

SECTION IV
LITERATURE

PRECEPT AND TRANSGRESSION Alcohol and Addicts in Ancient and Modern Thailand as Reflected in Thai Literature

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The precept *sikkhāpada* reads as follows:

Surāmerayapāne pācittiyam¹
In drinking wines and spirits
there is [a case entailing] expiation

The Tripitaka contains numerous precepts and prohibitions regarding the consumption of alcoholic beverages.² The above dictum is unequivocal. It has invariably been adhered to by monks and devout laymen alike wherever the Buddha's teachings are accepted as a binding rule of life. However, this does not hold true of all Buddhists in general. It is a well-known fact that from time immemorial there is a propensity in human nature for greedily indulging in intoxicating drink.

In the following pages an attempt is made to show the manner in which the Buddha's precept and its transgression have been treated as a specific subject in Thai literature.

1. The following verses from Sunthon Phu's *Nirat phu khau thong* are famous and well known to everyone familiar with Thai poetry:

๑ ถึงโรงเหล้าเตากลั่นควันโขมง	มีคันทองผูกสายไว้ปลายเสา
ไธ้บาปกรรมน้ำนรกเจียวอกเรา	ให้มัวเมาเหมือนหนึ่งน้ำเป็นน้ำอายุ
ทำบุญบวชกรวดน้ำขอสำเร็จ	พระสรรเพชญ์โพธิญาณประมาณหมาย
ถึงสุราพารอดไม่วอดวาย	ไม่ไกลกายแกล้งเมินจนเกินไป
ไม่เมาเหล้าแต่เรายังเมาอีก	สุดจะหักห้ามจิตคิดใจ
ถึงเมาเหล้าเข้าสายก็หายไป	แต่เมาใจนี้ประจำทุกค่ำคืน ฯ

- 56) Arriving at the distillery, heavy with smoke,
57) A dipper with a long handle is tied with a string to the end of a pole.
58) O sinfulness, O evil fate, this hell-brew boils in my breast
59) making me drunk like mad; it is a shame.

- 60) Pray, let me succeed in making merit and perform rites,
61) omniscient, enlightened Buddha, as it is my intent.
62) From alcohol I could safely escape; it did not destroy me.
63) It would be absurd not to go near, pretending to look away.
64) Not alcohol alone makes us drunk, but love makes drunk as well.
65) Should love also be repressed, I wonder?
66) Drunkenness with alcohol, day or night, is passing,
67) but this heart drunken with love is drunken every night on end.

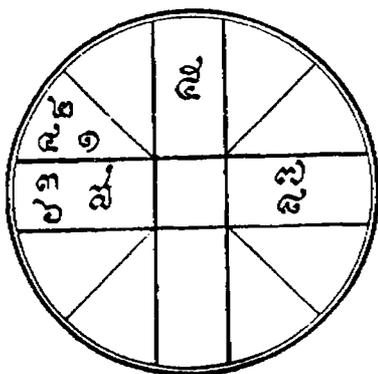
This passage, verses 56 to 67, is one of the best known of the poet's works.³ Sunthon Phu's reputation of being addicted to alcoholic drink is possibly to be attributed to these verses. His coinage "hell-brew," 58, is an expression well known to those familiar with Thai literature. Notwithstanding the playful spirit with which Sunthon Phu offers his verses to the reader, they also suggest his personal implication, 58 sqq. In verse 60 sq. he almost anxiously begs the Buddha for support to stay away from alcohol. The situation is then relativised, 64, by adding that drunkenness is not brought about alone by alcohol, but by love as well. One wonders whether verses 65 to 67 are an exaggeration or whether Sunthon Phu as a man was indeed so passionately given to the love of women.

Let us consider again verse 58: "O vice, O evil destiny, this hell-brew boils in my breast." In Thai literature speculations are associated with this verse about Sunthon Phu's way of life and his poetic creativity. It has been alleged that a) he was more or less addicted to alcohol throughout his life, and b) his poetic works were accomplished more or less under the influence of alcohol.

It has also been reported that *klon* verse came so easily from his lips that even two secretaries at a time could not cope with taking all of it down in writing. Furthermore, it is

said that courtiers approached him with a view to making him drunk and eliciting verses from him in the state of intoxication which later they passed on to the king as their own.

Sunthon Phu, it is alleged, lacked the "fifth virtue," *sin thi ha*, namely abstinence from intoxicating drink. Such grossly exaggerated stories go well with a supposed horoscope of the poet. The horoscope is intentionally qualified as "supposed." Neither the name of his parents nor the place of his birth are known. Nevertheless the horoscope even mentions the hour of his birth: "two o'clock in the morning." This does not fit well together. Damrong says⁴ there were horoscope casters determining Sunthon Phu's fate as follows:



สุนทรภู่ อาลักษณ์ขี้เมา

Where did the casters get these dates from? Those of the mother who disappeared and those of the father who is unknown? Who at all took an interest in Sunthon Phu before he had become a poet and a favorite of the king? Those fortune tellers surely did not draw a *duong chada* for someone belonging to the dregs of society.

Many if not most of the biographical dates of the poet remain a mystery. Nothing is known, not even in the form of a hint. Whence then this apparent sureness with which Sunthon Phu's character is delineated right from his birth? To crown it all, under the *duong chada* in the current printed editions we read as an integral part of it: *Sunthon Phu alak khi mau*. It can aptly be rendered in English by "Sunthon Phu the drunkard secretary," which is evidently an unusual addition to the horoscope of one of the most famous Thai poets. On the strength of the reasons given above, the authenticity of the horoscope can justifiably be doubted and considered as a subsequent addition with fictitious dates.⁵ The remark under the *duong chada*, which is not exactly flattering, can likewise be legitimately considered as a later addition based on the aforementioned quotation from the *Nirat phu khau thong*. According to the standards then prevailing in Thai society it cannot be assumed that the wording *alak khi mau* is meant to be a tribute to Sunthon Phu's poetic genius. How can a drunkard bring forth such an outstanding poetic work? In Thailand of the 19th century such a question would not have arisen in anyone's mind.

Even if a propensity towards alcoholic drink is now considered normal for persons rising above human mediocrity, it is yet amazing that reports are circulated in such a careless manner with seeming sureness about one of the greatest Thai poets, a fact that is possibly offensive to many people.

2. In *Kamnoet Phlai Ngam*, section 24 of the *Bot lakhon Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, Khun Chang's drunkenness, willfully brought about, is dramatically depicted in a very naturalistic manner (verses 285 sqq.).

Khun Chang was just about to kill young Phlai Ngam in the forest, after having learnt that Phlai Ngam is not his real son:

285. ๑ ฝ่ายขุนช้างคางเคราอายเจ้าเล่ห์ เมาโมเอย้มกริมอยู่ริมฝา
เสียงวันทองร้องไห้จุดไฟมา สองดูหน้านั่งเคียงบนเตียงนอน
ทำไกลใต้ถอมเป็นความหยอก ฤหนามยอกเจ็บป่วยจะช่วยถอน
พลางรับขวัญวันทองร้องละคร เจ้าทุกซึ้งอนรำคำญประกาศไร ฯ

313. แล้วแก็ก้อเร่อออกไปนอกห้อง ตะโกนร้องเรียกเข้ามาตาพร่ำ
ไปเที่ยวตามตามหาถึงที่น้ำ ไม่พบทำถอนใจกลับไปเรื้อน
รินสุรามาดื่มลิ้มสติ อุตริร้องไห้ใครจะเหมือน

327. เสียงอ้ออ้อแผ่กายนอนหงายเงย จนลิ้มเลยชบเซาด้วยเมามาย

285) Bearded Khun Chang is full of deceit.

286) Drunk he leans against a wall, smiling broadly.

287) He hears Wan Thong's voice; she is weeping. He lights a candle.

288) Light falls on her face; he sit down on the bed close beside her.

289) Loitering he makes inquiries in a playful manner.

290) "Are you pricked by thorns and in pain? I will help to extract them.

291) "I welcome you, Wan Thong," he sings, and cries out theatrically

292) "Are you sad? Are you worried?"

313) Khun Chang then leaves the room, covering up his embarrassment.

314) Shouting "I am coming" and continuously cursing

315) He proceeds to look for the landing place.

316) Not finding Phlai Ngam, he returns to the house with a sigh,

317) pours himself liquor and drinks until unconscious.

318) Being beside himself he starts weeping, wondering if there is the like of him.

327) He utters drunken sounds, "O-Ae," sprawling on the floor, his face turned up.

328) Unconscious, he rests his head on his arm—dead drunk.

"Khun Chang is full of deceit." He is drunk and acts out his state in an artful manner. He pretends, 313 sqq., to look for Phlai Ngam. In the verses his state of inebriation is made quite evident by leaving it open whether he deliber-

ately searches in the wrong place or whether he is led there through his intoxication. Verse 316 would point to the latter possibility. The comedy reaches its height in verse 317: "pouring himself liquor and drinking until unconscious," he is obviously seized by a fit of crying and tries to make up for his miserable condition by self-adulation⁶ (verse 318).

3. In Thai literature of the 19th century there are some other passages which describe the drinking of alcoholic beverages as a habit contrary to the prevailing moral standards, as in the *Suphasit son ying*, line 110:

คนสูบฝิ่นกินสุราพาจัญไร

"Some men smoke opium, drink liquor and behave badly."

Drunkenness is seen in a more discriminating manner by Khun Phum in *Phleng yau chaloem phra kiet*, line 611:

เกินมรั้นโดยฤทธิ์อวิชา

"Ignorance is even a more potent intoxicant than alcohol."⁷

4. King Mongkut's legal announcements reflect the same moralising and derogatory attitude towards drunkenness, especially⁸ announcement No. 79 concerning persons of notoriously bad reputation for drinking liquor during the *trut* and *songkran* rites, dated 2398 B.S. (1855), and announcement No. 121 concerning persons getting drunk with liquor on *songkran* day. The text of this announcement speaks for itself:

Whereas in accordance with the custom observed from time immemorial, on the occasion of celebrating the arrival of new year, by far the greater majority of manhood, partly consisting of rogues and ruffians, see fit to get themselves drunk all over the place; These revellers drink their way on to the highway and even naughtily into the temple and monastery, leaving in their wake scattered remnants of drunken brawl, assault, battery and mayhem. With the celebration running into eleven days altogether, that is to say, five days in honour of the lunar year, with three days for actual celebration, one day for preparation and another day for the send-off and six days in honour of the solar year, with three or four days for actual celebration, one or two days for preparation and another day or two for the send-off, the countless cases of drunken brawl, assault, battery and mayhem occurring within and without the City wall are beyond the power of the Nai Amphur and the police to cope with.

Wherefore, it shall be the duty of every householder, as from now on, to seize all persons getting drunk and disorderly in front of his house and deliver the same to the police at the prison gate while they are still in the state of insobriety. The performance of such a duty shall be made only by the householder in front of whose house the person to be seized

shall have been getting drunk and disorderly, and no neighbours of his shall be permitted to render assistance. If upon delivery the person seized in the said manner is found to be drunk by the police the householder who makes the delivery shall not be made answerable even were the person seized and so delivered is found bodily hurt or wounded. In order to prevent a possible rescue of the person thus seized for delivery while being taken on the way to the police, the householder may detain him at his house, pending the immediate examination by the Nai Amphur or the police into his state of sobriety, which examination shall be conducted immediately. Drunken revellers during the New Year celebration are hereby warned to confine their hilarity within the limits of their household, and any urgent business which they may wish to perform abroad before they get over the reaction of their over indulgence must wait until they are sober.

Announcement No. 160 testifies to the personal integrity and courage of Rama IV. It likewise is a proof of his authority. Two members of the Royal family are mentioned in it by name and exposed to the public as drunkards. The announcement forbids everyone to enter the residence of these persons with the exception of certain servants. Further short references about drunkenness are contained in announcements No. 189 and 289.

5. The general attitude prevailing in "Ancient Thailand" towards liquor and toppers is summarily dealt with in the *Suphasit* on drunkenness, *Suphasit khi mau*.¹⁰

Obviously this text was first printed in R.S. 114 (1895). The text may be described as of minor value from a literary point of view. As a document shedding light on cultural history, it is however quite interesting. The verses vividly depict the evil consequences and the sinfulness arising from the consumption of liquor. At the same time they admonish the reader to follow the path of virtue, i.e. abstinence. Drunkenness is associated with opium, gambling houses, brothels and crime. Verse 313 mentions that women's nature is sinful and that there is a direct connection between liquor and fornication. Drunkenness leads to quarrels and brawls with even fatal consequences, ending up in humiliation and a loss of social status.

6. The precept of abstinence is still part and parcel of the Buddhist canon. Hence it is valid as a rule to be followed by every adherent of Buddhism. To what extent modern poets have deviated from the rule can clearly be demonstrated by the poems of Angkhan Kalyanaphong. Some of them, in *Lam nam phu kradiung* for instance, can be considered as hymns of drunkenness. Other poems intimate at least that alcoholic intoxication is for him a pleasant state of mind which goes to enhance his awareness of life. Poem No. 89 in the above-quoted work is a proof of it. It bears the title "Drinking good brandy at the rock Mak Duk."

In a number of other passages, however, Angkhan makes use of the word drunkenness to characterise a nega-

tive state of mind—when it occurs to others! Also verses like the following have come from his pen:¹¹

แล้วสอนว่าอย่าไว้ใจมนุษย์	ทุตแมโขงหมดหลังวิสก็
ควดกันเกลี้ยงขวดพลันบัดนี้	ที่หมายไว้แก้มกภาพยกลอนไทย
ดื่มดื่มไปยังไม่เป็นเรื่อง	ฟังเพื่องลั่นแต่เรื่องเหลวไหล
วิปริตพิชกกล้าสุราเมรัย	ห้ามใจไม่ได้อันตรายนัก

And teach people: do not trust in men.
Shit on all the Maekhong...ever more whisky!
Drinking your glass to the dregs, quick get me more
brandy!
...which is a welcome concomitant in composing Thai
poetry.
Drinking and going on drinking...there is no meaning
in things.

Given imagination free rein—thoughts with no coherence.

This poison operates changes; strong liquor has a disastrous effect.

If you lose self-control you get into danger.

7. What has become established in good literature (see under 6. above) has now also been accepted by the broad mass of the population. Young and old in Thailand are familiar with the song *Lau ča*, "O my dear alcohol," sung to a brisk popular tune. There are even two variant texts in circulation at present.¹²

In conclusion, mention should be made that the subject treated in this article has also found expression in a number of works in Thai art.¹³

NOTES

1. See Pāṭimokkha, rule No. 51, here quoted from *The Pāṭimokkha*, 227 *Fundamental Rules of a Bikkhu*, p. 58 (Bangkok 1966).
2. Thus in Vin I (Mahavagga) 85 Majjapayihoti; Vin II (Cullavagga) 295 sq., Suttanipata (394-) 398 and 400, Dhammapada (246-) 247 (five precepts). In connection with the "five precepts" see further (for laymen) e.g. Dighanikaya III 181 sq., Majjhiman. II 51, III 120, III 163; Anguttaran. I 212, II 58, II 66, III 203-205, III 211-213, IV 271. (For these references I have to thank Lambert Schmitthausen, Hamburg University).
3. See WENK, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai Bd II, Texte und Interpretationen von und zu Sunthon Phu und seinem Kreis* (Hamburg und Bangkok 1985), pp. 100 ff.
4. DAMRONG, *Prawat Sunthon Phu*, p. 1 sqq.
5. This view is also held by PRAMUONMAK, *Prawat kham klon Sunthon Phu*, p. 249, regarding the inconsistency of the name "Sunthon Phu," unknown in the third and fourth reigns.
6. See also WENK, *op. cit.*, p. 43 sq., 64 sq.
7. On the subject see also WENK, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai Bd. III, Texte und Interpretationen zur Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg 1987), p. 57.
8. The text of the announcements quoted is contained in *Prachum prakat ratchakan thisi* (Kurusapha), vols. 1, 3 and 4.
9. Quoted from Seni PRAMOT, *King Mongkut as a Legislator, JSS XXXVIII, pt. 1*, p. 52 sq. This text is also contained in Seni and Kukrit PRAMOT, *A King of Siam Speaks* (Bangkok 1987), p. 34 sq.
10. GERINI refers to this text in *On Siamese Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions, JSS I, pt. 1*, p. 88. This text may be available only in private libraries at the present time. (A complete translation and analysis is in preparation).
11. On this see WENK, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai Bd. IV, Ein Textbuch zur Poesie der Neuzeit* (Hamburg und Niederglatt 1989), p. 127 sq., p. 200.
12. The texts of the song have been published in a collection of popular hits, *Star Music, chabap 26*, pp. 92 and 133.
13. To my knowledge such works are few and far between. I know of a painting of the Vessantara-Jataka in Wat Ratchasitharam in Thonburi depicting a group of servants drinking and fighting (see WENK, *Mural Paintings in Thailand, vol. II, part 1*, plate XXXVIII). Another example is the representation of drinking officers in the Ramakien reliefs in Wat Phra Chetuphon; on this see also WENK, *Reliefs in Wat Phra Chetuphon, Bangkok* (Niederglatt 1989), pp. 256 sqq.