knowledge of the real world and purely out of a desire to write (Siburapha 1954: forword n.p.). Even so, subsequent writers - in both Thai and English - have almost unanimously accepted Wibha's interpretation of the novel.[28]

This paper has traced *Siburapha*'s emergence from non-person status to being regarded as one of the most important figures in the development of modern Thai literature. In *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai (2475-2500),* one of the very few attempts at providing a historical framework for the Thai novel, Trisin synthesises and modifies the views both of progressive critics who promoted his later works and of apolitical scholars who recognised only his early works as being of literary merit. Despite the sometimes shaky critical foundations on which the credentials of individual works have been advanced, Trisin's selection constitutes a fair representation of Kulap's fiction, clearly illustrating his changing views on the role of literature and the responsibility of the writer. Written in an academic form that eschewed radical rhetoric in favour of textual reference and acknowledged literary shortcomings of individual works yet saw their importance in a broader context, Trisin's work has become an authoritative source for subsequent researchers and writers on the Thai novel, thus largely shaping Thai - and western - ideas about Kulap's niche in Thai literature in the politically stable decade that followed the upheavals of the 1970s.[29]

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[28] A more profitable line of enquiry for future literary historians seeking to explain the contemporary popularity of *Luk phuchai* might be to investigate the economics of literary production. *Luk phuchai,* unlike most of Kulap's other early novels, was published at the outset as a volume without prior serialisation, with the publishing company, Nai Thep Pricha apparently owned by Kulap, himself. From a very early point in his career, Kulap was in a position to publish his own work, either in journals he edited or through his own publishing companies.

[29] Since this paper was written a collection of articles about *Siburapha* by Witthayako'n Chiangkun, which first appeared in *Sayam rat sapda wican* between August and September 1989, has appeared in a single volume under the title *Su'ksa botbat lae khwam khit Siburapha* [A study of the role and ideas of Siburapha] (1989). It is the third volume in a series, previous volumes having dealt with Puey Ungphakon and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj.

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ECONOMIC THOUGHT IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY SIAM[1]

Ian Brown

As the rural communities of central Siam were increasingly drawn into the international economy from the middle of the nineteenth century, directing surplus rice production into the market and securing in return the manufactures of the industrializing west, the Siamese administrative elite in the capital were drawn into the world of western economic thought. The channels of transmission were numerous and varied: many of the most influential contemporary western texts in the field were acquired for the libraries and ministerial offices of the Bangkok elite;[2] the western newspapers, journals and magazines which found their way to Bangkok in this period frequently included informed commentaries on contemporary economic issues (or alternatively those commentaries were syndicated in the local press); the British financial advisers, appointed by the Siamese government from the mid-1890s, made available to the Bangkok administrative elite their long experience of financial administration and the firm command of economic principles which underpinned it; and finally, a number of those Siamese who travelled to the western world in this period, simply to visit, to study or to represent their government, actively sought an understanding of contemporary western economic thought.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the ways in which the Siamese administrative elite in the early twentieth century perceived and interpreted that body of western knowledge. It will focus on three economics texts published, by Siamese authors writing in the vernacular, in

[1] I am very grateful to Hong Lysa and Chatthip Nartsupha for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I only wish that I had the capacity to respond more effectively to all their ideas. Responsibility for errors of fact and interpretation remains with me. Research in Bangkok in 1987 was made possible by the generous financial support of the Nuffield Foundation.

[2] The library of Prince Damrong holds a notably interesting collection, including Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations;* W. Stanley Jevons, *Political Economy* (in an 1892 reprinting); Henry Fawcett, *Manual of Political Economy* (presented to Prince Damrong in 1887); S.J. Chapman, *Political Economy* (published in the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge series, with the preface dated June 1912); J. Ramsay MacDonald, *The Socialist Movement* (again from the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge); Harold J. Laski, *Communism* (published in 1927 and presented to Prince Damrong by Prince Chanthaburi).

the kingdom in that period. This discussion of elite perception and interpretation of western economic thought will, it is hoped, provide an important insight into two major, and related, themes which arise in considering the political and economic experience of Siam in the closing decades of the absolute monarchy: the response of the Siamese administrative elite to the substantial economic changes taking place in the kingdom at that time, changes which had their origin in the increasingly intense western economic penetration of Siam that had occurred from the middle of the nineteenth century; and, casting that theme in its wider context, whether (or to what extent) the final decades of absolute monarchical rule, a period of intense western challenge, were marked by strong intellectual innovation on the part of the Siamese elite.

At this point it is important to emphasize that, unlike the laws of natural science, the principles of economics are not immutable absolutes: in the search for an understanding of the principles which determine the creation, distribution and exchange of wealth, contrasting schools of interpretation rise and decline, orthodoxies emerge and disintegrate, each underpinned by contrasting assumptions of political and social order and by the contrasting economic experience of each age. Thus, in the context of the present discussion, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the dominant orthodoxy in the field of international trade, reflecting the powerful influence of Adam Smith (1723-90) and David Ricardo (1772-1823), held that freedom of trade would secure for each nation the most advantageous exploitation of its productive power. It was this orthodoxy which had been imposed on Siam in this period, with the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, and through which the kingdom had indeed strongly exploited the natural advantage it held in the cultivation of rice. But this orthodoxy did not pass without challenge in western economic thought. Perhaps the most notable critic was the German, Friedrich List (1789-1846). List advanced two, related, propositions which are central to the present discussion: that the establishment of industrial manufacturing, in step with agricultural advance, was essential to the strength of a nation (where the free-trade school maintained that a nation's interest lay in unrestrained specialization in those economic activities in which it held a natural advantage); that where a nation had a manufacturing potential but that potential was not being realized because of the existence of powerful competition from more advanced industrial rivals, it was essential that the state erect tariffs to protect nascent industry. It is not difficult to see how these propositions might be applied in analysis of the structure of the Siamese economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although marked specialization in rice cultivation had raised the performance of the economy to an unprecedented degree, it had also brought a dangerous mono-crop dependence, a serious imbalance between agricultural and non-agricultural production that was to hamper severely the potential growth of the economy in the long-term. Seen in these terms, to the extent that the Siamese administrative elite assumed the dominant free trade orthodoxy, they could be said to have reinforced the kingdom's dependent special-

ization: to the extent that they repudiated it, they would, in effect, be challenging the pattern of economic change that had emerged prominently in central Siam from the middle of the nineteenth century.

I

At the outset it must be said that the Thai-language literature on economics published in the early twentieth century (prior to the 1932 coup) is far from extensive. A careful search through the holdings of the National Library, the libraries of Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities, the Siam Society and the Prince Damrong Library undertaken in mid-1987 yielded only two substantial texts: *Talat ngoentra* (Money Markets) by No'Mo'So' (Prince Bidyalankarana), first published in 1916 and held in the Prince Damrong Library; and *Setthawitthaya kret* (Fragments of Economic Knowledge) by Khru Thep (Caophraya Thammasakmontri), published in 1922 and held in the Chulalongkorn University Main Library. To these must be added *Sapphasat* (The Science of Wealth) by Phraya Suriyanuwat, of which the first two books were first published, in a single volume, in 1911, the third and final book, under the title *Setthakit kanmu'ang* (Political Economy), in 1934.

Sapphasat commands a high reputation among present-day Thai scholars, notably for its radical analysis of the severe maldistribution of income and wealth in early twentieth century Siam.[3] In any event, *Sapphasat* stands as the first modern economics text in Thai.[4] This very substantial work is divided into three major parts:[5] the construction of wealth (production); the division of wealth (distribution); and exchange. The opening part considers *inter alia* utility, the essential factors in the creation of wealth, the characteristics of labour, the division of labour, the characteristics of capital, capital investment, the natural principles which govern the growth of wealth. The second part, concerned with distribution, includes discussion of property rights, the distribution of income to factors of production, landrent, wages, profits, worker organization and strikes, the harmful effects of competition, the co-operative principle. The final part is by far the longest. The opening section considers *inter alia* prices, the characteristics of money, the currency and exchange systems of foreign countries, commercial credit, free trade, protectionism, foreign trade imbalances, currency exchange, a proposal for the establishment of a 'National

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[3] *Sapphasat* has had an important influence on the work of Chatthip Nartsupha; and it was primarily on Chatthip's initiative that all three books were reprinted in 1975-76. See also Chatthip Nartsupha (1978).

[4] It was the first modern economics text in Thai not only in the sense of an original work; at the time Phraya Suriyanuwat was writing, no western economics text had been translated into Thai. See preface to the first printing (p.37).

[5] The volume published in 1911 comprised parts one and two and the opening 14 sections of part three. The volume published in 1934 comprised the concluding sections of part three.

Bank of Siam'. The concluding (16) sections of the third part are devoted to a consideration of public finance, and include discussion of the incidence of taxation, the measurement of taxable capacity, income tax, inheritance taxation.

This paper will focus on two important positions taken by Phraya Suriyanuwat in *Sapphasat*. The first is his assessment of the failures of competitive markets in the determination of income distribution. The essential thrust of his argument is that in an economy with a relative abundance of labour, where the ownership of capital is concentrated in a numerically small class, and where labour is dependent on borrowed capital to secure a living (dominant characteristics of the economy of central Siam in the early twentieth century), competitive markets would direct the income from productive activity overwhelmingly towards the owners of capital, leaving labour impoverished: where the market power of labour and capital is severely unequal, unregulated markets result in the exploitation of the former by the latter.

> Those with capital and business acumen will always seek to profit by the efforts of workers who are foolish and ignorant, and who have less power than they have. Ultimately, to hire labour is to live off the backs of the workers: the capitalist and entrepreneur pays out (small) wages to his workers but receives the entire income generated by their labour..... Those with substantial capital have great power, an ever increasing advantage: for the majority of workers do not have sufficient land to sustain an independent livelihood and are therefore forced to become dependent on borrowed capital. The capitalist uses his capital solely as a weapon; in brandishing it, the capitalist is telling the worker that unless he wishes to starve to death he must submit to exploitation at his hands (Suriyanuwat 1975: 247-8).

Phraya Suriyanuwat drove home this argument with a bitter observation:

> The opening stage in the manufacture of woollen cloth is to raise sheep (to shear their coat, spin into a thread and then weave into cloth); this is, really, the exploitation of an animal. But the way in which the animal is exploited is better than the way in which a human being is treated. The owner of a sheep must be committed to the animal's welfare, must constantly feed it well in order to increase its value; when the sheep is sold for slaughter, it must be fat if the owner is to receive a good price. But the capitalist has no need to be generous, to be concerned to satisfy the appetite of the worker (who is indebted to him); if the worker falls ill, the capitalist has no need to see to his treatment; if the worker dies, less money would be lost (by his creditor) than would be lost (by the owner of a sheep) were his animal to die (Suriyanuwat 1975: 248).

With the impoverishment of labour said to reflect the failure of the competitive market, Phraya Suriyanuwat then argued that a more equitable distribution of income would be secured through a restructuring of markets, in such a way as to create resistance to the power of capital or to eliminate its harsh competitive drive. In practical terms he proposed, prominently, the introduction of a tax on inherited wealth (that would break up major concentrations of wealth) and the abolition of capitation

taxes (that bore most severely on the poor); the establishment of trade unions to present the collective demands of labour on pay and conditions to capital and, if necessary, to organize strikes to enforce those demands; and, of central importance, the introduction into the economic system of co-operative structures, practices and attitudes. The inspiration here was the ideas and the industrial and retailing projects associated with the British manufacturer, philanthropist and writer, Robert Owen (1771-1858), who is widely regarded as the pioneer of British socialism. Rejecting the competitive passion that he felt characterized the manufacturing interest in Britain in the early decades of industrialization, Owen argued that if the worker was to be justly remunerated for his labour, the forces of production must be subjected to social control: against the competitive drive he proposed the principle of cooperation. Two forms of cooperative organization emerged in the Owenite tradition (and were later expounded by Phraya Suriyanuwat): the production cooperative, in which labour (alongside capital) invested in production, assumed partial responsibility in management and took a share in the profit; the consumers' cooperative, in which the bulk purchase of common items of consumption direct from the producer enabled the cooperative to sell to members at a substantial discount and in which the profits from the cooperative were shared among members according to the value of their purchases. The principal Owenite legacy in nineteenth century Britain was the modern cooperative movement which began, with a single store, in Rochdale in 1844, but which within a few decades had grown into a very large trading organization, serving the country's major concentrations of population. It is a measure of the Owenite influence on Phraya Suriyanuwat that *Sapphasat* includes a substantial reference to the history of that movement (Suriyanuwat 1975: 255-57). There is a final point in this context. Phraya Suriyanuwat argued forcefully that cooperative organizations would strongly depend upon, but would in turn engender, a commitment to the principles of unity, thrift, justice and self-reliance; they would bring to an end the fierce warring between and within capital and labour that characterized the competitive market; within a cooperative structure, the struggle between classes would dissolve. This is an important argument, to which the discussion will return.

The second important aspect of Phraya Suriyanuwat's thought that will be considered in this paper is the position that he takes with respect to the nineteenth century free trade orthodoxy.[6] Phraya Suriyanuwat opens with a firm statement of the advantages that will accrue to an economy as it experiences a major expansion of foreign trade: the market for its production will be dramatically extended; through imports it will obtain articles which it cannot itself produce or which it produces only at a much higher cost. Phraya Suriyanuwat then provides a most effective demon-

[6] This position is established in the final two sections of the volume published in 1911 (part 3, sections 13-14) and the second section of the 1934 volume (part 3, section 16).

stration of the principle of comparative advantage, an important theoretical foundation of the free trade orthodoxy. In a two country (Siam and Java)/two commodity (rice and sugar) model, both countries are shown to benefit from specialization in that crop in which it has a comparative advantage, even where one of the countries produces both commodities at a lower price. The essential thrust of Phraya Suriyanuwat's argument at this point is well caught in the following passage:

> As the different nationalities, races and religions (of the world) come to rely increasingly on each other's labour, both the individual and the nation progressively benefit, for the (international) division of labour is becoming progressively more extensive and specialized. If the population of a territory (with its distinctive characteristics) concentrate solely on that economic activity in which they are notably skilled and proficient, that activity which secures them the greatest benefit through their own effort, then the return from that economic activity will certainly increase to the extent to which foreign trade (the export of that production) flourishes (Suriyanuwat 1975: 485-6).

Here was a powerful statement of the advantages to be drawn by the whole world community from an increasing international specialization of production and from the growth of international trade.

It is at this point that the confident spirit of the analysis begins to disintegrate, as Phraya Suriyanuwat proceeds to establish a powerful criticism of the doctrine of free trade. The criticism builds from two principal observations. The first is that with respect to those economic activities in which a country does not have a comparative advantage, the unrestricted influx of cheap imports will destroy the livelihood of the people committed to those activities. Phraya Suriyanuwat noted the rapid decline of both sugar and silk production in Siam under free trade. If the number of people so affected is relatively small, the argument continues, there is little cause for concern, for their loss is more than balanced by the gain that will accrue to the population as a whole through the availability of cheap imports to replace domestic production. But if foreign competition threatens to close many local industries and push a majority of the population into impoverishment, then, argues Phraya Suriyanuwat, government must intervene to protect domestic production and livelihoods. Secondly, Phraya Suriyanuwat draws attention to the extensive protection of new industry in contemporary continental Europe and in the United States; having identified a potentially important new economic activity, the government protects it in its early growth (by imposing a duty on competing imports or by paying a subsidy to the new producers), until that industry is sufficiently established that it can compete in the international market.

Phraya Suriyanuwat, altering the direction of the discussion, then moves on to consider Britain's firm adherence to the doctrine of free trade from the mid-nineteenth century. The essential argument here is that free trade was singularly appropriate to the requirements and capacity of the British economy at that time. With a small area of cultivable land relative to population, the country could be fed far more cheaply if food were

imported without tariff restriction from countries with a comparative advantage in agricultural production; cheap imported food implied low industrial wages, which was important in maintaining Britain's international competitiveness as a manufacturing nation; the British industrial labour force was more skilled and diligent than that of any other country. Thus, free trade served Britain's industrial and commercial supremacy in the world community. With the establishment of this argument, Phraya Suriyanuwat returns, but far more forcefully, to the subject of protection.

The foundation of his argument at this point is the proposition that a country which, in meeting its requirements for manufactures, becomes substantially dependent on the advanced industrial/commercial economies, is economically disadvantaged and, indeed, politically threatened. The proposition appears in one form as follows:

> The more a country depends upon foreigners, the more its freedom will decline; it will decline to the point where the country falls under foreign rule. The only benefit will be that the people will have easy access to cheap (imported) goods. The end will be self-destruction (Suriyanuwat 1975: 508).

From this proposition, Phraya Suriyanuwat develops the argument that for a country to survive in the modern world (survive politically as well as economically) it must establish the ability to compete against the advanced economies: and that that ability can be established only as a result of major government intervention. Two brief passages capture that argument:

> Government must defend the borders of its territory (by military force) and the livelihood of its people (by economic protection): if government does not erect both defences, independence cannot be established (Suriyanuwat 1975: 504). It is true that (protectionist measures) involve an extravagant use of wealth, a futile use of labour, capital and time: but if that investment is not made, that support and encouragement not given, the people will have no way in which they can confront (compete against) foreigners (Suriyanuwat 1975: 507).

It is important to note the consistency between Phraya Suriyanuwat's argument here and his position with respect to the determination of income maldistribution, considered earlier. For Phraya Suriyanuwat, the impoverishment of labour reflected the failure of the competitive market; a more equitable distribution of income would be secured through a restructuring of markets, in such a way as to create resistance to the power of capital. In the present context his argument is that the freedom of international trade in time places the less advanced, agricultural, economy at a most serious disadvantage to the advanced industrial powers; and that the former, to survive, must establish the capacity to compete on more equal terms with the latter. But, crucially, in neither case does Phraya Suriyanuwat lose faith in the essential efficacy of the market. Labour would be justly rewarded not by removing the market (abolishing private property rights) but by reforming it; the less advanced, agricultural, economy would avoid economic (and political) subjugation not by withdrawing from the

market (the expansion of foreign trade held substantial advantages) but by entering it on more equitable terms. Freedom of trade (but between economies of comparable capacities) remained the aspiration. This argument, indeed Phraya Suriyanuwat's position in general at this point in his exposition, is clearly conveyed in the following extended passage:

> When a people who are still in a primitive, ignorant condition, whose only productive activity is to raise domestic animals and to engage in cultivation, are exposed to unrestricted foreign trade, they open their ears and eyes and become aware of the many articles which foreigners are now bringing to their country to sell. They enter the world commercial community, study foreign knowledge and expertise; they acquire increasing sagacity. Initially, therefore, free trade brings very considerable benefit to such a country. At a later stage, the people have sufficient knowledge and wisdom to undertake some agricultural, manu- facturing and commercial activities in opposition to the foreigners. If they do not take up those activities they are finished, for they will be left far too depen- dent on foreigners for their livelihood. In this process, government must protect, assist, support and encourage the people with all its might, until such time as they have established a livelihood that can compete, on an equal footing, with foreign competition; at that point, government can, as formerly, allow freedom of trade (Suriyanuwat 1975: 511-12).

By the time Phraya Suriyanuwat came to write the third volume of *Sapphasat*, published in 1934, his qualification of the free trade doctrine had become notably more severe, perhaps to a degree that was fatal to his essential free trade convictions. In the course of a lengthy outline of the history of Siam's foreign trade, he makes the following two observations. He suggests that under a free trade/laissez faire regime from the middle of the nineteenth century, the foreign trade of the kingdom, and therefore the income and profits which arose from it, had fallen exclusively into the hands of foreigners (Chinese, Indian, as well as European traders). He notes, approvingly, that when, during the reign of Rama III (1824-51), foreign trade had been a state monopoly, trading income and profit had remained within Siam. Second, Phraya Suriyanuwat suggests that the great expansion of rice cultivation under free trade had, in the long term, pushed the cultivator into hopeless debt; this proposition clearly contradicted the principle of comparative advantage, an important theoretical foundation of the free trade school.

> As the cultivation of rice expanded, the people brought an ever increasing area of previously uncleared land into production. Eventually (the expansion of rice production reached the point where) the cultivators began to compete among themselves (for markets); the selling price of rice gradually, but persistently, fell until finally the cultivators were no longer making a profit. They fell into debt - from which they were unable to recover (Suriyanuwat 1976: 12).

Phraya Suriyanuwat then poses what to him is clearly the central question: 'why (in those circumstances) did the people not attempt to find alternative livelihoods' (Suriyanuwat 1976: 12)? His answer is that the kingdom's administrators provided absolutely no assistance for them to do so. The

government rigidly pursued a policy of laissez-faire; the burgeoning state revenues during the fifth and sixth reigns were to an excessive degree committed to the extravagant upkeep of the court. Here was a direct link with Phraya Suriyanuwat's argument in the closing pages of the 1911 volumes, that government intervention was essential if people were to be able to establish an independent livelihood that would withstand the competition of a free international market. More importantly it was a direct link with his earlier characterization of the severe maldistribution of income and wealth, the impoverishment of the rice cultivator, in early twentieth century Siam.

The remaining two texts referred to at the beginning of this section, *Setthawitthaya kret* by Khru Thep (Caophraya Thammasakmontri) and *Talat ngoentra* by No'Mo'So' (Prince Bidyalankarana), may be discussed more briefly. Khru Thep (1876-1943) was strongly influenced in his thought by Fabian socialism, an influence he absorbed during the two years he spent in England (1896-98) studying for a certificate in education.[7] When *Setthawitthaya kret* was published (1922), Khru Thep was Minister of Public Instruction and Religion (he held that position from 1915 to 1926). In the early 1920s Khru Thep wrote a number of newspaper articles to provide elementary instruction on points of economic principle or commentary on local economic issues. The four fragments which together constitute *Setthawitthaya kret* would appear to be reprints of some of those articles. There is no unity of theme or analytical level within the collection. The first article, concerned with the determination of prices, provides an elementary introduction to the law of supply and demand. The second considers the essential failure of Siamese to establish prominent positions in the commercial structures of the kingdom after its opening to free trade in the middle of the nineteenth century. The third article contrasts the procedures and working attitudes of government administration and commerce. The final article is the most substantial, in terms of both length and theme. It is an allegorical tale, which explores the economic impact of the opening of Siam in the 1850s, including prominently the gathering influence of immigrant Chinese in the kingdom's trade. It must be noted, however, that here (as in the previous two articles in this volume) Khru Thep's writing can be characterized as social comment rather than rigorous economic analysis. Thus, typically, at one point the discussion moves to the urgent problem: 'why at this time is there such excessive banditry and criminality?' (Khru Thep 1922: 69). Khru Thep's interest in this article lay primarily in what he saw as the social dislocation, perhaps the moral disintegration, that had been occasioned in Siam by the penetration of the international market, the spread of monetization,[8] and the rapidly emerging commercial power of immigrant Chinese.

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[7] See Nitaya Maphu'ngphong (1983).

[8] As Nitaya Maphu'ngphong notes (1983:172), Khru Thep was to argue that with the monetization of the economy, the Siamese people had become 'slaves of money'.

Talat ngoentra by No'Mo'So' (Prince Bidyalankarana) draws very closely, as the author indicates in his preface, on a slim introductory text, *Cash and Credit* by D.A. Barker, published by Cambridge University Press in 1910 in a series, The Cambridge Manuals of Science and Literature. The opening eight chapters of Barker's volume are reproduced by No'Mo'So', partly in precis, commonly in full or near-full translation. The chapter headings here include, cash and credit, the money market in theory, the foreign exchanges in theory, the bill of exchange, the foreign exchanges in practice. Barker's final two chapters (concerned with the Bank of England and Britain's gold reserves) are ignored by No'Mo'So'. In their place he provides a single chapter, outlining briefly Siam's exchange mechanism under the gold-exchange standard, adopted in November 1902. In brief, *Talat ngoentra* provides a basic introduction to the domestic and external monetary mechanisms of the modern economy, one which, by reproducing a standard, primary English-language text, constitutes a statement of the contemporary western orthodoxy.

II

In the political circumstances of Siam in the closing decades of the absolute monarchy, *Sapphasat's* rigorous attack on the concentration of market power in the hands of elite owners of land and capital and its focus on the consequent impoverishment of the cultivator are strikingly radical. Inevitably the book was banned by government (Chatthip 1978: 408). However it must also be said that Phraya Suriyanuwat's proposals for the correction of market inequality and the alleviation of impoverishment are, in contrast to his analysis of their causes, rather restrained. Thus, notably, Phraya Suriyanuwat's concluding advocacy of the cooperative principle may be said to fit uneasily with his earlier class-based analysis; having graphically described the intense, uneven struggle between capital and labour within the competitive market, his vision of a dissolution of class conflict through the construction of cooperative structures, practices and attitudes is essentially utopian. Or again, having argued so convincingly the serious inadequacy of the unregulated market (the argument applies to both the internal and the international market), Phraya Suriyanuwat's central belief in the essential efficacy of the market mechanism cannot be entirely convincing. The powerful radicalism of Phraya Suriyanuwat's analysis of the causes of the severe maldistribution of income and wealth evident in early twentieth century Siam is not complemented by a comparable radicalism in prescription.[9] It is possible to see here the influence of the British socialist tradition.

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[9] See here the contrast between the essentially conciliatory character of Phraya Suriyanuwat's policy proposals and the radical prescriptions pursued in the 1930s by Pridi Phanomyong, as suggested by Sirilak Sakkriangkrai (1980: 53).

Sapphasat remains by far the most rigorously-argued original economics text produced in Siam in the early twentieth century. Neither Khru Thep nor No' Mo' So' achieved, or sought, such an advanced statement. More importantly, neither was predisposed to advance Phraya Suriyanuwat's critical analysis of the flawed economic circumstances of the kingdom in that period. However it is important to add that Phraya Suriyanuwat was not entirely a lone voice. Scattered through the Siamese administrative records from the closing decades of the absolute monarchy are critical observations on the pattern of economic change which had emerged in Siam as the kingdom had been opened to unrestricted foreign trade, observations which betrayed a distrust (at least) of the dominant economic orthodoxy. Thus in late 1910 the Minister of Agriculture, Caophraya Wongsanupraphat, prepared a lengthy memorandum on the condition of the Siamese economy, part of which observed that with the import tariff held low by international agreement, the kingdom was importing a large number of simple products (brooms, mats, baskets) which could be manufactured locally: 'something then is very radically wrong when foreign countries can send such things (to us) at a profit'.[10] Yet it must also be acknowledged that such individual, particularistic concerns failed to evolve into a fundamental critique of Siam's economic condition. There did not emerge from within the administration an analysis with the coherence and rigour (leaving aside the radicalism)[11] that had marked the work of Phraya Suriyanuwat. Why was the response of the Siamese administrative elite to western economic thought so weak: why did that discipline not penetrate Siamese intellectual discourse in the dramatic way that it clearly did in Japan, where the decades from the opening of the country to the western world in the 1850s saw the translation into Japanese of virtually all the principal western-language economics texts, the creation of an extensive indigenous literature in the field, and a very major expansion of instruction in economics at college and university level.[12] An initial response to that central question might be to observe that in the final decades of the absolute monarchy, political authority was frequently strongly hostile to the 'dismal science'. As noted earlier, *Sapphasat* was banned by government; when Chulalongkorn University, the kingdom's first university, was established in 1917, it had faculties of medicine, government administration, engineering and liberal arts/science but not of

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[10] Caophraya Wongsanupraphat, 'Memorandum on our Domestic Economy', 7 December 1910: National Archives, Sixth Reign, KS 1/4.

[11] Certainly Caophraya Wongsanupraphat's critical facilities were very narrowly focused. His 1910 memorandum also included the following views on income distribution and poverty in Siam: 'the distribution of wealth in our own country is much more republican than that of the United States.... we have not the absolutely poor or the enormously rich, as there are in other countries'.

[12] See Sugiyama and Mizuta (1988).

political economy (*Prawat Culalongko'n mahawithayalai* 1967:37); in 1927 a law was promulgated to prohibit the teaching of economic thought in Siam.[13] But this observation simply recasts the central question in another form; for why was political authority frequently so hostile to this discipline?

The most effective approach here is to see the response of the Siamese administrative elite to western economic thought as part of its perception of and reaction to western penetration as a whole and (the points are related) in the context of the nature of the domestic reforms the elite pursued from the final decades of the nineteenth century. There are two main arguments here. Because of the weakness of Siam's geo-political position in this period, the Siamese administrative elite was forced into an essentially subservient relationship to western power. The central principle of government was to avoid a provocation of western aggression; and a crucial element in that was to satisfy the (principally commercial) demands made against the kingdom by the western powers (important here was the preservation of internal law and order and the promotion of administrative efficiency, both of which would greatly facilitate the growth of trade). The external political circumstances of the kingdom drove the administrative elite into an essentially submissive, reactive relationship to western power in all its forms. An instructive comparison can be made with the circumstances of Japan in this same period. Japan's geo-political position was considerably more secure than that of Siam; the threat of western invasion was much smaller; and Japan's neighbours (across the sea) were weak (and weakening) Asian states rather than the expansionist European territories which encircled Siam. As a result the Japanese elite was drawn to seek an economic, intellectual and, perhaps inevitably, military confrontation with western power; Japan's external circumstances encouraged the elite into a creative response to western thought and knowledge, the foundation of a challenge to the western world. The second argument, well rehearsed elsewhere,[14] is that the Chakri 'modernization' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was aimed primarily at a consolidation of royal power against internal rivals. The central point to be drawn from these two arguments is that the response of the Siamese administrative elite to the internal and external circumstances of the kingdom in this period was essentially a minimal one; the elite contemplated only that change that was necessary to avoid western aggression and to secure royal power. A major restructuring of the economy or a far-reaching reform of the political system were not sought; both were inimical to the core interests of the elite, in that the former would represent a dangerous challenge to western commercial

[13] Chatthip Nartsupha (1978: 408). In a note to the author in September 1989, Chatthip Nartsupha suggested another perspective: that the hostility of the absolute court to economics was less an hostility to the discipline *per se* than a reflection of the court's association of economics with socialism: and its association of socialism with revolution.

[14] See, notably, Anderson (1978: particularly 199-211).

ambitions in the kingdom while the latter, clearly, would end the royal domination of power. The minimal ambition in Siam's reforms is forcefully illustrated by the administration's tardy and limited provision of higher education, for clearly a society intent on far-reaching economic and political change requires a major expansion of well-educated, highly-trained personnel. As noted earlier, Siam did not possess a university until 1917; by that time Japan had a well-established extensive university sector.[15] And the minimal ambition can also be seen, of course, in the administration's suppression of economic radicalism, indeed what appears to have been a distrust of the discipline in any form. There is a final consideration. For the Siamese administrative elite of the early twentieth century - concerned to see a major expansion of agricultural production and trade, delighted to enjoy a sustained rise in land prices and rents - the pattern of economic change experienced by the kingdom within the free trade orthodoxy would occasion little disquiet, indeed considerable satisfaction; from the perspective of the elite, there was little to provoke a challenge to the dominant orthodoxy.[16] In summary, the Siamese elite did not attempt a creative challenge to western thought but a minimal accommodation with it. Perhaps herein lay the origins, in part, of the cultural decline and intellectual stagnation of the late absolute monarchy noted by Anderson,[17] of which the weakness of economic thought was one important aspect. The exception is, of course, *Sapphasat;* and here it is important to note that Phraya Suriyanuwat clearly stood outside the dominant intellectual environment of late absolute Siam, indeed was physically removed from it for most of his formative years.[18] Born in 1862, he was sent for schooling in Penang and then Calcutta from the age of nine. When he returned to Bangkok in 1876 he entered government service. In 1887, aged 25, Phraya Suriyanuwat was assigned to the Siamese Legation in London, and for the next 18 years he held a series of increasingly important diplomatic positions in Europe, notably in Paris. In 1905 he returned to Bangkok, and assumed the position of Minister of Public Works; the following year he became Minister of Finance but relinquished that position in 1908.[19] At the time

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[15] This general point is made by Anderson (1978:201,n.11).

[16] For a more extensive formulation of this argument, see Brown (1988:180-1).

[17] Anderson (1978:227-30). Anderson develops this argument specifically with reference to the sculpture, architecture and literature of the period.

[18] The following is taken from a brief account of the life of Phraya Suriyanuwat, included in the third (1975) printing of *Sapphasat*.

[19] I have argued elsewhere that Phraya Suriyanuwat was obliged to resign as Minister of Finance as a result of serious disquiet within the government with respect to his management of the exchange rate and following allegations of administrative incompetence in connection with the abolition of the opium farm and the establishment of an opium regie (Brown 1975:186-92). Other writers have argued that the King allowed (encouraged?) Phraya Suriyanuwat to resign in order to quell the fierce protest that had arisen from the

Sapphasat was published, Phraya Suriyanuwat, then aged 49, had spent no less than 23 years of his life away from Siam. These were the circumstances in which his intellectual independence would flourish.

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opium farmers in response to the abolition of the farm. [This is the argument advanced in the account of the life of Phraya Suriyanuwat referred to in the previous note, p. 15]. Whatever the circumstances of his resignation, it is clear that Phraya Suriyanuwat's ministerial career had been brief and, in essence, unsuccessful. He did not return to government service until 1926. But it would not be justified to see in this the origins of his attack on the extreme wealth, extravagance and market power of the elite. His analysis in *Sapphasat* is far too richly argued to have been driven by the pain of failed ambition.

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WARASAN SETTHASAT KANMU'ANG CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN POST-1976 THAILAND

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Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang (Journal of Political Economy) was inaugurated as a bi-monthly publication in January 1981 by the Economics Faculty and the Social Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University. It joins the ranks of the host of Thai-language journals that cater to the more scholarly community such as the long-established *Warasan thammasat, Pacarayasara,* and the popular-oriented *Sinlapa wathanatham.* Unlike the publications just mentioned however, *Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang* as its name indicates, has a definite theoretical focus, though within the ambit of critical scholarship, it allows for a wide range of Marxist, leftist theoretical and empirical expositions, and occasionally, even the odd 'orthodox' contribution (Phansak 1986; Chumsak 1986) (though these would be largely empirical).

To understand the origins of the Journal, one has to locate the 'political economy' adherents within the Thai academic setting. In 1978, a number of lecturers signed themselves 'Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University' in a letter they wrote to the local press criticizing government policies and suggesting alternative ways of handling economic problems. They later changed their collective name to 'the political economy group' to distance themselves from colleagues who did not necessarily share their perspective (Naphapho'n 1988: 48). Thus from the outset, 'political economy' was identified with the universities, and a critical outlook. While historians were trying to work out a framework that challenged the Damrong orthodoxy, the economists (including history students interested in economic history) pitted themselves against neo-classical economics, the dominant orientation in the economics faculties, which produced the philosophy and professionals that supported the import-substitution open economy that Thailand adopted since the 1960s.

The political economy group in Chulalongkorn University's economics faculty, unlike their counterparts in the history department, attained an existence almost apart from their other colleagues. They read a different literature, used a different vocabulary, and published in different journals, so distinct and uncompromising were their theories. The culmination of this was in the setting up within the economics faculty in 1988 of the Supha Sirimanon Library, named after the late veteran socialist whose collection of books formed the core of Thailand's first library of books on socialism.

A formal 'political economy group' *(klum setthasat kanmu'ang)* was instituted in 1981 when Chulalongkorn University's Social Research

Institute set up a political economy project, an indication of the credence gained by the political economy approach. The works of its practitioners, especially those on Thai economic history, were much respected, and the *acan* responsible for them were also given key faculty administrative posts. Its institutional existence meant that graduates from the political economy camp could find employment as researchers. 'Political Economy' conferences were held on a grand scale annually, and *Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang* was produced. The political economy scholars also had interests in a publishing house, *Sangsan*, which puts out most of their works. Thus the loose affiliation of like-minded scholars developed into a school *(samnak, sakun)*, producing succeeding generations who adhered to the same principles, having sufficient institutional strength to dispense largesse, and to have their own outlets of dissemination. This meant for one thing that its younger recruits would not have to face undue penalties for deviating from the mainstream where their career paths were concerned, and for another, an independence from potentially hostile or profit-oriented editorial boards and publishers.

Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang can be considered as the organ of the progressive intellectuals in the post-1976 period. It records the processes and paths taken by which they tried to redefine their theoretical orientation and their role in relation to their intellectual inheritance - as heirs to a tradition of the scholarship and political commitment of the Thai left; to Marxism; to the political and ideological adjustments made by the state since the post-1976 period; and in relation to their formulation of the socialist society. The whole tenor of *Warasan* is that of a collective intellectual exploration, not only out to win new adherents but also for its practitioners to refine their theoretical maps and co-ordinates. The spectrum of concerns is reflected in the composition of *Warasan*'s contents, which range from translations of Marxist terms (Witthayako'n 1983a); introductory essays on the Frankfurt School (Kancana 1984b); and on Foucault (Witthayako'n 1985-86); seminar proceedings, including the verbatim transcripts of the ensuing discussions; translations of Western-language articles, findings of M.A. theses, to introspective contributions that grapple with the question of the direction of progressive scholarship and its function in Thai society. Of the myriad writings that make up *Warasan*. it is the last mentioned that presents a unity. One can locate through them, the delineation of, and possible resolutions to a problem - the loss of intellectual direction.[1]

For the Thai intellectuals, as for the other components of the Thai social formation such as the monarchy, the military, capitalists who formed political parties, the middle class and even the religious establishment, the

[1] The other category of papers that can claim to be original are those that examine aspects of Thai society such as the peasantry, capitalists, and labour. However, these papers are disparate, and there is scant theoretical and empirical build-up among them. For instance, on the peasantry, see Witthayako'n (1983b); Siwarak (1985-86); Charami (1984).

1973-76 period of intense and heightened conflict and polarization meant that they took extreme stands which grotesquely tinted their ideological coloration. For the right, this meant the exaggerated and elaborate defence of Nation, Religion and King; for the radicals, an almost unquestioning reverence for and application of Maoist principles enshrined in the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

The post-1976 period (not referring to the aftermath of the cataclysmic 6 October bloodbath and coup, but to the subsequent picking up and reordering of the pieces, and hence excluding the ultra-conservative Thanin period) defines yet another time frame or analytical unit in Thai history, one whose terminal date has yet to come. Whereas writers and activists in the 1973-76 period rediscovered the critical essay and fictional heritage of the 1944-58 period that comprised Marxist works - some in translation, some original analyses in the vernacular (Reynolds and Hong 1983) - the current generation, while they pay homage to their intellectual and revolutionary forebears, also realised that they needed a new direction more pertinent to the condition of their times. The military's ideological unity of development authoritarianism had been dislodged, but it emerged from a phase of identity crisis with an ideology that was framed to answer the condemnation of its political and economic record and to justify a reformed military's political leadership (Chai-anan 1982) - this, at a time when the Thai left itself was undergoing its most serious ideological crisis in the aftermath of its renunciation of the CPT.

In the academic world, following the 6 October coup, critical scholarship steered a precarious path, in a climate of censorship and proscription. The major trend of critical analysis that weathered the period was the Chatthip school, mainly because of its emphasis on economic history (between 1855 and 1932). It was not considered to be dangerously heretical or incendiary, though in fact there were political implications in its anti-*sakdina* stand. Chatthip had, since 1974, marked out the political economy approach: historically-informed study of the Thai social formation principled on dialectical materialism (Chatthip 1974). This flowed through the editorial of the inaugural volume of *Warasan* entitled 'Analytical methodology of political economy'. The editor, Kanoksak Kaewthep, noted the singular failure of the discipline of economics and other social sciences to alleviate the economic problems that beset Thailand and the neighbouring countries. This was because their approach was ahistorical, borrowing models and techniques from other societies that were ill-suited to their own; there was also disciplinary exclusivity which in economics, often led to intricate micro-level studies which had little cognizance of the larger systemic relationships (*WSK* 1981). The orthodox social sciences were thus deemed incapable of formulating a well-fitted theory sensitive to Thailand's socio-economic and political configurations. The political economy scholars looked instead to Marxism. Of the three articles that launched the maiden issue, the first two, by Pricha Piamphongsan and Somkiat Wanthana respectively, explicated basic Marxist tenets, while the last was an analysis of the condition of Thai society using what it called a political economy

framework.

Pricha, who in 1976, introduced a first year undergraduate course on political economy at Thammasat University (Naphapho'n 1988: 44), laid out the groundwork of orthodox Marxist theory:[2] the primacy of the economic; classes and class struggles; the scientific nature of the laws of capital accumulation. The study of political economy was deemed to be essential to the unravelling of economic laws and objective factors that determined the trends and development of the economy and the resolution of inherent problems. For political economy was the discipline of class struggle; in the Thai case, under conditions of a semi-*sakdina*, semi-colony, with an emergent capitalism (Pricha 1981).

Somkiat similarly emphasised that '... theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses': the very study of human society is itself a form of struggle. The brief of *Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang* was thus the systematic formulation of the suffering, exploitation and injustice in Thai society, both as a heritage of the past and condition of the present, and by so doing, to arrive at liberation from the defective system (Somkiat 1981: 33).

As with the Chatthip school, the early writings in *Warasan* displayed confidence in the application and apprehension of theory, whether it be the Asiatic Mode of Production, orthodox Marxism, or the Maoism of the CPT. Theory was not considered a problematic - it was scientific and its laws inexorable. Theoretical debates were launched not within the political economy camp but with bourgeois scholarship. The assumption was that the complacency generated by the orthodox social sciences would be rudely upset once the people were alerted to the condition of their existence by the political economy studies. In this, there was little development from Aran and Jit (Aran 1950; Jit 1957) aside from there being more research, and elaboration of Marxist theory. Both these earlier works had emphasised the revolutionary implications of their linear Marxist theories. There was also little development from the 1973-76 generation, who took to heart the formula: theoretical rectitude equals revolutionary victory.

This confidence was undermined on two fronts by the 1980s: the first, to be discussed later, was the question of the political space for the intellectuals in the liberal-reformist era. The second was the realisation of the inadequacies and for some, the bankruptcy of the Marxist theories by which they had held such great store. This awareness derived from the intellectuals' direct involvement in the CPT, following the exodus into the jungle as a result of October 1976. Their subsequent differences and disillusionment with the CPT have been well chronicled, and for our purpose, can be encapsulated in Seksan's observation,

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[2] Or more accurately, a combination of political economy scholars, Russian, Chinese, and East European. Pricha 1981 cites Oscar Lange, Lenin, lesser known Russian names such as Lehrduch and Nemchivov, and *Fundamentals of Political Economy*, published by the Shanghai People's Press in 1974.

> They (the CPT leadership) received their political training during the Cultural Revolution which in a number of ways preached that China was the intellectual centre of the world. Therefore all that the Chinese did was deemed to be correct. There was insufficient effort to study humbly and respect the special features of Thai society and Thai people (Seksan 1981).

The pages of *Warasan*'s tenth anniversary of 14 October issue took up the question of the role of intellectuals in the post-1976 period and their relation to the CPT, Marxism and revolution. It typified the diminishing concern with economic history of the pre-capitalist and early capitalist periods, and the unproblematic theory that characterized the Chatthip school and the orthodox Marxists. The debate with bourgeois scholarship lost precedence to that within the alternative discourse itself. The editorial of the issue noted that the legacy of 14 October and the current context needed to be addressed: the growth of a middle class and of capitalist democracy; the changed position of the military in the political equation; the increased size of the working class; the politicization of the peasantry (*WSK* 1984). The 14 October commemorative issue was particularly significant for the contributions of two academics: Kasian Dechaphira (Kasian 1984a; 1984b) and Kancana Kaewthep (Kancana 1984a); both affirmed the role of intellectuals and the relevance of Marxism in the post-CPT period.[3]

Unlike those who despaired of Marxism and socialism altogether, Kasian was one of the younger activists who came to terms directly with the intellectual crisis. This he did by understanding the student movement of 1973-76 in terms of paradigmic changes, focussing on its nature in historical context, and by relating the Thai experience of disillusionment with Marxism and Maoism with that of the reassessment of Marxism and Stalinism by European Marxists.

Kasian found a breakthrough in Thomas Kuhn's theory of developments in scientific knowledge as the outcome of paradigmic revolutions, that is, when anomalies persist which cannot be accommodated within the received paradigm, and can only be resolved with 'a construction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications' (Kuhn 1962). Hence scientific knowledge was not 'truth', nor was it inviolable, but the most coherent explanations within the current paradigm which awaited disproving and displacement.

Kasian postulated that the student movement between 1973-76 underwent two paradigmic revolutions - the first, which rejected the

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[3] A key contribution in *WSK* which challenged the Mao 'semi-colonial semi-feudal' thesis and critically assessed the CPT's neglect of capitalist developments that have taken place in Thailand is contained in Songchai 1981. This article is not treated in the present work as it has been dealt with by Reynolds and Hong (1983).

paradigm of authoritarian dependent capitalist development; and the second which overthrew that of the CPT. The student leaders who precipitated the 14 October uprising were in many ways intellectual pioneers who had no set of received theories. They explored ideas of Marxism, the New Left, existentialism, liberal democracy and Buddhism in their opposition to the dictatorial regime. However, with the first paradigmic revolution in place but not yet hegemonic, student intellectuals at that juncture were caught up with propaganda work, and had not the time to indulge in theoretical education. The CPT networks and ideology soon managed to infiltrate the movement. In the years of dictatorship, it had been the CPT that kept alive the legacy of the Thai left, and the ideological and physical challenge against the regime whose repressive policies had quite effectively stemmed the flow of dissident thought and literature, such that the student movement had little hesitation in connecting the CPT tradition with its own ideas, especially when the Party also had associated itself with, and thus derived an aura of prestige from, the Cultural Revolution of Mao, then still the inspiration of Third World radicals in particular (Kasian 1984a: 45-50).

Kasian drew a vital distinction for the Thai intellectuals between the CPT and Marxism. The CPT's theory, which they had hastily adopted, was basically Stalinism-Maoism, with its monolithic dehumanizing and deintellectualizing framework. Such dictatorial and repressive models European intellectuals as Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Leszek Kolakowski and Isaac Deutscher had all rejected decades earlier (Kasian 1984b: 77). But it was Deutscher, who turned his back on the Communist Party of Poland, but not on Marxism and socialism whom Kasian quoted (Kasian 1984b: 89):

> If we are to face our task anew and enable a new generation of socialists to resume the struggle, we must clear our own minds to the misconceptions and myths about socialism that have grown up in the past decades. We must disassociate socialism once and for all not from the Soviet Union or China and their progressive achievement, but from the Stalinist and post- Stalinist parody of the socialist man. ... We must raise socialism back to its own height ... We must restore it in our minds first and then fortified in our conviction and rearmed politically, we must carry socialist consciousness and the socialist idea back into the working class (Deutscher 1972: 243).

The Thai left wing therefore had to dispel the myths about Marxism that it had upheld: that Marx was omniscient, and Marxism definitive; that the development of Marxism was unilineal and cumulative from Marx and Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao; that Marxists outside of this tradition were revisionists. Kasian saw the need for the Thai left to eschew the search for a 'formula', and to open their minds to Gramsci, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Althusser, etc; but to read Trotsky without being Trotyskyites, Mao without being Maoists (Kasian 1984b: 88). An independent analysis of the Thai social formation could grow out only of the synthesis of the Thai condition and a creative understanding of Marxism.

Kasian's two articles in the issue on 14 October were addressed directly to Thai intellectuals such as himself. It stressed that 14 October was not the be-all and end-all of their potential. The intellectuals have yet to define their new paradigm, but it was evident that this task would be most successfully borne by those concerned with theoretical issues - the post-1976 generation, a good number of whom had been exposed to the libraries of France, Holland, Britain and Japan (Kasian 1984a: 45). For the challenge as it stood had to do with the conceptual and the analytical. The intellectuals first needed to find themselves. This, Kasian attempted to accomplish by situating them in the context of the indigenous, as well as international Marxist historiographic tradition. The anguish and despair of the CPT heretics were neither unique nor necessarily meant permanent defeat. It simply demanded a return to the drawing board - the library - for a more educated, well-grounded comprehension of historical materialism that would inform praxis - in other words, 'going to and fro between the library (of Thammasat) and Sanam Luang' (Akhom 1985-86a: 31). This meant plugging into the considerations of Western Marxism.

Sympathetic liberal critics of the post-1973 student leadership had contemporaneously and in the post-October 1976 period noted how the disastrous turn of events had in no small part been wrought by the student activists themselves. They played into the hands of the rightist forces, which mobilised intensively the traditional symbols of Nation, Religion, King, against which they defined the students as anti-Thai and communists. Typical of this is Morell and Chai-anan's critique of the student movement:

> Many liberals were embarrassed about using the traditional, national symbols for political purposes, even if this would have been effective. In their view, this kind of tactic was premodern, and did not belong in political discourse. Although they considered themselves true nationalists who loved their king and respected the Buddhist religion, they were unwilling to 'wrap themselves in the flag'. In this regard, of course, they were simply indicating their lack of understanding of the true nature of modern Thai society, in which these premodern symbols retain enormous political salience (Morell and Chai-anan 1981: 175).

The non-Marxist academics thus identified the neglect of ideological work as the cause for the isolation of the students, leading to their loss of popular support, and hence to the movement's doom.

From the standpoint of orthodox Marxism, such analysis was not valid, for ideology was only the superstructure, the reflection of class relations, manifested as false consciousness. The material base was the only legitimate and meaningful level of analysis. However, the post-1976 generation of Thai intellectuals, exposed and relating to post-1968 Western Marxist sociology in particular, could make sense of the criticism of the political scientists. This sociology, which focussed on advanced capitalist societies and its revolutionary potential, marked out the state, and the related sphere of ideology as fields of analysis and political practice. The

Gramscian concerns of this focus was obvious:[4]

> It is vital ... for the working class not to isolate itself within the ghetto of proletarian purism. On the contrary it must try to become a 'national class', representing the interests of the increasingly numerous social groups. In order to do this it must cause the disintegration of the historical bases of the bourgeoisie's hegemony by disarticulating the ideological bloc by means of which the bourgeoisie's intellectual direction is expressed. It is in fact only on this condition that the working class will be able to rearticulate a new ideological system which will serve as a cement for the hegemonic bloc within which it will play the role of the leading force (Mouffe 1979: 195).

Kancana Kaewthep is an active academic who would fall into Kasian's category of post-1976 generation who had no ideological ties with the CPT. Kancana received her graduate education in France, and had contributed articles to *Warasan* introducing the Frankfurt School (Kancana 1984b), psychoanalysis (Kancana 1982), and on local consciousness (Kancana 1986). She has also translated Althusser's 'Ideological state apparatuses' into Thai. Her 'Ideology: direction of thinking and analysis' (Kancana 1984a) in the same '14 October' volume of *Warasan* is one of the more purposeful and fruitful products of the process of learning from Western Marxism. The format of articles which go beyond Marx is set by the need to establish genealogy: the large part of the first section is devoted to locating the place of ideology in Marxist theory, going through Marx and Engels, the orthodoxy, the early revisionists, and the Western Marxists of the 1960s onwards. And as with Western writings of the 1970s it rejects the economism and reductionism of what was labelled orthodox Marxism, largely the line of the Second International. In contrast to that line, these writings map out a non-reductionist conception of ideology (Mouffe 1979: 170), the relative autonomy of ideology (Kancana 1984a: 8), the dialectic of ideology (Therborn 1980b: 16), or ideology as social practice (Sumner 1979: 10) - different ways of saying that the ideological realm was a valid, and indeed crucial sphere of struggle. Elaborating on the Gramscian thesis by incorporating the works of more recent radical sociologists such as Göran Therborn, Colin Sumner, Pierre Ansart, and Eric Olin Wright, Kancana focussed on the strategic aspects of subaltern ideology. Therborn and Olin Wright had postulated that all ideologies exist in historical forms of articulation with different classes and class ideologies, which meant that forms of non-class ideology such as gender, religion, and nationalism are bound up with and affected by different modes of class existence and are linked to and affected by different class ideologies (Therborn 1980b: 123;

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[4] As can be seen from Kanchana (1984a), and the political economy debate on the theory of the state which will be examined later, Gramsci is the Marxist who is about the most influential on the Thai left. His biography by Guiseppe Fiore, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* has been translated into Thai by Naru'mon and Prathip Nakho'nchai. Among the non-Thai scholars, John Girling (1984) has attempted a Gramscian analysis of Thai society.

Kancana 1984a: 19). Kancana applied this to Thai society, concluding that it was the function of the intellectuals to articulate into its hegemonic principle, elements of non-class ideology such as thrift, industry, gratitude, religion, nationalism, dislocating them from the dominant ideology. In particular, she noted the need to articulate Marxism, popularly seen as a foreign class ideology, with Buddhism, the indigenous ideology, in order to gain acceptance for the former (Kancana 1984a: 20). Such efforts at ideological mobilization thus involved a change *in* rather than *of* the dominant discourse, effected at the level of daily life in relation to the forms of everday resistance, not just in crisis situations which threatened the powers in existence.

Kancana's article thus defined a new arena of political struggle for the intellectuals - ideology, the contest of which would ultimately determine the outcome of the socialist revolution. The most immediate task was a theoretical analysis of Thai society, out of which would be generated the contending ideology and its articulation of democracy, national interests, history etc. For this purpose, the Thai radicals had to establish anew their ties with society.

The embryonic nature of the intellectuals' endeavours becomes evident when contrasted with the confidence and aggressiveness with which the dominant ideology has adjusted itself to reassert its hegemony which had become out of joint with 14 October. It is the 'new' military (Suchit 1987: 9-24) that has seized the ideological initiative, appropriating the critique of the student activists against capitalism, and turning it against parliamentary politics, which it termed bourgeois dictatorship. Just as the left of the 1970s drew on their predecessors, so too the soldiers emphasised their genealogy, traced to the R.S. 130 coup plot, the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, and the Young Turks abortive coup, all of which were termed 'progressive' coups (Prasoet 1981:34). The reformist soldiers also defined themselves against the CPT - they were against all forms of dictatorship, including that of the proletariat. As for Thai parliamentary politics in the 1980s, it was painted as being nothing more than a minority group using their monopoly of politics to further bolster their economic interests in order to serve the ends of foreign monopoly capital. In the analysis of the reformist soldiers, Thailand was in a political, economic and ideological crisis, and needed a revolutionary solution - a (military-led) 'democratic revolution'. In a clever sleight of hand, both forms of alleged dictatorships were conflated : the CPT and its supporters have been using the class alliance, and the economic resources of influential Chinese in Thailand to destroy the nation's financial and economic stability (Yo'tthong 1981: 27-28) - not too obliquely pointing to the non-indigenous origins of the both. The military pressed the other social forces to choose sides between it and the capitalists. As its ideologue, Prasoet Sapsuntho'n put it:

> I observe that the progressive forces cheer the clever dictatorship - the parliamentarians, against those who use coups (those threatening a coup if the constitutional provisions were not amended). I cheer neither. In fact the former

are the more dangerous with its deception of the people (Prasoet 1982: 30).

The ideological offensive of the military, as well as its political manouevres, in particular, the attempts to revoke the clauses of the 1978 constitution which barred serving officers, both military and civilian, from concurrently sitting in the House of Representatives has meant that the current political protagonists are the military, and the party politicians; the erstwhile progressives have lost ground on the political scene and have been marginalised.

The concern about this resounds through *Warasan* in various references to the morass the intellectuals are in - such as Witthayako'n's remark that his introductory article to Foucault could perhaps add some flavour to the blandness of Thai intellectual life (Witthayako'n 1985-86: 132). The radical intellectuals were also conscious of the ruling elites' attempts to co-opt academics as advisors. They rejected the avenues thus opened as possible means effectively to bring about desired changes, for the entrenched system was simply too overwhelming, and in the end the intellectuals who allowed themselves to be co-opted with the hope of achieving changes would find themselves actually working to perpetuate the system (*WSK* 1983: 7-9). The many seminars on capital, the state, labour, and the military (*WSK* 1985; 1986a; 1986b), which attempt to analyse the economic and political conditions of Thai society, its resilience and contradictions, were efforts to grapple with the post-1976 conditions. This assumed a more theoretical focus in one such seminar which featured the debate between Akhom and Likhit (both pseudonyms) on the Marxist conceptualisation of the state.[5] The immediate context of the discussion was the military's attempts at constitutional amendments in 1982-83, which aroused an effort by the intellectuals to formulate a stand (which may explain the prudence of using pseudonyms) but the debate transcended immediate and narrow concerns about groups and individual political actors.

The more orthodox Marxist stand was taken by Likhit, who considered the state as a historical anathema: it was the agent of the dominant class and the instrument of oppression, both physical and ideological. The nation state, the product of capitalist relations, marked the most advanced form of alienation between the people and the state. Having laid out his theoretical premises, Lihkit went into the analysis of the Thai state. The oppressive Thai state was developed markedly by the emergent bureaucratic stratum out of, rather than in opposition to, the preceding mode, from which it inherited a weak and dependent capitalist class, but a developed bureaucratic structure. It reached its height during the Second World War with Phibun's promotion of 'the Leader', which was the personification of the State. In the post-war period, contradictions were introduced between the bureaucratic capitalists and their policy of state capitalism, and the new

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[5] This debate is laid out in two articles by the authors, and the transcript of the discussion that followed (see Likhit 1985-86a; 1985-86b; Akhom 1985-86a; 1985-86b).

global economic and political priorities, which contradiction was resolved by the Sarit regime and the import substitution strategy under the aegis of conservative symbols of rule and military-bureaucratic capital. The decade of growth which this brought about ran out with the crisis in the international and the internal economy. The economic dislocations were matched by political and social disequilibrium, manifested in the concatenation of forces and events that went into making 14 October 1973 - the wresting of state power from the conservative[6] *(klum anurak)* and military bureaucratic capitalists. There were two concurrent forces at work to negate the configuration of state power in 1973 - that of the capitalists and labour, each according to the logic of its class position, but neither was strong enough as a class to withstand the physical and ideological reaction of the conservative and military bureaucratic capitalist class. Out of the specificities of the situation, in particular the rightist onslaught which evoked traditional symbols, the conservative faction emerged dominant in the conservative-military bureaucratic alliance, and it is this modified bureaucratic capitalist state that has worked out the present compromise which combined semi-democracy with an export-oriented economic strategy in order to accommodate other social forces, in particular, the big capitalists. This compromise would probably last so long as economic buoyancy was sustained; but when the built-in contradictions come to the fore, affecting economic performance, the 'suspended revolution' would be set in motion once again, this time with greater intensity.

In Likhit's analysis then, the bureaucratic state remained intact, but in the 1980s the dominant partner was the conservative rather than military bureaucratic capitalists such as the likes of Thano'm and Praphat. It has maintained Parliament as a sop to the big capitalists, and in order to increase leverage over the military bureaucracy. The fiction of representative democracy was thus sustained. In terms of strategic considerations, by implication, Likhit would play down the significance of the big capitalists and parliament as a viable counterpoise to military dictatorship, and would not accommodate any alternative to the class revolution, in which the intellectuals would be in historic alliance with the workers, and the prime target would be the dominant class in control of state power - the conservative bureaucratic capitalists.

This analysis (and strategy) was hotly challenged by Akhom, who criticized at great length the traditional Marxist reductionist conception of the state as a mirror of class relations, in which politics and ideology were reduced to the relations of production of the social formation. In its stead, citing Gramsci, Theda Skocpol (Skocpol 1979), Göran Therborn (Therborn 1980), and Isaac Deutscher (Deutscher 1984), and in particular the analysis of John Urry (Urry 1981), Akhom raised civil society and the relative autonomy of the state as critical concepts in the Marxist analysis of capitalist societies.

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[6] By far the most prominent component of the *klum anurak* is the monarchy.

In this analysis, capitalism as generalised commodity exchange (differentiation of the sphere of production and circulation) is taken as its basic feature. Out of this, society can be conceptualised into three spheres - the economic, civil society, and the state. It is in the sphere of circulation, which is located in civil society, that surplus value is realised, hence the relative autonomy of civil society from production. Moreover, the reproduction of the essential commodity labour power takes place not within production, but in civil society, wherein the class struggle between capital and labour is also enacted. Thus there are no pure classes determined economically - classes exist only through the precise manner in which the dominant capitalist relations, with a particular division of the antagonistic functions of capital and labour, are manifested in civil society.

Akhom's analysis of Thai society, though highlighting similar landmarks and turning points as Likhit, interprets them differently. In Akhom, the tension demarcated is between the Thai state and civil society, rather than conservative and military bureaucratic class, and labour. The events of October 1973 were the struggle by civil society to curb the excesses of the state, and for formal representation in its legislative organs. At present, Thai politics is the working out of an appropriate institutional form in which civil society can reduce the relative autonomy of the military-dictatorship state, with the latter resisting the political autonomy of civil society, expressed through parliamentary politics, but not out to destroy capitalist relations. The result of the current impasse is the condition of semi-democracy, typified by factionalism endemic within cabinet, which is comprised of the instruments of state, the conservative, bureaucratic capitalists, and the big capitalists. This results in policy implementation being ineffective. For instance, the expressed policy of privatisation of the economy through selling off state enterprises made little headway, because of the vested interests involved, with the representatives of the instruments of state, in particular, the military, supported by labour groups representing workers in the state enterprises, resisting the scheme.

In the orthodox analysis discussed earlier, the case of privatisation would have been interpreted as illustrating the dominance of the bureaucratic capitalists who, through their control of the state, moved to check the economic horizons of the big capitalists - it was a competition for *economic* resources between fractions of capital. The Ahkom critique of this would be that it blurred the conceptual distinction between the state and the bureaucratic capitalists. At one time, the bureaucratic capitalists did dominate the state, but since 1973, this was no longer the case. The big capitalists have made inroads, but at present, it was still the conservative bureaucratic capitalists that have the most political resources. The instruments of state worked to preserve the autonomy of the state and to dominate both the big capitalists and conservative bureaucratic capitalists through military dictatorship, but its ideological resources for this purpose were inadequate, despite attempts to reformulate a rationale for military intervention in politics as discussed earlier. The military bureaucrats thus

need to give due cognizance to the conservative bureaucratic capitalists, whose ideological fund remains the most substantial, and to tolerate the existence of parliamentary politics. For its part, the conservative bureaucratic capitalists would not be adverse to parliament, for its perceived support for 'democracy' would enhance its own legitimacy; and the balance that it holds between the state and parliament obviously redounds to its benefit.

The strategic and tactical implications of the debate are fundamental to the discourse, though these are implied rather than stated in the pages of *Warasan*. It is perhaps this link between theory and practice that accounts for the urgent, insistent tone and wide-ranging scope of Ahkom's critique of Likhit's rejection of the concepts of civil society and the relative autonomy of the state. For the orthodox Marxist conception which Likhit propounded would lead to a non-reformist view of politics. Socialism can only be achieved through totally revolutionizing capitalist society, smashing the bourgeois state and ideology, and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. His expectation of a future 'October 14' was predicated on the crisis-prone nature of the export-oriented economy; when economic disruption actually broke out, the 'suspended revolution' would resume, and the working class would negate the bureaucratic capitalist state. Meanwhile, all else would be of little consequence - the question of military-parliamentary polarization thus did not demand a concerted strategic response for it would make little difference to the revolution when it eventually came.

But if a '14 October' was an inevitability, so too was a '6 October'. Having discounted ideology as a meaningful field of struggle in his economic framework, the logical extension of Likhit's analysis was that class contradiction would automatically pit labour and the allied progressive groups against the capitalists and their supporting 'decadent' networks. The immanent laws of dialectical materialism would dictate the defeat of the latter. But this did not happen between 1973-76, and there was no reason why it should in the future.

By contrast, the primacy of ideology as a field of struggle was inherent in Akhom's arguments - the Gramscian postulation of the necessity of a class becoming hegemonic before the seizure of power, otherwise the momentarily triumphant revolutionary forces would find themselves facing a largely hostile population, still confined within the mental universe of the bourgeoisie (Femia 1981:52). In Thailand, the bourgeoisie, the principal economic class, as well as labour, and civil society in which they operate was weak, and the military-dominated state strong. In the first instance, the need therefore was to strengthen civil society (at this stage, involving supporting parliament against military dictatorship). When the principal economic class was strong, the relative autonomy of the state would be reduced. In such a situation, the task of the subordinate class was not only to wage a war of position - the steady penetration and subversion of the complex and multiple mechanisms of ideological diffusion to wrest the hegemony of civil society from the capitalists - but also the war of

movement (rapid frontal assault on the adversary's base) against the weakened state power. Otherwise the crisis of the capitalist class would only benefit the military dictatorship.

Thus the Akhom thesis suggested a temporary siding with the capitalists and parliamentary politics, preventing the strengthening of state power, and questioned the wisdom of direct confrontation with the conservative bureaucratic capitalists. This strategy was learned from 6 October as much as derived from Urry's sociology. Akhom admitted that, despite his lengthy exposition on the autonomy of the state (which Urry contended meant that at times the state would intervene on the side of labour's struggle against capitalist exploitation - he gave cases of this in Britain), he did not consider the Thai state as being capable of 'progressiveness', as it was too beholden to capitalists for funds at all levels (Akhom 1985-86b: 56).

Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang is a publication by Thai political economy intellectuals for Thai political economy intellectuals. This observation contains an element of negative assessment, namely, the inaccessibility of its writings to laymen unfamiliar with the host of Marxist theories paraded and the esoteric code that serves as its vocabulary.

It was not meant to be this way. The political economists make grand claims as intellectuals. Unlike the mainstream economists who use their expertise to fine-tune the economic system, they take a macro and total view, and aim to educate the people so that they too could participate in making choices for society. The political economy advocates did not want simply to replace the specialists' expert solution with their own. Hence they declared that they need make no apologies for not entering into frays like the margin of baht devaluation, for such matters only touched on symptoms, whereas they worked at more fundamental levels (*WSK* 1985). Embodied in this statement of purpose is a defence against the accusation that the political economy school was only good at criticising, without coming up with anything constructive where policy matters were concerned.

Such criticisms of the political economy scholars are not entirely unfounded. However, one needs to appreciate the need for the political economy intellectuals to conduct dialogues among themselves, to sort out their role in the changing matrix of Thai society. It is very self-conscious of their process having to convince themselves, no less than society, of their relevance. *Warasan* is a working out of the former, more intellectual introspective aspect, rather than the latter, more extrovert and practical stance. Some of the political economy intellectuals have arrived at a resolution of the two, the most obvious being those who advocate the *Watthanathamchumchon* ideology (Chatthip 1989), or a new Buddhism with elements of liberation theology (which finds expression in the journal *Pacarayasara)*. Meanwhile, others still search for their nexus with society. *Warasan setthasat kanmu'ang* operates within the conditions of a social formation of which it is an integral part, and which it aims to dislodge.

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THE COMMUNITY CULTURE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Chatthip Nartsupha

The community culture (*wathanatham chumchon*) school of thought has emerged in Thai society over the last ten years or so. It has expanded rapidly, has become more systematic, and is now the main school of thought of non-governmental development organisations (NGOs), attracting serious attention among intellectuals, academics, students, development organisations (both Buddhist and Christian) and in particular intellectuals and students in regional provinces.

This paper aims to present the main ideas of the school, its origins and also an analysis and evaluation of its ideas, as a leading school of thought in contemporary Thai society.

THE MAIN IDEAS OF THE COMMUNITY CULTURE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

The main ideas of the school can be summarised by looking at the thought of four intellectuals, Niphot Thianwihan (1947-), Bamrung Bunpanya (1945-), Aphichat Tho'ngyu (1954-) and Prawet Wasi (1931-).

Niphot Thianwihan

Niphot Thianwihan was born in Samphran, Nakhon Pathom, and brought up in Phayao. His mother was a Christian; his father was a military medical officer. He attended Sirimat Thewi School, which was a missionary school in Pan district in Chiangrai, Assumption School in Siracha district in Chonburi, and St. Joseph School in Samphran, Nakhon Pathom. He then undertook religious studies in Penang, Malaysia, for six years. He graduated in 1974 and was ordained a Catholic priest in the following year. During his studies, he went to live with villagers in the rural North, helping his relatives working in the fields while on vacation. When he graduated, he became the Director of the Centre for Social Development of the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD) in Chiangmai, working with the Karen. It was only recently that he began to work with Thai villagers in the lowland areas.

Father Niphot began to develop the community culture line of thought in 1977, when he saw that helping villagers to set up organisations for economic purposes, such as rice banks, merely created further problems, as the project and the community were sometimes at odds and that there were in addition internal conflicts between the participants. He then developed the idea of promoting communality - the community's identity and pride.

In 1981 he played a major role in the organisation of a seminar, 'Thai Culture and Rural Development', held at Sawangkhaniwat under the patronage of CCTD. This was the first time that the concept was presented and disseminated systematically. Later, under the pseudonym 'Bunthian Tho'ngprasan', he wrote articles presenting the idea regularly in CCTD journals. He has been a leader in CCTD training courses, and a leading thinker behind the CCTD's expanding work, to the point where the idea has become the main inspiration of NGOs in Thailand. In 1988 Kancana Kaewthep, a colleague of Father Niphot, collected his articles into a book, *The idea of community culture in development*. With his theoretical capability, his commitment to work with the people and with the support of a strong Catholic organisation, Father Niphot has been able to promote his ideas to the point where they are highly influential within the NGOs. He is an originator of this school of thought, and the figure who presents it in the most theoretical way.

Father Niphot's ideas can be summarised into two main points. First, a community has its own culture. Second, it is a culture which values human beings and a harmonious community. Community culture is the most crucial driving force behind community development; it can be utilised when the consciousness of its members is raised to achieve an awareness of their own culture.

A community has its own culture, that is to say a value system which has been assembled through time as a summary of the ideas and practices of the community. It is the way of life and the direction of development which the villagers themselves have evolved. The core of this community culture is the importance it places upon human beings and a harmonious community. The communities have existed, the villages have existed, for a long time because there has been harmony within the community. Furthermore the present and past members of the community share common ancestors. Rural development must start from the base of the community culture which is the villagers' strength. If the community culture is strong, it is not difficult for villagers to organise themselves as a group in order to carry out various activities. It also makes it possible to resist external exploitation. Father Niphot believes that community culture remains intact, because the community has its own mechanism of cultural reproduction. Even though new factors arise, the original culture remains. Being practised over such a long time, it has become ritualised, a ritual accompaniment to the community. Father Niphot maintains that we have to base our analysis on the concept that village society is in harmony. Anyone who causes disharmony in village society is sinful. The villagers have a process that can reverse this disharmony. There has to be a ceremony to redress wrongdoing. There must be forgiveness in order to achieve unity and mutual help. This is the new criterion upon which we have to base our social analysis, and this process has radically changed the structure of (development) activities.

Community culture is the most crucial driving force in community development because it is created by the people themselves. Therefore if a

development worker wants to understand and work consistently with villagers, he or she must understand the community culture, and must study the villagers' history and their way of life. Moreover, development workers and intellectuals may strengthen community development by joining with the villagers to help them to achieve a clearer awareness of their own culture, because long-established practices have become so much a part of the villagers' sub-conscious that they may have forgotten why they do such things. An analysis of community history can enable the people to recover the origin of their practices and rituals; make them realise their own values and identity; discover the independent consciousness of the community; recognise the value of communal organisation; inculcate a sense of history of their common struggle and make them realise the threat of domination from external, alien cultures aimed at exploiting the villagers. Father Niphot has concluded that 'consciousness-raising in development is the search for the real consciousness of the community in order to fight against the false consciousness created by outsiders'. Summing up Father Niphot's ideas, a development worker has said he believes that if the ideology of the disadvantaged is not dominated, there can emerge a powerful ideology for struggle.

What is the essence of this 'community culture'? In Father Niphot's opinion, it is religion; 'religion is the core, the centre for explaining various values'; he and 'people's organisations.... have ideologies which are historical and are linked together by religious beliefs .... Social theories are used only as a tool, not an ideology. Religious beliefs are the ideology or the standpoint'. The religion here is Christianity, but according to an interview with Father Niphot, Christianity, in his view, expresses itself in the history, culture and beliefs of local people. While studying the history of the Jewish people in the Bible makes us understand God, we must also study the history of our communities to understand that same God. Father Niphot says that 'the Holy Ghost is here. Truth is God. We must understand God from our cultural base', and 'theology must be located in historical philosophy'. In other words, Father Niphot believes in localised Christianity, and this is the heart of community culture.

Bamrung Bunpanya

Bamrung Bunpanya was born into a wealthy peasant family in Surin. He graduated from Kasetsat University and then worked for four years as a civil servant before resigning to work for the Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF). He went abroad for further studies, but did not complete his course. He returned and worked for NGOs, but he has now resigned to take care of his two children. He remains an honorary adviser of several NGOs. Bamrung is a senior development worker who is respected by the new generation of NGO workers. His ideas consist of three main points: 'two currents in culture'; self-reliance; and the role of the middle class.

Bamrung started to think about the 'two currents in culture' in 1978. He was the first development worker outside the Catholic organisations to

think about community culture. At that time there was no specific name for each cultural trend. He developed his ideas from his experience in rural development projects, implemented by the RRF, in Chainat. In 1980 there was discussion among development workers about the existence of 'two currents in culture' in Chainat. One current was village culture, the other capitalist culture. The village culture is independent of the middle-class and the upper-class culture. It is related to a way of life which is in close touch with nature, and relies on the use of physical labour; a community of kinship and a village community. It is 'the oldest form of society'. No matter what outside circumstances have been and how they have changed, the essence of a village or a community, its economic, social and cultural independence, has remained for hundreds of years. The village community thus has its own independent belief systems and way of development. However the line of economic development that Thailand follows is an imported idea, which is linked to internal state power. This is, namely, the capitalist way of development, geared to supply the needs of Westerners. We are at a disadvantage in this kind of development. The more development there is, the poorer we are. Those who get rich, of whom there are few, apart from the Westerners, are those who serve the Westerners. This minority are *'khon krung pen phuak phu di tin daeng, phuak tam kon farang* ' (upper-class urban people who have no experience of hard work and imitate Westerners).

Bamrung proposes that the direction of development should be changed so that the villagers rely on themselves as they had done in the past. They must begin by being independent minded and conscious of their own identity. In Bamrung's own words: 'consciousness of our own identity, the consciousness that enables us to understand that when someone comes to tell us to plant something or other, the aim is only to use our labour. All the activities that we have done are mainly for the benefit of others - to accept national economic objectives is to destroy the economy of the community'. Villagers should mainly produce for subsistence; production should be at an appropriate level, using mainly domestic labour. '(Villagers) should shake away the bonds of dependence, the bonds of the market system, and return to self-reliance.' Even at the national level, the aim should be internal self-reliance; that is to say, the national aim should be changed from production for export to 'production that allows everyone to have sufficient ..... and only then the surplus can be exported'. The government should adopt a 'nationalist economy' policy, promoting import-substitution industries, agricultural processing industries, agricultural-related industries, small-scale industries, rather than foreign industries. However in Bamrung's view, a nationalist economic policy has always been killed before birth. Such a policy cannot flourish in Thai society because it is strongly resisted by those who would lose by it.

Bamrung then considers the role of the middle-class in the promotion of community culture, especially development workers. He suggests that the duty of the middle-class is to exchange culture with the villagers. They must not order the villagers about or dominate the villagers' way of

thinking. In Bamrung's view, the duties of the middle-class are threefold: to disseminate the villagers' own culture, knowledge and thought systems more widely among the middle-class itself; to increase the distribution of resources from urban to rural areas; and to oppose state pressure upon villages. Therefore, according to Bamrung, the ideal would be to link the middle-class or the bourgeoisie with the peasants. 'We ... do not reject the middle-class' discourse, but at the same time the middle-class should not deny that the villagers have their own independent discourse as well'. Bamrung fears that 'the middle-class will come to hold exclusive rights of leadership - absolutely exclusive'. He wants to transform the role of the middle-class into a new dimension. The existing dimension is that the middle-class is an agent for importing a western way of thinking ..... This dimension must be changed in such a way that the middle-class becomes the agency for adopting and expanding a philosophy and aim of life which are products of the villagers' practices'. He is emphatic that to 'regard the middle-class as being capable of disappearing, leaving only villagers ..... is impossible'. Bamrung's ideology, then, contains anarchistic characteristics; it opposes the state. His aim is to join together people from various classes to resist the state. However, he resists only some kinds of capitalism. Bamrung still accepts private enterprise in industry. Moreover, he has a place and a role for the bourgeoisie.

Aphichat Tho'ngyu

While Bamrung argues the significance of both local culture in the social and economic development of the country and the wider political dimension, by proposing that the villagers should work with the middle-class in their struggle, Aphichat Tho'ngyu emphasizes the ethical values of local culture rather than the use of this culture to resist the state and capitalist culture. Aphichat is deeply impressed by this local culture because he came from an urban background while Bamrung grew up in the country. Aphichat was born in Chonburi to a middle-class family. He was a teacher in a Catholic school, Darasamut. He graduated in Geography from Sinakharinwirot University (Bangsaen) and became a lecturer in the Central Region Public Health College. At one time he was a freelance musician and painter. He has worked as a development worker for Redd Barna (the Norwegian Save the Children Fund) since 1981.

Aphichat shares with Bamrung the idea that there are two currents in culture. The villagers have had their own independent culture since ancient times - the culture which may be called 'the way of the village'. This culture still persists in village institutions. Aphichat has tried to prove that 'the way of the village' still exists by arguing that human beings may behave in a certain way while in fact they do not really like it; villagers may have to accept capitalism while in their heart of hearts they are opposed to it. Aphichat concludes that the villagers 'want the convenience and comfort of today, but they also want to preserve the old, traditional culture, a way of life and society which is moral, just and kind-hearted'. Moreover in the village there is no differentiation into classes,

particularly in terms of consciousness. 'The villagers have the same consciousness, which is also in harmony with the community'. The village community then remains as a system that has its own identity, both socially and culturally. They are related within the system. The village has not disintegrated. Aphichat therefore disagrees with some academics who believe that the process of differentiation within the village has reached the point where its members are in conflict and the wealthy have become a part of an external system.

The difference between Aphichat and Bamrung lies in the fact that Aphichat tries to describe the virtues of the society and culture of the Thai peasant community, appealing to development workers to maintain and promote the values of local culture in rural development, while Bamrung stresses the middle-class acceptance of peasant culture, to make the local culture a part of national development as a whole rather than being concerned only with rural development. Aphichat's books, *Caru'k wai tham klang yuk samai thi sapso'n* (Notes in the midst of a complex era, 1983) and *Sai than samnu'k lae khwam song cam* (The stream of consciousness and memory, 1985) best reflect his feelings. He states that the way of the village is the way of life of peasants who work in the field, who themselves create their tools and pass on all their methods, regulations, and patterns from generation to generation. This process has existed for a long, long time at the roots of society. Every cultivating season, people in the village will grow rice for you .... Tomorrow they will continue to work .... They are the ones who give life to all of us, but they never proclaim what they do. The most important aspect of the way of the village is 'kind-heartedness, fullness of love and abundant goodwill'. This is a moral, humanistic and pacific relationship. The village never hurts anyone; and every time that villagers suffer, whenever there is pain, they set about easing it among themselves.

Development in Aphichat's opinion is therefore the passing on of this wonderful communal culture, so that the villagers search for development solutions by themselves. There is no need to surrender to modern culture and rupture the wonderful pattern of our model society - an action which will create vagueness in the true values of life and degrade them. Aphichat says that villagers sum up their solution to the village's problems by saying that 'on the one hand, they must achieve spiritual recovery and then pass on their virtues to the younger generation, and on the other hand they must rely more on themselves'. The development workers' task is merely to reinforce this continuity, to learn the communal culture in order to be able to join the villagers in social construction, to help the villagers to revive and analyse the history of their community so that they can recognise the values of their original culture and rely more on themselves. Aphichat differs from Bamrung on the role of development workers. He sees them not, like Bamrung, as agents for disseminating communal culture among the middle-class, but as catalysts in helping the villagers to recognise the values of the communal culture among themselves. However both Aphichat and Bamrung agree that the right way for

development is self-reliance, both economically and culturally. The villagers have originally had this self-reliance but they are now losing it.

Prawet Wasi

The anti-state character in the community culture ideology appears most evidently in the ideas of Prawet Wasi. Prawet was born into a family of local traders in Kancanaburi. He graduated in Medicine from Mahidol University and continued his studies in America with an Ananda Mahidol Scholarship. He gained a Ph.D. in Haematology from the University of Colorado and later became a Professor in the Faculty of Medicine, Sirirat Hospital. He was awarded the Magsaysay Award in 1981 as an NGO leader. Prawet's thinking can be summarised in three main points:

1. It is anti-state. Prawet thinks that the state or state bureaucracy cannot carry out development work successfully, because the bureaucracy was created for governing, controlling and taxing. It is a power-centralised system, giving out commands vertically. The bureaucracy cannot understand rural communities. The Thai state introduced many laws but these laws have tied the country down, paralysing it, obstructing initiative, thwarting democracy and the people's participation. Thailand is a country with too much bureaucracy. Everything has first to be officially approved. The bureaucracy has dominated every aspect of the country. Solving this problem through elections alone is insufficient. Administrative power must be decentralised and greater authority given to communities. Prawet suggests that a real solution would be 'to decrease the power of civil servants over communities, barring this power from reaching the communities, and giving the communities the right to plan, to make decisions and to implement any activity, of which they are capable of many, by themselves'. It is a transfer of power back to the people, to the communities.

2. The emphasis is on the promotion of community. The organisation that in ancient times put up the most powerful resistance to the state was the community. This is an important characteristic of Thai history. Prawet states that in the long pre-history of mankind, there was no government, no state; there were only private citizens who lived their lives, developing themselves and each other. In Prawet's opinion, the rural communities must be strengthened, that is to say, they must possess *bencakhan* (the Five Aggregates - the five groups of 'existence' in Buddhist terms) which he expounds as: righteousness, diligence and solitude; a subsistence mode of production of integrated agriculture; a balance with the natural environment; economic self-reliance and the eradication of external dependence; and communal life, the institutions of family and *wat*, and a communal culture of mutual aid. This rural community will develop its knowledge and expertise from original knowledge which is called 'popular wisdom' (*phum panya chao ban* or *prichayan tho'ng thin)* and combine it with international knowledge. This combination and connection between communal culture and universal culture is the 'major tactic in a balanced and effective development'. Apart from encouraging the communities to

develop themselves, Prawet believes that NGOs should increase their role because these organisations have intervened in the lives of the communities by respecting the members of those communities. The NGOs must tread gently as they do not possess any power. He also suggests that the people should organise themselves into groups of 7-20 persons, meeting weekly to study and exchange their knowledge and virtue, to utilise this knowledge and virtue for the peace and development of society and the communities. These groups will not seek power or advance their own interests at the expense of others. They are linked to each other in a friendly way without imposing any authority upon each other; and because they do not seek power or to advance their own interests, they will endure.

In summary, Prawet's idea is that the people must organise as groups and small organisations to help and strengthen each other. These groups and organisations may manifest themselves in the form of village communities, NGOs or intellectual groups. Internal and inter-group relations must be conducted on the basis of equality. The state's power and duties must be reduced, and transferred back to those small groups and organisations. When the small organisations take up these duties, they may not need to use power. Prawet's idea is in fact an anarchistic ideology. Furthermore, Prawet wants to upgrade local culture by adding Dhamma, the Buddhist teachings (to be described in detail in the next section), and combine it with the universal culture, especially universal knowledge. At the same time, the 're-conditioned' village communities - re-conditioned on the original base - will have more duties because certain duties, now performed by the state, particularly development, will be transferred back to them. State power will be dissolved.

3. Religious principles, especially Buddhism, must be applied in development: that is to say, development must improve both the people's spirit and the environment. The base of this development must be strongly moral and ethical. Prawet believes that without a moral and ethical base, there can be no real development for the people, because human beings will promote themselves, be selfish, have *kilesa* (vices) and *tanha* (desire), which will overshadow wisdom and other virtues. Pure Buddhism promotes morals and ethics. Its teachings consist of *sila* (precepts), *samadhi* (concentration-meditation) and *phanya* (wisdom). *Sila* means a low level of consumption or in other words, a decrease of materialism. *Samadhi* means a peaceful mind. When the mind is peaceful, human beings can improve their behaviour. *Phanya* means understanding the nature of things. Development which has these three factors - precepts, meditation and wisdom - is then perfect development, that is it develops the mind. Prawet suggests that the communities should adopt religion as an element in their culture, creating moral communities. This implies that Prawet re-interprets Buddhism, which was the state's culture, and gives to it the task of being the guardian of community harmony. Buddhism in this way is applied to unite the community's members, and enable the community to have its own identity and become strong. Buddhism is then used to resist the state, to resist greed, selfishness

and exploitation which are products of a capitalist way of development. Community culture, according to Prawet, is therefore village culture plus Buddhism. In this sense, Prawet's view is different from those of Aphichat and Bamrung. The philosophical element of Buddhism is a system of thought of the middle-class, of which Prawet is a representative, not of the villagers. The moral community is something newly created, containing some new elements, and is not exactly the same as the village community in the past.

Comparing the ideas of these four intellectuals, one may divide them into two groups. Bamrung and Aphichat really think like villagers. They admire the villagers' culture in its pure form. Intellectuals' organisations can only show deep awareness of this culture and help to maintain it. On the other hand, Father Niphot and Prawet suggest a combination of villagers' culture and religion. In the case of Father Niphot, intellectuals will combine Christianity with local beliefs. In the case of Prawet, intellectuals and Buddhist monks will fuse Buddhism with the villagers' beliefs. We can note some differences between each of these two pairs of thinkers. Comparing Aphichat with Bamrung, Aphichat has the utmost admiration for the village community and villagers' culture. He gives the fullest details of the villagers' way of life and thoughts. He considers ways of maintaining these values and virtues within the villages. Bamrung, on the other hand, encourages villagers to maintain their local culture in order that they can join forces to bargain with merchants and the state. He also wants to persuade the middle-class to accept community culture as their own culture. As for comparing Father Niphot and Prawet, Father Niphot's proposals look out from within the community. They come from having worked more closely with villagers than Prawet. Although there is an element of Christian theological theory, this school of theology recognises local culture and holds that God is manifest in the local culture. Prawet has not had as much experience working with villagers. His proposal is made therefore from the position of a well-wisher from outside the community who is in sympathy with the villagers. His articles have had some effect in the sense that they call upon the middle-class and upper-class to be concerned about the problems and feelings of the people living in the countryside, rather than to mobilize the villagers.

THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNITY CULTURE THOUGHT

The community culture school of thought owes its origin to both internal and international factors. It is a discourse that has become popular because of both its Thai characteristics and international circumstances. With regard to external factors, it is an outcome of the transformation in Christian teachings which resulted from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the increase of international aid through NGOs. With regard to internal factors, it is a consequence of the perceived threat of capitalism towards village communities, of a fear that communities are disintegrating while community culture remains strong; and finally the intellectual and

political awakening of intellectuals and educated people and their participation in national politics after the 14 October 1973 events.

In an interview with the author, Father Niphot disclosed that the Second Vatican Council deeply influenced his way of thinking and also that of other workers in the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development. In addition, the ideas of the Vatican Council have strongly affected the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference and the Catholic Council of Thailand's ways of thinking. The agreements arrived at in the conference by bishops coming from all over the world with respect to community culture may be summarised in three main points:

1. The Church must relate to this world, listen to the problems of human beings in this world and try to solve these problems. In the past it was believed that this world was unreal, was nothing of importance. We lived in this world only to go to heaven. Preachers and pious believers then separated themselves from the world, and prayed for their final destiny, heaven. The Church was not a part of the world. The Second Vatican Council has changed this thinking. The new theology regards this world and human society to be important as a base with a bridge to heaven. The world and heaven are not separated as formerly believed. The Church therefore has a crucial role in this world. The Church must study, understand, change and improve human society, using the light from God as its guidance, rather than being concerned only with the purification of its teachings and with rituals as in the past.

2. Men who do not know the Gospel or the Church may survive if they follow their conscience enlightened by God's grace. In other words, men who have beliefs and behave according to the beliefs of their culture may survive, depending on God's judgement; there is no need to profess oneself as a Christian. This means that the Catholic Church agrees to have a dialogue with other cultures and other religions. The Church agrees to consider favourable aspects in other religions and other cultures. This amounts to the Church recognizing local culture and local beliefs. The Federation of Asian Bishops expanded on this statement in its first conference in Taipei on 22-27 April 1974. It stated that the Federation's first duty is the creation of a local church that is 'a church which has its roots among the people; it must be truly local in terms of culture and its life .... The church must have a dialogue with other cultures, other traditions and other religions in that locality .... The church must live its life in the same way as the people who have settled down in that locality, by willingly and rejoicingly accepting the people's history and their present life as its model. The church must accept everything belonging to the local people, including their meanings and values, such as their dreams, their way of thinking, their language, their arts and songs'. In the second conference in Calcutta, 1978, the Federation expressed its concern that Asia was encountering the problem of disintegration of its cultural heritage. 'The Church should try to maintain and promote local culture, successfully complete God's work with these people, through their national culture, even before they have a chance to hear the word of Christ... .'

3. The Church must be a servant to the people. It must not ask others to serve it and must not regard itself as superior. The Church must help create justice and equality on this earth. Production must be to serve human beings and not for profit or power. This line of thinking implies that Christian priests and laymen must work, engage in praxis, helping others whether they are Christians or not. They also have to learn from others, particularly those who are in a disadvantageous position in society.They must not see themselves as superiors trying to convert non-believers, as happened in missionary work during the colonial age. Father Niphot suggests that studying and absorbing the beliefs and culture of the poor will enable priests and laymen to accept these beliefs and culture, which in turn will convert the priests and laymen to the people's cause.

The Federation of Asian Bishops stated in its first conference in 1974 that it would act as the 'Church of the Poor'; and in a statement at the first conference of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action held at Novalises in the Philippines, also in 1974, the bishops stated that 'taking sides with the poor means .... learning the history of our people instead of adopting Western theological, legal and social systems as in the past'. In the seventh conference of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action in 1986 at Hua Hin, the bishops stated that, 'God has chosen to live and work among the poor .... The poor create chances for us to receive the message (from God) .... We can search for cultural values and religious activities, which are elements of a spiritual life, in certain aspects of the poor - a simple way of living, true sincerity, generosity, collective consciousness and faithfulness to the family'.

These changes stemming from the Second Vatican Council were a revolution in the Catholic Church. Its formal position had been concerned specifically with the world to come, had been based on centralisation on the Pope and Rome, and had ordered others to believe and follow. The new position was concerned with the present world, and the distribution of power to localities and with service to others, especially the poor. The consequence of these changes were that the Church must study matters concerning this world and its inhabitants, and the social sciences. There has to be a dialogue between social sciences and theology. There must be studies of local culture, emphasizing human values and moral principles from the existing culture. Each local church must study the society and history of the local people, because the Holy Ghost is working there. Reality both at the present and in history is, in fact, God. Men in each locality must understand God from their own cultural base. The consequences of these major changes allowed priests, to participate in campaigns for social change in Latin America and the Philippines.

The Bishops' Institute for Social Action at Hua Hin issued guidelines for Catholic priests, stating that the priests must be exposed to and be immersed in the lives of villagers, and apply social analysis, using the social sciences and history. Finally, they must be reflexive, that is, the analyser must be a part of what is being analysed. This final stage must be achieved with trust in God and with God's assistance in order to discover the whole truth. The

priests must carry out the practical side - the pastoral tasks - of which the major element is consciousness-raising among the villagers so that they unite in changing the world. In this sense, Catholic priests may be said to perform the duty of the Gramscian 'organic intellectual'.

The Catholic Bishops' Council of Thailand accepts the Second Vatican Council's resolutions. However those who have been most enthusiastic to live with and learn from the people are the Catholic priests working in the Catholic Council of Thailand for Development (CCTD). Others sometimes continue to adhere to the old theology. The leaders of the progressive priests are Bishop Bunlu'an Mansap (1929-), the Bishop of Ubon and chairman of the CCTD, Father Watcharin Samancit, the Secretary General of the CCTD, Father Niphot Thianwihan, the Director of the Centre for Social Development, Chiangmai, and Father Manat Suppharak, the Centre for Social Development, Nakho'nsawan. The CCTD has development projects, such as rice banks, and consciousness-raising programmes through its Centres for Social Development in 10 Bishoprics all over Thailand. There are around five full-time development workers in each Bishopric. The CCTD has published a journal *Sangkhom phatthana* (Social Development) and books, promoting the ideas of development through community culture. As it does not highlight religious issues, the journal is widely accepted among NGO workers. Bamrung, Aphichat and Prawet regularly contribute, and some of Bamrung's and Aphichat's work has been published in book form under the patronage of the CCTD. Although Catholics in Thailand number a mere 200,000, the influence of the community culture discourse presented by these Catholics has spread widely, especially among NGOs. The CCTD organised a seminar, 'Thai Culture and Rural Development', which was the first seminar to discuss this discourse, on 23-24 October 1981. In another important seminar among NGO workers, 'Experience Concerning the Discourse of Development', organised by the Thai Volunteer Service and the Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University, on 3-5 May 1984, Father Niphot played a most important role. Dr. Seri Phongphit, a former CCTD deputy-secretary, is another intellectual who advocates this discourse. While he was working for the CCTD before 1985, he tried to co-ordinate the CCTD with other development organisations and workers, academics and intellectuals, including those who were not Catholics. He has played a part in making the discourse widely known and accepted among NGOs. At the moment, Dr. Seri, in collaboration with other academics and development workers, has set up the Thailand Institute of Rural Development (THIRD) as an independent NGO, funded by CEBEMO (a Dutch Catholic funding agency) and MISEREOR (a German Catholic funding agency). The Institute has a Village Institute Promotion (VIP) programme, Rural Development Documentation Centre (RUDOC) and a number of research projects.

Apart from the re-orientation of Catholic theology, the other external factor related to the emergence of the communal culture discourse was an increase in aid from several countries through NGOs. This was a consequence of a review of development philosophy in which

development was regarded not as something one person can do for another but rather something that those in need must do for themselves. Development is not something the state or government does for its people or brings to the people but something the people must consciously do for themselves. They must have their own organisations, otherwise this development cannot really be for the people. Furthermore, development is a process which takes a long time for the people to build into their history, into the history of the community and nation. It is not just a thing that can be picked up immediately when needed. Therefore NGOs, which are set up on a voluntary basis without any aim of profit or power, should have a major part in assisting the people in the development process, because they emphasize unity with the people. They understand the needs and feelings of the people, particularly the poor. Their activities are consistent with local history, culture and resources. They are more capable of mobilizing the people than is the state. The state, in contrast, is a power-imposing organisation, and often, in the third world, exploits its own communities. As the philosophy of development has changed, intellectuals' duties have changed from guiding or commanding to serving the villagers, helping them to work out their own way of thinking. Considering all these factors, NGOs are therefore better catalysts in the development process than is the state.

The NGOs have also turned their attention to this kind of development because in their experience, social work, or aid based on charity, disregards social movements, and ideas about changing the structure of society, and the exploitative tendency of state-led development initiatives. It falls into a trap: it puts forward projects that are drawn from other places in the world or other times in history; it avoids conflicts and involvement in the present and participation in social movements. This sort of action cannot solve any of the villagers' problems. NGOs which at first were concerned only with matters of religion, social welfare, public health and natural or war hazards, have now turned to long-term development projects. In other words, apart from helping the people solve their immediate problems, NGOs also promote and support the people to develop their own potential in order that they, when formed into groups, can solve their problems themselves. In Latin America, intellectuals have found that when they become a part of a social movement, they have a significant role in advancing that movement. On the other hand, if they are isolated from the people's movements, they cannot induce change.

At the same time, some of these intellectuals do not want to be workers in any political party, because they believe that a party's line is fixed, is often too dogmatic. A party may be organised in a very rigid way. Working in NGOs therefore has become a very interesting alternative, as the NGOs emphasize their autonomy, and their independence from political pressure. These NGOs are flexible, and can adapt easily in response to the needs of the people in communities. Moreover, they are also concerned with other dimensions in the development of human society such as human values, family, community, culture and environment.

From the point of view of a funding agency, an advantage of the NGOs is that each of them is small, or can be broken down, which keeps their expenditure small. Therefore in only fifteen years, from 1970 to 1985, developed countries' financial contribution to NGOs in developing countries has increased from a billion dollars to four billion dollars; in the private sector, including the Church, the amount increased from 900 million dollars to 2.9 billion dollars (or around three-fold) and in the public sector the amount of aid increased eleven-fold, from a hundred million dollars to eleven billion dollars. In 1985, five percent of financial contributions to developing countries was channelled through NGOs. It is estimated that the developed countries financially support 20,000 NGOs in the developing countries. In each individual Latin American or South Asian country, there are up to a thousand NGOs. There are fewer NGOs in African countries. NGOs have been established in Latin America for thirty years, originally being related to the Catholic Church and receiving financial support from it.

In Thailand, the number of NGOs has increased in the last ten years. Surveys show that in 1984 there were 113 NGOs; in 1987, there were 49 NGOs working in the Northeastern region alone, all of them involved in rural development projects. Thirty-three of the latter began work in the last ten years. Most of them are financially supported from abroad; only three of them obtain funds inside Thailand. The major sources of funds are the Canadian government and the Catholic Church's MISEREOR. Considering NGOs in Thailand as a whole, apart from these two sources, the other major contributors are the German and Australian governments.

While the communal culture in Thailand remains strong, the intensity of the threat of capitalism to village communities in the last decade has led to a great interest in this cultural discourse among local intellectuals and NGO workers.

Thailand is unique among underdeveloped countries in the sense that there had been abundant land for such a long time, even though capitalism penetrated the national economy after the country was opened to international trade in 1855, exploiting village communities through trade and high-interest money-lending, and accumulating capital by drawing surplus from the weaker sector of the economy, that is the rural areas. While the population increased and production techniques remained unchallenged, Thai peasants were still able to compensate for their exploitation by capitalism, and increase overall production, by migrating to set up new village communities in the forest. Migration and the establishment of new communities were the compensation applied by villagers against the exploitation by capitalism. Outmoded technology was compensated for by natural abundance.

Only in the last fifteen years has the problem of land scarcity arisen. When the country was first opened to the European powers in the reign of King Mongkut, the population was only five million. Now it is well over fifty million, but the amount of land remains the same. Villagers cannot open up new land for cultivation as easily as before. The area of forest is

reduced to well under 25 percent of the whole area of the country. The problem of landlessness has emerged. In 1987, of 4.1 million households in the country, 0.9 million occupied less than 5 rai (1 acre = 2.4 rai). An increase in the population and the problem of landlessness severely affects the stability of villages. This change greatly affects villagers' lives. Family life disintegrates as landless peasants have to seek jobs outside their communities, their children go to work in factories and female members go to the service sector, including prostitution. Within the communities themselves, an economic-class differentiation has begun. Internal conflicts within the communities arise, and this clearly destroys communality.

However, these sufferings, when compared with other Third World countries, have happened very slowly. Rural problems in other Third World countries started earlier and have become more serious than in Thailand. In Latin America, especially in Central America, peasants have long been landless. The local Indian culture has been largely destroyed. In Thailand, rural communities have been continuously maintained for such a long time because natural resources, particularly land, have been in plentiful supply and because the *sakdina* and capitalist systems in Thailand are unique. In the *sakdina* period, Thai society was divided into two parts - the state and the villages. The state did not interfere with the management of production at the village level. The aristocrats were not direct landowners as in the manorial economic system. Buddhism could persuade villagers to accept that the king was the rightful ruler but this did not destroy ancestor cults within communities. The pre-*sakdina,* tribal and kin-related culture and society was therefore well-maintained in the *sakdina* system, that is in the village communities. Furthermore, in the early capitalist era Thailand had never been colonised, which enabled the communities and village-level culture to remain at a higher level than in other underdeveloped countries. Communal culture - kind-heartedness, brother/sisterhood, generosity, mutual-help, not taking advantage of others, unambitiousness, non-violence, self-reliance, honesty - among Thai villagers remains strong, especially in the villagers in *Isan,* the Lao North East of Thailand.

The increasing threat from capitalism towards village organisations, while at the same time the communities' spiritual character, their communal culture, remains strong, has stimulated a number of intellectuals and development workers to preserve and restore the original culture, as they witness the battle between market relations and original cultural relations. They aim to establish communal culture as the core value in development, believing that by preserving the communal culture, society - village communities - can also be maintained.

The local intellectuals' and development workers' desire to restore and enhance communal culture, which has remain a value system in Thai society longer perhaps than in any other society in the Third World, is consistent with the interests of the middle-classes both in the regions and in Bangkok, after the 14 October 1973 events. The restoration of democracy and social processes have created an atmosphere that encourages the study

of people's plights and problems. Projects that allowed university and school students to stay with villagers exposed the former to the realities of the lives of the latter. At the same time, academics both in Bangkok and in the provinces became increasingly interested in local history and culture. There were seminars on local culture in Mahasarakham and Nakho'nsithammarat in 1978, followed by scholarly seminars on local history and culture in Ayutthaya, Pitsanulok, Lopburi, Petchabun, Buriram, Kamphaengphet, Phuket, and Nakho'nratchasima, between 1978 and 1984. These seminars uncovered a considerable amount of information on the people's history and culture, transforming the social sciences, humanities and history to become more local and more Thai. The processes whereby local intellectuals and development workers apply communal culture as a development method, and join communal forces to resist state and capitalist power, are consistent with the way in which democratic forces seek political participation and with the enthusiasm, of intellectuals to study the country's regions and rural life.

The communal culture discourse has expanded in Thailand because it found a suitable environment. It is unique to Thailand. Thai society remains a society where its members are kindhearted, friendly, and help each other. In rural areas, there remains a communal culture that is more concentrated, more intensive than anywhere else in the world. The village communities remain stable. The problem is that they are beginning to lose their cultural base because of the threat from capitalism. On the other hand, Thai intellectuals, academics and the middle-class have become aroused and eager to participate in the country's politics and cultural affairs. As the alternative proposed by the Communist Party of Thailand has failed, the intellectuals, academics and the middle-class who want to search for their own roots and to solve the country's problems have become interested in learning from and joining with the people to solve problems.

At the moment, therefore, Thailand has become a country where the community culture school of development is widely accepted; and in other Third World countries, NGOs still mostly keep their activities at the level of economic assistance.

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY CULTURE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Anarchistic Character

The community culture school of thought emphasizes the importance of the village community and peasant culture, which are anti-state and non-capitalist. The peasants' culture directly opposes the *sakdina* culture that has dominated Thai society. While the *sakdina* culture legitimises the 'Asiatic' state that exploits villages, the peasants' culture preserves the village community and the village's identity. In the *sakdina* system, there were two separated sectors - the state and the villages. The villages possess pre-*sakdina* characteristics. Relationships identified as mutual-help within the community are maintained in the *sakdina* system. The promotion of

the community culture aims to bring back to the communities values that will make them a leading ideology in rural and national development, that is to bring back the inner core of Thai beliefs, to organise villagers and village communities to resist the state's power and to bargain with capitalism.

This resistance to the state's power allows the discourse to be categorized as anarchistic. Anarchism is a part of democratic thought, but it stresses the agency of ordinary citizens at the village community level, and a mutual process of bringing villages together. It emphasizes people's organisations, and local organisations. In other words, there must be a distribution of power from the state to people's small-scale organisations, so that the communities can bargain with the state. It is not therefore bourgeois democracy but common people's democracy.

The Significance of Anarchism in Thai Society

In Thailand, anarchism ought to have attracted great interest, because to change society radically at its roots it is necessary for there to be a movement or movements at the level of the common people. There was this kind of mass movement both in the French revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. The peasant forces, particularly in rural areas before the revolution, were a crucial factor that made possible real grass-roots change. However, there were only a few peasant movements during the 1929 economic depression leading to the political changes of 1932 in Siam. The lack of support from the common people made that change in Thailand incomplete. Pridi Panomyong (1900-1983) proposed an economic plan, aimed at the establishment of small communities: this was called the *'samakkhitham* system' - municipalities and co-operatives managed the economy and were also responsible for government and education. Pridi's ideas contained an anarchistic element. He wished the peasants to organise themselves. However, in his plan anarchism was mixed with state administration. This shows that at that time the ancient state system was still very influential in Thailand; even Pridi could not avoid maintaining state power after the events of 1932. He eventually managed to propose the idea of co-operatives based on the Buddhist notion of *samakkitham* and the primitive democracy of the Thai village community, only after he began his political exile in 1947.

Moreover, anarchism deserves consideration as Western liberal democracy cannot be easily established in Thai society. The reason is that liberal democracy is a bourgeois discourse. In Thai society, the bourgeois class is weak. This weakness can be most clearly seen in its cultural aspects, as its culture is imported, containing Chinese characteristics. Therefore, although the class of merchants and property-owners is wealthy, it does not yet have the legitimacy for its claims to leadership of the people to be accepted. However, if liberal democracy were to be mixed with anarchism, consonant with the communal culture discourse, and if the Thai bourgeoisie were to accept this mixed ideology that contains both Western

liberalism and peasant culture, then the bourgeoisie will be more Thai, will more consciously identify with the development of the country. When they share the same identity as the majority of Thais, the bourgeoisie will be stronger and may become a true vehicle for the advance of ideology in Thai society.

After Pridi, Sot Kuramarohit (1908-1975) also advocated the co-operative system. Sot saw it as 'the people's labour and economic system, organised by the people and for the people. This system is not under state control. The people group themselves at the horizontal level without any apex. The co-operatives which will crop up in every village all over the country are not isolated but they will enter into inter-relationships of cycles of activities, and networks of co-operatives will emerge'. Sot tried very hard all his life to persuade the Thai government to adopt the co-operative system as a part of the national economic plan. He wrote several articles on the co-operative economy, such as 'Co-operative towns' published in the fortnightly *Piyamit* magazine, using the pseudonym 'Barbara'; and 'Thoughts from *Paendinthai* (land of the Thais) Farm'. His economic ideas deserve further study as he was the avant-garde for co-operatives in Thailand. Another figure who deserves being recorded as a fighter for co-operatives is M.L. Dej Snidvongs (1898-1975) who in 1945 pressed for the establishment of the first bank for co-operatives as a bank for the poor. He gave important speeches on several occasions, emphasizing the significance of co-operation between people in the form of co-operatives. However the attempts by Sot and Dej met with very limited success.

Generally speaking, we might say that at the village level, anarchism is the fundamental discourse that has existed from the beginning. Though it does not appear evident in the villagers' everyday life, it manifests itself when there is a crisis. For instance, in every peasant protest or revolt, the underlying ideology is a denial of the state, a demand for village autonomy, so that villages can govern and help themselves; or, when there is a natural crisis, such as flood or drought, the villagers will help each other in whatever way is possible without waiting for help from the state. At the national level, although anarchism is very meaningful, it is only a discourse proposed by a few enthusiasts, and not a serious political-economic ideology for either the liberal school or the socialist school.[1] The discourses concerning ideology in Thai society at the national level and at the village level are not yet connected.

In the liberal school, attention is focused on controlling the state by an electoral system and controlling the bureaucracy through permitting the people to control the state. In the socialist school, on the other hand, attention is focused on allowing the state to plan and organise state enterprises to manage the country's affairs; the people control these affairs and make plans through the state. Supporters of liberal democracy do not pay enough attention to the point that being democratic is not a case of having control over the centralised state but concerns the distribution of power from the centralised state to the regions and the existence of pluralism. Those who are pro-socialist, on the other hand, do not recognise

that being socialist is not a case of handing economic affairs over to the state but concerns economic co-operation in various independent small-scale units and communities. The progressive schools of ideology in Thailand therefore do not question the nature of government and state institutions. They state only that the people should control these two institutions and suggest ways in which this might be done. The progressive schools of ideology in Thailand, both liberal and socialist, are thus not anarchistic. They still regard the state rather than communities as having the major role. Theoretically, they have not challenged the comcept of the 'Asiatic' state. If only they suggested that communities should have power and duties, they would be proposing a more radical change.

Advocating the discourse of communal culture by NGO thinkers is a new and very important trend. This is the first systematic presentation of anarchism which has its base in Thai beliefs and local culture. The author believes that this discourse will become more powerful in Thai society. Moreover, apart from the above mentioned thinkers, there are other significant Thai intellectuals in this context, such as Saneh Chamarik, Vichitvongse Na Pompetch, Sulak Sivaraksa, Nidhi Aeosrivongse and Preecha Piampongsarn. Many lecturers in various teacher colleges and universities also advocate the discourse of communal culture. Apart from the NGOs, where it is widely accepted, the idea is being introduced into the National Research Council, the National Education Council, academic associations, universities, teacher colleges and the Buddhist Sangha. In the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan - the present plan - the status of NGOs is recognised but the discourse is neglected. In the future, political parties should find this discourse attractive. At the village level, several successes have been achieved with the discourse, such as in experiments at the village of Ban Sokenamkao in Kho'nkaen and Ban Sakun in Buriram. Projects applying mutual-help - the economic factor of the discourse - have also been successful, such as at Ban Kudsuay in Ubon Ratchathani under the leadership of Charlie Marasaeng, and at Ban No'ngkhaem in Kho'nkaen under the leadership of Tho'ngdi Nantha. Furthermore, there are other farmer leaders who have been successful in applying the ideas of self-reliance in their own households, such as Suk Chanachai of Ban Dongsuanpung in Roi-et, and Wibun Khemchaloem of Ban Huayhin in Chachoengsao.

The significance of anarchism that is called communal culture is not only that it allows the people to join forces politically but also that it is an ideology that is consistent with the people's spirit, with their feelings and emotions, and because it stresses kindheartedness and the values of humanity. These are the characteristics of Thai consciousness, which, from ancient times, has been inseparable fromThai communities. The discourse of communal culture is therefore not only a political-economic ideology that offers a mode for economic and democratic-administrative development but it is also a discourse that suggests three levels of important ideas: the level of political and economic development that advocates self-reliance and power-distributing democracy; the level of social

and cultural discourse that emphasizes spiritual values and the people's feelings; and the level of religion - some of this school's thinkers proposing that the establishment and maintenance of relationships between human beings and God are of the greatest importance.

Anarchism and Its Class-Base and Allies

Apart from its political and cultural appropriateness, the anarchism that is called communal culture is also consistent with the stages of development in the economic structure of class relationships in Thailand. Basically, anarchistic ideology is the ideology of peasants and artisans, as it supports small and independent producers and encourages them to produce together, share common capital and labour in the form of co-operatives or guilds. Each of these co-operative units is small, as in Thailand there are large numbers of small peasants. Peasant households that cultivate rice fields of 20 *rai* or less amount to three quarters of the total number of households in the country. Moreover, there are many handicraft manufacturers and small factories. Ninety percent of factories in Thailand employ fewer than fifty workers. Considering this situation, a centralised socialism that advocates nationalisation is not attractive to the people because they are still the owners of the means of production, although each only owns a little. This situation, on the other hand, tends to encourage these small owners to combine their means of production in the form of co-operatives and guilds. A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in Southern Europe - France and Spain. In these two countries, anarchism has been very popular for many decades.

Furthermore, in Third World countries, including Thailand, apart from the fact that peasants and handicraft manufacturers are the major forces of anarchism, there are several forms of exploitation, such as exploitation between classes, races, sexes, ages, ranks, and educational levels. There is also no polarisation of classes into capitalists and workers. There are large numbers of people in disadvantageous positions apart from the proletariat, and apart from peasants and handicraft manufacturers; for example, ethnic minorities, women, children, low-ranking civil servants and employees, the uneducated, the unemployed. The political-economic ideology in the Third World should provide space for these people and should become their voice. These people should then be counted as supporting the forces of anarchism, because the discourse recommends that the disadvantaged join forces. Supporters of anarchism are not necessarily only the workers; in countries not fully-industrialised, the disadvantaged are not only the workers. Anarchism is thus aimed at the common people in general rather than at any specific class. It should be compatible with the situation in Thailand. Anarchism is not inconsistent with socialism, but it goes beyond proletarian socialism and becomes the voice of all disadvantaged classes and groups.

In Bamrung's opinion, the middle-class should be integrated as an ally of the community culture movement - an idea with which this author agrees. The middle-class possess scientific and technical knowledge. They

are educated and have capital. They are also receiving-agents for international culture. An alliance with the middle-class can strengthen the people's movement as a whole. However, this alliance can be fruitful only on condition that the middle-class are ready to share power with the common people; there is no place for a middle-class that accumulates surplus from the exploitation of rural people. To create this condition, villagers should enter into bargaining positions through their communities or federations of communities, because the community is the villagers' strongest institution. In order to become an equal ally with the middle-class, villagers must preserve their communities as they have no time to develop other forms of organisation, and if they try to bargain without any kind of organisation they will certainly be in a very disadvantageous position. Each household of villagers may avoid having individual contact with the middle-class. The introduction of large plantations and agricultural-processing plants in rural areas by domestic and multinational firms when villagers are not organised and do not have bargaining power, is a capitalist development that exploits villagers and breaks up communities. On the contrary, the alliance between communities or a federation of communities and business firms or middle-class organisations can balance socialism and capitalism at the village level. As for the middle-class, this alliance can be useful in several ways: the middle-class can obtain support from the villagers, and to enable them to legitimise their cause and strengthen their political power; and they can rely more on domestic elements, decrease their external dependence and become the base for more stable, long-term economic expansion.

Ideally, the author proposes libertarian socialism. However, in reality, what we face is capitalism. We should therefore have a maximum programme and a minimum programme. The maximum programme is anarchism and the minimum programme is progressive capitalism. In other words, we demand that a progressive middle-class share administrative power and the management of the economy with village communties. It must not be a system where the state has extreme power, nor a centralised capitalism where only a handful of capitalists control the economy, or a capitalism that relies on foreigners and exploits the rural people.

There are innumerable historical instances of organisations of peasant classes and the disadvantaged in society which have failed in their aims because they lacked the necessary strength, and especially independence. In particular there were those cases in history where the right-wing took the opportunity to draw leaders of people's organisations into their groups, without giving real power to those organisations and the ordinary people. There emerged a mirage of people's organisations coming together under the management of a party. In fact, however, power was in the hands of the party and party administrators who claimed to act for the people, and to fulfil people's needs and feelings. The activities were certainly not carried out by the people. In reality they were right-wing movements, embracing fascism and corporatism. They seized the leadership and fought against the

disadvantaged classes. An example is the Nazi Party which claimed to hold ideas about the people (*Das Volk*) in ancient German communities. Another example is Ikki Kita (1883-1937), a Japanese thinker who argued that socialism and Tennoism (an ancient Japanese idea about their Emperor) should be combined with rural development. Therefore when there is a proposal concerning rural development or the revival of an original, national culture, consideration must be given to ensure that power is given to organisations of the disadvantaged. A way to prevent this kind of right-wing movement is an alliance between the anarchist movement and the middle-class liberal movement.

Conditions for the Success of Anarchism Modelled on Communal Culture in Thai Society

Conditions for the success of anarchism could be set out as follows:

Economic conditions: A small community must have a material base to exist. When a community exists, its networks emerge. In the past, villages were stable because of an abundance of resources, with villagers having enough to live. Nowadays, to preserve the community the village economy must be restored and developed. Bamrung's suggestion that villagers should rely on themselves, produce first for living (with only a real surplus for sale); Prawet's proposal for 'Buddhist agriculture'; and Wibun's 'agro-forest society', which follows Bamrung, ought to provide the economic conditions for the success of communal culture model. At the same time, because there are now fewer resources per head of population compared with the past, productivity must be increased. Technological development is a necessity. What sort of technology, and how to implement it in a way that villagers can control, is an issue that must be considered in the context of the co-ordination of communal culture and universal culture. This connects the economic conditions with the cultural conditions.

Political conditions: The necessary condition is the villagers' own level of consciousness, by means of which they can join forces to carry out activities themselves. 'Consciousness-raising' may be necessary because, although communal culture still exists it may appear only in the form of rituals and practices in everyday life rather than as a conscious set of ideas. The villagers have, in a sense, forgotten why they behave in the way that they do. Reconstruction of consciousness will clarify this and enable the villagers to join forces in their struggles. Even though the economic base may be damaged, consciousness of communality can be very powerful and can rebuild communities. It is just that the outer form may be different. The search for consciousness in the history of particular communities and recovering it for the present generation is very important. And since the task of searching and transferring is largely in the hands of intellectuals, the success of consciousness-raising depends on the relationships between the

intellectuals and villagers.

Together with consciousness-raising, the creation of people's organisations in the form of strong networks is also important. The village community is the basic unit of this network.

Another political condition is the establishment of a front between villagers and the other disadvantaged in society and the progressive middle-class, because rural problems also originate from outside the village. These problems are caused by the exploitation of the state and parasitic capitalism. Therefore, apart from joining forces within the village, the villagers must also press for a change in the character of the state and of capitalism. In doing this, the peasants may have to co-operate with other classes in order to build a movement that is sufficiently powerful. They have to set up organisations to bargain with the state and capitalists, demanding land reform and more money for rural development. In consciousness-raising, apart from enabling the villagers to have a clear consciousness about community culture, the villagers should see their problems in the context of the history of Thai society. The villagers should know about politics and society outside their villages, and also the exploitation which the state and capitalism have imposed upon them.

Cultural conditions: Parallel to the search for the local culture which is the core content of community culture, is the need to co-ordinate community culture with Buddhism, the major belief system in Thai society. If the Buddhist *Sangha* accepts the discourse of communal culture, the discourse will become a national ideology. In this author's opinion, in the past Buddhism and other beliefs were alienated from communal culture. Buddhism was related to the state and those individual seekers after *nirvana,* rather than related to the real life of ordinary people. There must be an attempt to attract the *Sangha*'s attention, and make it more concerned with the real life of the people. Support from the *Sangha* will make the discourse of communal culture more successful, and in the long term make the *Sangha* more secure, because it would be an organisation of the people. The trends followed by Bhuddhadasa Bhikku and his disciples and other monks, who are also development workers in rural areas, including efforts by laymen such as Dr. Prawet Wasi, are very significant in this regard. The point here is not to attempt to dominate the people's culture with Buddhism (for this would fail because it would be an attempt to create a Utopian discourse and a Utopian society) but to make Buddhism a true religion of the common people, in terms of both discourse and of organisation.

Finally, conditions for the success of the communal culture discourse depend on an ability to link the culture of the village community with global culture. In other words, it depends on an ability to co-opt into the community culture progressive universal elements, such as technology, ideas about efficiency and initiative. This means that Thai culture and Thai village communities are capable of co-opting the Western cultural heritage, of assimilating it with local culture, of adjusting that outside culture into a

form that is acceptable to and usable within the village. The success of this assimilation will render the original culture of the Thai village more dynamic.

MU'ANG AND *PA*
ELITE VIEWS OF NATURE IN A CHANGING THAILAND[1]

Philip Stott

> Garuda eat *naga* and *naga* eat ordinary frogs and very small green frogs. The ordinary frogs and the small green frogs eat insects and caterpillars. Some animals eat other animals that are smaller than they.
>
> From: *Traibhumikatha*, ca. 1345 A.D. by (?) Phya Lithai
> (Trs. Reynolds and Reynolds 1982: 92)[2]

A REMARKABLE DECISION

On 18 March 1988, the thirty-nine member inquiry team chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Thienchai Sirisamphan, which had been asked to review the environmental implications of the proposed Nam Choan dam, made a remarkable decision (Paisal 1988: 24). The inquiry had originally been established to explore remedial measures to contain the impact of the dam development on forestry, wildlife, geology, and archaeology; instead, the inquiry unanimously requested the postponement of the project, and there is much to suggest that the Nam Choan dam will never now flood the protected forests of the Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary, although nothing in Thai environmental politics can ever be guaranteed. Recent attempts by a leading and much respected environmentalist, Seub Nakhasathien, to consolidate the decision by achieving UNESCO World Heritage status for the Thung Yai-Huay Kha Khaeng complex (Seub and Stewart-Cox 1990) have not yet borne fruit, and, sadly, events have been somewhat overtaken by the tragic suicide of Seub while at Huay Kha Khaeng. Such are the deep depressions of the environmental debate in present-day Thailand.

Such a *volte face* was unexpected, with certain prominent members of the inquiry team changing their minds at the very last moment; the decisions were clearly affected by short-term political expediency. It is the

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[1] I am deeply grateful to M.R. Smansnid (Nunie) Svasti for many hours of guidance and discussion on the Dhammanat Foundation and the work at Mae Soi.

[2] This quotation comes from a passage in the *Traibhumikatha* containing many observations of an ecological character; for example, there is a full analysis of parasitism and a classification of animals. One day it might be fun to try to write 'An ecology of the forests of Himavanta', a topic once brilliantly played with in a seminar by that fine scholar of all things Thai, the late Peter Bee. As an aside, I am not convinced by attempts to question the date and authorship of the 'Three Worlds', most of which seem to ignore the all important Pali 'Words of Praise'. However, I append a conventional question mark.

purpose of this present paper, however, to analyse the wider trends in Thai society that have helped to create a climate in which such a decision was possible at all, a decision which, for the moment at least, raised the uncosted benefits of 'externalities' like wildlife and wilderness above the hard economic realities of a newly industrialising country.

The Upper Khwae Yai Project, now forever known as the Nam Choan dam, had already been halted once in 1982 by a 'caretaker' Cabinet, which left the decision to the next government. The dam was to be part of a much larger project focussed on the Khwae Yai river system for which funds had been first obtained in 1966. Two dams, the Srinakharind, built in 1978, and the Tha Thungna or Lower Khwae Yai dam, finished in 1981, are already on stream; Nam Choan was to have been the third in the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand's (EGAT's) trio of hydropower producers, generating 576 MW, or 9% of installed capacity. The projected cost was US $406 million. Pressure for the dam was revived in 1986, and EGAT marshalled great political, economic and scientific resources to achieve its acceptance. Construction of the dam seemed inevitable.

Yet, in the end, EGAT's resolve was unexpectedly frustrated by a passionate, if somewhat disparate, group of conservationists, who ranged from academics and students, through *The Nation* newspaper,[3] and other mass media, to international pressure groups and concerned *farang*, including HRH the Prince of Wales and HRH Prince Bernhard (Stewart-Cox 1987; 1988: 18). More particularly, however, there was strong local opposition to the dam development in Kanchanaburi itself, where the existence of two geological fault lines and the occurrence of a major earthquake in April 1983 (5.9 on the Richter Scale) raised the fearful spectre of death by dam burst. Moreover, Kukrit Pramoj, warned sagely that popular concern on this issue could topple the whole government. At the last throw, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda and his close advisors clearly agreed.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

This is not the place to rehearse the arguments for or against the dam, although it is worth emphasising that, for both sides, the stakes were high, and that the combined contiguous habitats of the Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, the Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary, the Kroeng Kavia Non-Hunting Area, and the undisturbed forest across the border in Burma possibly comprise the finest remaining conservation area in the whole of mainland Asia. Moreover, the sheer diversity of habitats, which range from tropical semi-evergreen rain forest, through monsoon forest, bamboo forest, and savanna forest, to many waterside formations, guarantees a rich

[3] After the historic decision, *The Nation* issued a special edition entitled 'Nam Choan Inquiry: the environmental dilemma of the decade' on 18 April 1988. This collated many reports on the debate and summarized the story of the battle, ending with the piece from 5 April, headlined 'Government shelves Nam Choan dam project'.

wildlife, with rare endemics and relict species surviving in a last stronghold. The dam would have breached the integrity of this 'island of forest' in a 'sea of uncontrolled development', and would have inevitably opened up the region even further to the predations of squatter settlers, illegal loggers and hunters, and to increasing demands for more development. The region would have become one of the last 'pioneer' frontiers in Thailand's long history of extensification, which has already witnessed, for example, the demise of the dense forests that once clothed the Khorat Plateau escarpment described in the nineteenth century *Nirat No'ngkhai*.[4] Nevertheless, most observers, including ecologically-sensitive students at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, were pessimistic about the outcome of the inquiry. In a role-playing session held in November 1987, when the students acted out the debate over the dam, EGAT clearly won the day. In reality, the predatory chain was reversed, and the 'very small green frogs' turned and gobbled up the *naga*.

Concern over the environment has been present in Thailand for well over two decades. The student uprising of 14 October 1973, was partly triggered by a hunting scandal.[5] But the decision on the Nam Choan dam is of a different order of maturity, and is one which could be matched very rarely in other developing countries in the tropics. The elite of the Thai *mu'ang*, namely the government, many lesser ranks of the wider Royal family, the educated, especially those who have studied abroad, the press, and a group of concerned *farang*, fought out the battle, and eventually a decisive number chose for the *pa thu'an*, the wild, untamed, and unsocialized forest, thus integrating the *pa* within the Thai state, the *mu'ang*, in a very deep sense.

In this paper, I shall, in general, be avoiding the use of a common Thai word for 'nature', *thammachat*, because I am here concerned more with *pa thu'an*, the uncivilized forest lands traditionally at the edge of Thai 'civilized' space. *Thammachat* is a word too refined and wide in its meaning, embracing as it does all natural phenomena, such as rain, wind and sun, and even natural human behaviour. It is also rather formal and poetic. *Thu'an*, in contrast, is a powerful word, meaning wild, illicit, and it is not simply a reduplication of the *pa*. The two together emphasise the barbaric character of the forest, which lies outside the civilized and lawful lands; such regions are wild, uncontrollable, and full of 'energy'. Interestingly, the word, *thu'an*, is also used for illicit opium, bootleg whisky (or 'moonshine'), for charlatans, and quack doctors. *Pa* likewise means more than simply forest or wood, having the sense of 'the wilds' or wilderness, savage and barbarous. *Pa thu'an*, unlike *thammachat*, thus

[4] See Reynolds, this volume.

[5] See *Bangkok Post*, 1-15 October 1973; also a special supplement, 'The ten days', 19 October 1973.

stands in direct contrast with *mu'ang*. It is arguable that the changes I describe in this paper mean that for the urban elite of Thailand *pa thu'an* has come closer to *thammachat*.

I believe that this subtle change represents a remarkable new view of the cosmology of power in the Thai *mu'ang*. It is more than one developing country's learning at last to live with the imperative of conservation and sound land management. The *pa thu'an* is now directly 'under the merit' of the *mu'ang,* and, in a sense, as I shall attempt to show, the essentials of Forest Buddhism have become accepted in the urban heart of the state (cf. Supaphan Na Bangchang 1990).

MU'ANG AND *PA*: THE SPATIAL ORGANISATION OF THE TRADITIONAL TAI CITY-STATE

From Yunnan to Sukhothai,through the intermontane basins of North Vietnam, Laos, northern Thailand, and Burma, the spatial organisation of the complex entity that is the Tai *mu'ang* has remained essentially constant, a brilliant linking of religion and geography, each helping to determine the other like a snail and its shell (Turton 1976; Tambiah 1976; Rhum 1987; Condominas 1990). In the centre of the *mu'ang,* and usually aligned with the main river of the basin, as beautifully exemplified at Sri Satchanalai, is the princely capital, containing the most important Buddhist temple and palladium, the city pillar *(lak mu'ang),* and the royal palaces.This is the 'merit-heart' of the *mu'ang,* from which the 'umbrella' of merit will spread to the very edge of the intermontane basin,the foothills of which rise dark on the horizon. Above all, the effectiveness of this 'umbrella' will depend on the merit *(bun)* of the king himself. Such an idealised interpretation finds its fullest expression in a most telling passage in the *Traibhumikatha* of Phya Lithai:

> If any ruler or king, while he reigns, acts righteously, and does righteous things, the common people, slaves and free men, will live peacefully and happily, will have stability and balance, and will enjoy good fortune and prosperity; and this is because of the accumulation of the merit of the one who is Lord above all. Rice and water, plus fish and other food, the ten thousand measures of gems and ornaments, the nine kinds of gems, silver, gold, clothing, and garments of silk will be available in abundance. The rain from the sky, which is regulated by the *devata,* will fall appropriately in accordance with the season, not too little and not too much. The rice in the fields and the fish in the water will never be ruined by drought or damaged by rain (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982: 93).

Outside the walls and the moats of the 'golden' city will stretch the rice fields *(na)* which constitute the essential economic basis of the *mu'ang*. These will be irrigated through the age-old Tai system of small-scale, hydroagricultural (in the Wittfogelian sense), weirs and canals, the *mu'ang fai,* which control the water of streams as they debouch themselves on to the plains, or which are situated on the confluences of streams in the basin itself. Most of the villages on the flat land will be rice-producing villages,but

a few, often near the main city itself, will have a diversified portfolio or be more specialized, perhaps producing inland salt or making pottery, like those to the north of ancient Sri Satchanalai. Yet, although the *mu'ang fai* will help to offset the vagaries of the monsoons, the timing and effectiveness of the rains would at that time be likely to have been perceived as being under the direct influence of the merit of the king, a classic case of 'magic and management' (Demaine 1978: 49).

Finally, at the edge of the intermontane basin, there rise the mountains that hem in the mental map of the *mu'ang*, for here is a forested land, the *pa thu'an*, which is filled with spirits, wild animals, and non-Tai peoples. Such regions lie outside the essential social organisation of the *mu'ang*, outside the 'umbrella' of merit emanating from the king, and outside controlled and benign Nature. Here we have a crucial contrast between Tai 'civilized' space and Nature beyond normal social control. In this model, *pa* is a non-Tai entity, the word *thu'an* meaning not only 'wild', but also 'uncivilized', even 'illicit'. Thus, as Rhum (1987: 92) has argued recently, this raises again the very ancient question of the nature of the relationship of the *pa*, with its wild beasts and capricious spirits, to the Buddha, his disciples, and the 'civilized' world under the merit and rule of a *dhammaraja*.[6]

This model of the spatial organisation of the Tai *mu'ang* is, perhaps, most applicable in the intermontane basins so characteristic of the area of the former Lannathai kingdom, and it cannot be replicated in its entirety elsewhere, although the fundamental principles clearly survived even the move to the Central Plain of Thailand, first to Ayutthaya, and then to Thonburi and Bangkok. In the North East, there is also a similar pattern around the moated villages or 'water-harvesting' sites of the Khorat Plateau (Moore 1988; 1989) although these are likely to be Mon-Khmer in origin, hence the inapplicability of the term 'moated *mu'ang'*, often used to describe them. However, what is clear throughout is that the *pa* was not part of the world of the 'civilized' elite, although it was recognized as possessing great spiritual energy that could be harnessed under the right control and power.

FOREST MONASTERIES AND FOREST MONKS

So far, one element is clearly missing from this model of the Tai *mu'ang*, namely the identification of a bridge between the dichotomy of the *mu'ang* and the *pa*.. Such a bridge may be found in the forest-dwelling monks (*aranyawasi*).

'Forest-dwelling' is a very ancient practice, and is one of the thirteen *dhutangas*, or special ascetic practices,to aid deep meditation and purification. There are three grades of 'forest-dwelling', ranging from permanent habitation, through cool and hot season habitation, to dwelling

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[6] *Dhammaraja* is a title given to a King who is a great upholder of the *Dhamma*, the teachings of the Buddha.

in the hot season only (Buddhaghosa 1956: 53). Moreover, some monks live as sylvan hermits eating only the natural produce of the forest,whereas others live in properly constructed forest monasteries. According to established rules, the latter have to be at least 500 bow-lengths (approximately one kilometre) from the gate-post of a walled town.

Such monasteries came to play an extremely important role in the religious and economic life of the Tai *mu'ang* during the Sukhothai period, as is well exemplified by the dispersion of the *wat pa daeng* (Red Forest Monastery) tradition described in the *tamnan, Mulasasana* and *Jinakalamali* (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1972). According to the usual interpretation, this sect derived its title from a monastery *(wat)* which had been located by a *mai daeng* tree (*Xylia kerrii* Craib & Hutch.), this gloss is probably wrong because the actual term used, *pa daeng,* is a common Northern Thai term for savanna forest or dry deciduous dipterocarp forest (Stott 1978b: 169), and the founding monastery may well have been established within an area of this widespread forest association, part of the *pa thu'an* (Stott 1984). Such a*wat* , at the foot of Mount Siripabbata, south of Sri Satchanalai, was inhabited by Mahathera Anomadassi in about 1341/42 A.D. (Griswold and Prasert Na Nagara 1972: 51, 59).

As Aung-Thwin (1985) has argued for Pagan, such forest monasteries and monks, who had normally sought more correct ordinations from Sri Lankan sects, either in Ceylon itself or at Martaban in Burma, were then used by kings to control the increasing power and wealth of the urban elite *sangha.* It is interesting to recall that Anomadassi and his close companion, Mahathera Sumana, both returned from the Udumbaragiri Forest Monastery, a sect of forest-dwelling Sihalabhikkus near Martaban, to be placed by King Lu'daiya in the Mango Grove Monastery *(wat pa mamuang),* one kilometre west of Sukhothai, and at *wat pa daeng,* south of the twin-city, Sri Satchanalai, where Lidaiya (Phya Lithai) was *uparaja* ('viceroy', second king or deputy king).[7] The Prologue to the *Traibhumikatha* actually states that Phya Lithai 'learned...from the monk Anomadassi', whom he had requested to reside at *wat pa daeng,* while Sumana was at the Mango Grove Monastery.[8]

Such purer sects were thus used by kings to control the urban elite and to bring the religion of the Buddha to bear in the *pa thu'an,* thus creating a distinctive bridge between the *mu'ang* and the *pa.* It is worth noting, however, that many *Aranyawasi* were located just outside the city walls, but still within the 'civilized' space of the *mu'ang,* among the productive rice fields, as can be observed at ancient Sri Satchanalai. But others were in the

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[7] The king himself resided at Sukhothai.

[8] It is quite probable that much of the 'Three Worlds' was actually based on the teaching of Anomadassi, who, with Sumana, was much respected by Phya Lithai. Mahathera Sumana discovered a relic of the Lord Buddha between Sukhothai and Sri Satchanalai, which he took in great possession to Sri Satchanalai (see *Tamnan Mulasasana).*

forest proper, and some of these gave rise to the powerful tradition of the *thudong* and wandering meditation.

FOREST DHAMMA AND CONSERVATION

Such forest-dwelling is now starting to play an increasing role in wildlife conservation in Thailand, following a trend the present author had predicted might happen (Stott 1978a). The trend is particularly well illustrated by the project under the control of Phra Acarn Pongsak Tejadhamma, the Abbot of Wat Palat, in Tambon Mae Soi, Amphoe Chomtong, some 70 kilometres to the south of Chiangmai.[9]

As a young monk, Acarn Pongsak spent many years walking the hills of northern Thailand before the real onslaught on the forests of the region began. Eventually, he came to Tu Bou Cave, which had been a forest meditation retreat some centuries ago, possibly in the time of Sukhothai. He decided to make this a retreat once again, a cool and pleasant location in the hot season to which people could come to learn more about Nature and Forest Buddhism. The grove is now visited by many groups, particularly students from Mahidol and Chulalongkorn Universities, in groups sometimes numbering up to a hundred at a time.

But the Mae Soi catchment area also exemplifies many of the more serious and complex environmental problems which afflict the pioneer mountain fringes of Thailand. The settlement of Hmong peoples on the watershed has led to deforestation and to the diverting of water resources away from the *mu'ang fai* irrigation systems of the lowland Tai, the *khon mu'ang,* with a resultant decline in rice production. This, in turn, has forced the lowlanders to raid the forest for new and additional resources, such as charcoal, timber, game and orchids, all of which further exacerbates the problem and seriously disrupts the wildlife of the area.

Conflict was inevitable between the many vested interests and concerned parties,particularly as the Hmong were being encouraged to change from opium production to substitute crops such as cabbages. Lowland Tai have a prejudiced attitude towards the Hmong, whom they see as rapacious, ecologically destructive, and little more than 'wild beasts' of the *pa thu'an;* for the lowlanders, the Hmong are certainly not part of the Tai *mu'ang*. This same prejudice is widespread wherever the two groups come into juxtaposition, as I personally recorded in Huay Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, where the then Warden of the Khao Nang-Ram Research Station roundly condemned the Hmong for much poaching and forest destruction; he clearly regarded them, broadly speaking, as beyond the jurisdiction of the Thai *mu'ang*.

To try to overcome these tensions, Acarn Pongsak founded the Dhammanat Foundation, the main aims of which are to reconcile not only

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[9] M.R. Smansnid (Nunie) Svasti, personal communications 1987-90; see also Sanitsuda (1989); Suphaphan Na Bangchang (1990).

Hmong and *khon mu'ang,* but also officials and people, and people and Nature, above all through the teaching of *sinlatham,*[10] that is, the maintenance of balance within the individual, society, the environment, and the *mu'ang*. Practical measures include the construction of irrigation systems, the piping of water, reafforestation, soil erosion controls, and the improvement of soil fertility. But above all, the aim is to teach the basic principles of ecological harmony through gentle persuasion and the precepts of Buddhism. The six tenets of the Foundation are:

-to promote 'Right Understanding', thus eliminating self-seeking motives;

-to encourage living in *sinlatham,* maintaining the harmony and the balance of Nature;

-to promote the principle of *sinlatham* in the development plans, not only of the local area, but also of the nation, the *mu'ang;*

-to promote the use of *sinlatham* to restore the balance of Nature by the conservation and the restoration of forests;

-to foster compassion and understanding towards all living things;

-to promote self-reliance and co-operation in community development.

This project has aroused much bitter criticism from those attempting to resettle the Hmong, from others who regard Acarn Pongsak as a subversive, and in the Thai newspaper *Thai Rath.* The project is nonetheless increasingly gaining recognition,and is now partially funded by the World Wildlife Fund, whilst the Royal Forest Department of Thailand has provided some equipment and skilled labour. It might well be argued that this is a truly local project,which is gradually being accepted by the elite of conservation and forest management. However it must be pointed out that the project itself has somewhat elite origins, being led by a monk from outside the area, who although he is now very much trusted and accepted, is financially supported,through great personal sacrifice, by an aristocrat (*mo'mratchawong).*[11] What is undeniable is that Forest Buddhism is providing the bridge between the *mu'ang* and the *pa* at an ancient meditation site, perhaps itself linked to the Sukhothai tradition, and long respected by the local *khon mu'ang.*

Among Thai intellectuals and in the the wider world, there are increasing attempts to apply the principles of Buddhism to wildlife conservation (e.g. Seri 1988, Shari 1988), a trend which has been much encouraged by His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet. In Thailand, the writings of Chatsumarn Kabilsingh are characteristic of this development. Dr. Chatsumarn is a member of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Thammasat University, and is a leading member of the 'Buddhist Perception of Nature' Project. She recently contributed 'How Buddhism can

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[10] *Sinlatham* fundamentally refers to the Buddhist moral code and precepts.

[11] *Mo'mratchawong* is a non-hereditary, royal title conferred on the offspring of a *mo'mcao,* a grandson or granddaughter of a king.

help protect Nature' to *Tree of Life: Buddhism and the Protection of Nature* (1987), and she produced 'A Cry from the Forest' for the Wildlife Fund of Thailand (1987), a simplified version of the Thai-Tibetan Project. Interestingly, the latter contains a small section on 'Forest-Dwelling' (p. 55), in which we read, '...that cutting down a tree is a selfish act that disturbs the peace of others and deprives birds and other animals of their natural abode'. The level of analysis in most of these writings is, as yet, simplistic, but, nevertheless, they are an interesting expression of a wide range of literature, including many illustrated books for children which, I am arguing, has gradually influenced the elite of the *mu'ang* to support the conservation of Nature, to accept that the *pa* must be part of a modern civilized state, and thus to help to stop the development of the Nam Choan dam.

Undoubtedly, however, this latter trend, largely supported by and developed for a growing urban middle class, has tended to sanitise 'Nature', and much of the debate surrounding it. In many ways, the process simply continues to underline the clear distinction between an urban elite and the rural poor, the people who are actually directly concerned with the reality of the *pa thu'an*. For example, Supaphan Na Bangchang (1990: 286) virtually admits this: 'Through these Buddhist media, people in cities and towns have chances to share good deeds with the rural people and make merits *(sic)* according to the Buddhist way'. Here is the unconscious turning of the untamed *pa thu'an* of the true wild into the tamed *thammachat* of the city, the *mu'ang*, where Nature can be caught prettily in attractive illustrations for children, in the decorative arts, and on the television screen, all on show in the Central Department Store, Lard Prao. If a strong middle class is important for an effective conservation movement, it is also arguable that this class changes what it tries to conserve into something safe and homely, into an entity invested with its own values and hopes. Whatever survives in Thailand will thus become *thammachat;* it is, in effect, unlikely to remain *pa thu'an*. Great environmentalists, like Seub Nakhasathien, on the other hand, are desperate to conserve the real *pa thu'an*.

ELITE VIEWS OF NATURE

The elite of the *mu'ang* has thus changed, or is slowly altering, its view of Nature. Of course, forest, flowers, fruit and animals have always had a sanitized and stylized place in the poetry, drama and art of the court, as evidenced in the *nirat* genre of poetry. Now, however, the earthy *pa* is no longer outside the interest, the merit of the *mu'ang*. Indeed, many would argue that it must form an essential land element in any sensibly organised and managed *mu'ang*, thus helping to maintain, if I may coin the terms, 'Right Climate', 'Right Earth', 'Right Water', and harmony between people and the land. At any scale of Tambiah's 'galactic polity', the argument seems to hold good (Tambiah 1970). At the village level, the new view demands the development of agroforestry, forest villages, social forestry, access to fuel wood and local forest products, as well as employment and a benign environment in which to live. At the regional level, the main

concern is watershed management to maintain humid microclimates, prevent soil erosion and thus further downstream siltation, to control flood and drought, and to sustain a wide regional resource base. At the national, Thai *mu'ang* level, the concern is to organise local and regional programmes in a balanced fashion, to set aside 'core' forest for long-term genetic resource conservation, for research, for educational purposes, for recreation, for timber needs, and to present a mature political and 'green' face to the international community. Above all, it is recognized that the good of the *mu'ang* is ultimately linked with the wise inclusion of *pa* as part of the civilized and socialized state.

But how has this new view come about in Thailand? I believe that a whole range of factors have inexorably, but at different time-scales, worked on the thoughtful elements of society.

First, there is the recognition of the sheer rate of destruction of the forest habitat, which has at last hit home to even the most unobservant of travellers. In 1960 about 50 per cent of Thailand remained under some sort of forest cover. In 1988, although official Government statistics still claim 30 per cent (Dhira and Suthawan 1987) the real figure is closer to 15 per cent, with much land legally classified as 'forest' hardly carrying a tree.[12] In 1982, FAO/UNEP estimated the rate of forest loss as 3.15 per cent in Thailand (Allen and Barnes 1985), one of the worst rates in the whole world.

Secondly, there has been the steady infiltration of the basic scientific principles of ecology, which are today widely taught at all educational levels, and particularly to young children. Book shops in Bangkok now carry a considerable and colourful array of 'Nature books' and readers. All carry the message of the need to look after the wild places of the world.[13] Some of these are inevitably scientifically poor; others simply ape *farang* or Japanese texts; yet others are written for Thais by Thais about Thai natural history and problems. Although perhaps underplayed in this paper, it is impossible to deny the importance of contact with Western scientific thought, dating from at least the reign of Rama IV, in helping to create elite views of Nature and ecology. Likewise, the adoption of a Rousseauesque Western romanticism, which becomes apparent in the early portraits and fine arts of the Bangkok Period, had already begun to soften and civilize the Thai concept of the *pa*. The conservation ideal is thus a Western import, but the move described in this paper can be seen as a vital element in the creation of a Thai environmentalist discourse.

Thirdly, many young people have studied abroad; which is an elite trend which began early in the twentieth century with princes and the offspring of high officials. Many of these western educated students are now very

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[12] This low figure is based on my own observations and on the private comments of staff in the Faculty of Forestry in Kasetsart University, Bangkok.

[13] A range of these books for children collected by the author was displayed at the original symposium on which this volume is based.

thoughtful about Thailand and its image in the world, and many of them have witnessed at first hand elements of conservation in other countries where they have studied.

Fourthly, there has been the growth of an urban middle class who increasingly view *pa* as a place to visit for recreation and leisure.

Finally, there is the ease with which some of the principles of ecology can be grasped by a Buddhist and animist people - as one of my close colleagues at Kasetsart University, Bangkok, put it, 'Right Action, the law of cause and effect, and the fact that the Buddha became "enlightened" partly because of the wild places of the world, all conspire to make ecology a ready ethic in a changing Thailand'. As my opening quotation shows, the concept of the food chain goes back a very long way in Thai thinking; it is possible to overemphasise the recentness of Western scientific thought.

The decision on the Nam Choan dam is then the first fruits of this changing view among the elite. The *pa* is no longer outside the *mu'ang;* it must now exist in its new form as *thammachat,* for the *mu'ang* and for the people at its urban heart. In many ways, it is the agricultural countryside *(ban no'k),* lying between the *pa* and the centre, which constitutes today's backward and uncivilized space.

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INVULNERABILITY AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Andrew Turton

INTRODUCTION

Invulnerability - the idea, the palpable or imagined reality of a human person being able to resist wounding, especially by animals or other humans, to an extraordinary degree - is a powerful notion. It is a notion of great scope for social interpretation, involving both intimate conceptions of self and personhood, and also historical encounters, conflicts and sufferings on a large social scale. Elements of what one might as a term of art call the 'invulnerability syndrome' are also extremely widespread and intriguingly similar over all continents and periods of recorded history, and throughout the most disparate kinds of society. It is rare however to find the subject referenced in indexes or even specialist encyclopaedia (exceptions are Bächtold-Stäubli 1927-1942; Thompson 1955-1958).[1] Nor have I yet come across any attempt to discuss the phenomenon in detail.[2] The richest sources have been texts on 'magic' generally, primitive warfare and warriors, popular rebellions, millenarianism and banditry. Detailed context is usually lacking and a great many historical and ethnographic references to 'invulnerability' do little more than indicate that it is but one curious item in an inventory of bits of magic, or refer to its possession by exceptional warriors or leaders who may distribute it to followers at times of revolt or warfare.

I shall return very briefly at the end of this paper to a consideration of the near global incidence of the 'invulnerability syndrome'. My main approach is through Thai ethnography and with several related interests in mind. During several periods of fieldwork in northern Thailand[3] the notion of invulnerability was a recurring and rather insistent theme in unprompted conversations among villagers; it was apparently of great interest to them. Yet it was one which I could not adequately handle within the concerns and framework of ideas I had at the time. I later became more interested in questions of popular culture, conceptualised as popular or

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[1] I am grateful to Professor Rodney Needham and the Librarian of All Souls College Oxford for directing my attention to these useful sources.

[2] Berthold (1911) is a highly specialised essay on the phenomenon in Greek literature.

[3] Relevant periods of fieldwork in Northern Thailand were 1968-1970, 1976, 1987. I acknowledge with thanks financial support from London-Cornell Project, British Academy, SOAS Research Committee.

local *knowledge,* in its less hegemonised forms, especially in the context of 'everyday' forms of peasant resistance and in episodes of rebellion (see Turton 1984; 1986). As Shigeharu Tanabe and I noted in the Introduction to *History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia* notions of invulnerability seemed to have had an important place in ideas and practices within peasant rebellions throughout South East Asia up to recent times and regardless of whether the dominant religious traditions were Buddhist, Christian, Islamic etc. Invulnerability was linked in an important way with 'the theme of boldness, of overcoming fear and disparagement - crucial if fear is seen as an ideological mediation between coercion and consent..' (Turton and Tanabe 1984: 4, 7-8; Turton 1984: 60-62). Invulnerability, a seemingly god-like condition or aspiration, resembles some other concepts which imagine the transcendence of dualities or opposites in human experiences, viz:

fear	courage	invulnerability
weakness	power/strength	omnipotence
ignorance	knowledge	omniscience
death	life	immortality
suffering	the eightfold path	extinction of suffering

I hope to show, by starting with 'everyday', village-level, northern Thai ethnography and gradually moving beyond the local and contemporary, that ideas and practices of invulnerability (N.Thai *kham* (ขาม) - see below) are far from being isolated or marginal phenomena or concerned only with extraordinary people and events. To the contrary, I shall try to show their pervasiveness, deep-rootedness, and connections with many other ideas and practices, as part of a body of local knowledge and discourse which merges with ideas concerning the self, its potentiality and perfectibility, concerning fear, hope and memory, and which touches on other grand existential and metaphysical themes. In this way we may be better able to see how and why invulnerability ideas and practices can be called on, how this groundwork can be worked up, in dramatic historical moments.

The greater part of the 'northern Thai ethnography' I refer to is derived from my work in Amphur Mae Sruay, Chiangrai Province. I have also discussed my findings with various religious specialists in the North, and I refer specifically to interviews held in 1987 with Phra Chai Saen, abbot of Wat Aram Nong Mai and Phra Camras residing temporarily at Wat Sri Khong, both in Amphur Muang Chiangmai. One point of interest is that, compared with so many aspects of northern Thai local culture, *kham* information is rarely accessible in the locally published Thai script books.[4]This can hardly be explained in terms of decline in interest since much other more rarely used information is so collected and published. It

[4] I have examined a considerable number of these often ephemeral publications. The only reference I can record is in a short text on magical stones (*pek*) in Sanguan (1975: 239).

is perhaps partly that like some other local knowledge (e.g. about kinship and descent relations and practices, forest prohibitions etc) these are so 'ordinary' (*thammada*) that they are not paraded as anything special. Conversely, they are esoteric and secret. This is partly a question of respect for powerful knowledge and the teacher who taught it; partly a concern that others should not know the precise wording of certain formulae, even if they might be encouraged to respect the fact that one does possess and can activate them. And partly too there may be a slight element of their being not quite proper *vis-à-vis* the state authorities. To give two examples of a teacher's caution in these matters: my own principal teacher once woke me up after I had retired for the night in order to impart some long promised specialist information; on another occasion he required secrecy about the precise text of a formula for avoiding military conscription on the grounds that it was *'kho'ng ratsado'n'* ('people's property' one might say).[5] Secondary sources to which I am indebted include recent work by anthropologists working in the North (Cohen 1987; Irvine 1982; Tanabe 1986; Tannenbaum 1987).

The ethnography that follows might be termed, a little grandly, elements of a northern Thai discourse of invulnerability - the conditions and context for the authorisation, acquisition, maintenance, validation, dissemination, discussion and use of knowledge of 'invulnerability'. There is a risk, in attempting to recover a form of 'subjected knowledge' (Foucault 1980: 85) - at the least one not much attended to in orthodox religious or academic discourse - of defining and constructing an area of discourse which may be less systematic and more fragmentary and contradictory in practice than my presentation may make it appear. It may be that 'unsystematicness' is the normal condition of popular knowledge.[6] Furthermore the ideas and practices discussed here could be regrouped as part of a yet wider set concerning means of protection, encouragement, improvement, maximization of success and so on, both for oneself and for others. My initial justification, however, is that the phenomena to be presented are already grouped by the northern Thai category *kham*.

The northern Thai word *kham* (long vowel, low tone) is given the sole English translation 'invulnerable', in one northern Thai-Thai-English dictionary (Met 1965: 41, and see also p. 35 *'khongkham = [C.Thai] khru'angrang*, amulet..') Thammarachanuwat (1971) another northern Thai-Thai dictionary gives similar equivalences, together with 'central' Thai glosses *khongkraphanchatri, nieo, yukhong* and *thonthan to awut.*

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[5] Terwiel referring to central Thailand, discusses why research into the topic of magical tattooing is not easy: 'Most of the present day tattooing is part of an esoteric tradition and the specialist wi(ll only grudgingly give information about the spells and powers inherent in this ancient art' 1979: 157).

[6] Cf. Cirese's list of the characteristics Gramsci attributes to folklore or popular belief: contradictoriness, fragmentation, dispersal, multiplicity, unsystematicness and difference (1982: 219). See also Eagleton (1982).

dictionary (Met 1965: 41, and see also p. 35 *'khongkham = [C.Thai] khru'angrang,* amulet..') Thammarachanuwat (1971) another northern Thai-Thai dictionary gives similar equivalences, together with 'central' Thai glosses *khongkraphanchatri, nieo, yukhong* and *thonthan to awut.* Various Thai-English dictionaries gloss these Thai equivalences in English as 'invulnerable', 'impenetrable by weapons', 'proof against weapons' (Haas 1964; McFarland 1944; So 1972). Central Thai seems not to know *kham* as such, with the possible exception, which I have not been able to confirm, of *pongkham* 'quartz,... lucky stone' (So 1972). It is tempting to hypothesise that *khong* (here 'invulnerable' but also: secure, permanent, enduring, often also coupled as *mankhong,* secure as in 'national security'), and *yukhong* (*yu* = to be, remain) are the basic, ancient Siamese words to which have been added *k(r)aphan* and *chatri.* Another basic and multivalent synonym is *nieo* (here strong or tough), but this seems to lack the specialist overtones of *khong.* This meaning and usage of *khong* is virtually identical with the German *fest, festmachen* (in the sense of *unverwundbar* [invulnerable], see Bächtold-Stäubli 1927-1942) but I have not yet ascertained a possible Anglo-Saxon equivalent. During my early village-level fieldwork I never heard the word *khongkaphan* or *khongkaphanchatri* but Irvine (1982), recording conversations in Chiangmai province which may have included some central Thai lexicon, gives *yukhongkaphan* as both northern and central Thai and does not use *kham* at all.

Anuman Rajadhon remarks that *kaphan:*

> ... is usually juxtaposed to another Thai word to form a synonymous couplet peculiar to the Thai language as *yukhong kaphan. Yukhong* is no doubt an indigenous Thai word meaning invulnerability; the same meaning attaches also to the word 'kaphan' - a word of doubtful origin. The Malay has a word *kabal* with a similar sound and meaning i.e. invulnerability (Anuman 1968: 279).

I propose there is ample reason to accept Phya Anuman's typically modest and more than educated guess. There is evidence of much borrowing of elements of magical traditions between the Malay-Arabic world and the Thai. *Kabal* has a range of uses comparable to *kham* and *khong,* for example, *'kabal*:: a hardened charmed body (that is shot, or cut free, said by the Malays to be attained by charms)' (Howison 1801 Pt 2: 85; and see the section 'Regional Affinities' below). The Malay *-l* ending would become *-n* in Thai pronunciation; the occasional insertion of *-r-* (*kraphan*) seems to this author like a literary attempt to approximate a Khmer or Sanskrit origin, which in any case would be lost again in ordinary speech.

The Brahmanical and Sanskrit connections are made with the addition of *chatri* which is of course *kshatriya* (McFarland 1944) but can distance itself some way from the doctrine of the four varnas, as metaphor and metonym for male bravery and fighting skill in general: 'brave, valiant, doughty, a doughty fighter, a skilful swordsman, a blade' (So 1972: 296). There is of course room for ambiguity and subversion of meaning here, a slide from the idea of a ruling warrior class to brave men anywhere and fighters of all

sorts. Cohen (1987) links the peasant leader Pho Phan's exhortation to bravery, 'fight like *chai chatri'* (sc. 'warriors'), rather directly with the *kshatriya* notion, which then authorises the strong idea of 'subversive appropriation of elite ideology' over and above the less strong idea of the 'ennoblement of Thai popular views of masculinity' (Cohen 1987: 166; sc. 'fight like men'). Perhaps in this case the most innovative aspect is the call to non-violent, unarmed bravery and struggle. I shall be referring later to a recent central Thai text (Thep 1979) entitled *wicha khongkraphanchatri* (*wicha* = knowledge of -, study of -) which brings together all three terms; the sub-title is *khumu' chai chatri,* a handbook for *chai chatri.*

KHAM IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Basically *kham* refers to a kind of knowledge, in the form of verbal formulae (*katha*). This knowledge is for individual protection in dangerous and frightening situations, especially social encounters with possibly armed, potentially aggressive or malevolent human others. Interestingly, this seems to be the inverse of ideas concerning 'witchcraft' attacks in the widest sense. Namely, we have here to do with fears and dangers of *non-mystical* action, at close quarters or *face-to-face,* and with *living* beings. The formulae and/or their possessor are said to 'be *kham*', or 'be *kham'* (against) something'; able to withstand, be proof against pain, fear, wounding, loss of physical freedom, death caused by specific means (especially, as we shall see, the type of 'bad deaths').

Let me briefly elaborate some of the things that *kham* knowledge is proof against and with what effects. Above all it is proof against weapons (sword, spear, axe, clubs, guns) - the type instance is *fan bo' khao ying bo' thuk* (slash not enter, shoot not hit). In addition there are *other modes of human attack* (e.g. fists, but also magic); some *superhuman attack* (e.g. by spirits); and *natural dangers* such as fire, 'teeth' in general, tigers, bears, poisonous snakes, fish and insects. There are also related formulae for forms of social confinement (escape from prisoner's yoke, ropes; for kicking down doors; going without food). Some formulae are said to be proof against fear as such, for example, when visiting other villages or the forest alone. But as I said, the most prevalent case is that the body, the skin, is attacked with a penetrating weapon, and either resists penetration or if penetrated the wound is not fatal. Some forms are preventative or evasive; others weaken the aggressor rather than strengthen the body of the possessor (e.g. the sword falls from the enemy's hand, his arm is paralysed, he is made weak or unconscious).

There are conditions, rules and procedures, for the acquisition, maintenance and retention, application and use of this knowledge and its power. Many of these conditions also apply to some degree to other forms of specialist knowledge most commonly grouped as *saiyasat* ('magic'). Most types of knowledge, certainly the more powerful, have to be obtained from a 'teacher' (*khru*), who has a 'spirit teacher' (or spirit(s) of his teacher(s), *phi khru)*; the acquirer also takes on a *phi khru* in turn - without necessarily becoming a teacher himself. Acquiring the knowledge is often referred to as

'learning' (*hian kham*) which is not a once and for all process. It could also be seen nowadays as a commodity transaction, with cash sums recorded (at the village level) ranging from a day's wage to the price of a buffalo, for one item. Most types of knowledge are, in the first place, verbal; though some objects, possibly thought to be less powerful, might be obtained without verbal formulae or a teacher, for example, sports of nature which are held to be inherently powerful, such as stones (N.Thai *pek*), tusks etc., certain rare pictures of a king, or banknotes (curiously including a 1932 note said to be without the picture of a king). There are references too to bathing in certain wells, or boiling and eating herbs and creepers.

Teachers store their knowledge partly in written books. I have copied and recorded some of these. Let me describe one briefly: it is a small concertina book of 64 sides, handwritten on locally-made durable paper (*phap sa*). It is difficult to break down the contents into discrete items, but it has about 120 formulae and prescriptions, over half of which are specifically *kham;* other being mainly related formulae for invisibility, escape, physical prowess, personal esteem and popularity etc. They have possibly been selected and copied from various sources, perhaps over time according to the interests of the owner and/or previous owners. (Some of these books might be up to 100 years old or even older; some are in more than one style of handwriting.) One of the reasons why I am wary of reporting or constructing too exclusive a category of 'invulnerability' texts, is the way different types and preoccupations are jumbled up almost randomly. For example, in this text some items are grouped under a specific rubric (e.g. 'for going to war'); others seem roughly grouped; yet others seem to be a distinct grouping but of mixed contents, for example, the following set of yantra (*yan*) for these purposes and in this order:

- to make officials and princes love you
- to prevent children crying
- to make spirits afraid of you
- for success in trading
- for invulnerability against 'teeth'
- for invulnerability against guns
- to prevent fevers
- to prevent house theft
- to attract young women

Some texts - and many are much shorter - may include a few *kham* formulae but consist mainly of curative or love magic, and there are many other combinations.

The transfer of one particular item of knowledge may consist solely in memorizing half a dozen syllables or enough to fill a page. The formulae may be in a language other than northern Thai, or in a mixture of languages, with often only the first syllable of a word given; thus they are varyingly intelligible to the user. Other languages include Pali, Burmese and some minority languages. One informant claimed that *kham* texts

were likely to be in Burmese (the language of a once conquering polity) and 'aggressive magic' in the languages of autocthonous or other, subordinate, 'hill peoples'.

Very often the formulae are inscribed on copper in plain text or in the form of yantra (diagrams and pictorial images with words, letters, and numbers) or on cloth worn (as jackets or headscarves) or carried on the person. Tattooing is regarded as a most effective means of inscribing the formulae, a controlled piercing of the skin which can be a painful process. Other means of absorption include the subcutaneous insertion (in lower eyelid, arm or torso) of materials, or the swallowing, excretion and retention of gems and metals. Some materials used are obtained from the bodies or grave goods of the dead.

The knowledge is only effective under certain prescribed conditions. The formulae must be correctly remembered. One expert said he was afraid of using much of his knowledge because he had learnt so much and was not sure of correctly remembering or using it. What he feared specifically was punishment from his *phi khru*, for these 'spirit teachers' must also be properly cared for. There are numerous avoidances for the user (food, locations, improper thought and language, including boasting of possession). There is a concomitant need to possess and practise appropriate 'non-magical' skills, behaviours and personality traits. As well as routine maintenance, there are proper procedures for *ad hoc* use. The formulae may be written on or placed inside a candle and burnt, or may be written, burnt and the ashes drunk; spoken into water (either specifically auspicious or patently not so, e.g. sump water or urine) and bathed in; spoken into spittle or oil and rubbed on the body. They may be spoken into peppers, oil or alcohol and consumed; at the popular level there is a strong association with alcohol.

There are modes or conditions of validation for ensuring and explaining powers and failures, almost amounting to a system of apologetics. First, all the procedures referred to above must have been correctly observed. Knowledge, tattooing etc. should be acquired on a day auspicious for the purpose. A few formulae have a specific renewal or 'use by' date (e.g. three years). Many are specific to one named source of danger and do not comprehensively cover all risks and eventualities.[7] Possession of too much knowledge may be 'overheating' and lead to madness. There are rough and partial notions of hierarchy of potency of different formulae. There are explanations for failure or part-failure. For example, a man who died of a broken neck in a car accident but had no wounds was still said to be *kham*. Phra Chai Saen - see above - told me of a'bandit' in Chiangkhong who some years earlier had been killed by a bullet which had shattered his skull without piercing; this was offered as evidence of a kind of resistance to

[7] It is hard to avoid evoking similarities with insurance policies. The metaphysical and social importance of insurance provision has been discussed, in the context of witchcraft prosecution, by Keith Thomas (1973); see also Hirst and Woolley (1982: 247-257).

There is also knowledge of 'counter-magic' (sometimes revealed by autopsy) e.g. bullets to kill someone said to be *kham* are kept by a woman who is menstruating, or a revenge murder weapon is soaked in urine for seven days. One might term this the 'silver bullet syndrome' (see Skeat 1967: 528), 'Achilles' heel syndrome', or 'unique vulnerability syndrome' (see Thompson 1955-1958 Vol.2: 1840 ff.). The bodies of men said to have been *kham* are said to burn less easily on the funeral pyre, resistant to the end. Patients in Chiangmai hospitals have been known to need to request permission from their *khru* before an injection may successfully be administered.

Probably the most popular form of validation is physical testing, especially at New Year.[1] This may be self-inflicted or by attacking a possessor (sometimes unawares), or by firing a gun at a talisman. Those who get hurt in group fist fights at New Year are said to have to go away and 'learn their *katha* anew'. Some seem to be proved, not so much against the more dramatic attacks referred to in expert books, but by more mundane demonstrations of toughness and endurance: eating handfuls of peppers, walking barefoot on sharp glass, carrying hot pitch or plunging hands into boiling fat, breaking stones on the head, carrying heavy timbers, standing in a well and avoiding things thrown down, snatch stealing at crowded fairs with impunity and so on. There is also knowledge of plain deceit or the possibility of it.

The contexts of use of this knowledge are instructive and historically interesting. I have grouped some of them as follows :

- for use when visiting other and more distant villages for festivals (when young men would engage in controlled fist fights) and trading;

- for use when visiting the forest, not only for hunting and gathering (some rubrics warn that immunity may be obtained only at the price of *lack* of success in productive ventures) but for travelling between villages, or when avoiding or fleeing from others, or on forced migration;

- for use when visiting or being visited by or otherwise at risk from officials and nobility, police or bandits and robbers;

- for use in wartime as soldier, requisitioned civilian labour, victim of population raids etc.

These contexts indicate, among other things, experience of danger and success in mobile and often solitary situations, in legally or socially dubious activities (as victim *or* perpetrator), of competition for leadership or peer

[1] Irvine (1982: 211 Plate 7) has an impressive photograph of a recently tattooed young man being tested with a knife point.

group pre-eminence, and of political, legal, military subordination and oppression. The recorded contexts of use and supposed use, the occasional rubric added to the *katha* themselves, the accompanying conversation of my interlocutors, all recorded at the village level, suggest the needs and experiences of the unwilling conscript as much or rather than the victorious general, the cautious and normally fearful peasant subject as much or rather than the bandit chief or the noble lord, or the small scale braggardly ruffian as much or rather than the professional criminal. However all these social characters no doubt made use of the same *katha*, and may have acquired their knowledge from the same teacher.

What comes across strongly from my recollections of early fieldwork and rereading of my fieldnotes is a sense of the sheer general importance of this *kham* discourse for those involved. Apart from detailed discussion of texts and reported cases with experts, much of my notes is from overheard, spontaneous conversations; many a time after an evening meal there were lengthy conversations about *katha* in which *kham* was prominent : endless stories and examples, cases of named people, humourous escapades, mixed expressions of respect and scepticism. A field notebook entry (my own commentary 27 August 1976) captures some of this sense:

> It's a way of expressing fears and boldness: of explaining rare powers, strength, extraordinary skills and chance. Also a way of talking about people and their differences; admiring, judging, criticizing limitations, expressing a kind of (limited) ranking, i.e. good at some things not others; lucky in love but not rich etc.

Though *kham* concerns men, both young and very old, women would engage in these conversations. At this level it has to do with strong desires for individual enhancement, for acquiring special abilities and capacities. This was despite the recognition that the pursuit could possibly incur the risk of an unbalanced success in life. The theme seemed to link up with, and be a mnemonic, a focus in memory for all sorts of accumulated knowledge: of the characteristics of weapons, animals, other people, assessment of odds, and of appropriate physical and social skills and behaviours in risky and often solitary situations. There was a range of instances; at one end youthful boasting competitiveness and bravado, and exhibitions (and more frequently talk of them) of a sort of fairground virtuosity and wonderment. At the other end of the local scale there were the quieter but stronger reputations of older men, usually men with leadership roles - the former *khuba acan* (the old abbot), irrigation chiefs, headmen and so on. But all those who cultivated this form of knowledge, young and old, seemed to have had the experience of a wider and more distant social and spatial range than was normal in the locality.

There is a danger that the terms of art that anthropologists so often use - worship, magic, ancestor and so on, and here perhaps already the term 'invulnerability' itself, restrict as much as help understanding. They tend to reify concepts and suggest too comprehensive a comparability of the phenomena in view. At this point we may find it helpful to recast

'invulnerability' - *kham* in action, in context - in terms of ideas and practices concerning the self and body, related ideas and practices of endurance, pain, confidence, courage and risk-taking, and even of individual potentiality and capacity for self-improvement.

A LITERARY SOURCE

Khun Chang, Khun Phaen is an epic poem of 43,280 lines, possibly dating to the beginning of the Ayutthaya period or earlier. Transmitted orally for centuries it was collected and composed in written form for the first time by Rama II (r. AD 1809-1824) and court poets including Sunthorn Phu. And though primarily about the exploits of nobility it is described as a 'popular', 'folkloric' poem in the language of the common people. The occasions when it was recited were also popular events such as large scale household ceremonies at the village community level (Sibunruang 1960: 13, 15).

Khun Phaen is a senior military commander in the service of the King of Ayutthaya. His knowledge of magic of various sorts is absolutely central for his characterisation as a *dramatis persona:* his skills and abilities, his reputation, his extraordinary actions and achievements. A large part of Khun Phaen's education up to the age of 16, which takes place in three different temples, seems to have been in magic (*saiyasat*), especially techniques of invulnerability. Mention is made of *yu khong, khong kraphan, khong kraphan chatri,* and *khlaeo khlat* (avoidance). It is emphasised that this is part of his knowledge and wisdom, along with specific physical and military skills. When he asks his mother for permission to be ordained a novice in a particular temple, she replies that this is 'a very good idea; the abbot is very wise in matters of magic ... and will teach you the art of being invulnerable just like your father' (Sibunruang 1960: 22; see also Arada 1985). His father's invulnerability, like that of the heavily tattooed Lannathai general Tripech later in the story, could finally be breached only by death by impalement.[9]

Khun Phaen's powers of invulnerability (against guns as well as spears and other weapons) was combined in practice with powers of invisibility, metamorphosis, escape (*sado'*), personal charm (*mahaniyom*), and the ability to render his foes immobile (*maha-ut*). He was also assisted by spirits, amulets, and spells both impregnated in oil and inscribed on cloth - these latter being more the material media for communicating the power of invulnerability than a distinct source of power. In particular he possessed a magical horse and sword. This panoply contributed to and was enhanced by his personal boldness. In addition before battle he and his men would concentrate their thoughts and powers in meditation (*phawana*). Among these various special powers - sources, conduits and agencies of power - that of *yu khong* stands out as a dominant metaphor.

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[9] A somewhat comparable instance is that of the legendary defenders of Ban Bang Rachan against the Burmese in the eighteenth century, Phra Thammachote and Nai Thorngman who after heroic resistance and immune to weapons of war, could be put to death only by beating. See account given in the National Museum, Bangkok.

Consideration of *Khun Chang, Khun Phaen* helps to address the question of the antiquity of these invulnerability notions. The poem is apparently based on historical events late in the reign of Ramadhipati II (r. AD 1491-1529) but according to Prince Bidyalankarana (1948) - also cited by Sibunruang (1960) - it probably had a historical kernel dating to well before the founding of Ayutthaya in 1350, and the deeds and attributes of several 'heroes' may be combined in one figure, as in the stories of Phra Ruang, or for example King Arthur.

Siamese annals (cited in Marquès-Rivière 1938: 220) refer to a display of invulnerability powers by members of the Siamese embassy from King Narai of Ayutthaya to King Louis XIV of France They record that thanks to the 'three refuges' and talismans which make the Siamese *'invulnérables et invincibles'* the French sharpshooters' guns failed to fire 'not a spark from the flints, not a flash from the powder, not a gun went off'. It is interesting to note, regardless of whenever this passage in the annals may have been composed or recomposed, that this item of scientific or magical knowledge was thought appropriate in a diplomatic presentation of Siamese learning and capabilities. Comparable ideas and practices were no doubt present in some European military milieux of the time, before the more mechanical and disciplinary Prussian form of military training began to predominate (see Foucault 1977: 135ff), not to mention the rifle and then the machine gun. Military magic, including specifically the type of invulnerability (*festmachen*) was apparently banned in 1724 by Prussian articles of war, though the scholar who recorded this item for us felt obliged to add that such magic was to his own direct knowledge still in use in the German army during the First World War (Bächtold-Stäubli 1927-1942).

A MANUAL FOR THE MILITARY MAN

The manual *wicha khongkraphanchatri* (Thep 1979)[10] is an interesting example of the genre of contemporary printed and published magical textbook. It refers to itself as a textbook of magic (*tamra saiyasat*), a manual or handbook (*khumu'*) and as a profound treatise (*khampi*). It makes use of just about every term for knowledge, science, art and technique etc. (*wicha, witthaya, witthayakan, silpawitthayakan, sattra* etc.) in its claims for the learned nature of its subject matter. Its popularity may be partly judged from the fact that, first published in 1962, it was reprinted in 1965 and again in 1979.

Like *Khun Chang, Khun Phaen* this manual also allows consideration not merely of antiquity but of possible changes in use and interpretation, including one of the questions which interests us here, namely different ways in which invulnerability knowledge and practices may have been differentially perceived and used by elite and popular or non-elite sectors of society. Interestingly, the manual refers to *Khun Chang, Khun Phaen* as part of its claim for the antiquity of *khongkraphan chatri* and some *katha*

[10] I am grateful to Dr Manas Chitakasem for discovering this publication for me.

(*phramahakathamahachatri* pp. 58-59) are specifically those used by *'than acan phlaikaeo'* , which is another name of Khun Phaen. The Preface to the First Edition of the manual opens thus: 'The science of *khongkraphanchatri* is yet another exceedingly valuable kind of knowledge buried deep in the veins of us Thai people since ancient times'. The texts of the various *katha* (196 items in all) are full of references to divine, legendary and historical personages which lends a kind of timeless or cosmic antiquity and authority: Indra, Hanuman, Phra Ruang, Phra Narai, Phlaikaeo (Khun Phaen), and nameless *buranacan*, together with grateful and respectful acknowledgements to named and presumably living or only lately deceased *acan* residing at particular temples in particular provinces, from whom the compiler learnt the knowledge he onward transmits.

The compiler is concerned to present a genealogy in order to establish continuity, legitimacy, respectability and authority. In ancient times, he says, everyone [adult males intended] learnt this knowledge because everyone had to be a soldier. A general of the Third Reign (1824-1851) is mentioned for his renowned ability to *taeng khon*, namely to use *khongkraphan* extensively to protect his *phrai*. The knowledge, he says, was used successfully in wars against the Lao and Vietnamese in the early nineteenth century; and later by soldiers in the Second World War, in Korea and Indochina.

In addition to this genealogy, there is an attempt at a rationalisation and a sociology of the history of *khongkraphanchatri*. It is surmised that it probably predates firearms. At the outset of the Introduction *khongkraphan* itself is said to be proof against 'knives, wood, spears, swords, javelins, lances, pikes..' but not firearms, for which, it is speculated, *maha-ut* was developed later. This, together with *khlaeoklaat* concerns the power to prevent, foil or avoid force rather than resist penetration. This rationalisation is contradicted in practice, for example later in the manual there are *katha* which can serve for both firearms and other weapons *'chaidai saraphatthukprakan thang thaang yukhongkraphan lae khlaeoklaat'* (p.67).

The compiler is particularly concerned, in his preamble, with two sociological aspects which he combines in an interesting manner. He discusses at length his view that Siamese techniques of *yukhong* do not - or did not formerly - involve tattooing. He cites *Khun Chang, Khun Phaen* to show that neither Khun Phaen - epitome of Ayutthaya warrior manhood - nor his men used tattoos, whereas their Shan/Lao/Lannathai foes were tattooed all over. There was, he claims, a decline in the practice of *yukhong* after the end of compulsory military *corvée* (by 1905). This coincided with increased cultural contacts between the Siamese and Lao/Shan/Lannathai worlds and greater mobility of especially Shan tattoo masters. This in turn encouraged the adoption of *khongkraphan* practices not by *chatri* but *'phuak anthaphan nakleng hua mai* ' (gangsters and ruffians) who used it to cause trouble, in feuds and so on. Things deteriorated to such an extent that official measures were taken; an example given is the printing on the back cover of school textbooks of a warning by the Ministry of Education to

young people not to practice *wicha yukhong* because of its use by *anthaphan nakleng* etc. Though no date is given, from the context this would have been approximately in the late 1930s. After the Second World War, the author claims, the science was again to achieve 'world recognition' and be proved in subsequent wars.

I doubt that villagers I spoke to in 1968-70 and 1976 would either periodise in this way nor distinguish so nicely between proper military and improper civilian use. Thep, compiler of the manual under discussion, here historicises the shift or ambiguity between perceived legitimacy and illegitimacy of *yukhong* practices. A more evolutionary view, and a moral evolutionary view, is taken by the northern Thai peasant leader and mystic Phra Pho Phan:

> ... the power of us human beings, in former times came from the study of magical formula (*katha akhom*), whoever was *khongkraphan*, whoever could fell trees with a spell, had supernatural power (*rid*), had power (*amnat*), but Kuba Sriwichai, Kuba Khawip, Luang Pu Waen derived their power (*amnat*) from the true dharma (*saccatham*) (Tanabe 1986: 168).

The inherently amoral power quality of this form of power in any period is well put by a Thai Shan abbot from Maehongson in conversation with the anthropologist Nicola Tannenbaum:

> Two types of people get these tattoos [*kat*]. One kind considers that he is now so well protected from bullets and knife wounds that he is free to go out and fight with people. He does not fear anything and is thus free to be wicked. Others will use these tattoos like a fence which keeps water buffaloes out of their fields. They get the tattoos, become impervious to weapons, and others seeing the tattoos and knowing they cannot be harmed will leave them alone (Tannenbaum1987: 699).

There is then always the possibility of *khongkraphan* practices being used in the context of the most unscrupulous and depraved behaviour. Khun Phaen himself obtains his 'embryo spirit' by eviscerating his own wife - albeit shortly after she has attempted to poison him in obedience to the wishes of her father, a bandit chief. Certainly the theme of 'good/proper' versus 'bad/improper' use of *khongkraphan* crosscuts the elite/popular axis. Internal 'enemies of society' (dacoits, millenarian or other rebel peasant leaders) may use it, but so too may external enemy princes and generals, for example the Lannathai general Tripech mentioned earlier, whom Khun Phaen overcomes finally by ordering death by impalement. This theme is taken up again later in this chapter.

PERFECTIBLE AND CONCENTRATED POWERS

A great many powers may be said to constitute *kham*. They are certainly involved in constituting *kham* in thought and as part of discourse on powers. Just as *kham* itself produces or enables more than one power or capacity (though with unpierceable skin as a root idea), and is closely associated in practice with other powers (e.g. avoidance), so too it is constituted by more than one source or kind of power. Certain

components of general strength and well-being, such as *khwan* (volatile soul) or humoural balance, are perhaps so everyday that they do not appear in most specialist discussions but would need to be considered in a fuller account (see Irvine 1982). For example Phra Chai Saen, of Wat Nong Mai Chiangmai, attempted to classify *kham* in terms of whether acquired by virtue of:
1. *katha (akhom)* - (a) learnt, (b) written (e.g. tattooed, or on cloth or thin sheets of metal, *takrut,* and kept on the person);
2. *wan ya* (various creepers and plants);
3. *pek (khot, lae that).*
Phra Chai Saen had an almost lighthearted approach to *kham,* saying that if the Buddha had taught only meditation no-one would have listened. So a few displays of physical prowess were in order; to which end he claimed to be practising to be able to sit in a large bowl of boiling fat.

Phra Camras is a teacher and practitioner of concentration meditation (*samathi phawana*). His classification gave priority to meditation:
1. *samathi*
2. *katha akhom*
3. *watthu* (material objects) - (a) certain natural objects (*pek, khot, lek lai, wan ya,* etc.), (b) certain amulets (*khru'angrang, takrut* etc.).
The natural material objects are all examples of wondrous concentrations found in nature (rare and unusual metals, stones, tusks, seeds, eggs etc.). The material objects are said to be inherently powerful: *'mi khwam saksit nai tua man eng', 'di tam thammachat kho'ng man eng'.* They do not need to be activated by means of verbal incantations (*pluk sek*) nor treated with special respect ('they could be worn under the foot'). [This latter claim might be regarded as exaggerated or contentious by others and would certainly not apply to all objects in these categories.] Other means such as *katha* need to be combined with reflective thought (*phawana*) including good intention, an attitude of boldness (*phuak kham to'ng cai khla*), and ideally concentration meditation (*samathi phawana*). All methods are good on their own; but they are best in combination. *Samathi* is like the hand; all the other *wicha,* the special psychic forces (Pali: *itthipatihariya*) are like the fingers of the hand. Ultimately the power is that of human mental capacities; if the 'current of psychic energy' (Irvine 1982) is high (*krasae cit sung*) anything is possible. The human mind, 'like the sun', is both ordinary and extraordinary (*thammada* and *wiset*). Everyone has the potential to develop. This was the core of Phra Camras' teaching.

The dynamic notion of mental development and consequences for physical and social success is central. *Phawana* may be rendered 'mind culture', 'mental development' (Phrarajaworamuni 1985). The fourfold path to accomplishment of power and success *iddhipada* emhasises the cultivation of will, energy, thoughtfulness, and reasoning/investigation. The development of technical skills and talents, including martial arts, goes along with more 'mental' disciplines and training, but should probably not be so radically dichotomised in the first place.

If the *perfectibility* (or, less grandly, the achievability and improvement)

of powers (here *kham* types of powers) is one key notion, its accompanying trope is *concentration*. This idea comprises a range of metaphors or conditions including mental focus, the idea of combination of power, durability, and hardness (e.g. impenetrability of the body, impregnability, imperviousness etc.); all are counter-entropic notions which fly in the face of, on the one hand the inevitability of experience of individual physical death, and on the other hand, the Buddhist philosophical axiom of impermanence of all things. Hence some of the inevitable contradictions we shall consider later. In addition to perfectibility and concentration there is the idea of sharing or dispersal of power by the master on behalf of others. This precisely links the ahistorical theme of individual development with historical forms of leadership, whether this is the excercise of powers of legitimate authority or rebellion and popular resistance.

These themes have already been developed in Walter Irvine's discussion of *samathi* meditation and its links with mutually reinforcing ideas about the body, cosmos, and local and national security (Irvine 1982). The powers derived from meditation are the legitimate result of following the teaching of the Buddha from its beginning in the Four Noble Truths. The fourth truth offers the Middle Path that leads to the extinction of suffering. It is the Eightfold Path, which includes morality, wisdom and concentration (*samathi),* the latter in turn including right mindfulness, right effort and right concentration (Nyanatiloka 1959). Right mindfulness in turn, includes, among other things, contemplation of fearsome and disgusting things as well as physical exercises of breathing and posture (to establish mindfulness is to have *'sati mankhong'* [*secure* mind] Phrarajaworamuni 1985). These practices may lead - again among other things - to the 'Ten Blessings', among which are the overcoming of fear and anxiety; the endurance of bodily pains ('though they be piercing, sharp, bitter, unpleasant, disagreeable, and dangerous to life'); and the enjoyment of various 'magical powers' (*iddhi-vidha*). Irvine writes:

> The [*samadhi*] meditator ... becomes more than the strongest humoural system, more than the most impenetrable national community, a totally bounded and unassailable entity which can be compared directly to the image of the Buddha when it is used as an amulet of invulnerability [Irvine here cites Archaimbault, writing of Laos (1980: 39)]:
>
> > One of the most treasured amulets, one that is said to ensure invulnerability, is that of the 'Buddha of the Nine Openings'. Deep in meditation, and turned on himself in the foetal position, the Buddha presents the image of a hermetically sealed microcosm none of whose openings allow any expenditure of energy.
>
> As well as giving rise to hardness, closedness and boundary rigidity, the process of meditation is said to develop the capacity to project 'the current of psychic energy' outwards ... and control a threatening agent (Irvine 1982: 203).

This capacity is given a 'Buddhist' interpretation in terms of loving kindness (*metta*) : good *karma* extinguishing bad; and/or a 'magical'

interpretation : the magical power of the stronger wins in a relationship of confrontation. Moreover these powers can be extended to protect others. A decision to persevere in the practice may come to be regarded as a decision to forego the personal extinction of *nirvana* and as possibly leading to the condition of Boddhisatva, a 'saviour Buddha'.

It is a commonplace that this distinction 'Buddhist'/'magical' is problematic, and I agree with Tambiah (1984: 316) that such distinctions are analytically unhelpful at least. But it is of interest that it is an issue of debate and disagreement among villagers. Some *kham* practices were seen clearly to invert or profane some 'Buddhist' ideas (or Thai ideas associated with Buddhism) such as wearing a 'bad monk' image below the waist. One informent said he would take off Buddha amulets before testing *kham*. A layman thought that all *katha*, being he supposed in Pali, were the Buddha's, while one highly cautious and knowledgeable expert told me firmly that *kham* 'belonged to the Buddha' (*pen kho'ng phraphutthacao*) whereas other forms of magic 'belonged to *phraru'si* (Skt: *rsi*) and even *phayaman* (Mara)'.

Such a view of orthodoxy, of course, can give considerable local legitimacy to *kham*, though it may be heterodox from another point of view. Terwiel refers to applicants for junior government posts being asked to remove their shirts to show they are not heavily tattooed (1975: 92) which might have suggested attitudes threatening to those in authority. It is possible to claim in a reductionist fashion that these powers are morally neutral. Tannenbaum (1987), and her informants, seem to be saying as much, for instance by arguing that keeping precepts as part of the discipline of the owner of invulnerability tattoos is not to be interpreted as morality but as a means of gaining power through austerity. Also: '*kat* tattoos are effective despite the intentions of the person who posesses them' (Tannenbaum 1987: 699). The manual referred to earlier (Thep 1962) emphasises the orthodox view that use of *khongkraphan* must be accompanied by good intentions, that it is the Buddha who makes it *saksit*, or else it is mere trickery. Debate as to the relative orthodoxy or heterodoxy of *kham* and *khongkraphan* parallels their possible use by legitimate or illegitimate, and by formal or informal leaders.

POWERS OF LEADERSHIP

We have seen that the ability on the part of experienced men to use these special powers on behalf of followers is a recurring theme. It is a sign and result of high achievement. It is virtually a requirement of leadership. It is possible that invulnerability and associated powers may make a man both feared and attractive, though there is also a recurring commentary that people with extraordinary powers may not, and perhaps should not normally, reveal themselves (*mai bo'k tua*).

The ambiguity of issues of orthodoxy/heterodoxy and legitimacy/illegitimacy is well demonstrated when we look at historical forms of unofficial leadership. These are frequently associated with the invulnerability syndrome. They tend to arise either when state powers are

absent or relatively weak (in which case they may support or oppose state powers) or when state powers are being asserted, and meet with opposition. For summary purposes these leaders might be divided into (a) informal *ad hoc* pioneer leaders, who are historically often founders of local communities, (b) 'outlaws' (robbers and bandits), and (c) religious virtuosi, especially millenarian type leaders (e.g. those who were accorded the attributions *phuwiset* (men with extraordinary power) and *phumibun* (men of exceptional merit). In practice all these categories may overlap, and in a great many cases the individuals were also monks or former monks (see Tambiah 1984: 294-98; Keyes 1977).

An example of the 'pioneer leader' is given by Sharp and Hanks in their 'social history of a rural community in Thailand'. Chyn was an informal village leader, descibed as *nakleng* (a much glossed word: say, tough guy, strong man etc.) at the turn of the century near Bangkok:

> Chyn's talismans protected him against knife and bullet wounds, so that the more outrageous his behaviour, the greater his reputation for invulnerability and the more willing his neighbours to let him have his own way. His skill with a sword interested young men of the hamlet, some of whom had returned as veterans from the Ngiaw or Shan uprising of 1902. By teaching them some new tricks of swordplay, Chyn gathered a group of followers and thus fortified his position ... this gang of ruffians became the unofficial police for the hamlet (1978: 107).

This illustrates a pervasive theme and phenomenon, namely the way in which an individual with special powers can extend his social following; teaching and sharing knowledge, and mobilizing others. There is a discernible range and scope of such powers : from the ordinary *nakleng* to the *nakleng to* (big shot) to the type of 'social bandit' (Johnston 1975); from the learned and powerful *acan* to the *phuwiset* known to be able to help others on a considerable scale, or a *phumibun,* to a possible Maitreya Buddha (Keyes 1977). The 'bandit' types were (are) noted for their invulnerability and invisibility, for 'bearing a charmed life'. Many of them, while both operating in and creating an 'atmosphere of fear', acquired considerable legitimacy in villagers' eyes and gave protection from fear and insecurity (Johnston 1975).

The more exceptional millenarian leaders were all said to have possessed and shared powers of invulnerability, but also to have stressed the importance of observing moral precepts, and of purification and meditation (Chatthip 1984). In the 1901-2 rising in the North East mobilized peasant 'rebels' are said to have sat down and meditated to draw strength from past merit in front of government troops, to avoid being hurt by cannon shells and bullets. In another smaller movement, as recently as 1959, a leader told his followers not to fear guns: 'bullets shot at them would turn into lotus flowers coming to pay them respect or into arrows which would turn and injure those who fired at them' (Chatthip 1984: 123). In the northern Thai rebellion of 1889 - not of a 'millenarian' type - led by Phaya Phap, a former government military officer, endowed with *kham,* followers bathed in sacral water on a tower, walking down a ladder of seven

swords 'to demonstrate their newly gained protection against weapons' (Tanabe 1984: 97). Tanabe observes that people who are *kham* 'are often able to gain popular respect and become political leaders among peasants in time of crisis, due to their extraordinary capability which is believed to be attributable to a great accumulation of merit' (1984: 97).

It is clear that invulnerability powers were claimed by (or attributed to) senior official and aristocratic leaders as well as lowly commoners. It is a logical hypothesis that they would be a less important element in the panoply of powers, techniques and legitimating ideas available to high ranking royalty and priesthood; it would be relatively more important for challengers, rebels, and usurpers, for whom many kinds of power and sources of authority were less easily available. The common people made use of it as followers and footsoldiers in such large scale events, and to an extent it could be said to serve their purposes, chiefly for individual survival - perhaps also in attempts to achieve success in a larger collective purpose, whether with or against established order. But the ordinary people also used such powers in everyday or 'in-between' scale undertakings (cf. Turton 1986). It is in this area that we might speak of a more autonomously popular and 'local' knowledge. It is not so much that sharing this knowledge with higher social classes dilutes its 'popular' nature but almost the reverse. Cohen (1987) suggests that use of the *kshatriya* metaphor by peasant leaders in episodes of quite large scale defiance is a materially subversive act, a counter-hegemonic appropriation of higher powers. At the very least there is that crucial lessening of fear and deference to which we referred at the outset of this paper. Even more fundamentally assertive and challenging to notions of fixed social hierarchies, is the underlying asssumption of the perfectibility, or at least the potential for self-development of any who would learn and practice. If we then add the idea that village teachers might be seen as specialised repositories of such wisdom, then we have a yet fuller sense of a local and popular knowledge. It might be regarded as even more powerful for its being recharged at the margins of society. It could in turn be shared with say a visiting general or police chief, for a consideration, or perhaps selectively withheld, as in the instance I recorded during fieldwork, and noted earlier.

IMMORTALITY AND THE LIMITS OF INVULNERABILITY

The notion of 'invulnerability' is paradoxical. Indeed it may be, to follow a line of argument by Sperber, that it has become a 'culturally successful mystery', become enduringly memorable, precisely because of its powerful evocation of inarticulate desires and needs and 'half-understood ideas', a standing 'provocation against commonsense rationality' (Sperber 1985: 85). It is paradoxical not only in that it seems to fly in the face of what might be normally regarded as physically, humanly possible. The paradox is explicitly sharpest in the form of what I shall call the 'bad death paradox'. It was a common village observation that possessors of *kham* were likely to die young. It goes without saying that notorious bandits and leaders of millenarian rebellions often met violent and untimely death. But in

another sense they also achieve kinds of immortality.

The ordinary, magically endowed ruffian, meeting a violent death (I refer here to northern Thai ethnography), will not be cremated or even properly buried, and remains as a kind of 'undead', achieving posthumous notoriety and being capable of exerting power beyond the grave as a *phi tai hong*. The 'holy man' at the other end of the scale, so to speak, has performed the sacrifice of a Boddhisatva, or at least may be thought likely to be reincarnated in future at higher levels of existence. Some millenarian leaders themselves claimed to be the reincarnation of even quite recently dead heroes. Some are attributed the identity of Phra Sri An (Maitreya Buddha, a 'saviour Buddha'). They are in any case likely to be remembered with respect and veneration. We may recall that Achilles who (like Ned Kelly in recent times) had one weak spot in his 'armour' of invulnerability, was later worshipped as an immortal. There is also what one might term the Zapata (or Atahualpa) syndrome. That is to say: the hero is not really dead, or *perhaps* not really dead, but has ridden off into the hills, from whence may come our future help and strength etc. In the early 1980s I came across the notion in the North East of Thailand that perhaps some politicians executed by Field Marshal Sarit twenty years earlier were still active 'up there in the hills'. Some members of their families and descendants almost certainly were. This theme of resurrection, reincarnation, immortality, and the worship of dead heroes and ancestors is patently a large one which cannot be pursued further here.

REGIONAL AFFINITIES

There seems to be a plausible case for regarding many of the characteristics of this 'invulnerability syndrome' as comparable within the South East Asian region (and beyond, though I shall not develop this further here). These characteristics include, albeit within distinctly different cultural contexts, some ideas of the self, body and soul, physical and spiritual disciplines for enhancement of human powers, and their links with popular social movements and resistance. This comparability may have to do with certain widespread tendencies (and limitations) of human imagination; with possibly shared endogenous cultural features of great antiquity (not a currently fashionable notion); and there are likely to be some specific historical cultural 'borrowings' (as hinted at above between Thai and Burmese, and Malay). There are also shared characteristics which may derive from a common stock of originally exogenous Hindu and Buddhist ideas. Comparison is easiest with neighbouring Theravada Buddhist societies (Burma, Laos, and Cambodia) and reveals many similar and some identical practices. Yet this cannot sufficiently account for cases where the context is explicitly Christian or Islamic. I shall refer only to the latter instances since they are likely to be particularly instructive. For reasons of space I can do little more than make some suggestive observations.

In the Malay/Indonesian world *kebal* (hitherto transcribed *kabal*) is a shared notion which seems to have a close correspondence and historical

connection with the Thai *yukhong(kaphan)* and *kham*. However, unlike *kham* but more like *khong*, it is also used 'metaphorically', and in modern dress so to speak. For example, it is used to speak of many kinds of immunity and protection: immunization against disease, legal and diplomatic immunity, the protection of political patronage, and for armour-plated vehicles etc. [11]

I have not yet come across any detailed ethnography of *kebal* in everyday peasant life, so to speak, comparable to that I have sketched for northern Thailand. Most references come from accounts of peasant resistance and rebellion. Sartono, for instance, refers to *djimat* invulnerability amulets in Javanese revolts (of 1845, 1888, 1926) and writes:

> In serving the need for physical and material security the *djimat* cult gave tremendous spiritual impetus to the struggle against the infidel. In short their fighting spirit was so completely at one with their faith that the rebels felt certain of achieving victory over the modernly-armed forces of the colonial power (1973: 109).

Onghokham (1984) has written of the *jago* (a close Javanese parallel to the Thai *nakleng to*) 'ambiguous popular champions', and has stressed their reputation for *kebal*, and their teaching of others, along with martial arts and mystical practices, the means to achieve *kebal* against 'Dutch authority, and against bullets and sharp weapons' (1984: 328), and against the anger of those in authority. Onghokham refers specifically to the importance of *kebal* as a legitimizing authority, especially of popular leaders :

> One was invulnerable in a physical as well as a spiritual sense, meaning that one was invulnerable against sharp weapons and firearms. Much emphasis was given to this aspect in peasant martial arts and mystical practices. In all the peasants revolts of Java, the leaders had to be *kebal* and the followers had to obtain sacred charms (*jimat*) in order to be *kebal*. This concept of *kebal* contains the peasants' main justification for accepting charismatic leadership in Java (1984: 336).

I have come across a text, by a Dutch writer in 1949, which is marvellously symptomatic of a colonial viewpoint on these 'unauthorized' concepts of popular power and leadership. Entitled *Psychological aspects of the Indonesian problem*, the pamphlet refers to Indonesian intellectuals with a Western education during the Indonesian revolution against the Dutch following the Second World War:

> ... a gradual fallback set in towards a primitive stage of development manifesting itself in its first instance as a kind of dreaming, a trance, an obsession by [sic] images and wishes far removed from all reality and logic. Large groups of intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals believed once more in invulnerability - a belief never absent in the people: their commander can make himself invisible, a piece of sacred bamboo [sic] [amulet, *djimat*] can make bullets deviate from their course. Imaginary fulfilment of their wishes ...

[11] I am grateful to Dr Nigel Phillips and Professor Ben Anderson for information about Indonesian usages.

> contrary to all evidence ... (Wulffte Palthe 1949: 2).

The same author also plaintively echoes a recurring dilemma of the colonial policeman faced by insurgent natives: 'If one [note well the assumed colonial viewpoint] shoots in the air the belief in invulnerability is strengthened'.

A Christian context and the Philippine case is instanced in some detail in Ileto's *Pasyon and revolution* (1979). Invulnerability amulets (*anting-anting*) are obtained from the bodies of the dead or from Holy Week objects, and are tested during Holy Week. Their efficacy depends on the cultivation of *loob* (the 'inner self'):

> For the power that is concentrated in an amulet to be absorbed by its wearer, the latter's *loob* must be properly cultivated through ascetic practices, prayer, controlled bodily movements and other forms of self-discipline [including food taboos and not showing fear] (Ileto 1979: 32).

Here again, though now in a Christian idiom:

> Rebirth is its fundamental theme; one in possession of *anting-anting* often fights to the end because he anticipates suffering and death. ... With true prayer as in certain forms of *anting-anting*, the individual can face death calmly because his existence is 'situated' in a frame of reference that makes death the door to perfection (Ileto 1979: 32).

The theme of rebirth - denial of death, renewal of life - harks back to the 'bad death paradox' mentioned earlier. It also recurs powerfully, together with other themes treated here, in the Japanese case. Yasumaru (1984) speaks of a 'tradition of hope' among the peasantry in the Edo period which found expression and continuity in the veneration of executed leaders of frequent and invariably suppressed uprisings as *gimin* or 'righteous men'. The practice was reinforced by the belief that the spirits of those who die an 'unfortunate death' linger in this world.

HOPES AND FEARS

I should like to conclude with some frankly interpretive reflections which take us out of the local contexts, but which may in turn help to illuminate them. They concern experience, ideas and metaphors of, on the one hand, social space and mobility, and on the other, of time and memory. I referred earlier to the strong connection between an individual's possession of *kham* knowledge, of being *kham*, and the ability to travel alone, confidently, boldly away from secure bases, carrying a secure base with him so to speak (rather like the *phra thudong* [travelling monk] who relies on a rather different set of immunities) and the extension of this in historical social mobilizations over quite wide areas. In this perspective, 'invulnerability' might be seen as the antithesis of the common psychological notion and experience of fear as 'immobilizing' (see Hirst and Woolley 1982: 41), or the political-military use of intimidation to restrain opponents.

I would also note here the widespread co-existence of ideas of invulnerability with those of invisibility (and related ideas such as bilocation, metamorphosis, becoming very small etc.). Like ideas of invulnerability, those of invisibility have not only metaphysical dimensions, but also correspondences with very material popular practices. I refer to popular practices of secrecy, in particular in criminal and rebellious contexts (hiding, masking, disguising, anonymity, pseudonymity etc.). They correspond with the behaviour of 'underground' leaders and organizations and with the fears, on the part of established powers, of popular mobilization and the problems of detecting it. It could be argued that if 'intimidation' and 'surveillance' are major and related means of the exercise of power (see Turton 1984) then popular ideas of 'invulnerability' and 'invisibility' are among their opposites, in thought certainly, but also occasionally in political practice.

I have referred throughout to ideas and practices of invulnerability as a form of knowledge. There are many strands to this, including as I have already suggested, folk theories of the properties and behaviour of animals, weapons, the human body and so on. A highly embodied form, yet partly dependent on written texts, it is among the available means of storing, of retaining and controlling information and knowledge.[12] It also constitutes a kind of historical memory, which may include memory of past hopes, aspirations and assertion, and provide a source of present and future hope. I referred earlier to 'traditions of hope'. Hope, which is one antonym of fear, is also in a sense a memory of the future, or of past possible futures. I would suggest this is one of the sources which has been drawn on in historical episodes - in the Thai/Tai speaking world and elsewhere - of hopeful and courageous social mobilization against all odds. This is, I think, the sense of Walter Benjamin's (here appropriately messianic) view of history in which he speaks of 'articulating the past historically' not as recognizing it 'the way it really was' but as 'fanning the spark of hope in the past' (1969). The ideas and practices concerning invulnerability seem to have been among those sparks which have proved historically susceptible of being 'fanned' into new hope and courage. This however is but one moment in the continuing dialectic between the moral and immoral, elite and popular, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic polarities within the syndrome.[13]

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[12] Tambiah has a relevant discussion of the way in which amulets mediate between past and present, referring to Lévi-Strauss' analogy of Archives Nationales and the Australian *churinga* [sacred totemic objects, usually with inscribed designs]: 'Amulets, like archives, are the embodied essence of the event' (1984: 262).

[13] Cf. Leach's reference to heroes of current mythology (such as James Bond and Modesty Blaise) 'who exult in their criminal violence while demonstrating a god-like invulnerability to all forms of mortal onslaught from others'. ..... 'There is nothing new about such confusions. Nearly all the great dramatic tragedies of Western literature ... have played around with some version of this tightly knit complex, ringing the permutations on divinity, madness, criminality and legitimacy' (1977: 19).

Finally I propose that the image and practices of what I have termed 'invulnerability' deserve further analytical attention in even broader comparative perspective. For they seem to constitute one of those widespread - though not necessarily 'primordial' or 'universal' - characteristics or proclivities of the human imagination, such as Needham has highlighted (1978). There are family resemblances between the invulnerability syndrome and those 'synthetic images', as Needham terms them, 'the witch' and 'the shaman' and their paradoxical property of immunity from certain material and conceptual constraints. The invulnerability syndrome is, as we have seen, a multifarious and polythetic phenomenon, capable of many uses and interpretations. The main task of this paper has been to elucidate the detailed ethnography of one specific cultural context. It may be rewarding to consider what may be some basic similarities in imagery and imagination, in metaphysical interpretation, and in practical and somatic functions or effects of the phenomena in quite widely different historical and cultural contexts.

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SPIRITS, POWER AND THE DISCOURSE OF FEMALE GENDER: THE *PHI MENG* CULT OF NORTHERN THAILAND [1]

Shigeharu Tanabe

INTRODUCTION

Recent anthropological studies on the Northern Thai have often tried to understand their notion of gender by means of symbolic analysis of a systematically organised type of knowledge. Local historiographies called *tamnan*, various religious and practical texts or *tamra*, and popular Buddhist sutras, as well as ritual itself as a text, are major sources that serve for many anthropologists to formulate an image of gender (Davis 1984; Keyes 1984; 1986; Wijeyewardene 1986). However, such attempts raise a serious problem when they assume that representations of gender can be understood directly in relation to the symbolic identity of women and men within a cognitive structure depictable in texts. Conflicts and antagonism between the sexes become a mere reflection of the organised knowledge in the society, and gender is seen as reducible to its culturally unified totality. As a result of this, the anthropological picture of Northern Thai gender is a rather simple, unproblematic one, divorced from the quite diverse and often contradictory representations of gender observable in reality. This is mainly because it presupposes fundamental principles that organise knowledge in the society (Davis 1984: 21-2), and therefore fails to account for the multiplicity and inconsistency characteristic of gender representations and practices.[2] This paper is an attempt to understand the Northern Thai discourse of female gender by investigating the construction of knowledge

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[1] This paper is based on the fieldwork in Northern Thailand carried out from May 1985 to June 1986 and on further visits in subsequent years. I gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Japan Society for Promotion of Science, and the help given by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiangmai University. In particular, I should like to thank Shalardchai Ramitanondh, Anan Ganjanapan, Witoon Buadaeng and Prasert Intajak. I am grateful to Andrew Turton and Jeremy Kemp who gave valuable comments to an earlier version submitted to the Thai studies symposium held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London in May 1988.

[2] Davis maintains the dominance of 'patricentric ideology' which is structured in the hierarchically ordered fundamental categories within the cosmology, though recognising female dominance in domestic areas (Davis 1984: 68). Obviously, in many cultures contradictions of gender representations are often revealed at a 'cosmological' level, as argued in the Sinhalese case by Kapferer (1983: 108-10). However, what we need is a theory which encompasses the whole range of gender representations and practices, not simply those confined in 'cosmological' texts (cf. Harris 1980; Bloch 1986a).

and its relation to power and authority. In the course of analysis, the ethnography deals with domestic ancestor spirit cults, in particular, a special type called *phi meng* or 'the spirits of Mon'.

The Northern Thai discourse on gender is, I believe, best seen as a form of knowledge which is not a written text addressed in systematic form such as Buddhist sutra, *tamra*, or *tamnan* historiography. It is, nevertheless, constituted of a corpus of different texts, whether textual, oral or performative, which is not systematic but often internally subversive. Among the Northern Thai, these texts are appropriated from rather heterogeneous sources of knowledge. These range from rather fragmental but realistic ideas derived from social and economic relations, to more organisational ideas on kinship, to more religious premises such as Buddhism, spirit beliefs, magical lore, humoral theory etc, the representations of gender derived from these heterogeneous sources of popular knowledge are often mutually contradictory, but meaningful to the people in sequences of everyday life. More importantly, as I shall examine in detail later, the contradictory representations and practices concerning gender are effectively organised to create a particular image of the world, when they are put together in a distinctive process of ritual.

The Northern Thai notion of female gender has been discussed by many anthropologists, significantly with reference to the matrilineal spirit cults.[3] Turton's initial formulation is among others relevant here (Turton 1972). He recognises the matrilineal spirit cults as an authoritative ancestor-type cult in which the spirits *(phi pu nya)*, representing the category of senior kinsmen, legitimate jural authority of the elders as a whole. It is argued that the major significance of the cults is to govern corporate aspects and well-being of the descent group, particularly through regulating the practices of female sexuality and of marriage; the spirit cults are seen, then, as part of the traditional politico-religious system, articulated with other institutions such as the village guardian spirit cult, and the cult of *lak mu'ang* [4] (the foundation pillar of *mu'ang* domain) at the state level (Turton 1982 : 251-6). Turton, thus, identifies ideological relations embodied in the spirit cults, and their articulation to relations of power at various levels. An unexamined question then arises as to how such ideology leading to legitimate authority is constructed in the process of ritual *per se*, particularly in relation to contradictory representations so frequently appearing in the cults. I believe this question should be developed further with regard to the relationship between concepts of authority, power and gender in ritual context of the cults.

In dealing with these problems, I understand the construction of gender,

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[3] The initial arguments were set off in Turton (1972) and Davis (1973), and followed by such works as Wijeyewardene (1977; 1981; 1986), J.M. Potter (1976), S.H. Potter (1977), Hale (1979), Mougne (1982; 1984), Irvine (1982; 1985), Davis (1984), Cohen (1984), Cohen and Wijeyewardene (1984), McMorran (1984).

[4] As to the symbolic and political significance of *lak mu'ang* in Thailand, see Terwiel (1978).

basically following Foucault's conception, as a discourse (cf. Foucault 1972). This discourse involves the organising and delimiting of certain patterns of dispersal. In Foucault's sense, the discourse denotes a system of dispersion of statements, associated with various forms of 'disciplinary power'.[5] This power connection attached to statements is more particular to modern European society, distinguished from the 'sovereign power', dominant basically before its bourgeois social formation (Foucault 1980: 105). In societies like that of the Northern Thai, the discourse is also, however, formulated in quite a different way with much emphasis on a type of traditional authority. The discourse there refers to a corpus of patterned representations, utterances and other performative practices such as body movement, which are deposited in stocks of popular knowledge, and inscribed and embodied particularly in rituals.

The dispersal within a discourse is, I believe, not confined to 'modern capitalist society'; it is also evident in the Northern Thai society, although its linkage with 'non-sovereign, disciplinary power' remains less articulated. With this form of dispersal, individual representations and practices concerning gender remain rather disconnected, and its overall picture cannot be expressed in terms of spontaneous forms of everyday experience. In ritual it is, however, not surprising to find its internal multiplicity and contradictions: the image of magically vulnerable, publically obedient women is often juxtaposed with that of powerful, authoritative domestic women. In this sense, ritual is a node of dispersed and inconsistent representations, in which the discourse of female gender emerges into full view, and, by means of their combination, produces quite a different type of knowledge and its compulsive ideological effects.

More importantly, the 'discursive' representations, particularly those concerned with gender, are almost always deeply associated with certain notions of power, which are primarily given within various sources of knowledge. As typically manifested by Northern Thai instances of male 'powerful magic' and female 'dangerous-pollution', the representations of gender are always laden with power that cannot be reduced merely to relations of meaning. I would argue, then, that for this reason these representations and practices intrinsically engender unequal, asymmetrical relations as the effects of power.[6]

This functioning of power is not only intelligible at the symbolic level, but is articulated ultimately with relations of power at work in social and political realities. To understand such a power-centric, existential reality of

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[5] The statement or *énoncé* in Foucault's usage is distinguished from normal linguistic definitions, e.g. a sentence, a proposition or a 'performative act'. It exists, instead, as a particular articulation of signs that Foucault calls the 'enunciative function', though taking forms of sentences, proposition etc. See Foucault (1972: 106-17).

[6] Foucault suggests that our analysis should pay more attention to the operation and effects of power that sustain a discourse, rather than focus merely on the relations of meaning (Foucault 1980: 114; 1981: 11).

the discourse on gender, we have to identify and analyse how power operates and what effects are produced by examining the representations. For this purpose our analysis would focus on the ritual process of domestic spirit cults. In so doing, the way in which the differential representations and practices are combined together, reproducing a particular type of perception on gender and society in general, will be revealed. Before proceeding to detailed discussions of domestic spirit cults, I shall give in the next two sections some ethnographic accounts on the Northern Thai notions of spirit and their relevance to female gender.

NORTHERN THAI NOTIONS OF SPIRIT

What is referred to by the Northern Thai generic term *phi* or spirit shows considerable differentiation. It is recognised that various spirits share equivocal status between opposed categories like life and death, or any forms of deviation from dominant systems of classification (Davis 1984: 262-3). Thus, much ethnographic analysis of the notion of spirit among Northern Thai and other Tai groups has tried to identify its particular symbolic status within the cognitive structures of the society (Anuman 1986: 99-103, 120-4; Tambiah 1970: 60; Davis 1984 : 264-5).

Contrary to viewing the spirit only as a symbolic representation consisting of relations of meaning, I would, instead, develop a concept of spirit with respect to what sustains and changes its meaning, status and function. The Northern Thai concept of spirit is here viewed as power, in the sense that it can cause, through its working from outside, changes and engender unequal, asymmetrical relations within the individual as well as social groups. Spirit is an ambiguous, external power, and affects directly or indirectly the individual and social relations, irrespective of whether it is institutionalised or not.[7] This power of spirit is explicit when it attacks a person unpredictably or punishes him in response to his neglect of ritual duties. Such workings of spirit can cause instability, destruction or, even worse, total collapse of internal equilibrium, which normally is believed to be maintained within the individual and social groups.

A person intrinsically has his or her own internal equilibrium, constituted of the relationship between *khwan* (soul) and *rangkai* (body), which is always vulnerable and exposed to external power represented by various forms of spirit. In the Chiangmai area, *khwan* as a popular notion refers to the collective soul entity believed to be firmly located within the person's body. The firm unity of the soul entity and body provides health, while the drifting away of soul from body that could occur upon intrusion of external power, or through interference from other influential forces, can result in ill-health or even death. It is this idea of the unity of soul and body which forms the basis of the stability of the equilibrium and its breakdown in association with external forces.

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[7] For a structural analysis of 'institutionalised' and 'non institutionalised' spirits, see Davis (1984: 264-5).

The destructive effects on the unity of soul and body is best seen in cases of violent attack by various spirits such as *phi tai hong* (spirits of those who died 'bad deaths').[8] Possession by these spirits causes numerous signs and symptoms of emotional, mental and physical disorder, eventually inflicting illness, even madness, on the victims. First of all the possessing spirit may be exorcised by a doctor of magic *(mo' phi)*, and furthermore a ritual of propitiation of the spirit *(liang phi)*, and/or a Bhuddhist exorcism *(tho'n khu't)* by monks may be held. In order to call back the soul into the body, it may also be necessary to perform a 'calling the soul' *(ho'ng khwan* or *hiak khwan)* ritual for the victim by *mo' phi* or other specialists after exorcist rituals. It is such destabilised processes, as well as efforts to restore the original and optimal equilibrium by exorcism and the related healing rituals, that are commonly manifested in most cases of violent spirit possession.

In addition to spirits, external forces that affect and threaten the internal equilibrium include the popular Buddhist notion of *kam (kamma)* and the mythical theory of destiny or *chata* both of which are also often attributed to afflictions and breakdown of such relations (cf. Keyes 1983: 266-67). In both theories at a practical level, however, a person can take actions to modify and improve the determined conditions in the 'this-world' or the 'other-world' through ritual practices, such as merit-making *(tham bun)* in order to ensure a better rebirth, the ritual making an offering to the mythical ancestral couple *(song thaen)*, and the ritual of 'stretching the destiny' *(su'p chata)*.

Quite similar to these external forces, spirit is often used to explain incomprehensible and unpredictable sufferings (as in kammic theory) and accordingly numerous ritual measures and practices have been developed to cope with its causal effects. Nevertheless, compared with *kam* and *chata*, spirit brings about more direct and specified effects on the equilibrium to be sustained both in the soul body unity and social relations. It is a more concrete and material power, comparable to and deeply connected with real violence, fear and terror excercised against emotional, mental, bodily conditions of a person in social and political contexts (cf. Kancana 1982; Turton I984: 61-2).[9] Thus, spirit always acts more concretely on detailed human conditions, and is feared as much as are the coercive effects of political violence. In this sense, the power of spirit is, as Anderson suggested in the case of Java, not a theoretical and abstract postulate, but concrete existential reality (Anderson 1972: 7).

To tackle the destructive and unpredictable attacks of spirits, various sources of popular knowledge have been mobilised. One of the long

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[8] See Turton (l972: 248-9).

[9] Turton speaks of this articulation; the fear inspired by spirits is equivalent to that which is widely felt by people in the countryside in relation to revenge killings and various forms of 'extra-judicial' killings (Turton 1984: 56-62).

established traditions is 'powerful magic', *katha* (literally, 'magical spell'), including aggressive and violent magic *(katha ho'n,* literally 'hot magic') and invulnerability *(kham),* which can be almost exclusively wielded by men such as doctors of magic *(mo' phi)* and even Buddhist monks and novices.[10] The magical power is normally acquired in the form of verbal spells, - though is often preserved in written texts - from respectable teachers *(khru),* including Buddhist monks. This power, lodged in the spell itself, becomes effective when it is uttered in a prescribed manner. It is concentrated and preserved within the body of the male practitioner. By casting the spells over particular parts of the patient's body. often together with using other magical objects, the practitioner is able to repel harmful spirits intruding and destabilising the patient's soul-body unity.

The use of male powerful magic against spirits is not restricted to doctors of magic and other Buddhist laymen. As Irvine illustrates, it is obviously prevalent among Buddhist monks and novices, and Buddhist meditation also engenders a vital source of internal strength against external forces including spirits (Irvine 1985: 188-93). Powerful magic and meditation, intrinsically a male monopoly, are in nature a counter measure against external power in that they reinforce the practitioner's soul and psychic power, utilising it to regain the stability of other persons' soul-body unity and of social relations in general. However, we should note a transformational aspect of the power of spirit that is strongly evident in most Northern Thai spirit cults. In these cults women occupy crucial points of articulation between the power of spirits and the stabilised order of the individual and social relations, as I shall examine later.

SPIRIT AND FEMALE GENDER

Among the Northern Thai, men are assured of a relatively straightforward path of life in terms of Buddhist tradition. For men knowledge and its associated power can be gained, accumulated and exercised according to stages marked by the rites of passage.[11] By contrast, representations of unstable, vulnerable female gender have been firmly established in relation to physiology and the soul-body relations. Above all, menstrual blood is a case in point, in which the focus is on an uncontrolled physiological process of women regarded as a polluted and morally degraded entity *(kho'ng tam).* During menstruation women are prohibited from entering Buddhist monasteries, especially on holy days *(wan kam* or *wan sin),* owing to the

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[10] The 'hot magic' is discussed in detail by Irvine (1985: 188-93). As to more modest magical spells, glossed as 'cold magic' *(katha yen),* which are used by monks and novices for blessing and protecting the people from evil external forces, see Tanabe (1986: 162-5). 'Invulnerability' is discussed by Turton in this volume, and also by Tanabe (1984: 96-7).

[11] As to the widespread practice of novice ordination *(buat luk kaeo)* and the rather less popular bhikkhu ordination *(buat pek),* see Keyes (1986). The monastery life has given access to traditional Northern Thai literacy and to a wide range of specialist knowledge concerning magic, astrology, divination, humoral theory, herbal medicine and so forth.

polluted and sinful nature of menstruation. Since menstrual blood also has destructive effects on plants, they are prohibited from setting foot in the kitchen garden, rice field or tobacco field (cf. Mougne 1978: 71). The clothes, worn by menstruating women, particularly sarongs and under (in Thai 'inner') garments must be washed and dried separately from men's clothes.

Such pollution of menstrual blood, while constraining women's practices, also, however, represents a power destructive to men's mental and emotional stability and their magical efficacy. A man's soul entity can be weakened and magical spells possessed by male practitioners can be rendered ineffective when they are near or come into contact with menstrual blood, as is illustrated in the classic example of the case of Queen Camthewi.[12] The use of menstrual blood as counter power against male emotional stability is still to be found in a kind of magic generically called 'charm and esteem magic' *(sane)*, which intends to make a person attractive sexually and even sometimes esteemed politically by particular counterparts. In this way menstrual blood, the focus of the uncontrolled female physiology, can disrupt a man's emotional balance and even threaten the magical potential of the reinforced male soul. However, this dangerous quality of blood does not give women any social advantage or superiority, but rather addresses the illegitimate power of menstruation and women's degraded and marginal position in society.[13] The blood is dangerous and sometimes powerful because of its marginal and illegitimate nature.

Another representation that constitutes the Northern Thai discourse of female gender concerns soul-body relations. There is a dichotomous division of 'soft soul' *(khwan o'n* or *citcai o'n)* and 'hard soul' *(khwan kheng* or *citcai kheng)* in terms of the stability of the unity. Women are believed to share rather an inferior quality of 'soft soul' that makes them easily frightened, exacerbated and vulnerable to external forces, particularly spirits. The 'soft-souled' women are, therefore, susceptible to the destabilising effects of spirits. By contrast, men normally have a superior 'hard soul' that enables them to maintain a more stable emotional balance. The extraordinarily 'hard-souled' are the doctors of magic *(mo' phi)*, the

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[12] Queen Camthewi, a legendary Mo'n or Thai founder of Haripunchai Kingdom (Lamphun) sent as a gift a hat made from her under garments to her rival King Wilangkha (Milangkha), the Lawa chieftain. According to the legend, she was thereafter successful in defeating the Lawa chieftain: the counter-power of her menstrual blood totally vanquished his magical power in a javelin contest (Sanguan 1972: 25; also cf. Irvine 1985: 213; Davis 1984: 66).

[13] Another effect of menstruation relates to the humoral imbalance that causes physical and mental disturbance called the 'wrong menstrual wind illness' *(lom phit du'an)* after delivery of a live-born child. As to its relations to the Northern Thai humoral theory, and to the post-partal prohibitions, and its ideological relevance, see Mougne (1978), Muecke (1979) and Irvine (1985: 212-31).

monks practising meditation and those other trained magical practitioners who have obtained enough reinforced internal power to expel external forces.[14]

The notion of 'soft soul', addressing weakness and vulnerability is parallel to the physiological representation of menstruation. Both hinge on the unstable mental and emotional balance that determines, by nature, the female gender. It is these congenital conditions which are extended to reproduce the social distinction which sees women as a weak, vulnerable, inferior and marginal gender. Such a negative representation of women permeates everyday practices and utterances, and is accepted and confirmed in the male dominated Buddhist tradition.

Contrary to these negative representations of women, matrilineal spirit cults disseminated among the Northern Thai push forward rather an inverted image of female gender. A cult is organised by members of a matrilineally related kin group to propitiate the spirits called *phi pu nya* (generally meaning spirits of the ancestors). Although there are debates over the nature of the term *phi pu nya*, the cult itself is in most cases explicitly organised matrilineally - with a few exceptions in the case of a particular type of cult which directly originated from the patrilineal Mon tradition.[15] A cult may consist of an older woman as the core, with her sisters and their daughters and grand-daughters usually included. The core woman of the senior generation is called *kao phi* (the 'stem' person) who is the successor to the role of matrilineage head passed from a recognised ancestress in the ascending generation. Men's status in the descent group is rather ambiguous. An affinal male is in theory incorporated into his mother's group, but in practice he is allowed to belong to either his wife's or mother's descent group, though multiple membership is very rare (Turton 1972: 220-23; Cohen 1984: 293-96).

Despite the complicated aspects of membership of the descent group, the principle of succession of the spirits is explicitly simple, focusing on consanguinity, the spirits are believed to reside in the female body and to be succeeded consanguineously from a mother to her daughters. In the ritual context of the cults, the spirits are invoked at a shelf *(hing)* in the main bedroom of the lineage head's house *(hu'an kao)* and at a shrine *(ho' phi)* erected in the compound. It should be borne in mind, however, that the spirits are usually carried by women, and the significance of their bodily attachment is frequently emphasised in teachings passed from mother to daughter.[16]

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[14] There are 'soft-souled' men who share the female unstable quality. Some of them are transvestites *(pu mia)*, and sometimes find their way of living as a professional spirit-medium by virtue of their 'soft-souled' capacity.

[15] As to the debates on the term and its relevance to matriliny, see Wijeyewardene (1968: 76), Turton (1972: 236-7), Davis (1973: 58; 1984: 59-60).

[16] A daughter's bodily accompaniment of the spirits *(mi phi toi)* becomes stressed from twelve or thirteen years old. Becoming maidenly *(ok na sao)*, she may be taught about the

The matrilineal kinship addressed in the bodily nature of the spirits is deeply associated with sexuality and the marriage of women in the descent group. The spirits lodged in a woman's body would be violated, if she were to have any form of bodily contact, including intercourse, with an outside man. This violation, called *phit phi* (literally, 'wronging the spirits') may or may not result in marriage. Importantly, it is recognised that such sexual trespass permitted by women within the group is subject to punishment by the spirits, which is believed to take forms of illness and misfortune inflicted on any of the members. Therefore, many complicated rituals must be held in response to such bodily contact, whether it leads to marriage or not.

In this way the Northern Thai matriliny is constructed partly on a kind of 'biologically' defined kinship, focusing particularly on female sexuality and marriage. Even though this matrilineal kinship is represented symbolically as the 'spirits of the ancestors' that transcend gender distinction, it always concerns exclusively female sexuality, marriage and reproduction, a central domestic reality of women that distinguishes them from the opposite. In this context, the matrilineal spirits are a powerful, material entity attached to and transmitted through the woman's body, as opposed to the male magical stability. The matrilineal kinship and the associated representations, at this level, claims the centrality of female gender in its own right in contrast to the shadowy knowledge of physiology and the vulnerable soul-body relations.

At another level, however, such 'biologically' founded kinship becomes replaced by a quite different idea. The transcendental, non-sensual ancestors, detached from the idea of matriliny, are engendered as the truly tutelary beings, controlling and protecting as a whole 'the people of the same spirits' *(phi diao kan)* The term *phi pu nya* thus fits well with this transformed nature of the spirits as transcendental moral beings. In this regard, the spirits thrust the idea of causal relations between illness, misfortune and sexual conduct, that provides not only a safeguard for girls at puberty and adolescence, but also moral control over sexuality in general. The spirits are here identified as a single source of morality that determines the well-being, health and fortune of all members of the descent group, men and women.

I have so far pointed out ethnographically the rather inconsistent representations concerning female gender; first, the physiological inferiority, and the vulnerability due to the easily destabilised soul-body relations; secondly, the matrilineal kinship as a 'biologically' defined kinship involving female centrality; and thirdly, the female gender dominated by moral and jural authority, namely 'the ancestor spirits'. A question then arises as to how these contradictory representations relate to each other to form a discourse on gender. As I have noted earlier, this process is effectively organised and staged in ritual, focusing, in this case, on

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sexual misdemeanour that can cause illness of the descent group members.

the transformation of the spirits.

Rituals of the Northern Thai matrilineal spirit cults involve two crucially significant sequences of transformation, namely sacrifice and possession, though the latter is likely to be carried out, at present, only in special types of domestic spirit cults. In the next section I shall discuss these transformational processes by examining a propitiation ritual of a *phi meng* descent group in Lampang, one of the Northern Thai cities.

FEMALE GENDER IN THE *PHI MENG* SPIRIT CULT

Compared with relatively abundant ethnographic descriptions on the standard type of *phi pu nya* cults, very little attention has been given until recently to special types such as *phi meng* and *phi mot* variants. Earlier, rather sketchy accounts of these variants were given by Wood (1965) and Sanguan (1969) but later anthropological studies have not provided sufficient descriptions (J.M. Potter 1976; Davis 1984), with the exception of more recent studies by McMorran (1984) and Irvine (1982; 1985).[17] This may be partly because these non-standard variants are only to be found in particular areas of Northern Thailand. Nevertheless, they do seem to be crucially important in understanding the significance of the discourse on female gender which appears in the ritual process in particular.

The particular variants of domestic spirits include *phi mot* (the spirits of *mot), phi meng* (the spirits of Mon), *phi man* (the spirits of Burmese), *phi nyang* (the spirits of Karen), *phi lua* (the spirits of Lawa), *phi chao waen* (the spirits of the people of Waen), *phi chao tai* (the spirits of 'Southerners') and so forth. The name of these spirits indicates that they originate from other ethnic or local groups, mainly in the Northern Thailand-Burma borderland. The type categorised as *phi mot* spirit cult is distributed much wider than any other types, spreading over Chiangmai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Phayao, Chiangrai and Nan provinces. The *phi meng* cult, meanwhile, can be found mainly in the Mae Ping valley between Chiangmai and Lamphun, and in the Mae Wang valley of Lampang, but particularly distributed along the riversides of these valleys. Other rather minor cults are small in number and scattered, particularly in the Mae Ping valley.

The *phi mot* and the *phi meng* cults are basically made up of a matrilineal descent group, as ordinary *phi pu nya* cults are (with a few exceptional patrilineal cases). However, these variants have certain special features distinguished from the latter. First, the size of these variants is much larger, normally consisting of more than ten households, sometimes amounting to one hundred. This indicates their more complex composition of members, including many matrilineal collaterals, in addition to those members directly related to the lineage head *(kao phi).*

Secondly, sometimes found in cults of these types is a 'ritual of dance' dedicated to the spirits in consequence of a wish made between a member

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[17] Some earlier, useful descriptions in Thai are found in Carat (1955) and Nai (n.d.).

and the spirits *(fo'n kae bon)*, in addition to regular 'rituals of dance' *(fo'n papheni)*. Wishes made by members of these cults are currently concerned with more individualistic purposes, for instance, accruing interest in capitalist enterprises, winning lotteries, academic success, as well as curing illness and driving away misfortunes. Increasingly evident in these occasional rituals, held in return for vows, is a stress laid on the individualistic and even capitalistic success of particular individuals among the members, rather than the well-being and health hitherto collectively pursued within the domestic spirit cults.

Thirdly, in both the regular and occasional rituals of these cults, major, spectacular sequences such as sacrifice and the dance of possessed women are to be found. Contrary to stereotypical, rather cheap sacrificial offerings of boiled chicken in the standard cults, these variants often involve the actual sacrifice of expensive live animals or the various substitutes particular to the cults : *'phi mot* eating pigs' *(phi mot kin mu)*, *'phi meng* eating pigs' *(phi meng kin mu)*, *'phi meng* eating fish' *(phi meng kin pa)*, *'phi meng* eating fermented fish soup' *(phi meng kin nam ha)* and so forth. Female possession is another significant feature of these cults : here many female members are consecutively possessed by the common ancestor spirits, and dance for these spirits. It is evident that an enormous amount of money, as well as great organising efforts, is required to hold such magnificent rituals, which are thus unlikely to be realised in smaller cults.

The following ritual description is only one example from sixty-four cases of these particular types I recorded during my fieldwork in 1985-86 in Northern Thailand. It is a case of *phi meng* cult located in the heart of Lampang, consisting of thirty-two member households. The ritual I discuss is a regular one held for three days 28-30 March 1986.

THE ORIGINS OF THE ANCESTOR SPIRITS

Legendary origins of the ancestor spirits of this cult deserve careful attention. First, it is said that a person many generations ago within the descent group came across a group of Burmese *(man)* dancing cheerfully in a forest, and was told that their possessing spirits provided well-being and health. This person then purchased these spirits called *phi meng* for 15 rupee in the form of a bunch of flowers, joss-sticks and candles, and thereafter the people of the descent group held a ritual of dance every year, though in recent years triennially. Another legend tells us that a person within the descent group purchased the spirits in Moulmein, the homeland of the Mon in Lower Burma, and on the way back to Lampang made a pilgrimage to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon.

This is not an exceptional case. In many cults of the *phi mot, phi meng* and other special types, acquisition of the ancestor spirits is explained in terms of the purchase from other ethnic groups or any foreign people outside the territory of the Northern Thai. In this legendary trade of the ancestor spirits, the sellers are mainly Burmese, Shan, and the people from the south, presumably Mon or any other ethnic groups around Rahaeng (present-day Tak). There are, currently, no convincing historical sources to

prove whether the trade of the ancestor spirits was really practised among the ethnic groups in Northern Thailand-Burma borderland. However, the foreign origin of the ancestor spirits told in mythical language hinges on certain points in relation to the significance of *phi meng* tutelary spirits.

First, it was apparently Mon spirits, with originally patrilineal attachment, that were adopted by this Northern Thai matrilineal cult. There are certainly some *phi meng* cults in Chiangmai, Lamphun, and Lampang areas, which are composed of ethnically Mon members with a male lineage head patrilineally succeeded.[18] However, as in many other non-Mon, Northern Thai *phi meng* cults, it can be assumed that this cult has accepted the foreign Mon patrilineal spirits by converting them into matrilineal ones. This conversion could take place on account of these spirits being introduced not as an organisational principle of kinship but only as an idea of transcendency, irrespective of any descent lines, to govern the already existing matrilineal cults. It is the foreign nature that gives the *phi meng* spirits tutelary and dominating power over the domestically constructed kinship.[19]

Secondly, for this reason, the *phi meng* spirits have assumed a superior status to the traditional standard *phi pu nya* cults. As I have pointed out, any *phi pu nya* spirits can exercise transcendental power, when they are detached from their original matrilineal quality in the ritual process. However, the *phi meng* spirits, together with other spirits of foreign origin, are more powerful and efficient. This relates to an extraordinary power that enables the *phi meng* spirits to expel malevolent external forces destructive to the stability of the individual and social relations. This kind of extraordinary tutelary power is called *kho'ng di* (literally, 'precious things'). Provided with this special feature, the *phi meng* spirits are believed to wield an unusual, active power in curing illness and in solving various misfortunes, something that could hardly be achieved by any ordinary *phi pu nya* spirits.

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[18] The Mo'n patriliny in their cults propitiating the 'house spirits' (*kalok sni* in Mo'n) has been maintained, as described in Kanchanaburi and Lower Burma by Halliday (1914: 1917) and in central Thailand by Su-ed (1984).

[19] There are some *phi mot* and *phi meng* cults, whose ancestor spirits are derivative from Northern Thai princes' courts (*khum luang*). These cults, normally matrilineally organised, are found in Lampang, Phrae and Phayao provinces, but are rare in Chiangmai, the centre of the Lannathai Kingdom. The big matrilineal cults, while not entirely absent, are rare in the Chiangmai court, and this rarity may be explained in terms of its strong historically established tendency towards the Buddhist premises among the ruling princes. In this regard, we should recall the historical instance of the court of King Sam Fang Kaen of the Mangrai dynasty, who was severely criticised by Ratanapanna, the author of *Chinnakalamalipako'n* (The sheaf of garlands of the epochs of the conqueror) in the fifteenth century. He was criticised on account of his faith in various forms of spirit cult seen as at odds with Buddhism. See Ratanapanna (1974: 116) and Swearer and Premchit (1978: 28).

ORGANISATION OF THE *PHI MENG* CULT

The lineage head *(kao phi)* of the *phi meng* cult in Lampang is a fifty-seven-year-old female trader who succeeded to the office after her mother died about ten years ago. The lineage head who is the core of the descent group has to fulfil her obligations as a sponsor of triennial regular rituals of spirit dance. In a regular ritual each member household is requested to donate 300 baht to the lineage head to meet the expenditure. In an occasional ritual held upon the realisation of a wish made to the ancestor spirits, the member who had made the wish becomes the sponsor, responsible for the whole expenditure. Nevertheless, even in this case, the lineage head has to fulfil the role of a sponsor in charge of arrangements of the ritual as a whole.

The members of the cult called *luk phi* (literally, descendants of the spirits) include, in theory, all members of the matrilineal descent group who share the same ancestor spirits. However, in practice, *luk phi* refers to those who participate in regular and occasional rituals, including male and female affines and their sons and daughters who wish to be under the protection of the spirits. If a member neglects these rituals, he/she would become 'mad' *(phi ba)*, and sometimes all the members of his/her family would be considered as hosts of a witch *(phi ka)*.[20] Within this cult there have been some madmen in consequence of the punishment by its *phi meng* spirits. The cult is thus constructed on the basis of matrilineal descent; it is considered a re-organised group for performing the rituals, and comprises affines and their children under a single authority of the ancestor spirits.

Among the participants from the thirty-two member households, female elders of the first ascending and same generations of the lineage head are assigned some important roles in the rituals. They are mainly mediums who are designated as those to be possessed by particular ancestor spirits in the pantheon of the cult. The most senior female elder plays the role of 'the sacred waitress' called *mae tao lao* (literally, 'the woman of alcohol-distilling hearth') who is responsible for serving alcohol and coconut juice to the spirits possessing female members during the ritual. She sits together with other female elders at the northwest corner, nearest to the altar in the pavilion. There is another elder woman, 'the mistress of ceremonies' called *thi nang pham* (literally, 'the seat of ritual pavilion'), who has detailed knowledge of the ritual procedures concerning the programme of sequences, offerings etc. She is not a member of the descent group, but hired as a professional 'mistress of ceremonies', who serves many different cults.

The married male members of the cult are called *kamlang* (literally,

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[20] As to the witch spirit *(phi ka)* of the Northern Thai, Anan identifies its meanings in terms of rural economic situation (1984), and Irvine gives a rich account of its social and ideological relevance (1985: 292-318).

'strength'), with the implication that they give strength and energy to the descent group (cf. Davis 1984: 279; McMorran 1984: 311). Some of the *kamlang,* including some younger men have active roles in ritual together with female medium. In particular, a male elder called *kamlang kao* (literally, 'the stem of strength') takes the role of the ritual officiant who is responsible for organising the ritual together with the lineage head, and performs in many important sequences in company with mediums as well as the mistress of ceremonies.[21] The male ritual officiant in this cult is a sixty-year-old collateral of the lineage head.

Sitting at the south-east corner of the pavilion is 'the female cook' called *mae tao kam* (literally, 'the woman of cooking hearth'), who is responsible for the cooking meat and eggs which are sacrificial offerings made to various spirits during the ritual. She occupies the cooking hearth on the male side, as opposed to the 'sacred waitress' on the female side. The woman who serves as the female cook is a distant collateral of the lineage head. Again, on the male side is an orchestra, *kho'ng ko'ng* (literally, 'gong and drum'), consisting of Mon-style instruments.[22]

THE RITUAL SPACE OF THE *PHI MENG* CULT PAVILLION

On the eve of spirit dance the cult pavilion called *pham* is constructed by forty male members. The pavilion is customarily built close to the spirits' shrine in the compound of the lineage head's house. In the case of the cult in Lampang, however, it is always constructed in her male collateral's house, because her compound has not enough space. The pavilion, about 62.3 square metres (7.6 m x 8.2 m), is constructed with six main bamboo poles demarcating the inner sanctuary and seventeen minor bamboo poles marking off the outer sanctuary from outside, and is thatched with reeds.

It has a threshold *(patu)* facing east, slightly to the south of the centre. In front of the threshold there is a sacred tree *(kao ha),* erected early on the morning of the day of dancing by male members. Up until about twenty years ago, during the ritual men had strangled chickens and poured their blood into the hole over which the sacred tree was re-erected. This is often explained as a sacrifice to the witch-spirit *(phi kao ha,* a witch-spirit of the sacred tree) buried underneath the sacred tree.[23] Around the sacred tree are placed a pig and chickens to be sacrificed by Cao Khun Suk, the highest ranked ancestor spirit of the cult. After the sacrifice Cao Khun Suk also

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[21] *Kamlang kao* fulfils more important roles, compared with his equivalent called *tang khao* of various domestic cults in Chiangmai and other areas.

[22] The Mo'n-style orchestra in this case consists of nine instruments: *lanat ek, lanat lek, kho'ng wong, ko'ng teng thing, ko'ng hap, pi nae yai, pi nae no'i, Ching, chap.* It was hired at 1,200 baht per day. For the Mo'n orchestra, see Halliday (1917: 54).

[23] The sacred tree is one of the major symbolic materials in the ritual. In this case, its sacredness is attained through the expulsion of a stigmatised witch spirit that is seen as dangerous to the stability of the descent group.

performs healing for the cult members around the sacred tree.

The interior plan of the pavilion is symbolically divided into two parts: the northern half is basically occupied by the female members and the southern half by the male members. It is also divided into the inner sanctuary, surrounded by the raised altar and the white sacred cloth rope rolled up the six main poles, and the outer sanctuary.

There is a central axis along which the most important symbolic materials are located. On the altar is the main candle *(thian luang)* lit by the mistress of ceremonies at the beginning of the ritual. At the centre of the inner sanctuary, along the central axis, is a long red cloth rope *(pha chong)* hanging down from the central beam used by the many female members to gyrate themselves into trance. Around the cloth rope, some struggling games take place towards the end of the ritual.

On the northern side of the inner sanctuary, 'the ancestor spirit of the white robe' *(phi pu nya pha khao)* receives Buddhist precepts as a white-robed ascetic in front of the senior women. The corner close to the altar in the outer sanctuary is occupied by these elder women, including the sacred waitress *(mae tao lao)*. This corner spatially represents a reversed reality in which purity and superiority are attributable to women.[24] It makes a strikingly symmetrical contrast with the south-east corner where sensual and bloody features dominate in the cooking of meat and eggs by the female cook *(mae tao kam)*.

On the southern side of the inner sanctuary, the ritual officiant holds the 'cutting of the banana trunk' *(fan hua kluai)*, a symbolic sacrifice of the banana trunk presumably analogous to a big animal. At the end of the ritual in the same place, Cao Khun Suk again consumes the meat and blood of the pig, previously sacrificed under the sacred tree. Music for the spirit dance is provided by the Mon-style orchestra consisting of eight male musicians located on the male side of the outer sanctuary. In addition to the orchestra, there are young male members of the cult, banging bamboo clappers and striking bamboo poles on the ground to induce women to become possessed. Together with the female cook at the south-east corner, the male side constitutes a polluted zone where sacrificial and sensual conduct dominates, as opposed to the female zone.[25]

MAJOR SEQUENCES: SACRIFICE, POSSESSION AND GAMES

Among the various types of domestic spirit cults practised in Northern Thailand, the *phi meng* variant has the most complicated composition of ritual process. It normally consists of more than twenty, sometimes thirty,

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[24] The zone of reversal is symbolically well represented by the structurally inverted basket *(sa kon pin*, literally, upside-down basket) as an offering made to the sacred waitress.

[25] The female cook in the polluted zone receives an offering of the bamboo fish trap (*sum pa*) symbolically containing a witch spirit called *phi mia noi* (literally, the spirit of concubine). This kind of dangerous spirit is called *phi nang noi* (the spirit of young lady) in most *phi meng* cults in Lampang and Chiang Mai.

even forty sequences, taking only those performed during the day of dancing. The possessing spirits, offerings, skits, games etc. vary according to cult. However, most *phi meng* rituals share a quite similar basic ritual process as I have already indicated in part in the preceding descriptions. Such common sequences and performances can be summed up as follows.[26]

1. The sacrifice of animals, such as banana trunk as a pseudo-animal, pigs, fish, fermented fish soup, chickens. This is followed by the feasting of the ancestor spirits both at the shrine and the shelf of the lineage head's house, and again at the main altar in the ritual pavilion, accompanying commensal feasts among the cult members.

2. Female (sometimes male) possession by the ancestor spirits with a particular name in the cult's own pantheon, together with other foreign, stranger spirits such as Burmese, Kula ('Indian'), Karen, Phaya Chiangmai etc. Some of these major spirits cure the cult members. In addition to dancing, there are many skits played by possessed or unpossessed women, such as 'ordination of the white-robed spirit', 'the spirits of bride and groom', 'the spirits of two brothers', 'Karen's hill cultivation', the Mon style pitch-and-toss game using the snuffbox bean *(baba or saba)*, 'launching a rocket' etc. These skits are sometimes played with men as the subordinate character.

3. The category of skits includes some games of struggle, mainly fought between men and women, such as 'cock-fight', 'rounding up an elephant and a horse' 'snatching a tip of banana trunk', ending usually with a skit called 'rowing boat, rowing raft'.

In the Lampang case these major performances are almost always played by about forty active cult members in the presence of an audience numbering nearly two hundred throughout the day of dancing. On the day before the dancing, the first sacrifice is made for the feasting of the ancestor spirits in the lineage head's house, and construction of the ritual pavilion is completed. There is the final feasting of the spirit of pavilion, and then the pavilion is pulled down on the morning of the day after dancing.

As indicated by the generic term 'spirit dance' *(fo'n phi)*, the ritual consists foremost of the dancing of possessed female members, and is dedicated to the ancestor spirits. The objective of the dancing is, as most members put it, to achieve health, well-being and fortune of all the attendant members. In response to the dedicated dance and the prescribed offerings, the possessing ancestor spirits give their blessing *(pan po'n)* to these members by casting a spell *(katha)* over them. This accompanies the blowing on their head, and sometimes the tying their wrists with white cotton strings *(mat mu')*. The power of blessing resides in the ancestor spirits who are able to make use of a verbal spell that is derived from

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[26] The sequences and performances of the *phi meng* cults in Northern Thailand are strikingly similar to 'the *kalok* dance' of the ethnically Mo'n cult described in Kanchanaburi area early this century by Halliday (1914) and that recently reported from Central Thailand by Su-ed (1984).

magical lore, and sometimes Buddhist sutra. The members' objective is thus to be realised when this power of blessing reaches them by the ancestor spirits' performance *per se*. Although the ritual is composed of so many complicated sequences, its leitmotif is to be found in this process of blesssing.

However, we have to make a further inquiry into how the power of blessing becomes existent and effective through the performances within the ritual. If the power of blessing is wielded against the outer forces by the authority of the ancestor spirits representing the highest moral beings, we need also to examine the question as to how such authority is constructed. In viewing the 'spirit dance' as a process of constructing authority, all these points are linked in various ways to the symbolic representations, utterances and performances that are present in the major sequences: sacrifice, possession and games. I shall, therefore, give some detailed description and analysis of these major features in the Lampang case.

SACRIFICE

Animal sacrifice is made three times in the course of the ritual. First, in the early morning on the day of preparation, young men kill, rather unceremonially, a pig and chickens and cook them as offerings for the ancestor spirits at the lineage elder's house. The dishes made from these animals are again offered to the nine major ancestor spirits at the altar in the pavilion on the day of dancing. Secondly, the male ritual officiant *(kamlang kao)* cuts off the head of a banana trunk that has been squeezed into the pavilion through the threshold by the men and women. This pseudo-animal is cooked as 'salad of banana trunk' *(yam hua kluai)*, and is offered to the spirit of the pavilion on the day after the dancing. Thirdly, Cao Khun Suk, the highest ancestral deity of the cult, ritually sacrifices with a spear a pig and chickens under the sacred tree on the day of dancing.

The sacrificial offerings to the ancestor spirits are basically the same at the lineage elder's house and the pavilion. These include seasoned minced pork *(lap dip)*, minced pork with blood *(lu)*, pork sausage *(sai ua)*, viscera curry *(kaeng o'm)*, grilled pork *(chin ping)*, pork salad *(yam chin mu)*, boiled chicken *(kai tom)* and steamed glutinous rice. A raw pig's head *(hua mu)* and pieces of raw pork *(chin dip)* are added at the shelf and the shrine of the lineage elder's house. At the altar of the pavilion, khilek curry *(kaeng khilek)* and boiled non-glutinous rice are additionally offered specifically to the Burmese spirit in order to get it to possess a female elder. Chicken eggs, raw and cooked in various ways, are also used as offerings to spirits.[27]

The sacrificed animals and eggs are cooked mainly in the kitchen of the lineage elder's house and the house where the pavilion is constructed.

[27] Parboiled eggs *(khai pam)*, grilled chicken and steamed glutinous rice are offered to the spirits of the orchestra *(phi pat)*. In other *phi meng* cults the head of orchestra divines the oracle of the ancestor spirits by consulting the skull of a boiled chicken halfway through, and the main candle at the end of the ritual.

However, during the spirit dance all sacrificed animals and eggs are in theory to be cooked at the hearth in the pavilion by the polluted female cook *(mae tao kam)*. But for practical reasons, the pig sacrificed by Cao Khun Suk is grilled outside the pavilion, and is ritually pushed and squeezed through the threshold into the pavilion. In the finale of the spirit dance, the ritual is then highlighted by the sequence in which Cao Khun Suk bites nine pieces of the grilled pig and drinks pig's blood offered by the ritual officiant.

After the sacrificial offerings have been made to the ancestor spirits, the same foods are consumed commensally by the members of the congregation. The pig and chickens, sacrificed and eaten by Cao Khun Suk, are distributed to the members after the spirit dance has taken place.

We can discern a flow of power symbolically represented in these sequences of sacrifice and the subsequent treatment of the animals. As observable in many other areas of Thailand, the Northern Thai see animals, wild or domestic, as an entity that contains power, particularly in the forms of flesh and blood. Unlike the humoral elements of human beings which, particularly for men, are ideally accommodative and controllable, the flesh and blood of animals represents natural and untamed external power. In this sense, animals have a status equivalent to that of the spirit in general, a natural and ambiguous power opposed to the human equilibrium.[28] Sacrifice uses, however, particular domesticated animals such as chicken, pig, buffalo as the largest one, and their substitutes, which have a status closest to the domestic social life in terms of the animal categories of the society.[29] Sacrifice is a human practice performed to approach this untamed power attached to these sacrificial animals and to use it in reproducing the stabilised equilibrium and relations. In achieving this, it is necessary to transform untamed, ambiguous power into more rewarding tutelary power that convincingly protects the individual as well as the social group.

At the outset, untamed and ambiguous power attached to the animals is physically destroyed. The power in the form of flesh and blood, once negated with violence, is subsequently consumed by the ancestor spirits. Although killing of animals and the cooking of flesh and blood are considered polluted processes, they are necessary prerequisites for the next step. The ancestor spirits can obtain transcendental power only by consuming untamed and ambiguous power. It is this dual process of killing and consuming which enables the ancestor spirits to gain the status of moral and transcendental beings dominant over the members of the

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[28] The relationship between spirits and flesh is exemplified by a practice of feeding raw meat and viscera, particularly liver, of domestic animals, or sometimes live eel, to a witch spirit *(phi ka)*, the power most dangerous to the individual and to social stability.

[29] A structural analysis of the animal categories of the Northern Thai is given in Wijeyewardene (1968). As to the sacrificial animals, their gradation and their status among the Thai-Lao of North East Thailand, see Tambiah (1969).

cult. Sacrifice is a process of transformation in which ambiguous external power is violently negated and then introduced into a society as a tutelary and transcendental power (cf. Bloch 1985: 643-4; 1986b: 98-9).

In the *phi meng* ritual, this process is dramatically acted out through the three sacrificial sequences to reproduce the legitimate authority of the ancestor spirits. This authority transcendentally governs the moral conduct of the members of the cult, and is enabled to give blessing for the well-being, fortune and health of the cult members, irrespective of whether they are men or women.

POSSESSION

Together with the process of sacrifice, female possession is a central feature of the *phi meng* spirit dance, as in other types of domestic spirit cults. The ancestor spirits will possess mainly female descendants within the matrilineal group in response to sacrifice made to them in advance. Some instances of male members' possession can be observed in other cults in Chiangmai, Lamphun and Lampang, though not in this case. On the day of dancing more than twenty women were possessed; while some of those possessed were to play particular roles according to the prescribed programme, others, willingly or unwillingly, just danced in a possessed state.

As I have pointed out earlier, possession is mainly induced by gyrating one's body by hanging on the red cloth rope at the centre of the inner sanctuary. There are some elder females who are possessed simply in response to music without such inducing action, but most women experience exciting and dramatic movements through 'releaving' their bodies to a planetary-like gyration while hanging on the sacred rope before becoming entranced.

Simultaneously spinning and rotating their body clock-wise around the rope, they become giddy and are finally entranced. Music has a central role in this process, providing an additional inducement to the gyrating women to be possessed. Gyrating themselves faster and faster, keeping time with the music played by the Mon-style orchestra and the banging and striking rhythm of the young men's bamboo instruments, women finally get possessed. Conversely, they pass out of the state of possession by gyrating themselves on the rope in a counter clock-wise direction, this time the pace becoming slower and slower again in time with the music.

Upon falling into the trance, they wear a white breast cloth, a traditional under garment for women, and gyrate themselves further on the rope. After having become possessed completely, they then change costume, according to the roles prescribed, by wearing a colourful sarong, neckerchief, head-cloth, and putting on their heads the *kiang pha meng* leaves *(bai kiang pha meng)*, a symbol of *phi meng* spirits.

There are nine major ancestor spirits *(phi pu nya kao ton)* in the pantheon of the cult. These spirits have their own medium, (*ma khi* , literally, a horse to ride), mainly elder women in the cult, and some of those are professional mediums, curing and divining their customers

outside the descent group as well. The nine ancestor spirits include: (1) Cao Khun Suk who is the highest deity par excellence; (2) the ancestor spirit of white robe; (3) Cao Song Mu'ang; (4) Cao Pho' Tao; (5) Cao Pho' Dam; (6) Cao Phaya Kaeo; (7) the spirits of the two brothers (Cao Bua Kaeo and Cao Bua Kham); (8) Cao Ton Som; and (9) Cao Phakla. Some of these particular spirit names are quite popular among other *phi meng* cults in Lampang area.

At the altar in the pavilion, nine trays of offerings are made to the nine ancestor spirits in the pantheon. In addition, there are a pair of spirits called 'the spirits of bride and groom' who have their own mediums and play a skit of marriage. There are three groups of spirits who perform dances according to the prescribed sequences. While the group called 'the five spirits' consists of five spirits only within the pantheon, the clusters of 'the seven spirits' and 'the nine spirits' include some additional spirits outside the pantheon, occasionally possessing relatively younger female members. This indicates that the cult continuously recruits new mediums who occasionally get possessed during the ritual.

Most of these spirits possessing female bodies openly express their masculine character through bodily gesture, voice and habits such as drinking alcohol; but above all, it is as a sacrificer of animals that they express this masculinity. Nevertheless, there is an important skit of 'ordination of the white-robed ancestor spirit' who obviously represents ascetic morals opposed to such masculinity. In this skit an elder woman possessed by the white-robed ascetic, a *mae chi* (a Buddhist 'nun') receives eight Buddhist precepts and makes an imaginary pilgrimage to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, one of the most glorious of Buddhist symbols in Lower Burma. The skit obviously represents a religious claim by women who are not allowed to be ordained as a novice *(pha)* or a monk *(tu)*. As I have pointed out earlier, the white-robed ascetic belongs spatially to the zone of reversal claiming the women's purity and superiority as opposed to the sensual masculinity. There is therefore a symbolic opposition involved in female possession, between the bloody and sensual masculinity and the pure and superior femininity. In this sense the possession allows the woman, through the ritualised reversal, to become a man who is powerful and sensual, and at the same time who has the privilege of being a monk.

However, in addition to this kind of symbolic analysis, we need here to place these representations in another context, with respect to the working of power involved in the possession.

As I have noted earlier, the ancestor spirits intrinsically have a foreign nature, whether they have actually been bought from foreign people or not, and share the quality of wielding extraordinary tutelary power. However, this transcendental power can become valid only through certain ritual practices. Sacrifice is such a practice to transform untamed power into transcendental power through violence. Possession too involves quite a similar process of transformation, in which the tutelary power of the ancestor spirits is eventually created.

In the *phi meng* ritual the ancestor spirits can possess only those who

have 'soft souls' among the members, mainly women, because their soul-body relation is accommodating and easily controllable. The 'soft souled' women can transform themselves into the ancestor spirits at the expense of their fragile soul-body equilibrium. As in sacrifice, possession involves a necessary process of violence. In possession, violence is applied to the female body by the intruding external power of the ancestor spirits. The agonies and dissociation expressed during and immediately after gyrating themselves on the red cloth rope indicate explicitly that an assault is being made on the body by this external power.

Violent attack leads to negation such as the killing of an animal, as occurred in sacrifice. What is violently negated in the process of possession is the 'biologically'-founded matrilineal descent that constitutes part of the discourse of female gender. Female sexuality, marriage and reproduction constituting the matrilineal aspect of the very notion of *phi pu nya,* is here paradoxically negated, when the women leave their bodies under the control of the ancestor spirits. Possession is a self-negation that allows the women to accept the sensual masculine aspect of the ancestor spirits, after several occasions of commensal eating of sensual and bloody foods, become fully transcendental beings. If the first negation is the masculine negation of the feminine, this act of commensality constitutes the second negation. By this negation of the former negation the transformation is finally completed. Both the spatial opposition, which is clearly demarcated in the pavilion, and the opposition between the masculine, sensual spirits and the white-robed ascetic spirit are virtually fused into a world of single transcendency. In this dialectical process, the possessed women are transformed completely, becoming truly tutelary beings.

GAMES

After successive sequences of sacrifice and possession and a series of playful skits, punctuated by a commensal eating, the ritual is then highlighted by games of struggle towards the end. The 'cock-fight' is fought around the centre of the pavilion between a cloth cock and a real cock, each supported by a female elder. With an excited fuss of all attendants both fight for a few minutes, and the cloth cock symbolically representing the ancestor spirits eventually wins.

This is subsequently followed by the 'snatching of a tip of banana trunk', in which the ritual officiant *(kamlang kao),* a representative of the male members, holds a tip of banana trunk in his mouth and is continuously attacked by the two ancestor spirits. The spirits squeeze rice cakes, sausages, meat, alcohol etc. successively into his mouth. He vomits out all the squeezed stuff into plastic bags held by young male members. At last he surrenders and puts the banana tip on a board that one of the spirits thrusts with her sword and cuts into three pieces. The tip of the banana is a precious thing, metaphorically implying the head of the already sacrificed 'banana trunk' at the beginning of the ritual. This struggle between the representative of the male and the spirits again results in the victory of the latter.

In this way, these struggling games with playfulness and excitement always lead to the victory of the ancestor spirits, now transformed moral beings transcending the gender distinction. It is in these games that what has been acted out in the preceding sequences of sacrifice and possession is recognised and confirmed. What is recognised again and again in the games is the authority of the ancestor spirits dominating over both the male and female members. Unlike a game in general that engenders a difference from the symmetrical relation between two parties, the game here is, as Lévi-Strauss points out, treated as a ritual (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 31). In the *phi meng* ritual asymmetrical relations are postulated in advance between transcendency and this-worldly sensuality, and these ritualised games confirm only the former, producing not a difference but an order under authority.

The ritual on the day of dancing ends with a skit of the young men's painful journey called 'Rowing boat, Rowing raft'. The young men receive symbolic materials of masculinity on board a boat and a raft (small models previously made from the tips of a sacrificed 'banana trunk'). Rowing out from the pavilion they are met by fierce and continuous attack of water thrown mainly by women. In the midst of the storm of the women's attack, they rush out of the pavilion through the threshold, and finally crash against the sacred tree. The tree is knocked over and the water vessel is broken. After this symbolic destruction of the entire ritual space, the young men are praised by the ritual officiant *(kamlang kao)*, and again by the lineage head *(kao phi)* for bringing the 'precious gold' to the descent group after the long trade journey.

This final skit is not really the finale of the day-long spirit dance. This is because before the skit the real finale has already been played out by Cao Khun Suk, consuming meat and blood, and all the members have subsequently passed out of the state of possession. The skit of the young men's journey represents a way of getting back to the real world of gender confrontation and the male emphasis on economic success. The ritual as a whole brings up on stage the complicated imaginary process of the construction of authority focusing on the female gender through sacrifice, possession and games. As an aftermath, it finally gets us back to the reality in which male dominance is firmly assumed.

CONCLUSION

The *phi meng* spirit ritual is apparently full of women's claims to higher, prestigious status comparable to men's in religious, political, and economic fields. This is frequently re-affirmed by the men's rather indifferent view that the matrilineal spirit cult, and its ritual in general, are merely the concern of women. However, as I have examined so far, the female claims addressed in the 'biologically'-founded kinship are paradoxically broken down through the ritual process. The ritual in the end reaches at the terrain where neither femininity nor masculinity but only transcendental authority dominates. The inverted reality so expressively performed by the women's bodies within the spatial reversal is only a step towards

constructing the authority, disconnected from gender distinction. The authority virtually attains trancendence following the confrontations and reversals, and legitimates those elders and seniors - be they men or women - within the descent group who are close to the ancestors.

The construction of such authority involves certain crucial moments of negation and transformation in connection with the working of power. The locus of power depictable in this process indicates that the power of spirit *(phi)* intrinsically outside of the individual and society is utilised, in a particular way, in the constructing of authority. Animals and the sensual beings, particularly women's sexuality and reproduction, are all symbolically equivalent to this untamed power, which are first put on stage to be destroyed. Nevertheless, it is then reintroduced into the society as tamed power representing the ancestor spirits. If the legitimate authority can wield power, it is not untamed, dangerous power attached to spirits, but the completely different one that emerges from the transformation.

This dialectical process of negation and transformation concerning power fits in well with what Bloch illustrates in the Merina circumcision ritual of Madagascar (Bloch 1986a; 1986b). This ritual process, apparent among the Northern Thai and the Merina, constitutes an ideological discourse in which the fundamental categories of human beings, ostensibly attached more to women, are devalued as a preliminary step in the mysterious construction of transcendental authority. In this sense the *phi meng* spirit ritual can be seen as a discursive practice that induces the participants in the ideological process to recognise the existing social order under authority. However, this doesn't mean that the ideological discourse has the function of mystifying the participants as though a ruse intentionally prepared by political power-holders, as Marxist and functionalist theories of ideology have often postulated. Conversely, the ritual contains, despite ambiguity and contradiction, various forms of popular knowledge intelligible to the participants, thus being far removed from the notion of intentional mystification. It is this non-functional aspect of ritual that should be emphasised in connection with the significance of the Northern Thai discourse of female gender.

As I examined earlier, the Northern Thai discourse on female gender is essentially a construction of diverse and inconsistent representations. As opposed to viewing gender as something reducible to a culturally unified totality, gender is seen rather as an awkward, contradictory construction of different stocks of knowledge. In the Northern Thai case, the traditional knowledge of magic deals with superior male stability of internal equilibrium as well as the male ability to cure. The magical knowledge, combined with the humoral theory, also reproduces the inferior female representations such as 'soft-souled' vulnerability and physiologically degraded quality. All these, supported by the dominated Buddhist tradition, are, nontheless, co-existent with a quite different knowledge that gives to females a centrality and power in the domestic field. The matrilineal kinship which is deeply rooted in 'biological' ideas about female sexuality and reproduction, is a counter-knowledge to the above masculine oriented

theories.

The discourse of female gender constructed as such is fundamentally non-univocal, reflecting the internal relations of power. Foucault speaks of this significance of relations of power within discourse:

> they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of stability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations (Foucault 1977: 27).

In the Northern Thai society, this becomes most profoundly conspicuous within the spirit ritual I described above. However, in non-discursive and everyday circumstances the contradictions and confrontations are rather concealed. Each representation is instead felt by actors as meaningful in its own right with few implications beyond what it says.[30] This non-visibility of the entire discourse, *vis-à-vis* perception in terms of its component parts is conspicuous when we take up, in isolated form, an instance of the matrilineal ancestor spirits *(phi pu nya)* in everyday conversation. They may signify no more than the guardian spirits of a descent group with a strong emphasis on female centrality. They are thus rendered discrete, conceptually detached from the rest of representations that cumulatively constitute the whole discourse. In other words, all representations or statements are partial and limited, because of their conditions of existence within the discourse.

In this way the non-visibility of discourse is primarily attributable to the dispersal of different and contradictory representations of gender, and moreover, to the essentially partial character of such knowledge due to the heterogeneous origins. It is therefore totally misleading to assume that the ideological process embodied in ritual mystifies the participants as an intentional action. On the contrary, the ideological effect of ritual, that leads to establishment of legitimate authority, is primarily referable to the formation of discourse and knowledge itself.

In the Northern Thai case, the discourse on gender is best illustrated within female centered spirit rituals. It is a focus of the discourse, a central node in the web of discursive and non-discursive practices, particularly in the traditional Northern Thai society. The authority constructed in the ritual not only governs the people within the matrilineal descent group, but is also articulated hierarchically to relations of power at higher levels, as Turton illustrated (Turton 1972; 1978) and as I argued elsewhere for the case of Tai Lu' spirit cults in Sipso'ng Panna (Tanabe 1988). This occurs mainly because relations of power at any level of the traditional polity of Northern Thai society are deeply embedded in the discourse of gender. Moreover, the symbolism and practice used in ritual, such as sacrifice and possession, and its associated ideological process, are largely homologous at all levels. Thus, the legitimate authority of the category of elders, established in a way

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[30] See Foucault (1972). A useful discussion on this point in relation to the non-visibility of discourse is given in Cousins and Hussain (1986: 172-9).

analogous to the formulation within the gender discourse, can accommodate any power-holders at various levels.[31] Provided with the homology in symbolism and practice as such, the power of ideology can permeate fully through the society.

Finally, I admit that what I have argued primarily concerns the conditions in which traditional authority emerges in conjunction with the gender discourse within a particular ritual. Obviously we need to examine in further detail styles and modalities of representations and practices within the gender discourse in numerous Northern Thai rituals other than domestic spirit cults. Moreover, another round of analysis will be required to elucidate the way in which the traditional authority created in ritual is articulated to concrete power relations among social groups and classes in the wider milieux of nation and state. Deserving particular attention in this connection are the female practices of professional spirit mediums *(ma khi)* and 'nuns' *(mae chi)* which have recently become increasingly popular in the Chiangmai area, and which subscribe and respond to much wider sources of knowledge - more Buddhist, capitalist-minded, sometimes nationalist, as illustrated by Khin Thitsa (1983), Irvine (1984) and Shalardchai (1984). How these new forms of female practices constitute part of the discourse, perhaps within changing relations of power in the current Northern Thai situation, however, requires further reflection.

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[31] This accommodative aspect in ritual is exemplified by the recent restoration of rituals propitiating the various tutelary spirits by the Chiangmai city authorities, such as the cult of *sao inthakhin*, the foundation pillar of Chiangmai (cf. Wijeyewardene 1986: 78-9). As to the homology of ritual practices and its ideological implications, see Bourdieu (1977: 143).

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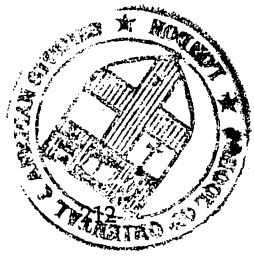

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