

# THE KHWAN AND ITS CEREMONIES

by

*Phya Anuman Rajadhon*

## I. ITS NATURE AND MEANING

There is a primitive belief which has survived among the people of Thailand that in every person either old or young there is a *khwan*. The *khwan*, as vaguely understood in a confused way, is an unsubstantial thing supposed to reside in the physical body of a person. When it is there the person enjoys good health and happiness. If it leaves the body the person will be ill or experience some undesirable effects. A baby which is easily frightened, will have a *khwan* with the same tendency. When the *khwan* is frightened it will take flight into the wilderness and will not come back until it has regained its normal self. As the baby grows stronger with age the *khwan* will grow stronger too. It will be firmer and more stable in temperament like the person in whose physical body it has as its abode.

Such belief is not confined to the Thais of Thailand; the Shans of Upper Burma, the Laos of the Lao Kingdom and other Thai minority groups in other lands have a similar belief. In fact, this belief may be generalized to other races in Southeast Asia as well. It is a belief rooted in the dim past and has survived in many Thai expressions embedded in the language, rites and ceremonies in connection with the *khwan*.

The *khwan* is not confined to human beings only. Based on certain ceremonies which are performed in connection with the *khwan* and also on certain expressions in the Thai language, we may say that some kinds of animals, trees and inanimate objects useful to man have individual *khwans*. For example: an elephant, a horse, a buffalo or bullock, a certain house post, a bullock cart, a paddy field or paddy, and even a city, each has a *khwan*.

The *khwan* may therefore be described as something in the nature of a principle of life, vital to the welfare of man and animals.

Certain inanimate things have also a *khwan* because such inanimate things have their particular spirit or genius residing in them.

Traditionally, a typical Thai house is made of wood. The part of a house deemed most important by the people is the first post raised called a *khwan post* (เสาขวัญ) or premier post (เสาเอก). There are rules relating to the selection and the ceremonial raising of house-posts. In the old days people built their own houses with the help and co-operation of their neighbours. The first thing they did was to obtain house-posts with lucky characteristic marks. They obtained them direct from trees which they felled in a forest. Now, every big tree in a forest is supposed to be the residence of a tree spirit either male or female. A tree with certain usefulness such as for building a house or a bullock cart or a boat, has a female spirit called *nang-mai* (นางไม้) or wood nymph, while a tree with no such economic value, as the pipal and banyan trees for instance, has a male spirit called *rukha devada* (รุกขเทวดา) or tree angel. The above fact is only a generalization based on observation. When a tree is felled, its spirit or essence is superstitiously believed to be still in it. Hence it is not desirable to use trees felled from different forests as house-posts, because female spirits residing therein, coming from different localities would naturally quarrel among themselves; with the result that there would be no peace for the occupants of the house. A bullock cart or a dugout boat has a spirit or essence in the same manner as the house-post. A paddy field or rice paddy has a Rice Mother; likewise a city has its tutelary spirit. Naturally any thing that has a spirit has also a *khwan*.

By comparing the word *khwan* with that of the Chinese word *khwun* (魂 — old Chinese sound “kwun” or “gwun”) which means a soul or a spirit, one is inclined to believe that the Thai *khwan* and the Chinese *khwun* are one and the same word. On this presumption we may safely say that the Thai “*khwan*” was a soul in its original meaning. The Chinese word *kwun* is composed of two characters meaning vapour and demon. As the English word spirit and atman or soul in Sanskrit mean etymologically

breath (compare the word atmosphere) one is tempted to think the Thai words *ghwan* (กวัน soft aspirated sound in 'gh) and *fwan* (ฝวน hard aspirated f) meaning smoke and dream respectively have derived from the same source as that of the *khwan*.<sup>1</sup>

The modern Thai word for soul is *vinyan* (วิญญาน) a Pali word *Viññāna* meaning simply consciousness in its original sense. No doubt the Thai obtained this word when they made their home in Thailand after they had adopted Buddhism of the Southern School. The Laos, the Shans, the Burmese, and the Mons of Lower Burma and the Cambodians have the same word *vinyan* for soul in their modern languages. The *khwan* of the Thais, the Laos and the Shans, is the *Leip-bya* of the Burmese, the *praling* of the Cambodians and the *piing khamau* of the Mons. As Buddhism denies a permanent individual soul which clashed with the old animistic belief of the peoples in this part of Asia, they probably adopted the word *vinyan* from Pali, the language of the Southern School Buddhism, as a compromise with the old belief, which is still apparent among the people in the popular side of their

---

1. The character 魂 may have a simpler explanation than the one you offer. Like the great majority of Chinese characters, it is split into two parts: the meaning-part and the sound part.

The meaning part is the graph 鬼, meaning "spirit", "demon" etc. and the sound part is the 云, pronounced "yün" in Modern Chinese, but "yun" or "ywun" in Ancient Chinese. The kh or h initial consonant is simply one of the permissible "family variants" of all words using 云 as a phonetic element.

No doubt the compilers of the graph chose the phonetic 云 firstly for its *sound*, but secondly may be for the *fortuitous* suitability of its original meaning of "cloud". No strength of argument can be relied on, however, for the second reason for choice. For example, 魂 is always associated with p'o or p'ch (maybe 𠄎) in classical texts, but here the phonetic part is 白 pch/po meaning "white", which clearly has no meaningful contribution to make.

It boils down to this: one spirit (鬼) is called "hun" (i.e. 云 in sound), and the other is called "p'o" (i.e. 白 in sound).

This makes the "atman" part of your argument rather far fetched, but does not spoil your tentative "family" grouping of ขวัญ, ควัน and ฝวน.—Peter Bee.

Buddhism. As the word *vinyan* meaning soul is to be found in the language of these peoples, one suspects that the word *vinyan* came through the old Mons for the reason that the old Mons were a relatively civilized race in this part of Asia, chronologically before the coming of the Thai and the Burmese. Nevertheless the *khwan*, deprived of its original meaning *soul*, still exists in its shifted meanings as may be seen from the following Thai words and expressions.

When a baby is born, its inherent *khwan* is in a feeble state like that of the baby. As this stage it is called *khwan awn* (ขวัญอ่อน) or "tender *khwan*". By an extension of meaning, *khwan awn* means in current use "tender, loving care" such as a mother has for her baby. A young man may say in a mildly slighting manner to a young woman who is easily frightened *khwan awn* or "tender *khwan*".

When a child suffers a shock from some sudden fright and cries sharply and continuously, it is believed that the child's *khwan* has taken flight. In such a case it is called in Thai as *khwan hai* (ขวัญหาย), *khwan nee* (ขวัญหนี) or *khwan bin* (ขวัญบิน) meaning respectively the "*khwan* disappears, flees, or flies away". In its extension of meaning we can use either of these three words to express a state of alarm or surprise.

An appreciation expressed to a person is *kham khwan* (คำขวัญ) i.e. "words for *khwan*".

When a man experiences a great fright and may die of its effect we say *khwan nee dee faw* (ขวัญหนีดีฝ่อ) meaning literally "the *khwan* flees, the bile (gall-bladder) withers".

A sudden scare may be expressed as *khwan khwaen* (ขวัญแขวน) i.e. the *khwan* is dangling somewhere. This expression is now to be found only in literature.

To threaten the *khwan* (*khu khwan*—ขู่ขวัญ) is to strike terror, and to destroy the *khwan* (*thamlai khwan*—ทำลายขวัญ) is to give a fright.

To refer to a person in approving or disapproving terms is to *klao khwan* (กล่าวขวัญ) i.e. to speak about the person's *khwan*.

To lose courage is *sia khwan* (เสียขวัญ) i.e. the *khwan* is despoiled, reversing the position of the two words to *khwan sia* (ขวัญเสีย), it means a despoiled *khwan*.

Good morale, as in soldiers, is *khwan dev* (ขวัญดี) or good *khwan*.

To keep up the morale is *bamrung khwan* (บำรุงขวัญ) or the sustenance of the *khwan*. Usually a priest will sprinkle consecrated water on a persons or persons as an act of "bamrung *khwan*" as one often witnesses in a ceremony on certain occasions.

If a baby lying quite normally on its bed is startled suddenly and gives a sharp cry and then continues to cry its mother or someone nearby will at once pat lightly many times on the baby's breast, and at the same time pacify it with such word, "Oh *khwan*! abide within thy body". (ขวัญเอย อยู่กับเนื้อกับตัว). Such treatment is called *rap khwan* (รับขวัญ) meaning literally to receive the *khwan*. In its shifted meaning *rap khwan* means to cajole or to sooth a child from peevishness, or to make up to the girl you love if her feelings are running high against you.

The ceremony of *tham khwan* (ทำขวัญ) is indispensable in order to strengthen or confirm the *khwan* after a fright. In its present meaning in everyday use it means a compensation for an injury done. To harm a person, a person's animal or thing is *ipso facto* to injure the *khwan* which requires a *tham khwan* as a restoration to its normal state.

A gift presented after a ceremony of *tham khwan* to the participant is called *khong khwan* (ของขวัญ) or "*khwan*'s thing", but in current use the words means a gift or a present in general.

*Khwan* is sometime used as a qualifying word with certain nouns to mean precious or an object of affection. For example: *mia khwan*, *luk khwan*, *suan khwan* (เมียขวัญ ลูกขวัญ สวนขวัญ) means respectively a precious wife, a precious child, a precious garden.

*Khwan chai* (ขวัญใจ) literally the *khwan* of the heart *chom khwan* (จอมขวัญ) the highest point of the *khwan*, *khwan ta* (ขวัญตา) the *khwan* of the eyes, are words used to address one's beloved or favourite. The last two words are to be found mostly in poetry. *Khwan fa* (ขวัญฟ้า) literally the heavenly *khwan* means the beloved.

Eyes, ears, mouth, noses and hands have their particular *khwan*; they are *khwan ta*, *khwan hoo*, *khwan pak*, *khwan chamook* and *khwan mi* (ขวัญตา ขวัญหู ขวัญปาก ขวัญจมูก ขวัญมือ). These words if precede by the verb "to be" mean a feast for whichever particular part of the body is mentioned. For example *pen khwan ta* (เป็นขวัญตา) is a feast for the eyes.

Traditionally a person has 32 *khwans*. This tradition is known among the Thai of Thailand particularly in the North and North-East, also among the Laos and perhaps to the Shans, but so far it is not found among the Thai in the central area including Bangkok. In the many texts of invocations and addresses to the *khwan* in the dialect of the North-Eastern Thai there is an enumeration of the various *khwans* in a person. There are, apart from the *khwan* of the eyes and so on as mentioned above, heart, the intestines, the kidneys, etc. Try as I would I could not get the *khwan* to make up their right number of thirty-two. The belief in plurality of souls is to be found in many peoples, but so far this has not reached to such a number. Probably the thirty-two *khwans* is a later development due to the influence of Buddhism where there are enumerated thirty-two integral parts of a human body.

## 2. THE KHWAN AND ALLIED WORDS

Allied with the *khwan* there are three words in the Thai language which produce a complexity as to the nature of the *khwan* they are the words *ming* (มิ่ง) *chetabhut* (เจตภูติ) and *chai* (ใจ).

*Ming* like the *khwan* is an immaterial thing, also residing in a person. It gives him good fortune and prosperity if it does not desert him. In speaking, the word *ming* is frequently coupled

with the word *khwan* as *ming khwan*. It means probably a mysterious power supposed to determine one's luck or fortune. By comparing the word *ming* with the Chinese word also *ming* (命) meaning life, fate, destiny of men, I believe that they are one and the same word. The Thai have lost the original meaning of their word *ming* through the adoption of Pali word *chivita* (ชีวิต = Pali *Jivita*) meaning life. The various Thai tribes outside Thailand i.e. the Ahom in Assam, the Tho and other Thais in Tongking, the Diao and the Nung in Southern China, still retain the *ming* meaning life in their language.

Like the *khwan* the word *ming* has shifted its meaning from life to that of luck or fortune. It has again been superseded in its later meaning by the words *sri* and *siri* of Sanskrit and Pali origin, both of which mean luck, prosperity, wealth, beauty, fame. So popular are the words *sri* and *siri* with the Thais that the two words are to be found in the above senses in everyday use, and also to be found as a prefix to many Thai title-names, and as a suffix to many Thai female personal names. No wonder, then that the word *ming* has become vague in meaning. It is now, confined to limited uses. With the exception of the couplet *ming-khwan* already mentioned, the word *ming* strange to say, is usually followed by a word of the same initial sound such as *ming muang* (เมืองเมือง) *ming mia* (เมียเมีย). The word *muang* means a city, and the word *mia* means a wife. With word *ming* as a prefix, *ming muang* and *ming mia* may mean the best or precious city and the best or precious wife. Comparing this with the meaning of *khwan*, one is no wiser than before.

We now come to the word *chetabhut*. This is a Pali word meaning in its original sense a substance which is the author of thought or consciousness. It is, therefore, not much different in meaning than to the word *mind*. But in popular parlance, particularly among the older generation, there is not much difference between the *chetabhut* and the *khwan* in certain characteristics. The *khwan* will forsake someone only when the person is in great fear or is influenced by evil spirits, while the *chetabhut* will leave a

person only when he or she is in an apprehensive fear or during sleep in a dream. A man walking alone in a lonely place hears footsteps as if someone is walking behind. He turns back in an apprehensive fear but sees no one. To country folk the sound heard by the man is no other than his *chetabhut*.

There is a folk story about the *chetabhut* well-known among the different Thai peoples which agrees in substance and differs only in details. Here is one version of the story. Two men on a journey took a rest at a certain place. One of them fell asleep. His companion saw an insect issuing from one of the sleeper's nostrils. He followed it and found that the insect, by accident, had floundered into a water-hole. It tried to swim to get out of the water. The man put a bit of grass on the water, letting one end of it touch the water and the other end touch the ground. The insect took advantage of that bit of grass and succeeded in getting out of water. It crawled back followed by the man and eventually re-entered a nostril of the sleeping man who then woke up. He told his companion that he had had a bad dream: he fell into some water, but succeeded in getting out without drowning by means of a piece of wood which jutted into the water. His companion then knew that the insect was his friend's *chetabhut*.

Among the stories of the *chetabhut* as heard from the older generation, the form of the *chetabhut* varies. It may be in the form of an ant, a caterpillar, a spider or a scintillating thing somewhat like a firefly. Another version of the story relates that the *chetabhut* got out from the sleeping man not through a nostril but through the tip of one of his toes. Instead of falling into water, the *chetabhut* climbed up with difficulty to the top of a hill; which in reality was only a heap of cow dung.

Like the *khwan* with its thirty-two multiple souls, the *chetabhut* has four. When a person is very ill in a critical stage with no hope of recovery, old folk say that three of the sick man's four *chetabhut* have left him. Probably the folk refer to the traditional four elements, earth, water, wind and fire, but mis-called them *chetabhut*. Possibly the *chetabhut* is no other than the



*khwan* itself, but of alien origin, which the Thai have gathered into the fold of their old beliefs along with the *khwan*.

Although the *khwan* is nowhere stated explicitly to have a physical form, the expression *khwan bin* or the *khwan* flies away when it has a fright, points to the fact that the *khwan* must have wings. The Lao's *khwan* is in the form of a cricket, the Malay, and possibly also that of the Indonesian, *semangat* soul is in the form of a bird, and the Burmese *leip-bya* soul is in the form of a butterfly. There is also the belief of the people in Europe that the soul of a dead man becomes a butterfly or a moth, so there are some possible grounds for thinking that the *khwan* must have a form of some kind.

Shway Yoc (Sir George Scott) tells us in his book "The Burman, his Life and Notions" that the *leip-bya* or the Burmese butterfly soul "is the cause of dreams. It is not absolutely necessary that the butterfly should remain constantly in the body; death will not necessarily ensue from the separation. When a man is asleep, therefore, it leaves the body and roams far and wide. But in these wanderings it can only go to those places where the person to whom it belongs has previously been. A straying from known paths would cause extreme danger to the sleeping body, for it might happen that the butterfly would lose its way and never return, and then both would die. The body because the animating principle was gone, and the *leip-bya* because it had no earthly tenement to live in".

Sir George Scott, further in the same book, says that there is another kind of soul of the Burmese, the *thwe seit* which he translates as "soul of the blood". Lack of information on the primitive belief of the soul among the people of various races in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula is a handicap to comparative study. Anyhow the Burmese butterfly soul and the Thai *chetabhut* seem to be one and the same kind in certain aspects.

The Chinese say that a man's soul goes out at night during sleep through an aperture on the crown of the head. (Compare the brahmarandhara or Brahma's opening of the Hindus, where the soul

of a holy man leaves the body during death from an aperture in the same locality of the head). A man's dream is the experience of the soul while roaming. As the soul gets in and out every night, the hair on the crown of the head is disturbed by continual treading of the soul, so they are, therefore, unable to grow and thrive, unlike the hair on either side of the head, which grows luxuriantly undisturbed by the treading of the soul. Hence baldness is usually confined to the central part of the head.

The Thai *khwan* goes out from that part of the head also, though it is not expressly stated. An average Thai will not tolerate without resentment anyone touching his head. Woe to the person who pats a Thai head, if that person is a woman. Worse still if the hand that touches it is a left hand, for that hand is unclean, particularly that of a woman. No man if he can will pass under a clothes line, nor let a woman's lower garment touch his head. When passing or standing near a superior or an elder, one should lower one's head in order not to be above or on an equal level with the head of that personage. If that personage sits on a chair or on a raised platform one must lower one's head when passing near the person. If he squats on a carpet or floor one must kneel or crawl. These social habits have become so conventionalized that they now form part of the Thai etiquette of good manners and decorum. Why is the average Thai so fastidious about his head? The reason perhaps may be found in the old belief that the *khwan* has something to do with the head. If you want two boys to have a fight, just draw on the ground two circles, assuming that one of the circles is one of the boys' head, and the other circle is the head of the other boy (เขียนหัว - to draw heads). Now, dare the boys to rub out the other's circle with their feet. Should one of them accept the dare and do it, it is a great insult and in most cases there will be a fight between the two. That is how sacred the head is among the Thai, and this I believe to be due to the belief of the *khwan*.

The Thai word *chai* which means heart or mind, is also curious. Through magical art the *chai* can be removed from a person like a possession and hidden somewhere. No harm will be

done to the owner but it will give the person invincibility for no weapon can harm him. He will die only when his *duang chai* (the heart in a round form) is discovered in its hidden place and crushed. The magical removal of a heart is called in Thai *thod duang chai* (ถอดดวงใจ) which quite literally means to remove a heart. By extension, a lover may say to his beloved that he has entrusted his heart to her. The belief of removal of a heart by magical means is to be found only in a certain class of Thai literature. It is probably of Indian origin. When frightened one's *chai* or "heart is lost and overturned" (ใจหายใจคว่ำ) whereas the "*khwan* flees and bile withers" (ขวัญหนีดีฝ่อ). Why, I do not know. As one of the causes of jaundice is a severe mental emotion like anger or fright one is apt to think "the *khwan* flees and bile withers" has the same cause as the jaundice.

The word *chai* forms a couplet with the *khwan* in *khwan chai* and the word *khwan* forms a couplet with *ming* in *ming khwan*. One can not reverse the order of these two couplets nor can one interchange their components. I venture to translate the couplet *khwan chai* as the *khwan* or vital spirit of the *chai* or heart while *ming khwan* is the *ming* or life of the *khwan*. Hence a person has in himself or herself a *chai* (heart or mind), while the *chai* has its *khwan* (soul or vital spirit), and the *khwan* has its *ming* (life).

### 3. "THAM KHWAN" CEREMONY

If a child comes home crying and in a feverish condition after experiencing a fall or a scare, people believe that the *khwan* has left the child. Someone, usually the child's mother, will in an instant take a brass bowl<sup>1</sup> with its ladle and a piece of cloth and go out directly to the spot where the child is supposed to have lost the *khwan*. Calling back the child's *khwan* which is imagined to be

1. The brass bowl as referred to above is a domestic utensil for storing cooked rice and is to be found in nearly every Thai home in the central part of Thailand. It is called *khan* (ขัน) in Thai. One frequently sees it in the early hour of the morning when people present food to monks.

nearby at the spot, the child's mother takes the ladle out and dips up the imagined *khwan*, which she puts in the brass bowl, and covers it with the piece of cloth. Returning home to the sick child she turns the brass bowl round and round many times over the child, in the hope that the *khwan* will scent, possibly from odor, the child; thus enabling it to go back to its former abode in the child. Pieces of unspun cotton thread (a thing to be found in every Thai home where there is home spinning and weaving) are then tied in a fast knot round either wrist of the child. Then follows a wish or blessing with a present as a gift to the child. With such procedure and treatment it is believed that the sick child in due time will regain its normal self.

In this simple ceremony just described, the first act done is called *riak khwan* (เรียกขวัญ) meaning the calling of the *khwan*. The next is called *tak khwan* (ตักขวัญ) or the dipping up of the *khwan*, and the tying of unspun cotton threads round the child's wrists is called *phook khwan* (ผูกขวัญ) or the tying of the *khwan*. The whole procedure is called *tham khwan*, literally the making of the *khwan* or, in its shifted meaning in current use as already mentioned, compensation for an injury done. What has been described of the *khwan* here is mainly done in Bangkok and in the central area of Thailand. In other areas of Thailand the words and details of the ceremony vary but overlap to a degree where two sub-cultures meet. For instance, in Northern Thailand the *tham khwan* ceremony is called *choen khwan* (เชิญขวัญ) i.e. the invitation of the *khwan*, while in the north-eastern part of Thailand where its culture meets that of the Laos and also in a southerly direction that of the Cambodians it is called *su khwan* (สู่ขวัญ), i.e. the welcoming of the *khwan*. The tying of unspun threads round the wrists is called *mat mü* (มัดมือ) in Northern Thailand, meaning the binding of the hand. In the North-East it is called *pook khaw mü* (ผูกข้อมือ) or the tying of the wrists. The ceremony of *tham khwan* or to be short the *khwan* ceremony as given hitherto is in its simple form. There is also a certain kind of *khwan* ceremony in a complex form, perhaps due to later

development, with degrees of elaboration pertaining to different classes and ranks of the people concerned.

Also, when a child every now and then has an ailment with "three days good four days ill" (สามวันดีสี่วันไข้ = *sam wan di si wan khai*) as in the current Thai expression, a condition which may, in the long run, deteriorate into serious ill-health with a tendency not to survive, such child is called in Thai "hard to raise" (เลี้ยงยาก). When a child is in such a condition, a person known to "raise children easily" (เลี้ยงลูกง่าย) is invited to come and tie the *khwan* for the child. The person will tie both wrists of the child with unspun cotton threads. Before tying, the person takes one end of the thread brushing it to and fro over the child's wrist many times, and at the same time expresses a wish for the welfare of the child in a formal chant worded thus: "Oh *khwan*! abide with the flesh and body (=peace) and be cool and happy". (ขวัญจงอยู่กับเนื้อกับตัวจงอยู่เย็นเป็นสุข). One will notice that, living in a comparative warm climate, the Thai expression for a peaceful life is a life of coolness. The brushing of the tip of a thread on a child's wrist is probably of Indian origin (compare the investiture of the sacred cord of the Hindu twice-born). There is a saying in a rhyming couplet of the people in the northern area that "to tie the left hand is to let the *khwan* come, to tie the right one, is to let the *khwan* stay" (ผูกมือซ้ายให้ขวัญมา ผูกมือขวาให้ขวัญอยู่). As the visible sign of life in man is the regular beating of the pulse, perhaps the tying of the *khwan* round the wrists is to keep it within bounds.

Some fifty years ago small silver coins with two denominations of an eighth and a quarter of a baht, were used in this country. The person who tied the *khwan*, made from these coins a plain inflexible and small bracelet, something like an anklet which could be adjusted in size. Such a bracelet is called in Thai a "spirit-fetter" bracelet (กำไลขี้ผี). The person who performed the tying of the *khwan* put a pair of such bracelets on either wrist of the child as a *khwan* gift. Sometime, in its simple form, one of these small coins,

which had a hole in the middle, was strung to the unspun cotton thread. It is to be noted that such small silver coins were to be purchased from a widow. The parents of the child by custom had to pay the person performing the tying of the *khwan* an amount of money equal to the price for the coins he had paid to the widow. Possibly due to a later development, instead of a silver bracelet, gold or alloy of gold was used, and sometime also with a miniature lock made of the same metal as the bracelet. At this stage of development it became unnecessary to purchase the metal from a widow, nor had the parents of the child to pay equal the price of the bracelet to the person performing the tying of the *khwan*. In fact the parents of the child simply gave something of value in gratitude to the person tying the *khwan*. Usually the performers of the tying of the *khwan* were two persons, a man and his wife, who alternately tied either the right or left wrists of the child.

What is recorded here is confined to Bangkok and derived from personal experience. In outlying districts, particularly in the central part of Thailand among the peasant folk, the tying of the *khwan* was no doubt the same but probably simpler. According to my information, the miniature locks strung to the unspun cotton threads were sometimes made of wood carved into the shape of a lock, the wood having been taken from a beam supporting the floor of monk's privy; or in substitution for a lock, the bone of a frog's leg was used, which looked like a Chinese old style lock in shape as used by people before the coming of European locks and keys, or sometimes a vulture's bone in the shape of a *takrut* (ตะกรุด) or a cylindrical shaped amulet was worn.

Also, in case of a child who is frequently ill, if he is a boy, the parents take him to a monk to have the tying of the *khwan*. If the child is a girl, the monk will give pieces of consecrated unspun cotton threads to the parents to tie the child's *khwan* by

themselves at home, for monks cannot consciously touch a female without sinning. The bringing of a child to a monk for tying of the *khwan* is called in Thai idiom *thot pha pa* (ทอดผ้าป่า) literally it means to lay a cloth in a forest or an uninhabited place. The *thot pha pa* is a name of a certain convention where a monk's robe is laid for merit-making on a branch of a tree where a monk may come by and "draw" it. In ancient days a Buddhist monk lived the life of a mendicant. By discipline, a monk could possess only one yellow robe—a set of three pieces. More than the pieces he wore he could not possess. When the garments became tattered and worn out, he had to replace them from discarded cloth which he found. This he washed, dyed and cut into the desired shapes. Perhaps later on some meritorious minded person, seeing the plight of a monk in a tattered robe, placed a cloth on the branch of a tree where a passing monk might see and take it for his use. By discipline a monk cannot receive a robe offered from anyone unless it be during the month after the Buddhist Lenten period, when a monk by the religious vote of the brotherhood may accept a robe from anyone in a ceremonial presentation. Such a presentation robe is known as a *kathin* robe (ผ้ากฐิน). In the present day there has arisen a method of presenting the *thot pha pa* by hanging the robe on a branch of a tree together with other articles as befitting gifts to a monk. Usually the robe to be presented is hung on a cut branch of a tree placed in an ornamental basket or otherwise, together with other articles hanging on the branch of the tree. Prominent among these articles is a towel made into the shape of a gibbon which purports to be a denizen of the forest. Sometimes there are many decorated baskets in a *thot pha pa* ceremony where many people co-operate. These are carried in a grand procession to the intended wat or monastery where the monks help themselves to the gifts.

The taking of a frequently sick child to a monk for the tying of the *khwan* as a *thot pha pa* is a ruse to hoodwink the *phi*

(ผี) or spirit. A child was often ill, the people believed, because of the *phi* who wanted to take away the child.<sup>1</sup> If the child now belonged to a monk, as if it had been left as a *thot pha pa*, it was believed that the *phi* would not dare to afflict the child any more, for the *phi* fears a monk on account of his holiness.

If a parent, usually the mother, has to be away from home temporary and entrusts someone with the care of her baby, she will tie an unspun cotton thread to each of the baby's wrists. She must say something in a cajoling manner to the baby that she will come back as soon as possible, may it be good and happy during her absence. If the mother leaves her baby without performing such necessary leave-taking, the baby, during her absence will show signs of vexation and cry continually. Such is a belief of the people which has existed even up to the present time. When a baby during its mother's absence cries every now and then as if it suffers a pain or illness, people nearby will make a remark during her absence that she is a modern-minded mother who has not observed such a necessary performance.

---

1. According to popular belief, a person is born through the making of the *phi*. The *phi* shapes some clay, perhaps, into the figure of a child to its own liking. It then puts the figure into the womb of a woman and a conception ensues. Within three days after the child is born, the *phi* will come to see the child, and if it finds the baby still to its liking it will take away the baby, which means the baby will die. Hence the well-known Thai expression as "three days (the baby) is a *phi*'s child; four days a human's child" (สามวันลูกผี สี่วันลูกคน) meaning that within three days after birth the baby may die to become a *phi*'s servant. If in the fourth day the baby still lives, it is then a human's child. There is a trick to mislead the *phi* by selling the baby immediately it is born to some one, by make-believe to mislead the *phi* that the baby is not the woman's child. In order to hoodwink the *phi* further, the baby is named with words of undesirable meaning such as buffalo, dog, frog, bad smell, and so on. When the *phi* hears of a baby with such names, it will not take away the baby believing the baby has such characteristics as the names describe. Such names sometimes stick and survive with the baby until it has become a man without any change; if the baby grows into a child but has continual ill-health, the parents believe that it is the *phi* again who is the cause of the trouble, hence the giving away of the child to a monk in the *thot pha pa* fashion.



In the North and North-East of Thailand there is a *tham khwan* ceremony for distinguished visitors who have been temporarily in their midst. Also, in Central Thailand there is a *tham khwan* ceremony for a person who comes back after a long absence from home or returns from an expedition of war. The nature of the performance of such a *tham khwan* ceremony is not a simple one such as has already been described. Neither is the *tham khwan* ceremony related to other rites of passage. Before dealing with these ceremonies it is necessary to describe first, certain paraphernalia in connection with the *tham khwan* ceremony in the next chapter.

#### 4. ARTICLES IN CONNECTION WITH THE THAM KHWAN CEREMONY

The chief article in connection with the *tham khwan* ceremony is the *bai si* (บายศรี<sup>๔</sup>—long ai in bai). It is a word of Cambodian origin, meaning literally auspicious rice or in other word the *khwan* rice. In Northern Thailand it is called also *bai si* (ใบศรี<sup>๕</sup>) but with a short sound in bai, which means auspicious leaf, or also *khan si* (ขันศรี<sup>๖</sup>) or auspicious tray, while in the North-East it is called *ba si* (บายศรี<sup>๗</sup>), no doubt a corrupted form of *bai si*.

There are two kinds of *bai si*; the *bai si pak cham* (บายศรีปากชาม) meaning literally the dish-border *bai si*, and the *bai si yai* (บายศรีใหญ่<sup>๘</sup>) or the major *bai si*. Sometimes it is called *bai si chan* (บายศรีชั้น<sup>๙</sup>—tiered *bai si*) or *bai si tang* (บายศรีตั้ง<sup>๑๐</sup>—standing *bai si*)

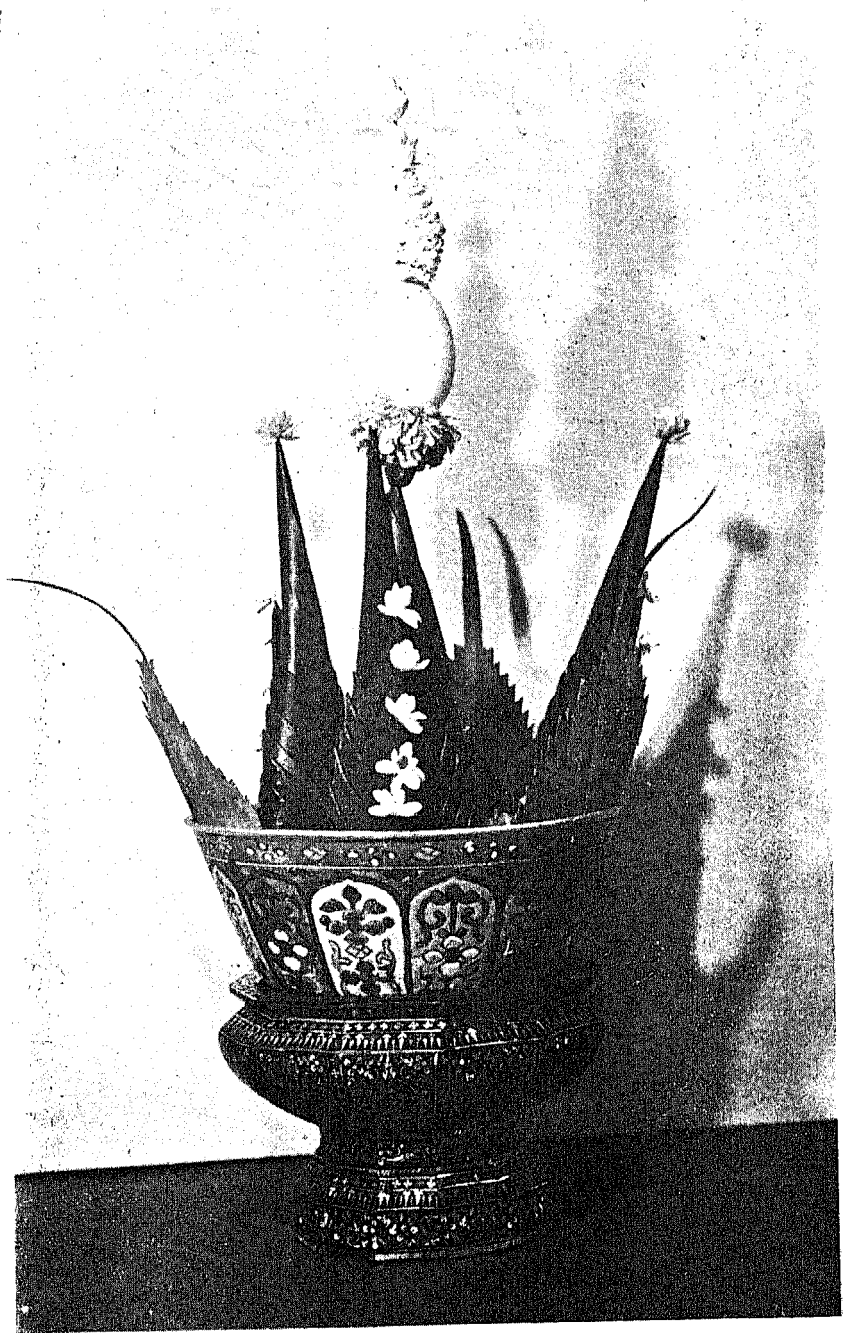
**The Bai Si Pak Cham.** This kind of *bai si* is composed of three items; (a) the *kruai* (กรวย) or the cone-shape vessel, (b) the *nom meo* (นมแมว) or cat's breasts, and (c) the *mangda* (แมงดา—king-crab or horseshoe-crab-Tachypleus gigas).

(a) *The kruai.* This cone-shape vessel is made of banana, leaf, cut and folded in such shape and filled with cooked rice. In fact the *kruai* is similar to the ice-cream cone in shape. It is placed with its circular base in the centre of a large sized dish. The apex of the *kruai* is surmounted by a hard-boiled duck's

egg, shelled and pinned by a small wood sliver. (In the North, either a hen's or a duck's egg may be used, and in the North-East only a hen's egg is used. Probably this is due to the abundance of hen's eggs in relation to duck's eggs). This egg is called *khai khwan* (ไข่ขวัญ) or *khwan's* egg. Usually the *khwan's* egg is again surmounted by a row or a cluster of flowers placed one upon another with a wood pin stuck in the top of the egg.

(b) *Nom meo* or *cat's breasts*. Each "cat's breast" is made of a strip of banana leaf which has been cut to size and then folded back so as to make a flat triangular, arrowhead shape at the fold with a residual "tail" below. Three of these "breasts" are then placed one upon another in an overlapping sequence so as to form one unit with an overall triangular shape with a common major apex but with the minor apices (the cat's breasts) jutting out a little below the topmost point like spurs or spikes (a bit like the layers of an artichoke). Three of these triangular, multi-apical units are placed equidistantly round the dish with the apices sticking up and jutting out slightly beyond the rim of the dish. The residual tail-ends of the "breast" are roughly interwoven into one whole forming the "floor" of the dish and are fastened together with a small wooden pin to prevent them from coming loose and unfolding. Thus the three units of three, though separated radially, are pinned together in the centre by their tails. As a further anchor to keep everything in place, the *kruai*-cone full of cooked rice is placed point-upwards in the centre of the dish on top of the tails. The cone of the *kruai* should be higher than the apices of the units around it. For the above reasons the "dish-border *bai-si*" is sometimes called *bai-si-nom-meo* or the cat's breasts *bai si*.

(c) *Mangda*. A banana leaf cut into the shape of a serrated leaf, something like the outline of a *mangda*, (king-crab or horseshoe-crab). Such is the name of this article. The middle of the serrated leaf is cut through into two slits like a gable in shape. Three pieces of this *mangda* but sometimes four, are placed in the same way as the *nom meo* or cat's breasts, but at intervals between the *nom meo*. The *mangda* has also a long



Bai Sri Pak Cham. (บายศรีปากชาม) Dish-border Bai Sri.



tail which is twisted with the other two of its set and placed in the same manner as the *nom meo*. The *mangda* is sometime called *tao* (เต่า) or tortoise, probably from its shape.

Three pieces of ripe banana cut lengthwise are inserted in the folds of the *nom meo* or cats breasts. The banana as used traditionally is from a variety known as *kluai nam Thai* (กล้วยน้ำไทย). Three pieces of cucumber, also cut lengthwise, are placed each on the *mangda*. These pieces of banana and cucumber may be placed simply in the *bai si* dish in a consecutive manner at either place. Three pieces of sweetmeat are sometimes used in place of the three pieces of banana and cucumber. Sweetmeat as used commonly is of the kind known as *khanom tom khao* (ขนมต้มขาว) meaning literally "boiled-white sweetmeat". It is made of glutinous rice flour kneaded and rolled into a shape and size of the children's stone marble with a small piece of palm sugar cake inserted within. This is boiled and sprinkled with shreds of ripe-coconut flesh. It seems similar to the Hindu sweetmeat called *modaka* which I have been told of, which is used by the Hindus as an offering to their spirits and deities. The Thai use it too as such an offering. Other kind of sweetmeat may be used in place of the above one.

There are also three sets of another kind of offerings which compose a set: one beeswax taper, an incense stick and a flower. These are stuck and placed in and around the *bai si* dish alternately between the cat's breast and the king crabs. Extra flowers usually jasmin may be used as decoration. Pieces of unspun cotton threads of a hand-span in length are placed across the cat's breasts. These threads are used for the tying of the *khwan*. The "dish-border *bai si*" is an offering either to the *khwan* or to a deity, if an offering is made to a deity there is no necessity to supply such threads.

*Critical comment.* The "dish border *bai si*" is evidently a plate of food and sweetmeats as an offering to the *khwan*. It is perhaps, in part, of Indian origin. Orthodox Hindus are vegetarians and in certain localities take their food from banana leaf or from a platter

made of such material. The Thai on the other hand take their food from a dish. They may take their food from a banana leaf platter only on certain occasions when there is no dish at hand, as in a picnic excursion for example. In Thai traditional customs when an offering of food and sweetmeat is to propitiate spirits or deities, it is always offered in a platter made either of banana leaf or from the sheaths of banana stem in certain prescribed shapes as dictated by tradition. The offering of food and sweetmeats to the *khwan* is in one respect different from that offered to the gods and deities. In the former the owner of the *khwan* is visibly there, while the latter are always invisible. It looks undecorous to have food and sweetmeats placed in a banana leaf platter instead of a dish for entertaining a person who is the owner of the *khwan*. The placing of a banana platter in a large dish or tray is probably a compromise between a tradition and a Thai recognized good manners. Even today when one offers anything to one's superiors or elders, either a glass of water or an invitation card, for example, it should be placed on a salver or a tray when handing it. The handing of anything to a superior or an elder in the offhand manner tolerated nowadays is undoubtedly due to the impact of other cultures.

The *kruai* is evidently no other than the cone-shape woven bamboo covering for food called in Thai *fa chi* (ผ้าชี) to be found in many Thai homes. The *fa chi* is always covered with a red cloth, and in certain special occasions with brocades. Thai food traditionally are placed in dishes and these again are arranged in a tray. A *fa chi* for covering the food before partaking them is, therefore, a necessity.

The *khwan* egg on the apex of the *kruai* may be a symbol of vitality or a second spiritual rebirth if partaken ceremonially by the owner of the *khwan*. (compare : Easter egg).

The *nom meo* or cat's breasts and *mangda* or king-crabs are undoubtedly the serrated decorations round the borders of the banana leaf platter. The best kind of Thai banana leaf platter is made with a surmounted serrated border called in Thai *krathong*

*chirm* (กระพวงเงิน) meaning a surmounted-border *krathong*. If such a platter is a small one, when placed in a large deep dish, only the surmounted border of the *krathong* will be visible to the eyes from a distance as something with pointed tips protruding above the rim of the dish. No doubt in a later period the banana leaf platter might have been discarded for the reason that the dish itself is an appropriate receptacle for food and rice, why then should a banana leaf platter be utilized unnecessarily. A trace of a banana leaf platter with serrated borders survived only in its border-decoration.

Sliced banana and cucumbers are dainties among the Hindu in India in certain localities, as in Calcutta for example. Perhaps the bananas and cucumbers are also dainties of the *khwan* and have their source perhaps from India.

One will notice that the number of things as used in the *bai si* is always in three. This is a favorite number with the Thai.

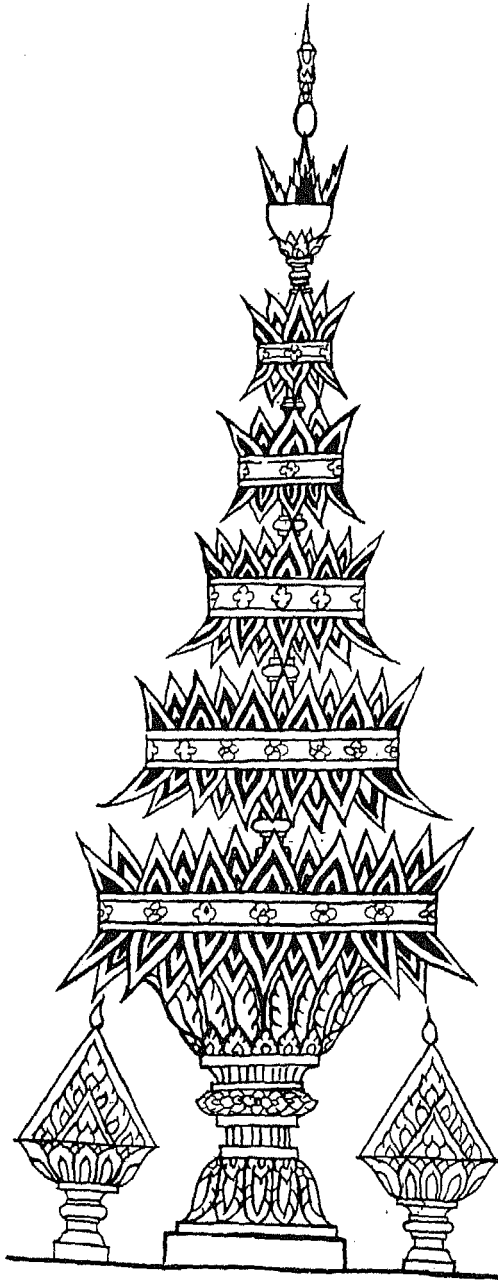
*Bai si Yai or Major Bai si.* This is a kind of structure usually pyramidal in shape and is composed of five tapering tiers. There are also seven or even nine tiers, but they are rarely constructed owing to the fact the whole structure would be too high and would not stand firmly unless it had a relative large base. The five tiers have as their platforms thin boards, round and flat like a disc, with a rod or shaft running through a perforated hole in the centre of each disc. The discs vary in sizes, the lower one is relatively the largest and the size becomes gradually smaller with the higher ones in a tapering manner. The borders of each of the discs are ornamented by the *nom meo* or cat's breasts. They are arranged in two consecutive circles; the top one with its tips pointed in a sky-ward directions and the lower one with the tips pointed in the opposite direction. These two *nom meo* with their pointed tips in opposite directions are fastened round the borders of the disc by a clasp-like fastener made of a material from the sheath of a banana stalk. On each disc, save the highest and smallest one, are small banana leaf platters filled with food, sweetmeats and choicest fruits,

On the highest disc is placed a small bowl or dish decorated with flowers. In the old days a *bai si pak cham* or a dish-border *bai si* was the thing in use. It is still to be seen, but infrequently, up to the present time. Three laths of bamboo splits of an appropriate length are placed endways at equal distances from base to top of the sides of the structure and fastened each with three knots in equal proportions. These three laths of bamboo are supporters of the structure. Three young banana leaves (ใบตองอ่อน) are wrapped round the structure, and this again is wrapped with a piece of brocade or other valuable textile materials. This cloth is called *pha haw khwan* (ผ้าห่อขวัญ) or “*khwan*’s cloth wrapper”.

The making of *bai si*, especially the folding of banana leaves into cone-shape *nom meo* or cat’s breasts, was in the old days handed and taught traditionally to the younger members of the family. When a novice had a sufficient command over the folding of the *bai si* he or she was initiated into the mystic art. The initiation was simple. The teacher will hold the hands of the novice while folding banana leaves into the shape of *nom meo*. Such an initiation is called in Thai *krob* (ครอบ) which means to cover (or to impart asknowledge to the pupil). The “*krob* ceremony” or initiation is not confined only to the making of *bai si*, but is used in most of the traditional arts, for instance, the fine arts, sculpture, painting, music (both vocal and instrumental) and dramatic art, have their “*krob* ceremonies”, some peculiar to each case as well. The School of Music and Dramatic Art of the Silpakorn University has its annual *krob* ceremony.

The best made major *bai si* is decorated around the shaft with flowers or with figures carved from sweet potatoes and unripe papaya fruits into scenes taken from certain episodes of the best known Thai literature. Such figure carving is called *keh bai si* (แกะบายศรี<sup>๔</sup> = carving of *bai si*). The “carving of *bai si*” forms a part of a certain class of Thai oral literature called *le keh bai si* (เหล่าแกะบายศรี<sup>๕</sup>) in which a reciter describes in an intoned voice as an extra part of an invocation to the *khwan* depicting certain imaginary scenes to be found as decoratives of the *bai si*. Such





Major Bai Sri (บายศรีใหญ่) of the First Reign.  
(From the mural painting in Buddhaisawan Hall in the  
National Museum, Bangkok).



decoration of the *bai si* is rarely found nowadays for it costs a lot of skill and time, not to speak of the relatively high pecuniary cost. This workmanship is also to be seen frequently as decoration of the best made funeral pyres.

*Critical comment.* Owing to the real meaning of the *bai si* and also that of the *khwan* being vaguely understood by most people, the *bai si* in modern times has undergone innovations in certain aspects. Instead of the cone-shaped things surrounded by the discs of the major *bai si* are made with banana leaves, in some cases they are now made with croton leaves—a garden shrub with ornamental foliage variously coloured and shaped (*codiacum variegatum euphorbiaceae*). In one instance, the major *bai si* is constructed entirely of wood and painted, so as to have it look like a real traditional one. The cone-shaped *nom meo* or cat's breasts are painted green like the colour of banana leaves; the rod that runs through the centre of the discs is made into the shape of the mythological naga-snake (นาค) and painted white. So also the *khwan* egg at the apex of *bai si* is made of wood and painted white too. This *bai si* is made by a professional *khwan* doctor (หมอขวัญ) who officiates at the ceremony. Perhaps the *khwan* doctor wants to save the trouble of laborious work in constructing a major *bai si* in its traditional style every time when there is a brisk demand for his professional service during the season of Buddhist ordination period, when there are in most cases *tham khwan* ceremonies for the many candidates. Also the *khwan* doctor will be able to lower his officiating fee against competitions of other men in his own profession. When there is a *tham khwan* ceremony for a Buddha image newly cast, the major *bai si* on such an occasion is filled in the disc-platters with flowers instead of food, sweetmeats and fruits. As food and sweetmeats are meant as oblation to the spirit, I believe that the replacement of the *bai si pak cham* or dish-border *bai si* on the topmost disc by a silver bowl or dish with flowers is the probable reason.

*The royal bai si.* There are three types of *bai si* used in the royal *tham khwan* ceremony.

1. *Bai si tong long thong khao* (บายศรีตองทองขาว) meaning literally banana leaf *bai si* with nickel covers. This is a major *bai si* as previously described, with the exception of the rod and discs which are made of nickel instead of wood as in ordinary major *bai si*. It is always in seven tiers and one of a pair.

2. (a) *bai si keo* (บายศรีแก้ว) or crystal *bai si* (b) *bai si thong* (บายศรีทอง) or gold *bai si*, (c) *bai si ngern* (บายศรีเงิน) or silver *bai si*. These three kinds of *bai si* are composed of trays supported on pedestals in various graduated sizes placed upon one another in such a way so as to form five or seven tiers in a pyramid-shape like the ordinary major *bai si*. They are named crystal, gold or silver *bai si* according the materials used as trays. Food and sweet-meats are placed on every tray. They form a set by themselves known as a minor set of *bai si*, (in contrast to a major set of *bai si* in 3.), and are used in the royal *tham khwan* ceremony on a minor scale. The crystal *bai si* stands in the middle of a row, the gold *bai si* on the right side of the crystal *bai si* and the silver *bai si* on the left side. The pair of banana leaf *bai si* in 1. stand apart by themselves. This reflects that the *bai si* in 2 is a later addition to the banana leaf *bai si* in 1.

3. This is exactly the same as the *bai si* in 1 and 2, but bigger in size for an occasion of *tham khwan* ceremony in grand style.

*Complementary articles of the royal major bai si.* These include:—

1. *Waen wien thian* (แว่นเวียนเทียน). It is a taper holder made of brass in a lenticular shape with three beeswax tapers fixed on it. Five of such taper holders form a set and are stuck in a metal bowl filled with rice as supporters. These taper holders are used only when there is a *wien thian* ceremony or the waving of taper-lights carried round and round a candidate in a circle. The ceremony is no other than the aspersion of light in ritual purification of the candidate.

2. *Thian jai* (เทียนชัย) or victory candle. Such a candle is lit from special fire caught from the sun by a magnifying glass and is stuck in a candlestick. (Compare the Indian "arani", a wood friction method of producing sacred fire).

3. Unguents of scented oil or paste, or sometime both, for anointing the tapers on the holders.

4. A salver of betel-vine leaves.

5. Pieces of unspun cotton threads placed in the same salver as in 4. (If these pieces of threads are provided already in the dish border *bai si* such threads are not necessary).

6. A young coconut on a salver. The coconut is pared of its outer husk and sometimes its top is cut off and opened. There is also a small silver spoon on the salver.

There are sometimes extra things, supplementary to the above articles as described. There may be a pair of boiled pig's heads, or there may be a number of trays filled with food.

The articles as listed are for the royal *tham khwan* ceremony on a grand scale, which includes the rite of *wien thian* or the waving of lights. Certain articles listed may be omitted, or there may be additions as dictated by necessity. The *tham khwan* ceremony is not confined to human beings only, but may be extended also to certain kinds of domestic animals and other inanimate things as well. In the royal *tham khwan* ceremony the listed articles are in most cases in triplets, so also is the crystal, gold and silver *bai si*.

There is a certain type of *bai si* made of two circles of the pointed-tip *nom meo* arranged in two consecutive circles one with its tips pointed in a sky-ward direction and the low one with the tips pointed in the opposition direction. This doubled circlet is stuck on a stalk or bole of banana tree of a certain length as its base. There is nothing in the *bai si* except flowers, incense sticks and, perhaps, a taper. I was told that food or other eatables were provided as an offering to a spirit or a deity in a separate tray. It has nothing to do with the *khwan*. After the offering, the *bai si*

was left at the place as something discarded. It has no particular name except merely as *bai si*. This sort of simple *bai si* is found in the provinces of Pitsanulok and Sukhothai, and probably is also to be found in the other neighbouring provinces.

##### 5. THAM KHWAN CEREMONY.

The *tham khwan* ceremony consists mainly of three parts, namely :

- (1) *Wien thian* or the waving of lights.
- (2) The feast of the *khwan*.
- (3) *Pook khwan* or the tying of the *khwan* with unspun cotton threads.

The ceremony as performed by the people, particularly in Bangkok, is for the following persons, animals and things :

- (a) a month old baby when its first hair, ( called " fire hair " - *ผมไฟ* in Thai ), is shaved ceremoniously.
- (b) a person coming of age when his or her top-knot is cut in a tonsure ceremony (*พิธีโกนผม*).
- (c) A person when he is going to be ordained as a Buddhist monk on the eve of the ordaining ceremony.
- (d) a bride and bridegroom in a wedding ceremony.
- (e) a person returning home after a long absence or after a recovery from a long illness.
- (f) certain domestic animals and inanimate things.

Of these the one still practiced in force is (c) when a person is going to be ordained. The others are rarely done nowadays, except on the outskirts of Bangkok or in the rural parts of Central Thailand.

The performance of the *tham khwan* ceremony may be performed in an abbreviated form or in an elaborate one. The former consists of the tying of the unspun cotton threads (*phook khwan*) and the feast of the *khwan* with a dish-border *bai si* only, and there is no ceremony of the waving of lights. The latter consists

of the (1) *wien thian*, (2) the feast of the *khwan* with the dish-border *bai si* and the major *bai si*, and the *phook khwan* ceremony.

The *tham khwan ceremony* in its elaborate form is as follows:

The two kinds of *bai si*, i.e. the dish-border *bai si* and the major *bai si*, are placed in the middle of a room prepared for the purpose. It is spread with mats or carpeted for the occasion, two small low tables stand on either sides of the two *bai si*. There are on one of the tables three ceremonial taper holders, each with three tapers attached to it in a row, stuck in a metal bowl (usually silver or gold-plated) filled with rice. The rice in this particular case has no meaning. It is used merely as a support to the taper-holders only. Rice has always been a thing ready at hand in every home; hence the convenience of its utilization for such a purpose, and it has then developed into a tradition. The number of taper holders may be more than three as occasion demands if the room is a big one and there are more people participating in the rite. The number is always odd for it is deemed lucky. On the same table is a metal tray with a pedestal called *phan* (พาน) in Thai. In it is placed a young coconut pared of its outer husk and with its top cut open. There is also in the tray a spoon. On the other table are "small victory candle" (*thian chai*) on a candlestick and a small jar or two of unguents of scented paste and oil. There may be on the table a gold decorated conch shell placed also on a tray. (This is a redundancy unless there is a lustration of water).

When the astrological auspicious moment arrives, the candidate in befitting apparel on such an occasion is led by the hand (or carried if a child) by a parent or an elder of the family into the middle of the room and sits alone near the two *bai si* surrounded by a ring of relatives and friends in the sitting position. A Thai classical orchestra, if there is any, plays a familiar tune when the auspicious moment arrives and stops playing when the candidate is seated.

Now a pundit, either a native brahman or a professional layman sitting nearby, starts to initiate the rite. He moves into the middle of the room and sits in an appropriate posture<sup>1</sup> before the candidate and the *bai si*. He directly raises his hands and clasp them palm to palm in a worshipful attitude, and commences to recite, in some places with intonations, in a loud voice the invocation of the *khwan*. The invocation consists of three parts, and the end of each part is marked by the beating of a big gong, three strokes accompanied by three cheers of *ho hui* (โหฮิ้ว).<sup>2</sup> The commencement of the invocation is the adoration of the Buddhist Sacred Triple Gem, then follows the adoration of the King, the parents and the teachers. This is confined to the ordination ceremony only. As to the tonsure ceremony the high gods of Hinduism are also invoked. In other ceremonies indigeneous tutelary gods receive the same homage. These reflect the traditional belief of the people. The rest of the invocation depicts the way of life of the Thai in the old days, or at least during the time of the author who composed it. It describes, for example, what tenderness and love has been bestowed on the candidate by the parents in his tender years, how he has been reared and trained. The last part contains the invocation to the *khwan* not to stray in forbidden paths but stay always with the candidate. A feast of delicious food and dainties is arranged for the *khwan* to partake in pleasant surroundings. Here the invocation depicts the various foods and dainties, and the scene of the best furnished room of a typical Thai house in the past. The description does not necessarily coincide with the real things in the room.

---

1. The appropriate posture here is the sideways sitting posture with the lower limbs turned inward and touched behind the haunches (นั่งพับเพียบ). By traditional etiquette squatting directly on the haunches (นั่งยองๆ) sitting with stretched legs (นั่งเหยียดขา), or squatting crouched on floor or on chair with legs apart (นั่งถ่างขา), or with knees raised up like a monkey (นั่งขี้มู) are deemed socially vulgar and indecorous. Sitting with crossed legs (นั่งขัดสมาธิ) is permitted with foreigners or with Thai between equals and juniors on intimate terms.

2. This is the traditional cheer of the people. A precentor begins with the word "ho" (โห) in a long-drawn high tone followed by a chorus refrain "hui" (ฮิ้ว) also in a high tone. It was replaced by King Vajiravudh on certain occasions in later times with the word "chai-yo" (ไชโย)



There are many texts and versions of such invocations which have been handed down orally by professional officiants of the *tham khwan* ceremony. These versions of invocation form a part of Thai expressive oral literature. Selected ones have been collected and edited into book form and printed by the former Royal Institute now the Fine Arts Department. The various versions are a valuable study of folklore, for they contain beliefs, traditions and customs of the people of former days which have been inherited unconsciously by modern progressive people in the ways they think, feel and believe.

Immediately after the invocation comes to an end, the officiant starts stripping the brocade and the three young banana leaves from the major *bai si*. These he rolls together into a bundle with the brocade as a wrapper. He hands it to the candidate who will hold and press it tightly to his or her breast. If the candidate is a baby the bundle is placed nearby.

The ceremonial room sometimes is surrounded by the consecrated unspun cotton threads (ด้ายสายสิญจน์) to mark a mystic boundary of the place and to be a protection against evil spirits. Sometimes there is also placed in a tray nearby a set of the candidate's clothing. This is confined to a candidate who is a child only. The set of clothing is probably a used one of the child-candidate. This is perhaps to attract the *khwan* from straying; for the *khwan* is theoretically, very sensitive in recognizing the odor of the owner of the clothing.

Now we come to the ceremony of the ritual waving of lights. The officiant lights the tapers on the three taper holders with fire from the "victory candle". He holds the three taper holders carefully with both hands by arranging the holders in such a way that he can hold them together by rims, and circumambulates thrice in a clock-wise direction round the *bai si* tables. He then holds the taper-holders one at a time at the rims with both hands and lifts it in a circle thrice to the level of his forehead as an act of adoration, and wafts the smoke with the back of his right hand towards the candidate. He hands the taper holder to the person next to him on the left, who begins again and so on with the second and third in succession. All the persons who receive the taper holder repeat the same process.

When the three tapers complete their round the officiant takes a betel vine leaf as provided from a tray and places it as a score on

the table. It is called in Thai "tally betel vine leaves" (ใบพลูตะแนน). After a completion of the three rounds (sometime five or seven) the officiant replaces the taper holders in the bowl as before with the lights still on. He smears the three betel vine leaves with the scented unguents as provided. He now simultaneously takes the three taper holders from the bowl bringing the flame close together he extinguishes them each with one of the smeared betel vine leaves and wafts the smoke towards the candidate. He next rekindles the tapers for the second and the third time repeating the same process. During the *wian thian ceremony* from start to finish the orchestra plays its tunes throughout with appropriate melodies,<sup>1</sup> and there are three cheers of *ho hui* at intervals.

---

1. Enquiries have frequently been made as to whether the correct way of lifting the waving lights is in an inward or outward direction. Evidently the ritual waving of lights is to conjure in the air a sort of magic circle. Whether one does it in either way, one always has a complete imaginary circle. To do it in an inward directions in a clock-wise circle is deemed auspicious on all propitious occasions. Compare "arati" the waving of lights of the Hindus before an image or a person as a protection against evil eyes.

The extinguishing of the lights with betel-vine leaves smeared with scented unguents is undoubtedly a purification rite by driving odorous smokes towards the candidate. Why is a betel-vine leaf used as an agent in such a process. Perhaps in the old days a betel tray (with betel nuts, betel leaves, lime paste, etc.) formed part of the *bai si* articles, but things were missed out in latter times, only of the betel-vine leaves which are used as scores for they are there conveniently at hand. Chewing of betel nut (which of course includes other ingrediants too) was prevalent with past generations. Every Thai home used to have at least one betel tray. The tray contained many small receptacles for storing betel nuts, leaves and other ingredients. They are made either of precious metals or of a baser kind or even in wood, according to the status and rank of the owner. The king has two formal betel trays made of pure gold, one for use in a state function and another for his majesty's private use. These royal betel trays are still symbolically in use in traditional grand state functions. Proper Thai etiquette required the host to serve a guest first with a betel tray as a symbol of respect and regard. After a meal, betel was chewed in the same manner as one smokes a cigarette. If a girl handed you a mouthful of betel for no particular reason, it means that she had a kind feeling toward you,

After the waving of lights comes to an end, the officiant anoints the candidate. He does it with his right-hand index finger which wears a *phivot* ring (แหวนพิรอด)<sup>1</sup> or a *nophakao* ring.<sup>2</sup> (แหวนนพเก้า) He touches lightly the unguents as left on the betel leaves with the tip of his afore-said finger and anoints the candidate. If the candidate is a male, a mystic figure in a clock-wise direction thus is inscribed on the area between the eye-brows, if the candidate is a female a mystic figure in the opposite direction thus is inscribed. Such figures are called *unalom* (อุณาโลม)<sup>3</sup> in certain cases both hands of the candidate are also anointed on the palms of the hands.

After the anointing, comes the feast of the *khwan*. The officiant takes the spoon on the table which he moves three times up and down in the air near the *bai si*. This is a make-believe that he has taken some food and dainties from the *bai si* with the spoon, and mixed them in the coconut. He then dips into the

---

1. *Phivot* is a ring made from a cloth inscribed with mystic figures and characters called *pha yan* (ผ้ายันต์) intertwined in a shape of certain kinds of magic knots. It is used as a talisman.

2. *Nophakao* is a ring set with nine variegated coloured gems They are diamond, ruby, emerald, topaz (บุษราคัม), garnet (โกเมน), sapphire (มณี), moonstone (มุกดาหาร), zircon (เพทาย) and cat's-eye (ไพฑูริย์). It is used also as a talisman. The Hindus deem the index finger and also the middle finger as unlucky. They never utilize either of the two fingers in anointing, but use the ring finger only. King Vajiravudh and some high Thai princes utilize the thumb. Sometimes by necessity, in the case of cutting a top-knot in the tonsure ceremony, one cannot manipulate the scissors with other fingers than the thumb and index finger. Hence the manipulator has to wear either a *phivot* or a *nophakao* ring to counter-act any evil that may occur to the candidate''.

3. *Unalom* in its original meaning is a tuft of twisted hair which grows on the forehead at a place between the eyebrows. It is one of the thirty-two characteristic marks of the Lord Buddha which may often be seen as a relief circular dot which adorned the forehead of a Buddha image. The *unalom* is undoubtedly a symbol of Agni, the Vedic god of fire,

coconut and draws a spoonful of its water, presuming the food and dainties are also there in the spoon which he feeds to the candidate in simulation. Sometimes a small helping of dainties is put in reality. Such a simulation is usually performed in the case of a child candidate. If the candidate is a baby the spoon with coconut water is turned round and round over the baby's mouth only. I have never seen an adult candidate receive such treatment, nor has the person taken any of the *khwan* food either real or imaginary. Perhaps the partaking of *khwan* food was a real thing in the old days. In case the candidate is a young baby it is fed thrice with plain tepid water provided for the purpose. Then follows the partaking of the *khwan* egg and cooked rice in the dish-border *bai si*, imaginary of course. It is a belief that the *khwan* being thus feasted will satisfactorily stay with its owner.

Tying the *khwan* is the next ceremony. Three strands of consecrated unspun cotton threads are entwined into one and knotted at intervals with three fast-knots. The thread is passed thrice under either arm of the candidate, and then tied in a fast-knot on either wrist. Sometime the thread is passed also round each leg first, then on the arms and the head of the candidate. During the tying process the officiant mumbles certain incantations. Perhaps he exhorts the *khwan* with the usual well-known words. "Oh! *Khwan*, abide with the body", or he may use a Pali stanza of his own selection to enhance the sacredness. Usually, the arms are lightly brushed lengthwise three times with the thread or the wrists are brushed three times with the tip of the thread which is then burned and pinched off before tying. The brushing process is no doubt the taking away from the candidate of all impurities and undesirable things which cling on the tip of the thread. Hence the burning and pinching off. Sometimes the candidate's ankles receive the same treatment too, and sometimes the tying of the *khwan* is done before the anointing and the feast of the *khwan* in the reverse order to what was previously described. Such differences as described are due to different schools as followed by

the officiants. (Compare the process of investiture with the sacred thread of the twice-born Hindus as a second spiritual rebirth).

After the tying of the *khwan* by the officiant, relatives and friends may tie the wrists of the candidate with additional threads as provided in the dish-border *bai si*. Then gifts are presented to the candidate by the binders. In case of the *tham khwan* ceremony of a bride and a bridegroom as performed in rural areas of Central Thailand in particular, gifts of money are the presents made by relatives and friends. Here one may understand how the words *tham khwan* and *khong khwan* (gifts) developed from their original meanings of a "making of *khwan*" and a "*khwan* gift" to that of the present day meanings of a compensation for an injury done and a gift in general in the Thai language. The orchestra as provided for the occasion plays its melodies at intervals throughout the ceremonies of the anointing, the feast and the tying of the *khwan*.

The *tham khwan* ceremony is now concluded. The bundle of three young banana leaves and brocade, or in other word the "*khwan* wrapper cloth" is brought home and placed in the bed of the candidate or in other suitable places for three days and then disposed of (minus the brocade of course). The candidate, usually a child, has to embrace tightly the "*khwan* wrapper cloth" during sleep, evidently as a communion with the *khwan*. The banana leaves with flowers and other perishable decorations on the *bai si* are disposed by floating them in a running stream. The remains of eatables in the *bai si*, if they are now uneatable for human consumption, are disposed of by depositing them on banana leaves at an out-of-way place as oblations to the common *phi* or spirits.

What about the boiled pig's head with its four legs and tail as previously mentioned? It is perhaps meant also as the *khwan*'s delicious food, and eaten afterward by the people after the ceremony. A pig's head with its four legs and a tail is a favourite offering to tutelary *phis*. It is supposed to be the whole pig, but in fact

the best part of the pig is not there. When one makes a vow to a *phis* promising a pig as a thank-offering if the request is granted, one will, after the request is fulfilled, offer such a pig. It is, of course, very easy to hoodwink a *phi*.

## 6. THE ROYAL THAM KHWAN CEREMONY

The royal *bai si* with its accessories has already been described in chapter 4. Now we come to the royal *tham khwan* ceremony.

Three priests of brahmin extraction preside over the three *bai si*. The chief priest or purohita stands in the middle near the crystal *bai si*. His two assistants stand on either side, one near the gold *bai si* on the right, and the other one near the silver *bai si* on the left of the candidate. Behind these three stand another set of two brahmins each holding a conch shell. Yet again, behind them, there is another set of brahmins in equal number each holding a *bandoh-tabor* (Pali *pataha*—a small hourglass-shaped drum beaten by a lead ball on a string attached to a peg projecting from its middle). If a ceremony of waving the lights is to be performed in a throne hall, red cloths are laid over the carpets along the route of the waving lights. This is to prevent molten wax from the lighted tapers dropping and spoiling the carpet. The invited officials who will participate in the ceremony stand at the borders of the red cloths in a circle. The three brahmin priests in the front row initiate the rite by anointing the tapers with unguents. A "victory candle" is now lighted from a sacred fire. The brahmin priest in the middle initiates the lighting of tapers from the fire of the "victory candle" followed in the same process by the other two brahmin priests on the left and right of the middle man. When the first light of the tapers is lit, the brahmin priests in the two hind rows of two each blow conch shells, the royal classical orchestra somewhere starts playing. When lighted tapers on taper-holders have all been handed to the next man standing on the left, who waves the lights in a prescribed manner as stated in the last chapter, the blowing of conch shell is stopped but begins again when the

tapers in succession complete a round. A person may mark each round of the waving lights from the blowing of conch shells. The playing of the "bandoh-tabors" and the orchestra continue from start to finish of the rite without a stop.

The waving of lights is of two kinds. The major one is in five rounds, and the minor one is in three rounds. The latter has no "*khwan* wrapper", while the former has three young banana leaves and a brocade wrapped round the *bai si*. Brocades as used in the three *bai si* are of three different colours. The crystal *bai si* has a white brocade, the gold *bai si* a yellow brocade and the silver *bai si* a green brocade as wrappers. After the waving of lights completes its three rounds, the brahmin priest uncovers the wrappers of the three *bai si* and gives them to the candidate to be held in the hands. If there are more candidates than one, the wrappers are distributed evenly to them. The waving of lights is usually in three rounds, five rounds is rarely performed. As already mentioned (chapter 4) there are five taper-holders fixed each to the triplet of metal bowls. When the waving of lights completes its prescribed three or five rounds, the brahmin priest in the middle takes successively, whichever comes to hand first, the first of the five taper-holders, which he sticks in the metal bowl in front of him; but before doing so, he detaches all the lighted tapers from the second to the fifth taper-holders and adds all these to the lighted ones of the first taper-holder. The second and third brahmin priests repeat a similar process with the succeeding tapers. Then the three brahmin priests perform the rite of extinguishing the flames from the tapers with layer of betel leaves smeared with unguents, and waft the odorous smokes toward the candidate. After this the three brahmin priests perform the rite of tying the *khwan* with consecrated threads. One of them brings a "victory candle" and a number of the threads to the candidate. He takes one thread and brushes it lightly in an outward direction on the candidate's wrist once only, and then burns it at the "victory candle". He takes another thread which he this time brushes once only in an inward direction, and then ties it to the candidate's wrist. (This is logically

better than the pinching of the tip of a thread after burning it and binding the same thread on the wrist as previously described). He repeats the same process on the other wrist. Another brahmin priest takes a spoon and dips it in the air near the three *bai si* in the same manner as described on the feast of the *khwan* in the previous chapter. The third brahmin priest anoints the candidate. Here ends the brahminical rite.

Next is the royal rite of anointing by the king. His Majesty pours lustral water from a decorated conch shell into the hands held in a worshipful attitude by the candidate. If the candidate is of royal blood lustral water is poured by the King from a rare conch shell with a spiral in a clock-wise direction belonging to the first King of the Chakri Dynasty. Such a royal *tham khwan* ceremony is called *somphot* (สมโภช) in Thai. It is originally a Pali word meaning a feast or the partaking of food together, but its current use in the Thai language is for "celebration" and is confined to the king's celebrations only. If a *somphot* is of a grand style which has a young high prince or princess as a candidate in the *tham khwan* ceremony in a royal tonsure ceremony, for instance, the King may graciously condescend to permit certain high-ranking princes and selected dignitaries to anoint the royal candidate too. A high ranking prince may anoint the candidate on the palms of his hands, and a high-ranking dignitary on the instep (หลังเท้า) while the King himself anoints the candidate on his forehead. The blowing of conch shells by the brahmin priests in the hind row commences when the waving of lights completes the prescribed rounds and continues to the end of the *tham khwan* ceremony. When the blowing of conch shells stops, the playing of "bandoh-tabor" and the orchestra stop too. Here ends the royal *tham khwan* ceremony.

One will notice that the dish-border *bai si* and the major tiered *bai si* of the people do not come into the royal ceremony. The two kinds of *bai si* as above are there in the ceremonial hall too, but they are kept apart, only the crystal, the gold and the silver *bai si* are used. This means that the dish-border *bai si* is perhaps the oldest and of the three kinds, next comes the tiered



major *bai si* in its development, and the crystal, gold and silver ones are later innovations and confined only to the royal ceremony. The major tiered *bai si* is nothing more than many dishes or plates with pedestals placed one upon another in a graduated pyramid, in order to save space when there are many dishes of food and other eatables to be displayed for the *khwan* feast. This may be inferred from either the crystal, gold or silver *bai si* which consisted of many graduated plates placed one upon the other on pedestal and filled with food and sweetmeats. No *nom meo* or cat's breasts or other decorations made of banana leaves are included in the latter kind of *bai si*.<sup>1</sup>

I may add here as an addition to the end of this chapter a *tham khwan* ceremony or celebration for a Buddha image which is newly cast and to be sent abroad as a present to a certain Buddhist Institution. I was one of the invited guests at such a ceremony and here are the facts I have taken note of.

The Buddha image is placed on a table in the middle of the room surrounded by articles such as trays of flowers, tapers and incense sticks as befitting offerings. In front of the Buddha image stands a major *bai si* in five tiers, but instead of eatables placed in each tier of the *bai si* they are filled with flowers. There are also small tables in front of the major *bai si* on one of which stands a neillo silver bowl filled with rice in which five lenticular holders with three tapers each are fixed. Nearby stands a dish-border *bai si* on another small table flanked on either side by two tapers on pedestals. There are the necessary accessories appertaining to the *tham khwan* ceremony, such as the unguents, tally betel leaves and a young coconut pared of its outer husk but with the top not cut open. There are three brahmin priests acting

---

1. I have witnessed the royal *tham khwan* ceremony once or twice only. I have, in fact, had the opportunity to participate once in the royal rite of waving the lights, but have never witnessed the ceremony in its entirety, nor have I been able to read any text relating to it. What I have written the royal *tham khwan* ceremony as described above, was through the kindness of a high ranking prince, my revered mentor, who took pains to note for me what he had remembered.

as officiants. The middle one who acts as a head is in a ceremonial cloak clad in such a way which leaves his right shoulder bared. The other two a little way behind him hold one a "bandoh-tabor" and the other a conch shell.

The head brahmin priest commences the ceremony by lighting the tapers in the five lenticular holders and proceeds in the same manner as for the waving of lights as previously described. One of the brahmin assistants blows the conch shell and the others plays the "bandoh-tabor" and the orchestra plays throughout the ceremony. The blowing of the conch shell is done at the commencement of the rite only, and does not continue through like the "bandoh-tabor" and the orchestra. Probably the conch shell brahmin blower is either negligent or too lazy to continue blowing. The head brahmin before extinguishing the tapers at the completed rounds, takes the two lighted tapers from the dish-border *bai si* and adds them to the waving light tapers. He then wafts the smokes toward the Buddha image. There are also three cheers of *ho hiu* at intervals through the ceremony. The head brahmin then falls on his knees worshipping the Buddha image in the prescribed attitude thrice. Next he anoints the base of the Buddha image with three dots in a horizontal row with his right hand index finger. The finger as I can remember does not wear a *phirot* or a *nophakao* ring. He next anoints the palms of the host's hand in a similar manner. There is no feast of the *khwan* logically on such an occasion. Most of the actions done in the ceremony are similar to the royal *tham khwan* ceremony.

#### 7. THAM KHWAN CEREMONY IN NORTHERN THAILAND

The *tham khwan* ceremony as performed in other areas does not essentially differ much to what is performed in Central Thailand as described in the preceding chapters. In the North and North-East they have the *phook khwan* or the tying of the *khwan* and the feast of the *khwan* in their ceremony of *tham khwan* but, as known, there is no *wien thian* or the waving of lights in their tradition. They have a *tham khwan* ceremony per-

formed on distinguished persons who are strangers in their midst as a gesture of goodwill and regard of respect to their honoured guests. They have also *bai si* as the major part of the ceremony.

### **Tham Khwan Ceremony in the North (Chiengmai)**

The *bai si* of Chiengmai consists of seven cones made of banana leaves, somewhat like the cat's breasts *bai si* but with six pointed tips to each of the cones. One of the cones is of a bigger size relative to the other six. The big size cone may be compared to the *kruai* and the smaller ones to that of the cat's breasts *bai si* of Central Thailand. The big cone is placed in the same manner as the *kruai* in the middle of a metal tray with pedestal with the other six cones surrounding it. These cones are decorated with flowers. There are also in the tray two balls of cooked glutinous rice, two boiled eggs, of either a hen or a duck, two pieces of ripe banana (or more if desired, but they should always be in even numbers), a cup of water, mouthfuls of *miang* (fermented tea mixed with salt and other ingredients used for chewing purpose), two mouthfuls of betel-nut and leaf (or more in even numbers), two cheroots or cigarettes, one small ball of unspun cotton thread which has already been consecrated. All these are placed in the *bai si* tray. There may be a boiled chicken, or sometime also a boiled pig's head, as a complementary offering placed in a separate tray. The *bai si* tray is set on top of another tray. More trays with pedestals may be added to form a storeyed *bai si* to the number as desired.

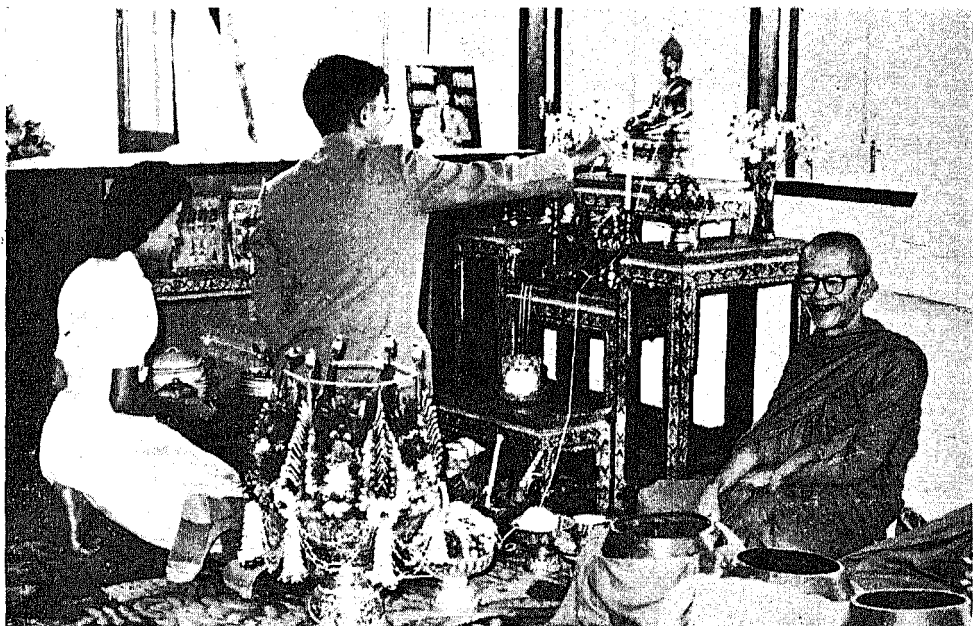
When a ceremony is to be performed, the *bai si* with its accessories is brought into a room and placed before the candidate. An old man experienced in the lore is engaged for the purpose. He initiates the ceremony by taking the ball of unspun cotton thread as provided in the *bai si* and with the tip end of the thread he brushes, in a formal manner, both hands of the candidate who, by now, sits in a worshipping attitude. The officiant then burns the tip end of the thread and pinches it off. He then binds, in two rounds, the candidate's wrists' first the left and then the right wrist. Every-time when the binding of either wrist is completed, he pinches off a

thread from the ball and simultaneously says a formal wish thus: "May it (the evil) fall along and off the tip of the little finger, may it ooze along and drop from the tip of hands" (ขอให้ตกไปตามก้อย ขอให้ย่อยไปตามปลายมือ). While binding the wrists the officiant says "to tie the left hand is to have the *khwan* come, to tie the right hand is to let the *khwan* stay" (ผูกมือซ้ายให้จ้าวัญมา ผูกมือขวาให้จ้าวัญอยู่). One will notice that the binding of unspun cotton thread to the wrist is severed from the ball only after the ceremonial binding, while in Bangkok the thread is cut in appropriate length ready for use.

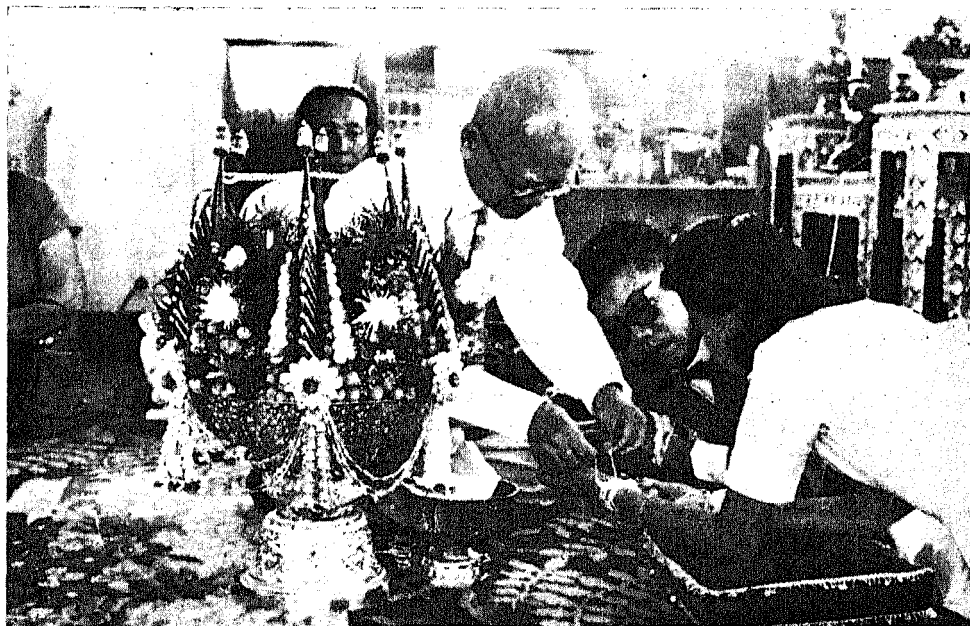
After the binding of hands (มัดมือ) as called in the North, comes the ceremonial feast of the *khwan*. Little bits of eatables of the *bai si* are partaken by the candidate in a simulated manner. The *bai si* with its accessories, except the boiled chicken or the pig's head, is kept after the ceremony in the candidate's bed room at most no more than two days and then disposed of. The North call the *tham khwan* ceremony the "ceremony of binding hands" only. The waving and aspersion of lights is not in the ceremony, neither is the drinking of coconut water, as far as is known.

The "ceremony of binding hands" is performed on a guest who is a stranger. If the stranger is a distinguished personage, there may be a parade or procession and ceremonial dance by a bevy of girls in honour of the guest.

I have never had an opportunity to witness the *tham khwan* ceremony as performed in the North, and neither have I read any book written on the subject. The above description of the ceremony is, therefore, based from information as supplied by an informant and verified in certain items from other people who are natives of that locality. It is more or less difficult to get information on a traditional subject from a person who is not a specialist or an interested person. Thus my informant, though an aged lady of the North, sometimes in answer to questions put to her, could not give me satisfactory answers for the simple reason that she could not remember, especially the sayings of the officiant. Hence my description of the "*khwan* ceremony" in the North is relatively a short one and must be read in the light of the above observations.



Wedding ceremony in Chiangmai showing *bai-sri* of Northern Thailand.



The author binding wrists of bride and groom at Chiangmai wedding.  
The *bai-sri* of Northern Thailand may be seen in the foreground.



**The Tham Khwan Ceremony After a Funeral at Pré Province.**

When coming back after a cremation, all persons participating in the service have to attend the *tham khwan* ceremony at the house of the mourners. A ball of unspun cotton thread, one mouthful of betel nut and leaf, a cigarette, two balls of cooked glutinous rice, a boiled hen's egg, a piece of *khao tom kluay* (ข้าวต้มกล้วย) - a ripe banana enclosed by glutinous rice which is again wrapped with banana leaves and boiled, a piece of ripe banana, a taper, an incense stick and a flower which form a set, a set of clothing as worn and belonging to the dead man just cremated are provided by the mourners and placed in a lacquer bowl. The officiant brings with him a small net with a handle. This he places across the bowl. Each candidate, one at a time, puts his or her right hand at the rim of the bowl. The officiant takes the ball of unspun cotton thread which he ties to the wrists of the candidate in the manner as has previously been described. He repeats the same process to all the remaining candidates. He then over turns the bowl for a while, and reverses it to its former position. During the tying of the wrists he recites certain words calling back the *khwan*. The wording of the recitation I have with me is a short one of about eight lines full of jumbled words both of Pali and Thai. After the ceremony the officiant or rather a medicine man departs taking with him his net, while the bowl and the rest of things are disposed off in a suitable manner.<sup>1</sup>

This ceremony may safely be generalized to other parts of the Northern Area, and perhaps to other peoples as well beyond that area in the northerly direction. The Lahu or Musso, a Thibetan-Burman tribe, in the Eastern Shan States have a similar ceremony. After returning from a funeral, their medicine man will perform the ceremony of tying the wrists with unspun cotton threads of persons who have participated in the funeral service. The medicine man will say during the tying of the wrist some formal words thus: "Oh *khwan*! do return. Do not stay with the dead in the dead land.

---

1. The information was gathered by my wife who participated in the ceremony in 1947.

In that land there is no food, no clothing and no place to live. There are only ills and unhappiness. Do stay in the land of the living where there are joy and happiness. Oh *khwan*! do return.”<sup>1</sup> (Compare the distribution of red silk threads to participants in a Southern Chinese funeral in Bangkok).

#### 8. THAM KHWAN CEREMONY IN THE NORTH-EAST

In the North-East of Thailand the *tham khwan* ceremony is performed:

When a person returns home after a long absence on trade or expedition of war; when he suffers a fright through seeing a *phi* or ghost; is scared by an elephant or experiences a thunder-clap; when he recovers from a long illness during which he has made a vow to a spirit promising a thank-offering if he recovers: when he recovers from a fall from a tree, from having nearly drowned when a boat capsized; from being kicked by a horse, horned by a buffalo, or crushed by a boa snake.<sup>2</sup> When a person is elevated in rank. When he is critically ill, when he marries, when he has a house warming, when he is ordained, when it is prophesied by an astrologer that his days are numbered, when a distinguished person his superior or master visits his home, when he becomes a father.<sup>3</sup>

Before we come to the ceremony of *tham khwan* a description of their *bai si* which is called *ba si* is necessary, for it differs from the *bai si* in certain details. The *tham khwan* ceremony is called *pit-thee su khwan* (พิธีสู่ขวัญ) or the ceremony of the welcoming of the *khwan*. What is written in this chapter

1. See J.H. Telford, Animism in Keng Tung State, J.B.R.S. Vol. XXXVII. part II, p. 204.

2. From an old North-East book entitled “Thamada Sorn Lok” (ธรรมดาสอนโลก) or a teaching on a worldly lore as kindly supplied by Nai Thong Chaiyachat (นายทอง ชัยชาติ)

3. From “Prapheni Boran Thai Isan (ประเพณีโบราณไทยอีสาน) or Ancient Customs of the North-Eastern Thai by a Monk Phra Maha Preecha Parinyano (พระมหาปรีชา ปริณฺฑาโณ) Bangkok, 1954.



may be generalized also to the Laos, though perhaps there may be some variants due to local and regional aspects.<sup>1</sup>

The North-Eastern *bai si* is of two kinds i.e. the *ba si* (บาศรี) and the *mak beng* (หมากเบง) the five articles. The latter is also called *kruang ha pha khwan* (เครื่องห้าพานขวัญ) = the five articles of *khwan's* tray). The *ba si* and the *mak beng* may be compared to the major tiered *bai si* and the dish border *bai si* of Central Thailand.

*The ba si.* This consists of a large size metal tray with pedestal. In the middle of it are placed in five circlets of the cat's breast *bai si*, similar to that of the major *bai si* of Central Thailand, surmounted one upon another. Sometime there is a wooden structure supporting these surmounted circlets of *bai si*, which are decorated with flowers. The following articles, fruits and sweetmeats, are placed in the tray around the *bai si* circlets; four pairs of beeswax tapers, a pair or two of knives, or a penknife or a razor-like knife with handles made of gold, silver, ivory or other valuable materials, four pieces of *khao tom kluay* (ข้าวต้มกล้วย—a domestic sweetmeat made of ripe bananas covered with glutinous rice and wrapped with banana leaves and boiled), four ripe bananas or other kinds of sweetmeats which have to be in pairs, pieces of unspun cotton thread cut to a length of a hand span in size. In the tray there is also jewellery made of silver, gold and precious stones. (Compare the crystal, the gold and the silver *bai-si* of the royal *bai si*). Sometime the *ba si* is topped by a *mak beng*.

*Mak beng.* Five cones made of banana leaves in the same manner as the cat's breast *bai si* of Central Thailand and decorated at the tops with flowers, are placed in the middle of a large size tray. In the tray there are also other cones made of banana leaves, five in number, each contains a pair of tapers, incense sticks and flowers. A set of used clothing belonging to the candidate of the *khwan* ceremony is placed in another large size tray. The tray of *mak beng* is then placed on it. Around the pedestal of the *mak beng*

1. See the Baci by Thao Nyouy Abhai in the "Kingdom of Laos", p. 128-131, France-Asie, Saigon, 1959.

tray are a bottle of spirituous liquor, a boiled hen's egg in a shell, one or two pairs of *khao tom kluay* sweetmeat, one ball of boiled glutinous rice, a cluster of ripe bananas, two young coconuts, one cup of uncooked glutinous rice, one small leaf cup of popped rice, one cup of scented water (made of *khamin water* (curcuma domestica, Zingiberaceae) and *sompoi water* (Acacia concinna, Leguminosae) mixed together and scented by placing in it, a few of frangipani flowers, a leaf cup of betel nuts and leaves for chewing and a number of local made cigarettes, a small skein of unspun cotton thread placed in a small tray, and there are also in it five pieces or more of such threads cut in the length of a hand span. Sometime this *mak beng* instead of being made with banana leaves is made of three or five trays with pedestals surmounted one upon another. Food and sweetmeats are placed in these trays, but the top one is exclusively filled with boiled glutinous rice with a boiled hen's egg as the top<sup>1</sup>

Here I may add as a parenthesis that before the introduction of soap, *sompoi* pod (Acacia concinna) and kaffir lime (Citrus hytrix) were used as a detergent particularly for washing the hair. A yellow powder of *khamin* (curcuma domestica) was rubbed on ones face and body after washing to preserve the skin and enhance a golden complexion which was admired in the olden days but not now.

When the time arrives for the performance of *su khwan*, as it is called in the North-East, the *ba si* is brought into the middle of a room or a temporary shelter provided for the purpose. Both the master of ceremonies or officiant and the candidate or candidates sit in an appropriate attitude facing a point of the compass as determined by astrological knowledge usually by the officiant, surrounded

---

1. I have had no opportunity to see myself the *ba si tham khwan* ceremony. For what has been written here I have relied on information kindly supplied by friends who have been in the North-East for a number of years or who are the natives of that area. My thanks are due to them, particularly to my friend Phya Rajasena, who had been a governor in many provinces of that area and to Nai Thong Chaiyachart a North-Easterner by birth.

by relatives and friends who are participating in the ceremony. When the auspicious moment arrives the officiant initiates the ceremony by announcing the duty he is going to perform. He then lights three tapers and three incense sticks. The light and smoke of which he waves above the head of the candidate, and stricks the tapers and incense sticks in the *ba si* or *khwan's* tray after the waving. He now sits in a worshipping attitude with his hands raised, carefully and reverently holding an old style book a little above the breast, in the same manner as a monk reads his sermon from a palm-leaf book. The book he holds carefully is a text on the invocation of the *khwan*. There are many versions of this text which form part of the people's oral literature. The officiant reads, or recites by heart if he can, the text. From the start to the end of the invocation of the *khwan*, the candidate must hold the edge of the *bai si* tray with his right hand. He cannot release his hold until the reading of the text comes to an end.

When the officiant has finished his invocation of the *khwan*, he, or the parents of the candidate, puts a boiled hen's egg (unshelled) and a ball of cooked glutinous rice about the same size as the egg into the right-hand palm of the candidate. The candidate now, instead of holding the edge of the *ba si* tray, has to lean on it with the back of his right hand, and have his left hand hold his right arm just below the elbow. The parents and other relatives with their right hands hold the candidate's right arm. If there is a large number of candidate's relatives, every one has to repeat the same process alternately and cannot be left out before the ceremony of tying the wrist can begin.

The initiation of tying the wrist is done by an elder monk. If the candidate is a woman the monk will delegate a layman to act for him. Then the officiant and the parents of the candidate and others in seniority of age or rank will tie the candidate's wrist. The tier picks up with his right hand two pieces of unspun cotton thread as provided in the *ba si* tray. He makes a fast knot in the middle of both of the two threads, and then holding them at the knot he brushes with the ends of the threads up and down a number of times

the right hand wrist of the candidate, who still holds in his palm of the right hand a hen's egg and a ball of cooked glutinous rice. While brushing the wrist with the ends of the unspun cotton threads the tier mutters a wish as to the welfare of the candidate. The tier then smoothes the threads, as a matter of course, and parts the threads in the middle two by two and then ties the right wrist by passing the threads around the wrist in a clock-wise direction. In tying, the two threads must be fastened in one knot. The tier mutters a wish by saying, "Oh *khwan!* come and stay in the body".

After the tying of the wrist the boiled hen's egg of the candidate is shelled. If the white of the egg is pure white and in a perfect state it is a sign that the candidate will be lucky in all his undertakings. If the egg turns out otherwise, it is a sign that the candidate's lot will be an unlucky one. Some advice and exhortations will be given by the elders as a forewarning to the candidate. Then follows a repast and celebration among the participants. After the ceremony any materials of the *ba si* such as tapers and incense sticks are presented to a monk, the unspun cotton threads which remain are kept for future use or presented to the monk. Spirituous liquor, food, bananas and sweetmeats which are still in good condition are kept for consumption. It is a belief that sweetmeats belonging to the *ba si* if partaken by a child, who suffers from a certain chronic disease characterized by thin arms and legs but enlarged abdomen (โรคตามขโมย), the child will be cured.

---