

PLACE, POWER AND DISCOURSE IN THE THAI IMAGE OF BANGKOK

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Abstract

Bangkok's natives see their city less as a grid of streets than as a patchwork of named places defined by activities, communities and historic events. This pluralistic popular image once competed with a single-centered royal image, and today it challenges a bureaucratic official image legitimated by modernity. Thai urbanization is the triumph of the royal and official images. These ruling images are effectively as fixed and given as texts, while the popular image arises from a discursive culture of place that is fundamental to not just the Thai but their larger family of Tai peoples. [Thailand (Bangkok), urbanization, urban administration, modernity, Tai culture of place, discourse.]

Introduction

Sitting in Bangkok traffic I often wondered, was the Marquis de Sade the first foreign traffic adviser? "No," I would recite, "there's order to this, there *is* an indigenous order . . ." This mantra passed the time and helped meet my professional obligations as an anthropologist. It also 'worked,' at least on me. I discovered a Thai Bangkok. Yet why was it so hard for me to 'find' this huge city? I had a handicap. I used

a map. It was not a map of Bangkok. In fact, so far as I know, there is no map of Bangkok. There are only maps of Bangkok's streets. Here I freely admit that for some well-tutored people — mostly social scientists, foreign tourists and government officials — a street map is an authentic image of Bangkok. But the ordinary people I knew never used street maps. Of course they did use the streets, but their daily travels left only a vague notion of where the thoroughfares went and met.

Can we conclude that these people had no clear idea of Bangkok's overall physical order? Sternstein (1971) did. He interviewed 193 people and found that their shared public image of Bangkok was "virtually formless" and showed "a profound lack of appreciation of the component parts of the city and their coherence" (Sternstein 1971:74, 68). Like me, Sternstein wanted to replicate Kevin Lynch's (1960) *Image of the City* to see how urbanites saw their city. Like him, I found my questions answered as though people were strangers to the city. But something was wrong. So vague an image should have left them feeling lost, ill-at-ease (Lynch 1960:4-6), and yet the people I knew were very much at home in Bangkok. So I stopped asking and started listening. How did people talk about the city? Here I found clarity and consistency.

Bangkok was not a city of streets but a patchwork of named places.¹ A person went from Banglamphu to Bangkhunphrom to Thewet to Si Yan. Now a well-traveled road joined all of these places, but few mentioned it and not everyone knew its name. Asked for directions, most named a string of places, not streets pure and simple. Often they simply told you what bus to take. Bus lines, not streets, connected places. Even the buses slighted streets. As their route signs told you, they went from place to place, not street to street (e.g. Bus 9's posted route was the places Talat Phlu, Wongwianyai, Sanam Luang, Banglamphu, Si Yan — none of these were the eight major streets it actually traveled on).² Finally, when you got to the place you wanted, lesser places appeared. Your friend lived across from (*trongkankham*) the market, behind (*lang*) the temple, one bus stop past (*loei*) the gas station, and so on.

Were we to call this hodgepodge of places the mental map of Bangkok, it would be less like a city map woven together by roads than a national one cut up into towns and provinces. Yet a map is a poor metaphor. Its order is simultaneous, physical and flat. A single glance shows each place amid the others. You see the whole. But Bangkok is lived more like a poem is heard — a line at a time. Just as one verse leads to another and then fades away, so too do people move from one place to another without, as Sternstein (1971) shows, keeping all of the places in mind. True, whether it is lines in a poem or places in Bangkok, the physical links are key, but at any moment their order is sequential, not simultaneous like a map's; it is local, not total. And beyond that moment, if we turn to the total, the larger order is not simply physical but symbolic. Here again a map fails. Its flat surface joins the city's places physically, not socially and culturally where their deeper unity lies. In sum, a map does to Bangkok what Ricoeur (1979) says writing does to speech: it denies discourse and context to create its own meanings.

That gives us two Bangkoks: an everyday living one and a map-like textual one that, as we shall see, scholars and officials favor. We must understand both, resisting the populist tendency to take the everyday as the 'real' and make the textual the 'ideal.' As Ricoeur (1979) shows, each has its own meanings that cannot be reduced to the other, and as Nader (1974) argues, we should study both 'up' and 'down.'

This paper describes both Bangkoks. I begin with the popular image and then consider the text-like royal and official images. From there I explore the larger space (a "culture of place") wherein these three images contend and argue that it is fundamental to not just Bangkok and the Thai (peoples of Thailand) but the Tai (the larger family of people that includes ethnic Thai) and their urban order.

The Popular Image

Named places make up Bangkok's popular image, but what makes an area into a 'place'? In a word, activity does. Let me give some examples. Key intersections like Sam Yan and busy thoroughfares like Sukhumwit are not just roads but well-known places that name their environs. Major hotels, markets, hospitals, temples, schools, police stations and almost any official site are not just buildings but named places and often local social centers. Once bridges were monuments to the city's progress that named neighborhoods; later movie theaters became popular signposts that also signified modernity; and now, amid these earlier names, shopping malls are the bright stars.

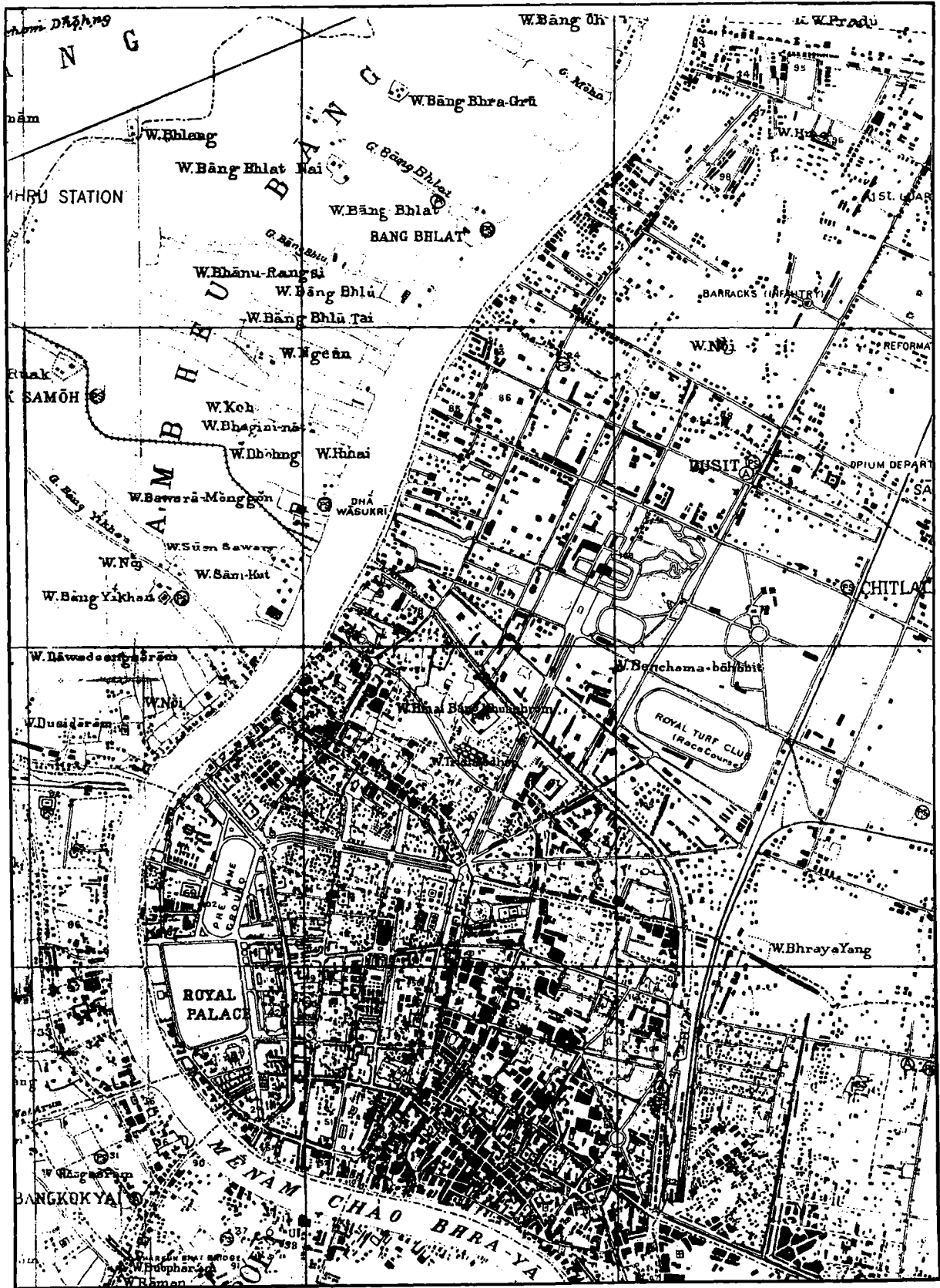
Wherever people congregate — whether to live, work, shop, play, travel or make merit — that area is a noted place. It is not that activity comes first and prominence later, but that the two feed on each other and so make places busy, active and alive. When Sternstein (1971:72) asked people what came to mind when they heard the word Bangkok, he found that "their 'instant' image sprang . . . from activities." Of course activities are as social as places are physical, and so Thai society enters Bangkok's image.

Is Thai culture there too? At first glance it seems not. Surely Bangkok is not a cosmological city orchestrated into a neat circle or square. To the contrary, its roads seem to run at random. Within this tangle, it is simply practical to name and note those places where the streets force people to congregate anyway. All of this is true, although it does not make the pattern any less cultural. Traffic alone does not give a place a name. Naming shows significance, and it is Thai culture that deems where significance lies. Going to a movie is a culturally significant activity, and so theaters are duly noted. But why is it that first-class theaters (e.g. the President) often name a neighborhood while second-class ones (e.g. the Si Yan) are usually named *by* their neighborhood? The distinction is not simply the number but the kind of patrons. It is a cultural concern for the status of the theater.³

We can put this another way. Bangkok is made up of not just places but *particular* places. Culture confers particularity. It notes, names and weighs activities, differentiating places. So, for example, in Thai culture a temple's activities differ from a shopping mall's. Within this, what one temple does differentiates it from others. Thus Wat Bowonniwet's serene merit-making sets it apart from Wat Mahathat's bustling religious marketplace. By the same token you do not just go shopping; rather you go to Siam Square to buy, say, the latest imported shoes, or you go to Banglamphu to pick up the cheaper local copies. Such distinctions make each place unique and vivid within the city's image even as they impose a cultural order of prestige and propriety. Thus shared meanings tie Bangkok's many places together in ways the tangled streets cannot.

So far I have shown how society and culture underlie the activities that animate Bangkok's image, but all of this hinges on the priority of place. Why is place so significant? Admittedly, every city has distinct places. Washington, D.C., for example, has Georgetown, Capital Hill and Foggy Bottom but these are not the city's basic grid. A stranger could get almost any place knowing only a street address. Try that in Bangkok! Houses can be numbered by when they were built, not where they are; major streets can change names between blocks; lesser lanes may have no name; some streets have popular as well as official names, and English or Chinese names as well as Thai ones; and finally, there is no overall grid-like naming that tells you where one street fits amid others, as with Second Street being between First and Third. Faced with this maze, named places are a remarkably effective way to order the city. Practicality thus guarantees the significance of places. Again, being practical does not make this any less social or cultural. What makes places practical is not just the absence of a street grid but the presence of a Thai social and cultural order that presumes the prominence of place.

To understand these social and cultural roots of place, imagine Bangkok as a collectivity of real and fictive kin communities. It is easy to do. Thai do it whenever they cultivate connections or explain events as an outcome of who knows whom. Now this social plane of communities is structurally similar to the spatial plane of named places. Both communities and named places are the everyday conceptual entities that make up Bangkok. Both are distinct wholes. Each is, in its own way, irreducible. A community reduced to its indivi-



Map of Bangkok and its districts, 1931. Thewet is just above the center.

duals would not be a community just as a named place reduced to its streets and buildings would have no identity to merit a name. A Bangkok without communities would be simply five million monads, not the city of intrigues and factions that everyone knows; and without named places it would be an endless urban blob, not a mosaic of distinct parts.

Is this structural similarity fortuitous? Hardly. Consider its cultural expression in the words *ban* and *myang*, the very building blocks of traditional society. *Ban* means house, house compound or village, while *myang* means city either by itself or together with its hinterland. Both are at once social and spatial units, ideally communities and usually named places. Early Bangkok was a conglomeration of villages, palaces and temples, each a social community and a named place within the larger city. From princes and nobles to abbots and headmen, patriarchs governed localities from their homes, fusing place and community. Of course the two did not match perfectly. Surely some named places, say a city gate, had no surrounding community and clearly many effective communities, say a faction of nobles, were too dispersed to identify with any one named place. Even so, communities created places while places defined communities. Thus a Vietnamese community created the place known as Ban Yuan ('the Vietnamese Village'), while the Thewet bridge provided the name and center for a surrounding merchant community. Even today a new school or temple can turn a vacant lot into both a named place and a community; or a budding group can give their alley's name a place in the local urban image.

Here those who know Bangkok may object, "Each place a community, each community a place — it's all too neat." Indeed it is. It is an ideal. Real communities overlap and fall apart. Yet 'real' social and spatial planes are still parallel. To say "I'm going to Thewet," presents this named place as a single whole, just as the ideal community is supposed to be a unity. When you get to Thewet, however, you find its actual boundaries are vague, just as an actual community has people who drift in and out. You find Thewet's fringes overlap with Bangkhunphrom and other named places, but then actual communities overlap whenever individuals cultivate several patrons. Finally, within Thewet you find many lesser named places, such as Si Sao Thewet and Thewarat Market. In a like manner, actual communities encapsulate lesser ones whenever a client is the patron of his own following.

Are these structural similarities simply fortuitous? I doubt it. They arise not by chance, but as a common consequence of shaping society to a ruling center. Traditionally commoners looked to nobles who looked to the king, just as villages copied towns that copied the capital (cf. Tambiah 1976:ch.7). Ideally major communities encapsulated lesser ones, just as today Bangkok includes Thewet which includes Si Sao Thewet. Of course this ideal order did not seek the blurred boundaries and mixed loyalties that actually arose (Akin 1969), but it got them in part by seeing all 'civilized' order in the center and leaving the peripheries open. After all, the center's importance presumed the triviality of all else, and so the further you went towards social or physical peripheries, the less anyone cared what you did or said. So today ambiguous edges to named places trouble no one. Thewet's center is clear; that is order enough.

How is Thewet a center? It is an intersection at a bridge that names the larger area. So main roads make it a center. Side streets sustain its eminence. Many deadend. Few interconnect. That funnels traffic into main arteries so that to move about Thewet one moves into or towards the center. This physical order sustains a social one. Without a secondary grid, neighbors must go like ways. Channeled towards a center, they see and meet each other. Comings and goings catch the eye, making grist for gossip. So communities can and often do coalesce, if only along lesser lanes where factionalism keeps them little but lively (e.g. Akin 1975; Evers and Korff 1982). Of course no one quite intended vivifying streets. Acting as centers unto themselves, earlier communities cut roads to serve their own not the city's interests. A patriarch had only to cut a drive to his house and settle his dependents along it and one had a community (cf. Durand-Lasserve 1977:121). It is no surprise then that these side streets are physically what the patron-client entourage (Hanks 1975) is socially. It is not just that each channels everyday life within a larger official order, but that structurally both branch off from a center and, as few branches connect, they remain tied to it. So, like many named places, Thewet's roads tell a Thai social tale of communities oriented to a center.

How else is Thewet a center? Consider the culture of naming. Thewet was first a bridge that became the center of the larger area it now names. Within Thewet, a pier on one edge (Thanam Thewet), an insurance company on the opposite edge (Prakanphai Thewet), and stores (e.g. Si Thewet), schools (e.g. Thewet Suksa) and lanes (e.g. Soi 1 Thewet) all carry the name Thewet. This is the same center-oriented pattern whereby a capital names its province and a city's central district (i.e. Amphoe Muang) carries the city's name.⁴ Thus the pervasive cultural concern for centers complements Bangkok as a patchwork of places, each its own little center within the city.

To sum up this popular image we can say it focuses on activities and places which echo and acquire meaning from Thai social and cultural life. Yet clearly this is not the whole image. Indeed, it is not even an image of Bangkok but rather its pieces. What ties these pieces together to make a city? Hierarchy. It sets a great center above lesser ones. Let me now turn to this once royal, now official image of the city as a whole.

The Royal Image

Let me begin with the traditional city or *myang*. Earlier we noted it was both social and spatial, being at once a community and a place; now consider that as it meant city by itself or encompassing its hinterland, it was two places, one (the city itself) within and yet above the other (the whole realm) in an elementary center-periphery hierarchy of place.

Such a city properly had at least three particular places: a royal palace, for a *myang* had to have a ruler; a shrine to the supreme spirit of the *myang*, perhaps associated with a mountain or the pillar of the city (*lakmyang*); and a temple housing a Buddha relic or image that was the palladium of the *myang*. Like the *myang*, each of these three had its own center-periphery hierarchy of place. For example, a Buddha relic and its temple were a place that stood above all lesser

relics and their temples. Also like the *myang* this spatial order matched a social one. The people's respect and the relic's protection joined everyone in a single great moral community that subsumed all lesser communities dedicated to their own relics and temples. We could repeat this for palaces and spirit shrines where, socially and spatially, the greatest of each was at once the head of a hierarchy and a center that subsumed the whole. In short, a hierarchy of places and communities made the traditional *myang* a city.

Bangkok was built on this sense of urban hierarchy. As traditionally this was a royal Indic hierarchy, we can call it the royal image of Bangkok. How did this image relate to the popular one I described earlier? Ideally they were distinct yet complementary. Consider naming. Important places had precise Pali-Sanskrit names that described their unique place in the royal order, while common places had simple Thai names that often described some ordinary physical feature. In this royal-popular duality, place names mirrored the clear social distinctions between elite and commoners (*chao vs. chao-ban*) and between the royal and the popular order (*luang vs. rat* from *ratsadon*). Symbolically, of course, the two images were not just distinct but opposed. The strict royal hierarchy clashed with the popular hodgepodge, but then their tension dissolved so long as popular names filled in the hierarchy's bottom where their disarray highlighted, indeed justified, the top's precise 'civilized' order.

But popular names were, in a word, popular. Some did not stay at the bottom, but stuck to places with proper royal names. This was no trifle. Social order hinged on such distinctions. So kings issued edicts to keep popular names in their place (e.g. Mongkut 1961:113-117), and King Chulalongkorn bemoaned the difficulty of establishing royal names once popular ones were accepted.⁵ In one instance even royal officials 'lost' a particular Bangkok temple when their lists gave its long forgotten royal name (Chulalongkorn 1963:115-116). Often, however, this opposition settled into a comfortable duality whereby a place had two names, such as the royally named Wat Phrasirattanasatdaram and Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem that were popularly known as Wat Phrakaeo and Khlong Khut (or Khlong Khut Mai) respectively. Thus, just as within society an important abbot had both a royal name (*ratchathinam*) and a popular fictive kin title (e.g. *luangphu*, *luangpu*), so too did his temple have both royal and popular names. Whether it was people or places, each name was real in itself and yet distinct from the other.

This royal-popular dualism was clear but not static. Consider the naming of Thewet. In early Bangkok it was sparsely settled. Its orchards and gardens grew amid jungle. If the spot had any marked identity it probably came from the local temple, popularly known as Wat Chimpfli or the Silk-Cotton Tree Temple (Wat Noranat 1963:5). In the Fourth Reign (1851-1868) a major canal, Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem, was cut through one side of the temple. Sam Sen Road cut through another side and crossed this canal at the temple's corner. Here the bridge came to name the place. By the Fifth Reign (1868-1910), if not before, people called it Saphan Hok Khlong Khut, or just Saphan Hok, The Draw Bridge. Later in that reign, *Phraya* Thewet replaced the old bridge with a major new one. The king named the bridge (Saphan Thewetronarumit) after the *Phraya* and, shortened, it became the name for

the intersection and indeed the whole neighborhood. Today Saphan Hok and Wat Chimpfli are long forgotten but Thewet is a well-known named place in Bangkok.

What changed? An obscure, largely rural site became a thoroughly urban and distinct part of Bangkok. We can quite properly call this urbanization although the key shift was cultural, not demographic. What was this cultural urbanization? Most obviously a royally awarded Pali-Sanskrit name (Thewet [in Thai]) replaced popular Thai ones (Wat Chimpfli, Saphan Hok) and thereby symbolically tied the area into the larger urban order. Yet this was only the surface. In itself this simple change embodied three deeper changes.

First, a physical image was changed into a social one. Thewet's original popular names described the physical appearance of a temple with silk-cotton trees and a draw bridge.⁶ Its subsequent royal name described not physical features but the social significance of the bridge as a royally named structure built by a particular nobleman.

This urbanizing, physical-to-social shift suggests why Sternstein (1971:74, 73) found Bangkok's public image was "virtually formless" and its people had "an abyssal disinterest in form." He asked about physical not social form. So interviewees who described Wat Saket rarely noted its giant gold-plated stupa (*chedi*), its most prominent physical feature. Instead they spoke of the temple's Buddha relics and former Supreme Patriarch (Sternstein 1971:75). As true urbanites they 'saw' social significance, not physical features. Of course today many noted places take Western not Pali-Sanskrit names, but this merely marks their social significance as modern. A name like the Coliseum or Hollywood is prestigious, but it has no more connection to physical appearance than the royal name of Thewet's bridge. Today as in the past, simple, physically apparent Thai names characterize the countryside (e.g. Bang Chan means "the elevated village"), not the city. If Bangkok's important places had peasant names, then it would not be the civilized and sophisticated capital that it is. Thus naming embodies the hierarchy that sets the city above the countryside, important places above ordinary ones, and the elite above commoners. So in Thai urbanization social images swallow physical ones.

Now this change implies a second one: the local was lost in the urban. Thewet's silk-cotton trees and draw bridge were local in origin and impact. They stood out within the locality, not the city. When the locality's own features defined it, that made it a center unto itself. In contrast, the name Thewet was royal in origin and meaning. It defined the locality not by its internal features but by its external tie to a great, intrinsically urban center. Of course a royal name was an honor, not an imposition, and the king did not name the locality but simply the bridge that became its center. Popularly, however, the bridge's name was shortened to Thewet and extended to the whole neighborhood. Why? A royal name was prestigious and urban, while a purely local name was common and rural. This popular orientation to the royal center brought localities into a larger urban order, and so helped to make a collectivity into a hierarchy. Well beyond naming, this was the very status structure of society. A nobleman and his palace or an abbot and his temple marked centers of local communities *within* the city, but as great men their status came from links *beyond* the local to the great royal

and monastic urban centers. Thus a royal title superseded a local identity as in Wat Theptheadaram's 1910 list of donors which identified people by their locality unless they had a royal title or position.⁷ Obviously the elite had to live somewhere but their local identity was overshadowed by their royal—which is to say urban—identity. To move up in society one moved beyond one's locality and out into the city, from the common to the royal domain.

Third, these physical-to-social and local-to-urban shifts complemented an urban centralization of power that eroded local autonomy. Consider Wat Chimphli. When it was just a little local temple half hidden by jungle, neither the king nor the Supreme Patriarch particularly cared or perhaps even knew about its abbot. If tradition is any guide, he was chosen by monastic seniority and local popularity. Yet as Bangkok grew and the new canal brought commerce, the temple rose in stature. A wealthy nobleman, *Phraya Nōranat*, developed business interests near Wat Chimphli, and he and his wife took an interest in the temple (Wat Nōranat 1963). Early in the Fifth Reign they rebuilt the temple and offered it to the king who accepted it into his patronage as a royal temple and renamed it Wat Nōranatsuntikaram. Now it mattered who was abbot. If the local people and monks still had some say in running the temple, it had to fit with what the king, *Phraya Nōranat*, government religious officials (Krom Thammakan) and monastic leaders all said. When Wat Nōranat lost its local name, it also lost local autonomy. Being 'in the city' took the temple 'out of its neighborhood. True, this ruling hand was not heavy. It did not need to be. Prestige worked well enough. To enhance or even keep its high position, the temple had to be attuned to the royal urban order, not just the commoner local one. Of course this was not unique to temples. From cremations to corvée, the closer one came to the royal center, the tighter the regulation. Ultimately it was this urban centralization of power that set Bangkok above its hinterland and the urban elite above local commoners.

Taken together these three processes show the urban differentiation of place. Once Thewet was nowhere; later activity appears to have made it first a place within Bangkhunphrom and finally the place apart that it is today. A royal name facilitated the break. Bangkhunphrom, on the other hand, shrank. Nor was this just the loss of Thewet. Where once Bangkhunphrom named a local temple (Wat Bangkhunphrom Nōk), a palace (Wang Bangkhunphrom) and a canal (Khlōng Bangkhunphrom), their modern successors (Wat Intharawihan, The Bank of Thailand, and several roads) now bear royal or official names stripped of the old local reference. Like other named localities in Bangkok, the rise to urban significance of the places within it shattered Bangkhunphrom's wholeness, its integrity as a center. Of course this did not undo the order of place; it merely created new smaller places as local centers. Thus the local temple now names several nearby lanes (Soi Wat In, Trōk Wat In) as Bangkhunphrom once named it.

To sum up, let us look at Thai urbanization from yet another angle. Consider Embree's (1950) insight that what the Japanese elaborate horizontally the Thai express vertically. Clearly this simple contrast says nothing of the origin and little of the impetus behind these two styles of orienting life. It can, however, orient us as it does the Thai. Let us say the Thai value

the vertical to express status, a point evident from architecture to interaction. Now consider two implications of this choice. First, while the horizontal relates places to each other, a vertical display can occur only within a particular place—either that or upland peasants would rank above the lowland king. It fits then that particular places make up Bangkok's popular image. Second, unlike the horizontal, if you go up you can only go so far. Then the physical must become social—and that is the essence of the royal image: Hence today the most meaningful bond between Bangkok's places is not 'out' along the roads that link them but 'up' into Thai society; and for the past we may doubt the cultural depth of Tambiah's (1976) galactic polity, a horizontal rendering of a more deeply vertical society. Of course the contrast is relative, and we cannot deduce urbanization from a 'theme' itself shaped by urbanization, but playing between the two shows the coherence of Thai urban life.

Earlier we asked what tied Bangkok's jumble of places together. Now we have the traditional answer. A royal center made Bangkok a city and ordered its many local places into a single urban hierarchy. Culturally, urbanization meant urban eminence and power grew at the expense of local distinctiveness and autonomy.

The Modern Official Image

What about today? A center still binds Bangkok together, but where once it was royal and Indic, now it is bureaucratic and modern. Urbanization still centralizes power, but modernization takes it far further in breaking up localities. True, traditional Bangkok was never *just* a collectivity of local communities, but effective local administration often came down to local patriarchs, whether they were princes, noblemen, abbots or the petty officials and headmen formally charged with these duties. Even as late as the end of the Fifth Reign many deputy district officers (*palat amphoe*) still governed from their homes, a tradition that joined place and community.⁸ Of course this was not modern and so it could not be. Local administrators were taken out of their homes and put into offices, while a modern police force took over what had once been largely local patriarchal powers.⁹ Today local urban life falls under a plethora of competing government agencies, each too jealous of its powers to cede any to a locality and its would-be patriarch.

Take the bus system for example. Until the mid-70's twenty-six companies split up the city's ninety odd routes. Each company was a little barony with its own blood enemies and palace politics. Each had its own distinct colors, logo and equipment. If some European factory conspired to make two buses alike and then sell them to rival companies, when they hit the streets they differed sharply. Mechanics did their part. They outfitted and then bandaged buses to fit their company's unique ways. One company (Me Daeng) seemingly set up its fleet to cater to midgets, while another (Me Khao) favored basketball players. Drivers helped too. Some lines favored truly rapid if random transit (e.g. Samut Prakan Khonsong), while others kept to the leisurely pace of an earlier day (e.g. some lines of the misnamed Express Transport Organization

[R๑ S๑ Ph๑]). On some lines well disciplined drivers rarely breezed by waiting passengers, while on others getting on was as hard as getting off. On such lines free competition so fired the drivers that they sought to catch and pass buses further up the line to sweep up waiting fares. Then they could display their talents at slalom driving to stay in front. And finally the conductors helped to keep each line distinct. Uniforms varied in color, neatness and style. One company's conductors seemed to be straight out of the rice paddies, sometimes still without shoes (Samut Prakan Khonsong), while another recruited a surprising number of attractive young women who did their nails when traffic was slack (Si Nakhon's line 14).

Into this feudal chaos leapt the government. In the name of order and efficiency, it bought up the companies and pooled their equipment to make a single mass transit organization. Diversity dissolved into a single set of uniforms, identical colors and a standard logo.

We can call this modernization. Modern administrators conceived and carried out this transit coup. Why? It gave them power to manage the buses efficiently and plan the city effectively. Of course their standards of efficiency and effectiveness were modern and, like their logo, largely borrowed from the West.

We can also call this traditional Thai urbanization. After all, just as the traditional royal center brought order to the popular patchwork of places and communities, so too did the modern bureaucratic center bring order to a quirky lot of bus companies. In both instances the center's proper and civilized way was culturally the only alternative to popular chaos. Both traditional and modern urbanization broke down lesser communities, centralized power, and changed physically vivid images into socially coherent ones. In this last change lay the greatest cost to what Lynch (1960:9–13) called the imageability of the city. The diversity of the old bus system, its premier virtue, struck the eye and snared the mind. Bus lines were easily seen and separated lineal links between places that wove the city together like multicolored threads. Buying up the buses and painting them all alike thus erased an effective popular map of the city. True, they left the old bus numbers, and so people had clues to where they were going, but learning bus numbers is now a difficult task that diversity once made easy. Today the most vivid distinction is, as any hierarchy would have it, one of status between ordinary buses and the higher-fare air conditioned ones. Of course what Bangkok lost in native imageability it gained in modern meaning. Like the traditional royal order, a single government-run bus company is proper, prestigious and meaningful. Losing vivid distinctions between bus lines mirrors the way Thewet lost its physically apparent name for a more socially significant and meaningful one. Here modern urbanization follows traditional lines. But there is an essential difference. Traditional royal naming made each spot unique, while modern administration demands the uniformity that ensures its own efficiency. This modern quest for homogeneity threatens the diversity that makes Bangkok lively and liveable.

What has this done to Bangkok's modern image? Hollowing out local or just autonomous communities and hardening bureaucratic control has sharpened the official image. Today almost everyone knows their district (*khet*),

subdistrict (*khwaeng*), police district, postal zone and so on. Yet is this one image or many? Each bureaucratic agency draws and enforces its own map of the city, and where once the king symbolized and enforced a single higher order, today agencies often act autonomously. So the surface is fragmented, but then the solidarity of the official image lies in the deeper acceptance of the government as both a single entity and the only alternative to the even more fragmented popular order. Here modern symbols act as Indic ones once did. They create and legitimate a governing center that makes Bangkok a single city, often administratively and always symbolically.

Yet this single city still harbors a patchwork of places. This popular image fills a void left by an official image that unapologetically ignores everyday life. Thus the Thewet everyone knows is officially unknown. It may be a signpost for many and home to a few, but to the government this mural scene is just graffiti on its wall. So what some call Thewet is 'actually' only where three subdistricts in two districts meet. No one denies this official image of arbitrary lines, and yet everyone ignores it when they say where they live or where they are going. The old royal-popular duality lives on in modern Bangkok.

So now we have three ways to see Bangkok: popular, royal and official images. To set them out clearly we have set them well apart, yet we should not make too much of how they differ when what they share is so profound. Their common question, "how will place be defined?," presumes the answer matters and, by the shared fact of differing, they keep the answer open and invoke debate. Such debate demands—creates—its own space. So the outcome is not just three differing images, but a larger domain that lets them differ, what I shall call a culture of place.

The Culture of Place

Here 'culture' is discursive. It is not, then, a 'code for living,' nor even three contending codes, but an arena defined by an issue, a domain open to discourse. As everyday discourse it cannot be a 'text' (Ricoeur 1979), though rulers would rather it were. Then it would be *their* text, the royal or official one, and their way would be more fixed and universal than discourse allows. Of course, as we have seen, here they fail. Yet they have succeeded in one way: their sense of place—a ruling center—approximates what Sahlins (1976:211) calls a "privileged institutional locus" that orders the rest of life (O'Connor 1983). If nothing else they have made place a determining issue. To explore this we shall focus less on what it is possible to 'say' — Foucault's (1973) question — than on how what gets 'said' echoes widely.

We can show this prominence of place in two interwoven ways. One way looks at power. As we shall see, the discourse on place goes deeper than answering "how will place be defined?," it asks who and what will rule, a question posed by the rise of powerful cities and kings. Another way widens our focus from the Thai to their larger family, the Southwestern Tai.¹⁰ In principle, whatever these historically related but now diverse peoples share is either ancient or

essential to Tai life, and probably both. We shall begin with this Tai perspective and let power enter as it will.

Place is a pivot of Tai life. All Tai organize society in an inclusive hierarchy of social 'boxes': house (*ryan*), village (*ban*) and *myang* (Condominas 1980). Each is a social entity that defines, and is defined by, a place. Of course within this Tai vary in both the level (e.g. house vs. village) and locus (edge vs. center) each people stresses (O'Connor 1988a), but all combinations tie society tightly to places.

Note: to tie is not to fuse. What is tied can come untied. People and place stand apart even if never finally parted. So Tai must always ask, "how are people and place related?" This query recurs because in an animate world neither side can be reduced to the other. It is not, as our disenchanting world has it, that people are real and chthonic powers imagined. No, for Tai each side has a say. So they negotiate the bond, aligning people and places presuming the integrity of each. On the place side this is well expressed in animism where territorial spirits give each significant place a character as quirky as a person. Here negotiation flourishes.

In building a house or a *myang*, rituals help align people and these places to a still greater order of place. Here, especially where Indic texts enter, negotiation can give way to conformity. Place becomes prior. After all, great or little, places last longer than people. That commands respect in a region where permanence partakes of sanctity (O'Connor 1985a). Besides, as people come and go that leaves places like shells, real in themselves, awaiting people. Thus Tai Yuan tales tell of cities built by hermits and only later filled by people (Prachakitkorachak 1961). Still, the shell of place is not the only reality. People come not one by one, wanderers and strangers sharing only a place, but as groups already united under leaders. People take even more prominence in the Champasak Chronicle (1969) that relates a Lao group's quest for a place. Indeed, where ethnicity (Rhum 1987:103) or vassalage (DeGeorge 1927-28:606-607) defines the *myang*, a people can endure in an alien place (e.g. Rispaud 1937:117; Mogenet 1972:171). In sum, Tai distinguish people from place, value both, and yet align the two.

Let us label this localism. People and place negotiate a balance, not once and for everywhere, but again and again, spot by spot. It is an orientation that lets life unfold locally, not a full plan for society. Of course kings, modernizers, and cities propagate just such plans. Their centralizing powers deny localism. In principle, they would define all places by their relation to the ruling center, shifting 'place' from localism's discourse between people and chthonic powers to a lecture from ruler to ruled. Yet the ruled can 'reply.' If they add the new but keep the old, then the one plan becomes many, and the lecture turns into a debate. However unwittingly, the ruled thereby keep the symbolic means of asserting local autonomy, a key to what Scott (1976) has called their moral economy.

If peasants everywhere have such refuges, imbuing place with power has a particular Tai twist embedded in a specific Southeast Asian history. The Tai aspect is that, as 'boxes,' house, village and *myang* are all alike and self-contained.¹¹ Hence lower levels have a potential autonomy that has withstood even centuries of urban rule (e.g. the Lao village [Taillard 1977]). At the same time an acceptance of local powers reflects an apparent historic compromise be-

tween Tai and neighboring peoples they rose to rule. As Tai spread across Southeast Asia (c. 10th cent. AD on) their polities recognized that earlier peoples had the favor of local spirits of place that controlled fertility. In effect Tai rulers accepted a regional dualism, taking the conqueror's pole with its sky-linked ancestral spirits and leaving their predecessors the earth-linked spirits of the place (Mus 1975). As ritual efficacy demanded both poles, this balanced ruling center and local powers of place.

Of course great capitals and powerful kings tilted this balance toward the ruling center. Indeed, as Universal Monarchs (*Chakkraphat*) they proclaimed an ultimately monistic order where all revolved around the center, what Tambiah (1976) rightly calls a galactic polity. As ideology this was to the polity what the royal image would later be to Bangkok. Now if many Tai rulers aspired to this ideal, it was the Siamese who went furthest in actually eroding the power of local places. Consider how they differ from the Tai Yuan (O'Connor 1985b). Where Yuan myths weave history into a landscape of sacred sites, Siamese chronicles see great rulers who shape space to their order. For Yuan major *myang* have relics fixed in space by the Buddha's visit whereas the Siamese stress images linked to rulers and peoples, not places. Where Yuan relics are outside the *myang* on mountains once honored by fertility cults, the Siamese bring great relics into the city, cutting links to autochthonous cults and denying any tension between sanctity and the royal center (i.e. the *myang* as the king's city). Overall, we might call this a shift in the goal of traditional rites. Where all Tai seek prosperity, Yuan and many others focus on fertility. Their cults thus grant power to places if only to tap it. In contrast, the Siamese subsume this animistic fertility in a Buddhist quest for 'order' or discipline. In the end this 'order' arises from royal rule, not sacred places. So it neutralizes or at least subordinates every place but one — the royal center. Note, however, that this does not dissolve the people-place nexus; it simply replaces the autochthonous or just local with the royal. That is exactly what the Siamese polity did and Thai urbanization still does. Now let us put this culture of place in Tai cities.

Tai Cities Before and Beyond Bangkok

All Tai have *myang*. All proper *myang* have rulers, although unlike island Southeast Asia where the traditional city is culturally almost the ruler's shadow, the Tai *myang* has a life of its own (O'Connor 1983). Thus upland animist Tai often have two spirits of the *myang*, an ancestral one of the ruling line and another seemingly for the place or land itself. In these petty polities the *myang*'s two sides remain culturally similar, but in the lowlands where empires arose, one side, the ruling center, diverges from the other side's more collective sense of place. An alien idiom sets rulers above commoners and city above countryside. So the cultural urbanization we saw in Bangkok occurs among other Tai. Its background is the same. Apparently many Tai commonly name villages by some physical feature (e.g. upland Tai [Dang 1972:160], Yuan [Anuvit and Vivat 1978:46]). That lets the city's social and

royal naming stand apart. It also stands above, being borrowed from a foreign civilization. What it stands close to matters less than that it is not Tai. So Lao, Yuan and Lue call a great city a *chiang* or *wiang*, a Chinese borrowing, whereas the Siamese use *nakhon*, from Sanskrit.

Tai also vary on how far cultural urbanization goes. Consider the Lao city of Luang Prabang as Mogenet (1972) describes it. Like Bangkok it is a city of fluid boundaries and distinct named places, many known popularly, not officially. What makes a name is also similar: physical features, ethnicity, activities, historic events, temples, and so on. Yet the two differ in three fundamental ways. First, unlike Bangkok, Luang Prabang's image emphasizes villages (*ban*). That shows continuity with the countryside and implies local integration. Second, Luang Prabang's popular image includes the official one. Apparently the two do not clash or stay a plane apart as in Bangkok. Certainly that fits the two societies historically. Where the Lao kept close to a simple ruler-ruled split and all focused on fertility, the Siamese interposed an elaborate social hierarchy that created a world apart, driven by status competition and focused on trade (O'Connor 1987). Third, Luang Prabang's image appears far more physical than Bangkok's.¹² Certainly it has but a fraction of the royal and foreign terminology that dot Bangkok. In essence the Lao official image has not left the highly physical popular one that is common to everyday Tai life. By this measure, then, Luang Prabang shows far less cultural urbanization than Bangkok.

Of course less is still some. Using Mogenet's list of 87 toponyms, roughly 43 out of 51 purely popular names (84%) are clearly physical and visible while only about 20 out of 36 official names (56%) fall in the same category. Part of this comes down to temples (*wat*). The popular image notes more of these physically imposing buildings than the official image (19 of 51 [37%] vs. 5 of 36 [14%]).¹³ Significantly, temples ideally define local communities. Instead of temples, the official image gives prominence to a higher level of integration. Thus, visible or not, if we consider names that indicate glory, prosperity or the city itself — all associated with urbanism and the king — these make up 11 of the 36 official names (31%) but a mere 4 of 51 purely popular ones (8%). All of these differences show Tai urbanization, even if Luang Prabang falls far behind Bangkok.

Now that we have set Bangkok in the context of Tai cities, let us look at its own Siamese tradition that dates from 13th century Sukhothai. While this city was once Khmer, Tai eyes saw their own order, judging by King Ramkamhaeng's inscription (Griswold and Prasert 1971). He describes his city as so many distinct places, never mentioning any connecting or even noteworthy roads.

Apparently mid-18th century Ayutthaya looked like that to a native. Consider how a member of the elite described this capital to his Burmese captors (Watpradusongtham 1969-70). He lists places (weirs, landings, markets, gates, bridges, palaces, sacred entities, etc.). In itself, listing lends each prominence. True, perhaps the Burmese asked for a list, but then why is his memory for places so sharp that he can name 91 markets? In any case, how these many places fit together physically is often unclear. Significantly, the city's many canals do not appear as a distinct list, but mostly in listing bridges. A word for road (*thanon*) recurs in listing markets, but

as it is paired with another that indicates an area (*yan*), they are less pathways than places. Yet while the actual links are vague, an overall physical order prevails. Roughly, the author's narrative moves inward. After the realm's boundaries and vassals comes what physically surrounds the city. Then come the walls, gate by gate, followed by bridges, markets, royal stables, palaces and so on, all inside the city. Later two exceptions occur: he lists palaces outside the city and then sacred entities both in and outside; and finally he abandons place altogether to describe royal rites and laws. Does this break the periphery-to-center movement? Physically, yes; socially, no. We saw the same in Bangkok and dubbed it Thai urbanization. Its final step takes it beyond place altogether, up into the royal order, and so it is not surprising that this account of Ayutthaya does the same.

Of course this is an elitist view. It focuses on royal life (palaces, ceremonies) and places linked to trade (a royal monopoly), if not simply taxation (markets; possibly landings and bridges). Yet an everyday image peeks through. It focuses on temples and villages, judging by how frequently these name or locate other places (e.g. the list of 30 land markets outside the city uses *wat* 26, *ban* 12, canal 6 and road 4 times). Given their popular prominence, why did these not merit their own list? Were they too numerous — or just too common? Apparently his list of palaces gives the communities that count, and the roll of sacred entities mentions the major temples, first to locate the great images and relics and then to specify the administrative structure of the Sangha. Two centuries later Sternstein's (1971:75) respondents 'saw' this same social image — a relic and a titled monk, not the physically imposing temple.

The Siamese built Bangkok as a model of its predecessor, Ayutthaya, and so their likenesses hint at how these two capitals were perceived two hundred years ago. Clearly it was not in a strict lineal sense. A map of Ayutthaya's streets and canals says little about Bangkok.¹⁴ What mattered were the palaces and temples and their particular names (Wenk 1968: 17-22). Rebuilding these rebuilt Ayutthaya. Often it meant simply changing a name. Later King Mongkut (1961:113-117) observed that a Tai capital had to have three temples of particular names. Named places thus made a capital. Since then Bangkok has grown many fold, but it has not outgrown this past.

Texts in Context

Of course some see that past as cosmological (e.g. Tambiah 1976), and surely that is nearly gone. But it is not quite clear where the change lies: have the Siamese become more modern or have we made their past more mystical? Actually one often defines the other. Calling the past mystical or traditional makes modernity appear 'rational' and 'universal.' Yet this mirror game masks a deep similarity: just as writing alters speech (Ricoeur 1979), so too do these ruling texts remake everyday life and deny discourse. Each is its own monologue. True, as we live between traditional and modern texts, today they must 'talk' to each other, but then all other discourse disappears into the gap between them, becoming

not an authentic voice but a simple failure to change, a fault of the speaker. Here we see why the past must be traditional: cosmological cities must be made for modernity to destroy them. So an everyday guerrilla struggle against the text's domination gets lost in the larger war between old and new texts. The everyday does not lose, it simply disappears.

It follows then that to open the present, we must free the past from the textualism once imposed by administrators and now beloved of scholars. So let us ask a naively empirical question: just how 'textual' were Tai? If we put faith in legitimating texts and rites, then clearly the cosmos ruled all, just as kings and priests said it did. Against these texts stand a few clues that Tai were never rigorously cosmological anyway. Let us begin where the Siamese did—with the Khmer. They imitated the Khmer, and so if here the Siamese differ it hints at what they valued. Now for the Khmer under Angkor cosmological texts clearly ruled — or at least they aligned buildings precisely to the cardinal directions and willfully cut their order into the land, denying the vagaries of local terrain (Groslier 1973). Were that to describe the Tai, then particular places would have less local power than we have claimed. Still, among the Tai it might describe the Siamese — if we went only by texts. But actual practice shows they adjust to the exigencies of the place. How do Siamese orient a house? Texts tell the auspicious directions but local factors often get the final say (Terwiel 1975:162). So they set a house to face a road or waterway (Ruthai 1976:14), orienting it to activity, turning the compass to suit the site. Similarly, Lao villagers orient their houses to rivers that follow the lay of the land, not the points of the compass. Within a village newcomers build downstream from earlier houses, and flip entrance and sleeping area around so that adjoining houses do not juxtapose one sleeper's head with another's feet (Charpentier and Clément 1978:38-75). So the site is both physical and social, and its magnetism moves the compass so that north is upstream, south downstream (Mogenet 1972:177). True, one might call this cosmological, but its pivot is not textual, royal or urban but local.

But perhaps today's house is the wrong place to look. Surely it is the temple that sets the cosmological in stone. It did for the Khmer. They stuck to the texts and built the temple's main building facing exactly east. The Siamese knew east was 'correct,' but in Bangkok by Indorf's (1982:47) data only 75% face this way, and the supposedly more cosmological Ayutthaya got it 'right' only 64% of the time. While the Lao vary by region, overall Parmentier (1954:185) found only 31% of 110 temples faced east. Lao kept an eye to the compass, but aimed to face river or road (Leclère 1899:434 fn1). The same compromise orients Tai Yuan temples in Lampang (Nyberg 1976:30). Why compromise with the cosmos unless other forces are afoot?

Finally, consider Siamese cities. They too follow their site, not just a cosmological text. True, Sukhothai's walls make a rectangle where each side faces a cardinal direction, but then this was first a Khmer city. Even so, as Gosling (1983:141) argues, Sukhothai's major monuments appear oriented to a nearby ridge, and at neighboring Si Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet both "cities and monuments . . . conform with major [natural] landmarks that were oriented — more or less — towards one of the cardinal points." For the Khmer 'more

or less' would hardly do, but for the Tai the site has a say. That also describes both Ayutthaya and Bangkok where only a leap of faith can make them into cosmological cities anywhere near as perfect as their neighbors built. Of course the larger point is not that Tai miss textual perfection, but that a study of texts alone misses traditional Tai discourse. By reifying the past, it justifies the present's apparent pragmatism, an ideology we can now question.

Conclusion

So the prominence of place in Bangkok's popular image is at the core of not just Thai but Siamese and even Tai culture. Will it endure? It is too late to ask. Bangkok can never pause to fulfill planners' dreams. So we might better ask will it live? — will the popular sense of place keep its meaning? Here two threats loom.

One threat comes from the withering of local communities, places that once Thai could assume were social shells. Long ago the city abandoned the village as an administrative unit, severing the official link between place and community. Now what remains faces growing numbers who live within a locality but look to the wider city's jobs and connections. Is this just the triumph of self-interest? No, the old local communities knew self-interest aplenty, but when residence and rule went together the ambitious almost had to have local roots. Today urbanization strips away what neighborhoods can offer as it opens up opportunities that ignore place to honor wealth and education (O'Connor 1981). Yet the withering of *local* communities does not spell community's end. To the contrary, breaking down localities simply favors the supralocal or dispersed city-wide communities that flourish within and between bureaucracies. So Bangkok's popular image — a patchwork of places, not a city of streets — still reflects social life, and that makes it meaningful, not just practical.

The other threat comes as pre-packaged progress. It is the official image. It too is necessary if anyone is to plan and run the city, but will it be Thai or just mindlessly modern? Will it incorporate the popular image creatively as the royal image once did whenever it honored the past and accepted practice, or will it destroy all that differs from its way? If we see the city past or present as a text, then there is little hope. If, on the other hand, we hear its discourse, then its people might reason out its problems.

Consider roads. Modern administration presumes the importance of streets. It covets efficiency in moving people and goods. It tallies time and cost. All of this clashes with Bangkok's popular image where streets make social, not economic sense. Deadends that tie neighbors together snarl traffic. Some see these chopped up and tangled roads as a lack of order and so want to get on with straightening them out, but as I have tried to show their order lies in culture and society. True, Bangkok's streets are largely afterthoughts, unintended consequences of the way Thai society works. But change is risky, especially when its goal cuts so close to the cultural core. Society creates roads that re-create society in its own distorted image. Making Bangkok more efficient could end up making urban life meaningless.

Clearly Bangkok must live with its past, not in it. No one likes the traffic or finds much meaning in chaos. Change is necessary, but does modern or at least Western-oriented administration hold the answer when it has helped make the very problems it now offers to solve? Here the bureaucracy is the struggling sorcerer's apprentice. As it asserts central control to solve problems, it breaks down local communities and so furthers modernity. Where once home and workplace were one and localities largely governed themselves, today people must move out into the city where its administration must furnish facilities and governance. Each step towards modernity may be necessary and meaningful in itself, but what about the journey? Simply dissolving the diversity that gums up central administration will only make it harder for people to carve out niches within the city. Should moderniza-

tion ever reach its homogenizing end point, then Bangkok will be as modern cities are thought to be: a mass of solitary individuals facing a monolithic administration. The planners' dream could turn into the people's nightmare if none will study the popular image of Bangkok.

To conclude, let me return to the Marquis de Sade. It is too bad he was not the first foreign traffic advisor. If ill intentions scrambled Bangkok, then good ones might be remedy enough. It is not that easy. Bangkok is too complex to understand fully, much less control. For better or worse, modern administration is predicated on simplifying this complexity and the danger lies in its believing its own simplifications. Certainly the image of Bangkok is anything but simple. To grasp it, remember its cognate: imagination.

ENDNOTES

¹People usually refer to a place by name rather than generically, but when such a need arises major urban places are often called *yan*. Here *yan* is both a noun and a classifier for a district or local area within the city. Other more general words used in this context include *thi* (place), *thaeo* (section or district) and *haeng* (place).

²Obviously this was practical. For some routes a list of streets would have covered the side of the bus (e.g. Route 53 ran along 17 streets), and many passengers did not know street names anyway. Remembering bus numbers and place names was easier and clearer than untangling streets. Of course, as we shall see, such practicality by itself is not sufficient to explain this pattern.

³This describes 1975-76, just before government promotion of the Thai movie industry changed the kind and cost of available films and thereby eroded some old status distinctions. Of course status did not die. Video parlors appeared, keeping prestige as vivid in the city's image as it was in the mid-70's when first-class theaters showed first-run films in elegant buildings often in fashionable shopping malls. In contrast, second-class theaters showed second-run films in ordinary buildings often set amid the dirt and smell of markets. First-class theaters cost more and presumed educated patrons as they did not dub their foreign films. They

drew patrons from throughout the city and took Western or urban names (e.g. the Lido or Charoenkrung), while most second-class theaters served local clientele and, appropriately enough, took local place names (e.g. the Ratchawat). See O'Connor (1988b:260-265) for details.

⁴In the Fifth Reign upcountry districts (*amphoe*) were even renamed to correspond to the subdistrict (*tambon*) where the district office (*thiwakan*) was located. See the letters from Phraya Sisahathep and Prince Damrong to Prince Sommot, 29 Sep 1903 and 26 Mar 1907, National Archives Bangkok [hereafter NAB] R5 M2.5/3.

⁵In letters to Phraya Thewet, King Chulalongkorn observed that no one used the royal name of a particular bridge (3 Sep 1899, NAB R5 Y7Th7 9/38), and he urged posting the name of a new road quickly before people coined a popular name that would then be hard to change (25 Aug 1902, NAB R5 Y7Th7 9/83).

⁶I am assuming that the Silk-Cotton Tree Temple actually had silk-cotton trees. Whether or not it did, there are many instances where a socially significant royal name replaced or at least competed with a physically apparent popular one. The royal name of nearby Khlong Phadung Krungkasem meant, roughly, the Canal Sustaining

the Prosperous Capital, while its popular name Khlong Khut or the Dug Canal referred to the frequent dredging it required. The giant gold-plated stupa at Wat Saket had the popular Thai name "the Golden Mount" (Phukhao Thong) before it was even finished and given the royal Pali-Sanskrit name "the Highest Mountain" (Borombanphot [in Thai]) to commemorate a royal funeral pyre. While this name never caught on, King Chulalongkorn did issue a proclamation explaining why this was the proper name and correcting those who had coined a Pali-Sanskrit rendering (Suwanbanphot [in Thai]) of the popular name (Somphong 1975:55-57).

⁷Letter from Phraya Wichit to King Chulalongkorn, 24 Apr 1910, NAB R5 S7 6/31 (Th7). An interesting exception on the list of 133 is the two pawnshop owners who are identified by the names of their shops.

⁸Letter from Phraya Sukhumnawinit to King Chulalongkorn, 9 May 1908, NAB R5 No 4.4/7.

⁹*Ibid.* See also O'Connor 1981.

¹⁰Here Tai refers to the many branches of the Southwestern Tai (Lao, Lue, Shan, Yuan, Siamese, Ahom and the upland Black, Red and White Tai) which include most Thai (citizens of Thailand under a largely Siamese culture), whether by ancestry or assimila-

tion. What follows largely excludes the heavily Hinduized modern Ahom.

¹¹One can argue that this order requires that place have powers that people, in their own realm of power, can never quite escape. How else could house and village keep their integrity within a ruling *myang*? After all, if people stood entirely apart from place, then as the little must defer to the big, house and village would soon lose all but de facto powers to the *myang*. Indeed, Tai can talk like that to honor higher-ups, but they need never live like that so long as place has its own powers that defy the ruler's centralizing grasp.

¹²This is also true for the city name itself. Luang Prabang refers to a Buddha image all

can see, and two of its earlier names (Chiang Khong Chiang Thong [City of the River Khong, City of the Thong Tree]; Muang Luang Lan Chang [Capital of the Land of a Million Elephants]) are equally physically vivid. In contrast, some gloss Bangkok's short name (Krungthep) as the City of Angels, and its full name makes it Ayutthaya, Dvaravati and probably Angkor all rolled into one. While one might see these earlier cities, I suspect the name evokes their glories, not their ruins.

¹³Judging by Wijeyewardene (1986:34, 138) *wat* are as, if not more, prominent in the images of Nan and Chiang Mai, two Tai Yuan cities. He reports that Nan's municipality favors identifying local areas by *wat*, and

both towns use *ban* more than one finds in Bangkok.

¹⁴It does, however, tell you something about how Bangkok was perceived. In 1822 Crawford (1967) collected a map of Bangkok drawn by a native. It depicts the capital as rectangular and crosscut by canals aligned with the cardinal points, a reasonable image of Ayutthaya and cosmologically 'correct,' but rather far off for the more circular Bangkok.

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