

THAI HISTORY? WHAT THAI HISTORY?

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I. Studies in the Ancient History of Thailand

According to Sukhothai Inscription No. 2, the first ruler of Sukhothai was Poh Khun Sri Nao Thom. He was the father of Poh Khun Pha Mueng of Mueng Rad, and the father-in-law of Nang Sukorn Maha Devi, eldest daughter of the king of Kambuja (Jayavarman VIII). Besides giving Poh Khun Pha Mueng his eldest daughter, the king also gave him the title of Sri Indrabadindraditya, as well as the sacred weapon, the Khan Chaisri. The two should not be confused with one another. The title was given in his capacity as son-in-law, while the sacred weapon was bestowed on him as regent ruling the country. There is supporting evidence in the Kambujan inscription called Bantay Srei.

According to this inscription, in an undated year in the reign of Jayavarman VIII, the king invested his son-in-law Phra Pada Sri Srindravarmadeva (Pha Mueng) as Yuvaraja (Junior King) and Phra Bhagavadi Kamrateng An Sri Srindrabuphesvara Cuda, who was the Chief Queen (of the Yuvaraja) and eldest daughter of the king, to rule over the land. The sense here is that Poh Khun Pha Mueng and his wife Nang Sukorn Maha Devi in Sukhothai Inscription No. 2 of Wat Sri Chum, became king and queen of Kambuja with absolute powers (Khan Chaisri). In essence the information in this Kambujan inscription is the same as in the Sukhothai Inscription of Wat Sri Chum.

The name Srindravarman (Poh Khun Pha Mueng) appears in another Kambujan inscription called Mangalarath. Four dates appear in this stele, as well as four others in the Bantay Srei Inscription. However the dates in the two steles do not agree. It would be as well to clear up this point at once.

II. Studies in the Origin of the Thai Race

Southeast Asia was the most fertile land in the world in the old days, and perhaps it still is even today. All sorts of people settled in the land from ancient times, including the Thai without much doubt. The question is which people were the first to show its racial characteristics. Very probably the Thai, and the best evidence of their presence is in their

living Myths and Legends which are widely spread over the present map of Thailand.

According to a Buddhist discourse the world came into being when some elements of Nature, moving in their course through the atmosphere, came together and merged into a form that in due course became solid. Thai Myths start after the earth had become solid but when it was still a new earth. The soil smelt sweet and some luminescent elements of nature, called Abhasara Brahma in Buddhist sources, were wont to come to earth to rest and relax in pleasant surroundings. One of these luminescent elements took a piece of this sweet scented soil and tasted it. It was delicious so it ate a whole meal. After that it fell asleep and slept a long, long time. When it woke it found the earth was the same as it was before falling asleep. Then it tried to rise in the air and go off as it was wont to do before. The ability to leave earth was gone, and it became the equivalent of the Christian Adam, the first man on earth. He became known as Suang, or Khun Suang in this context.

Suang lived on his own for a long time until one day another luminescent element came to earth and partook of the delicious, sweet scented soil, and she, this being a female element, failed to take off again after her meal and long sleep. So the earth was populated by the first ancestors. To make the story quite clear, Khun Suang and Nang Sarn were the first ancestors of the Thai Race, while Adam and Eve were the ancestors of some other races. To some scholars, particularly professors of languages and philology, the term Thai Race is taboo, that is, it is beyond their comprehension. Let these good people rest in peace.

Meanwhile every race that is not a new one like the White Americans, South Africans and Australians has such myths. The Khmers have the story of Phra Thong and Nang Naga (the Naga woman), the Sinhalese (Sri Lankans) have the story of the rampant lion who managed to capture a Kalinga princess (Northeast India), and raped her. She was finally rescued or managed to escape, and returned to her father's palace. In due course she gave birth to a brood of which the eldest was a male named Vijaya Kumara. When grown up the youths became rough and unruly. To make a long story short, the king put them on a ship and sent them off to find a new home overseas. They arrived at the island of Ceylon

and set up a Lion or Singha State there. This was on the day when the Lord Gotama found Enlightenment and became the Buddha. He was the fourth in the line of five Buddhas.

There is no need for any more examples. The point is that Thai Myths and Legends do not have any symbolic animals or anything particularly magical. In fact there is not even one mention of a sacrifice in the myths, not of any living thing let alone a human being. So when any magical animal appears, we can take it that some outside belief has been added.

Khun Suang and Nang Sarng were the first ancestors of the Thai. In due course long after Suang and Sarng had died and gone to the heaven called Suang after them, there appeared the first Buddha. Aeons later the world was destroyed by fire and water, and after that those who survived by taking refuge in caves, came out and started all over again. This was the era of Khun Than, a name that survives strongly in the North and Northeast but is almost forgotten in the Central area of the country. Then came the second Buddha, again followed by destruction of the world, and again another new world. This was the Era of Khun Phan, a name almost forgotten everywhere. Then came the third Buddha, another destruction of the world, followed by the Era of Khun Man. This Era came to an end with the appearance of the Buddha Gotama of our present belief.

The Later Era of Khun Man was the Middle Age of these Thai Myths. The first of these figures, Khun In and Nang Kwak, followed by a host of others, are with us still. For instance the image figure of Nang Kwak, or Nang Kwak Thong Ma (She Who Beckons for Gold to Come), is found in most Thai shops and many homes where she is venerated as a Luck Charm. Mae Posob, the spirit of the Rice Grain, is another highly venerated figure and is found in many homes,

particularly in the homes of farmers. These figures, as is only to be expected, are found in every part of the country. I am not aware of anyone who has made a thorough study of this subject.

But now an Archarn in the Teachers' Training College of Chiangmai named Renoo Athamet has a course which she calls Belief of the Lanna People (Lanna means Northern Thai). Taking her course are about 70 students. These students live in Chiangmai during the week, staying with friends and relatives, or in dormitories. On weekends they return home, some to outer Districts of Chiangmai, others to nearby provinces. They went round to the old men and women in their communities and villages and asked to be told the stories of how the world started, of the luminescent beings who came to eat the new-scented clay, and the names Suang and Sarng or similar. To make a long story short, the students collected thirty items from interviews, and from records written on palm-leaf. While the items were collected from the Lanna country, some items were Shan, others were Lao over the Mekhong River.

That is all for now. This paper must seem pointless, but there have been arguments of late as to where the Thai derived from in the first place. The answer is that they have always been where they and their Living Myths are found today.

NOTE

Anyone interested in this subject further, and who can read Thai, will find the reports printed in my *Tamnan Ton Phi Thai* ตำนานต้นผีไทย, Original Ancestors of the Thai.