

ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. โทมัส เคิร์ช

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| ๑. นามท่านโทมัส เคิร์ช
เต็มคุณความดีครอง | ความรู้เลิศควรยกย่อง
ทั้งถ่องแท้ศึกษาไทย |
| ๒. รู้พร้อมประเพณี
ซึมซับแนบแน่นใน | สยามศรีลิกซึ่งไซรั
ค่านิยมสมเป็นครู |
| ๓. เรียนเก่งกว่าอาจารย์
หนังสืออ่านทุกผู้ | ศึกษาการเฝ้าความรู้
เอ่ยปากพร้อมดีม่วนจัน |
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โลกถ้วนเหตุการณ์ | เปี่ยมคุณค่าสารพัน
สนุกม่วนเมื่อใจงาม |

ไพฑูรย์พรหมวิจิตร
๙ มีนาคม ๒๕๔๓

One could say that Professor Thomas Kirsch was a very interesting and intriguing person for the very reason that he was a student who surpassed his teachers. Not only that he was an ardent Thai scholar, enlightened in its culture and values, he also composed his writing as he had lived- full of *muan* . . . fun

Panpen Khruathai
9 March 2000

OBITUARY

Anthony Thomas Kirsch (1930–1999)

A MEMOIR¹

by O. W. Wolters*

Anthony Thomas Kirsch, a distinguished student of Thai Buddhism, Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies, and a member of the Cornell Southeast Asia Program since 1970, died on 17 May, 1999.

He was born in Syracuse, New York, on 29 May, 1930, into a family that, on his father's side, came from Germany. His mother was Florence Sheehan; her family was Irish. His grandfather owned a large dairy, dairy shop, and potato farm on land that included or was near the site of Syracuse's Hancock International Airport. Tom and his cousins would be recruited to help harvest potatoes, and he is remembered as a somewhat reluctant toiler on the land; sometimes his absence was noticed and he would be found reading in an apple tree. Working in the yard never became one of his preoccupations in later life.

He was brought up in a devout Catholic family that donated land in Mattydale for the original St. Margaret's Church and convent and also the first public library in the area.² His relatives were numerous. They farmed together and went to the same schools. Each summer they still celebrate reunions of a hundred or more of all ages on the shores of Onondaga Lake, where their custom is to consume half an ox. Tom and Yohko, his wife, habitually attended these gatherings. In his pre-Harvard days he was regarded as being quiet and reserved, though he also fancied himself behind the wheel of an MG. His relatives may never have quite understood their eccentric kinsman and why, when a student at Harvard, he should have decided to go to the other end of the world and live in a Thai village.

He was educated at the Christian Brothers Academy, Syracuse, and received what today would be regarded as a traditional education. He studied "Religion" and "English" for four

years, "History" for three, and "Latin" for one. Unfortunately, in view of what lay ahead for him, details about the range of his religious studies are not available. His parents urged him to read as much as possible and consider a career away from the farm. After leaving school and spending a year as an "inspector" on an assembly line in a factory producing TV sets (one of the first of its kind), he decided to become an electrical engineer, but soon realised that he had no mathematical and calculus skills. He then considered a career in professional geography, entered Syracuse University, was advised to study some anthropology, and became "enraptured", as he wrote years later, and now knew where his interests lay. Administrative circumstances required him to take a joint anthropology/sociology major, with a fateful consequence; he was introduced to the influential theoretical work of Talcott Parsons and a number of issues such as sex roles and kinship that were one day to occupy his attention.

He received a B.A. cum laude in 1952, was drafted into the U.S. Army, and there he undertook medical and psychiatric work from 1953 to 1955. He recalled many years later that his military experience provided him with an environment in which he could read and study cultural, social, and psychological matters. Thereafter, having worked briefly in his family's business, he returned to Syracuse University because he knew that academe was where he really wanted to be. He took an M.A. in 1959 before proceeding to Harvard for graduate studies in anthropology.³ His earliest connection with Cornell was in 1961–1962, when he began studying the Thai language. Unfortunately, why Thailand should have been his country of choice is not known for certain, though the choice had been made before he went to Harvard. He once disclosed that he was fascinated by Thailand's

geographical shape and especially by how it lunged into southern China and the Malay Peninsula. Geography had been one of his earliest adult interests.

He would have arrived in Cambridge feeling independent as never before. He was probably unusually well educated, inquisitive, and with plenty of ideas in his head. His fellow graduates remember him, as we who knew him subsequently do, as a friend who gladly shared his knowledge with anyone who talked to him. He had come to Harvard at an exciting time in the history of social anthropology, when the dynamic relation of culture and society was a focus of enquiry. He had already been influenced by Talcott Parsons's emphasis on social systems and their dependence on cultural orientations, and he became convinced, as he later wrote in his classic *Feasting and Social Oscillation: Religion and Society in Upland Southeast Asia*, "that religion is the repository of cultural values and conceptions which provide the cognitive and effective framework within which social action takes place".⁴ This view was being taught at Harvard when Tom was there, and his achievement later would be to elaborate it in the context of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, the core beliefs of which he knew thoroughly.⁵ A fellow anthropologist has praised Tom's success in being able to link Parsonian theory with empirical data.

His lifelong intellectual concerns were announced in a daringly ambitious doctoral outline of May 1964, pruned to become a study of Phu Thai religious syncretism in northeastern Thailand. During 1962–1964 he lived with a village schoolmaster in Ban Nong Sung, a remote and largely unknown village in the District of Khamcha-ee and in what today is the province of Mukdahan. A few years ago an old monk in Washington, D.C., recalled how Tom—the only Westerner not only in the village but in that part of the northeast as well—had impressed the population. Perhaps his youthful years on a farm in upstate New York helped him settle down in the Thai countryside, and his Catholic upbringing may have accustomed him to a way of life that respected authority, discipline, and ritual, and enabled him to understand similar elements in the Theravada Buddhist way of life practised in his village. At any rate, his affection

for his village meant that thereafter he was always eager to teach that the surest basis for ethically grounded conduct was village Buddhism rather than the rational Buddhism of the metropolis or versions of Buddhism without "Asian trappings" which usually appealed to Westerners. The village of Ban Nong Sung became the personal adventure and intellectual influence that remained with him until the end. Unless his village is borne in mind, not much sense can be made of Tom's subsequent life.

His doctoral outline, written after he returned from Thailand with tropical sprue, reads today as though he was already drawing up the research programme that occupied him throughout his career. It comprised no less than the study of the hill tribes of mainland Southeast Asia, the "sanskritic" peoples of the lowlands of mainland Southeast Asia, and the Theravada Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. Not surprising, the outline was more than thirty pages in length.

Still at Harvard, he wrote graduate papers on these topics against the day when he could return to them, as indeed he did. Professor Hjørleifur Jonsson, who came to Cornell because he was attracted by Tom's interest in the highland peoples of mainland Southeast Asia and was among the last students to complete a doctoral dissertation under his supervision, is introducing a collection of Tom's influential writings for publication under SEAP auspices. Two items remain unpublished. The collection will illustrate the range and coherence of Tom's intellectual preoccupations and also how he approached Southeast Asia as a field of study. In several instances he seems to have anticipated research directions anthropologists followed later.

The writer of this memoir owes Tom much. Tom honoured him by attending and participating in his lectures and sought to persuade him that there was more to be done to "history" when cultural and social influences were borne in mind. He was a historian's anthropologist. There he was continually at one's side, quietly proposing, by way of speculation or hypothesis, new ways of looking at the past and advancing reasons for doing so as a result of his anthropological insights. Three of the essays in the projected collection of his works concern Thai and Khmer history, and they read, among

other things, as written from the perspective of a scholar alert for signs of movement and maybe change beneath what he called the “surface” of a text.⁶ In his essays on history he mobilised his anthropological expertise to challenge conventional wisdom on, for example, the significance of kinship systems or on the rise and fall of cultural and social systems. He paid attention to contingencies such as warfare, succession disputes, and manpower needs rather than following rigid models of social organisation. He always sought to identify human agency and motivation as factors influencing the course of events.

With a lifetime of research goals in his notebooks, he left Harvard in 1966 to become an assistant professor at Princeton and worked there until, in 1970, he began his Cornell career of nearly thirty years, where by all accounts he undertook every responsibility that could be asked of him, and had the reputation of volunteering to do whatever needed to be done.⁷ Only a year after arriving, he had already begun to serve the first of three terms as chairman of the anthropology department and by 1990 had completed more than nine years of service.⁸ Those close to him remember that he managed to take the ups and downs of office in his stride and always with a twinkle in his eye. He served on heaps of departmental committees. Some will remember him as having a propensity for dashing off on his typewriter (“no infernal word-processor for me”) long and forcefully argued memoranda addressed to those in authority whom he thought had treated his department without proper consideration.⁹ Yet he seems to have been the obvious choice for a series of college deans when they had to appoint faculty members to serve on committees. From time to time he was a member of the Faculty Council of Representatives. And this is not the limit of his miscellaneous services to the academic community. In 1989 he was one of several scholars asked to create a program for the study of religion at Cornell. He served on the program’s steering committee until his death and chaired its curriculum committee. At the same time, he lectured on “Magic, Myth, Science, and Religion”.

As a member of the Executive Committee of the Southeast Asia Program, he would exhibit

his familiarity with the regulations of the college and his expert experience with the moods and whims of deans. When necessary, according to a colleague, he would utter the group’s conscience and remind it of what it was supposed to be doing. He was a stickler for the rules of academic life. He made himself responsible for organising the annual film series on Southeast Asia. But, much more important, he was a favourite chairman of graduate committees and was also in demand as a “minor” member of these committees.¹⁰ He sponsored the publication of manuscripts written by scholars visiting the program and wrote forewords and prefaces for them. He edited a festschrift in honour of Lauriston Sharp, the program’s founder, and cooperated in planning a festschrift in honour of Jane and Lucien Hanks. Away from Cornell, he served on the Thailand Council of the Asia Society and the Southeast Asian Council of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). Between 1965 and 1992 he attended numerous seminars, symposiums, and panels organised by the American Anthropological Association, the Association of Asian Studies, the Asia Society, and centres of learning in various parts of the country and in Thailand. He regularly wrote book reviews. From time to time he refereed book manuscripts and journal articles. In 1985–1986 he served as a Fulbright scholar and consultant at Khon Kaen University, Thailand. In 1992 he received a Fulbright Hays Faculty Research Abroad Award and became a Visiting Senior Scholar at the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute.

In 1984 he married Yohko Tsuji, a fellow anthropologist and a joy to him as well as a helpmate in times of need if ever there was one. They were a happy, hospitable pair. She amused him, as he did her. They were together in Thailand in 1985–1986 and 1992. On the latter occasion, Tom was preparing materials for a “Social History of Two Thai Families: 1960–1990”, concerning the families with whom he had kept in touch since his Harvard days. His intention was to gauge the qualitative and human effects of the profound changes that had occurred in Thailand during this period. But he returned from his last visit to Thailand in discomfort, and shortly afterwards, in October, 1992, his larynx had to be removed. The disaster occurred

only two years after he had given up the chairmanship of his department, and he had been looking forward to fewer duties. He now had to converse by means of an electrolarynx. For a less brave man, the disaster could have meant the end of a useful career, but the contrary happened. Without showing a trace of self-pity even when he was often required to undergo further and disagreeable medical treatment in Syracuse, and supported by his courageous wife, Tom responded to his predicament with admirable endurance and carried on uncomplainingly. He may even have been grateful that he was still a teacher and student advisor and relieved at last of what he was to describe as "extraordinary administrative responsibilities that adversely influenced my time, thought, and energy". In his last years he was perhaps at peace professionally as never before and could write that "I know that I enjoy my teaching and advising more now than I did previously". He never behaved as though he were handicapped. His colleagues readily took his composure for granted, and he wanted nothing else.

With a new "voice", and determined to be active, he was now known to be almost furiously busy lecturing and revising lectures to make them, he said, more relevant to the state of contemporary theory and the state of regional developments. At the same time, he was always seeing students, holding examinations, and attending endless departmental meetings. As a result of this sudden whirl of activity, his friends often found it difficult to get in touch with him. In 1994–1995 he took a great deal of trouble to compose an authoritative and affectionate memorial statement in honour of Lauriston Sharp, whom he admired and often quoted. In 1995 he participated in conferences in Leiden and Lund and was a panel discussant at the 1995 and 1996 AAS meetings in Hawaii and Washington, D.C. In 1997 he travelled in the British Isles and visited Oxford, where he enjoyed examining the "utterly overpowering" Pitt-Rivers Ethnological Museum. In 1997 he accompanied Yohko to Japan. Also in these post-1992 years, his resolve to carry on in spite of his disability meant that he grasped an opportunity to return with passion to an earlier intellectual interest, which was a concern for the future. The opportunity, as we shall see,

came in the form of the Southeast Asia Program's "Golay Memorial Lectures".

Tom's concern with the future was derived from his long-standing interest in the past and, therefore, with what came next. When travelling in Britain, he was well-informed about and relished heritage sites. Three articles in the projected collection of his writings are on historical subjects. Perhaps his interest was originally awakened as a result of his education at the Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse. Certainly long ago at Harvard he had encouraged his peers not to neglect history.¹¹ His doctoral outline included what he called "an evolutionary dimension" and involved a detailed historical approach to the "sanskritic" civilisations. Not many years later he coauthored *The Human Direction: An Evolutionary Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*.¹² History and evolution seem to have been interchangeable notions.

His interest in history also led him to study the history of his discipline, and this had become a sufficiently lively interest that he spent 1974–1975 at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, working on what he came to define as paradigmatic changes in anthropological theory. In 1982 he published an important article titled "Anthropology: past, present, future: Toward an anthropology of anthropology"¹³ and noted that anthropologists had created their discipline by studying origins and today were studying the present with an ethnological focus. But, he insisted, humans had always been interested in the future; an awareness of the future shaped and affected their lives. He therefore proposed, as others were beginning to do, that the future should become a legitimate focus for a new generation of anthropologists.

An unexpected circumstance gave him the opportunity to reaffirm this concern. A series of annual lectures had been endowed by the Golay family in honour of Frank Golay, a distinguished economist and one of the earliest members of the Southeast Asia Program, and Tom played an enthusiastic role in launching the series. His correspondence in these years (1994–1998), occasionally in the form of the long memoranda he favoured, reveals him as urging vigorously that the implications of the dramatic pace of change in Southeast Asia should be a central

topic in contemporary Southeast Asian studies and therefore an appropriate focus for the "Golay Memorial Lectures".¹⁴

Evidently, he had been thinking earnestly on these lines during the upsurge of energy in the final years of his life. He was well aware of remarkable changes overtaking Thai society and elsewhere "out there" and was also, of course, mindful of the direction that he had long urged anthropologists to take. In his opinion, changes in the region represented fundamental dimensions of life such as "space, time, proximity, distance, affections (e.g., love and hate), and health and well being, the essential quality of life for Southeast Asian peoples, past, present, and future". A year before he died, he summed up the urgency of the situation in no uncertain language:

It strikes me as inescapable that the religious, political, economic, social organizational and familial orders in Southeast Asia (and the rest of the world) have already undergone transformations that might only a short time ago have been deemed too fantastic even to contemplate.

So convinced was he that priority should be given to these developments that he would not accept that other and more recent academic pursuits—which he dismissively referred to as the "post toasties"—should be allowed to steal a scholar's attention. In a somewhat heated letter written to an overseas friend in February, 1997, he insisted that one must not be diverted from "thinking about, addressing, or even perceiving (much less engaging) the pervasive disjunctions and transformations that affect the lives of the peoples of Southeast Asia, or anywhere else, or the social and cultural forms that are being transformed and changed". Furthermore, he realised to his grief that the global market was today the latest instance in world history of a large-scale transformation and that it was accompanied by moral disarray and frequent violence. What lay ahead of this globalising and deplorable situation was "the future" that needed to be studied, and to do so meant that one had also to take into account the past and present, "a trajectory" of historical experience. He was fond of the expression "trajectory".

In this way a new paradigm for regional studies could emerge, and "globalisation" was his obvious candidate. But, as he wrote to the

same friend, it should be studied: for the future—not "today" but "tomorrow". And, unlike the preferred model of previous area studies [i.e., "traditional" politics], any new perspectives cannot privilege "us" as models of what tomorrow will be like but must incorporate "us" as both actors and acted upon along with all those "others".

The Golay Memorial Lectures probably gave Tom pleasure by providing him with an unexpected context for voicing ideas developed earlier in his life and also, perhaps, for racing against time when doing so, for he was perfectly aware of the gravity of his physical condition. But an event that took place not long before he died undoubtedly brought him contentment, and this was when friends of Harvard days, colleagues, and former and present students came together at Cornell from many centres in the United States and several disciplines. On 19–20 February, 1999, the anthropology department, with the cooperation of several other Cornell departments, centres, and programs, organised a two-day interdisciplinary symposium to celebrate his career.¹⁵ The theme chosen was an appropriate one: "Religion, Society, and Popular Culture". Professor James L. Peacock, of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, introduced the symposium with a moving address: "Applied Weber/Kirsch/Parsons". Eight papers were delivered, and the proceedings were notable for the deference accorded Tom and his career. A friend commented that "no big egos were involved on this occasion". The sincerity of the homage and the depth of affection displayed were striking. A reception was held in the Kahin Center, and guests declared their feelings for him. One speaker went so far as to attribute to him qualities associated with a Bodhisattva. Later that evening Tom was overheard to murmur: "I would have liked to have known that guy".

The timing of the symposium was perfect. About a month later his condition began to deteriorate rapidly. He never recovered and was transferred to the Ithaca Hospicare Center, where he endured his suffering with characteristic tranquillity. Never alone, he sometimes bewildered his visitors by speaking Thai. Students were at his bedside to the end. A Westerner in Thailand had asked one of Tom's

former students why the Thudong monks (forest monks) of Thailand, about whom she had written, were prepared to undertake dangerous risks. This student, always with Tom in his final days, consulted him. Tom asked for his electrolyrnx and taught for the last time.

To understand why Thudong monks were not afraid of death, we need to examine their beliefs in karma, or rebirth in multiple lives. So strong was their faith that they believed that if they got killed, say by being attacked by a tiger or wild elephant, they still had another chance to be reborn and in their next life try to make progress toward enlightenment. In other words, if they do not succeed in this life, there is always a next life in which to try again.

By contrast, Westerners generally do not believe in rebirth; they think that they have only one life to live. The typical Western Buddhist is determined to meditate his or her way to enlightenment in this life. As a product of the prevailing culture (belief in one life), they tend to be more cautious. You can't be reckless because you might blow your only chance to get enlightened.¹⁶

He died peacefully on 17 May.

This memoir is written by a friend and program colleague but not by an anthropologist. Others will be qualified to judge Tom's scholarly status, and it is hoped that they will acknowledge that he left behind a substantial body of writings in spite of heavy administrative duties and the tragedy that prevented him from completing what he intended to achieve: a study of the changes over the years that affected his two Thai families¹⁷. He also intended to write a commentary on his collected articles that would, as he put it, identify "what I think their 'trajectory' is".

He was a reserved person, but observant and with steely resolve and a sharp analytic focus. His was a complex personality. He was inclined to keep to himself and never sought the centre of the stage. Sometimes he may have been unassuming to the point of self-effacement. In his last years he confessed that he seemed to find himself to be "cranky" and in the uncherished role of "naysayer". He was always quiet even before 1992. A friend of many years has observed how Tom would tend to "whisper" words of wisdom when commenting on current

issues. He was, however, always ready to be consulted and would answer enquiries with magisterial handwritten notes, accompanied by references, comments, and sometimes regrets that a subject had so far received insufficient attention. He gave the impression that he had mastered a canon of invaluable literature to be shared whenever an opportunity arose. He had a wry sense of humour, mischievous eyes, and an impish smile. A friend has said of him that his smile was gentle, "but I always felt that I needed to prepare myself for a droll remark when I saw his smile". Tom was unquestionably considerate and is gratefully remembered as a friend in time of need.

Some may have imagined that he was passive, but this does not mean that he did not influence others. On the contrary, his influence, albeit subtle, was profound. One reason was that he invariably attended the annual meetings of the AAS and the American Anthropological Association. He was a convention aficionado and knew every German restaurant on the convention circuit¹⁸. He therefore had ample opportunities for informal conversation with friends and colleagues, often his former students, and his comments on what they were doing would be sought, remembered, and treasured. His opinion was never lightly ignored.

Tom's summing up of the ground covered during a panel in honour of the late Lucien Hanks may give a glimpse of how it felt to have an informal conversation with him. One would soon gather that one was being "encouraged" or assured that one's work provided "food for thought" and might even be "ambitious", "intriguing", or providing "a provocative hypothesis, worthy of further consideration". Yet perhaps something more was at stake, and Tom would then begin to think aloud and wonder whether "it might be that . . .". At the same time one would be gently reminded of insights of other and earlier scholars. Eventually, one would be offered suggestions and maybe recommendations for considering additional aspects of one's study. But he would always be courteous and perhaps sometimes even playful, and he would certainly disclaim the right to make "assertions", even though one would probably end up with having to acknowledge that further research was still necessary. In the

meantime, Tom's distinctive approach would have come across; the "social and cultural aspects" of whatever was being studied had to be taken into account. Moreover, if the subject impinged on Buddhism, one would be reminded that substantial research had indicated the "dynamic role of Buddhist values, ideas, and institutions" among Tai peoples. And so one would go away with the feeling of having received warm encouragement and useful hints for further lines of investigation from a learned but modest scholar¹⁹. A friend, who, still a young Thai student, first met Tom at an AAS meeting, recalls that "he never made me feel as if I was a struggling student, or that I were Thai for that matter. He treated me as a fellow traveller in quest of a better understanding about Thai society. He made me feel that I 'belonged' in that group of scholars".

Another and major reason for Tom's influence was that his students could readily spot a teacher who had much to offer and would take trouble with them. A colleague who shared courses with him remembers his delight in his students' creativity and how they would respond by outdoing themselves in meeting their own standards. Their tribute on the occasion of the symposium in his honour explains convincingly why they held him in esteem. In spite of his disability, he had won their attention and affection by sheer intellectual integrity, and they expressed their debt in personal terms. He had "opened our eyes", "pointed us forward". He respected "our ideas, our work, and our individual projects in a way that encouraged us and challenged our intellectual horizons". He "guided us to become our own anthropologists in order to sustain the discipline and keep it vital". They had no difficulty in recognising his qualities as a teacher: his encouragement of creative projects; his love for and skill in introducing them to their discipline's intellectual foundations, upon which their projects rested; encouragement to explore new areas of anthropology, even if they were "trendy". "You point, but you never push; you question, but you never cross out". Other and characteristic glimpses of him were recalled: how, for example, he would put notes and clippings into their boxes by way of carrying on an interrupted conversation, how he would have an eye on the future "when issues would be

resolved one way or another, or all ways imaginable—and some unimaginable", and his fondness for quips. He would explain that the candy on the seminar table was evidence that "God is in the details" or would counsel that "in the great garden of anthropology we should let a hundred flowers bloom. However, we should probably recognise that there is a difference between flowers and weeds"²⁰.

Tom may not have visited Thailand very frequently, and yet his rapport with Thai was remarkable. It was as if he did not have to go to their country to become close to them. One former Thai student has even suggested that one could forget that he was not Thai. Here, then, is the final source of his enduring influence. He has sometimes been described as a revered teacher, and this he was to his Thai students in a special way. He exemplified what for them was the powerful and enduring teacher (ajan) and student (luk sit) relationship. He had jai yen ("a cool heart"): he possessed equanimity and could meet all situations. They could see him as a selfless and compassionate being who practised the ethical standards of a Buddhist. He was a good and kind man who taught by personal example just as the Buddhist teachers he had known in his village did. He listened to those who approached him and always had something helpful to say. According to one Thai friend, he had the reputation of having *arom dee* (a "good disposition"), he was *jai dee* ("kind"), his was "the heart of a monk" (*jai phra*), and he had *yim suai lae yim samer* ("a beautiful smile and was always smiling"). The same friend visited Tom in the hospice and observed how he exuded good will, kindness, and enviable serenity. "It was close to visiting one's favourite monk at a temple. It was good therapy".

The Thai poet, Sujit Wongthes²¹, receiving the news that Tom had just died, immediately wrote:

Ajan [the teacher] Kirsch was born and died
in the West.

Then he willed his spirit to [the Province of]
Mukdahan,

Where on the banks of the Mekong the
human world links to the world below.

His spirit has now made its way to the highest
heaven in the skies²².

When he was in the hospice, Tom had asked that his friends in the village where he studied long ago should be told that he was dying and that he had requested his ashes to be taken to the village Wat. The poet knew this.

Yohko honoured Tom's wish. His ashes were deposited in a chedi erected inside the Wat Traiphum compound, a privilege usually reserved for deceased monks.

Notes

* Southeast Asia Program *Bulletin*, Cornell University (Spring/Summer 2000). Used by permission of the author.

¹ I thank a number of Tom's friends, and especially his wife, Yohko Kirsch Tsuji. Without their willing assistance, this memoir could not have been written.

² For these and other historical details concerning Mattydale, see Helen Burnham, *Trolley Stops Two, Three, & Four*. (Baldwinsville, New York, Eagle Media, Inc., 1994).

³ His M.A. thesis was on "Factors Influencing the Relations of Married Siblings". It was basically a sociological one and somewhat influenced by Talcott Parsons's essay on social stratification in industrial societies. Noting the interesting circumstance that a brother of the head of General Motors had been employed in that firm as an hourly paid worker, he developed the hypothesis that the more divergent the status difference was in occupational terms the less close ties would be between close relatives. He conducted his research among members of the "wives" club of the engineering staff of a large manufacturing plant in the area.

⁴ A. Thomas Kirsch, *Feasting and Social Oscillation: Religion and Society in Upland Southeast Asia*. [Data Paper 92], (Ithaca, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, July 1973), 3. Professor James L. Peacock, speaking during the symposium in Tom's honour, held in February, 1999, suggested that Tom's understanding of the influence of Theravada Buddhism on Thai women was "unequaled in demonstrating the force of religion in the social order".

⁵ His spirited reaffirmation of what he regarded as Thai gender roles relied to a significant extent on his ability to gloss the Thai "Blessings of Ordination" text in order to read it as encoding Theravada teachings. He rejected the suggestion that, in Buddhist terms, anyone could be "naturally good". All were human beings caught up in a world of ignorance, desire, and illusion ("Text and Context: Buddhist sex-roles/cultures of gender revisited", *American Ethnologist* 12, 2 [1985], 306).

⁶ Language such as "responsible", "actor", "activating", "mobilizing", "achieving", "valuing", "rewarding", "promoting", "punishing", "recruiting",

"had to resort to", "staking a claim", and "calling on to support" signify the matter-of-fact but actual happenings that interested him.

⁷ He rallied behind the author's ineffectual attempt to organise an interregional and multidisciplinary seminar. An extract from his presentation will appear in Professor Jonsson's collection of Tom's works.

⁸ He served briefly as acting chairman of the Department of Asian Studies.

⁹ One day, strolling back to McGraw Hall with him after a SEAP meeting, the author told him casually that he had recently noticed a favourable review of a certain book by an anthropologist. Within half an hour Tom dumped a three-page note on the author's desk to warn him of the book's harmful tendencies.

¹⁰ Four of his students were awarded "Lauriston Sharp" prizes for scholarly excellence. He served on the committees of six other prize winners. The prize was established in 1975, and Tom was closely involved with a third of the prize winners.

¹¹ At Harvard he recommended that his friends should read E. H. Carr's *What is History* (published in 1964). In an essay, published in 1976, he wrote that he offered the essay in the spirit of a remark by Carr: "the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both".

¹² *The Human Direction: An Evolutionary Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (with James L. Peacock) (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), and now in its third and revised edition, was translated into Japanese in 1975 and has also been translated into Thai and awaits publication.

¹³ "Anthropology, Past, Present, Future: Toward an Anthropology of Anthropology", in E. A. Hoebel, R. Currier, and S. Keiser (eds.), *Crisis in Anthropology: View from Spring Hill*. (New York and London, Garland Publishing Co., 1982), 91-108.

¹⁴ It was his suggestion that the Fifth Golay Lecture should be accompanied by a conference. At school he was top of his class in "civics", and it is tempting to believe that our undemonstrative colleague had been long ago endowed with a lively social conscience.

¹⁵ The Fall 1999 SEAP Bulletin contains an account of the symposium held in his honour.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Dr. Kamala Tiyavanich for relaying and commenting on Tom's words. He was reiterating what he had long taught. See, for example, *American Ethnologist* 12, 2 (1985), 304. Tom was no longer in a physical condition to explain that the monks were fearless (*kla*) in face of danger and death, not only because of their faith in the possibility of spiritual development over many lifetimes, but also in the protective power of the Dharma always conferred on those who themselves followed and protected the Dharma.

¹⁷ Yohko's reminiscences of his 1992 return to his village will be published in Professor Jonsson's collection of Tom's work. He very much wanted to write about the situation of religion in Thailand today. In a letter to his overseas friend, dated 14 August, 1996, he noted: "If it has not already happened, it is on the way for Thai Buddhism to develop a full-scale 'Reformation'. . . . All too often 'religion' is seen as a 'constant', but it is always a 'variable', and this is especially the case in Thailand today. The ferment in Thai religion in general and Buddhism in particular is changing many of the cultural parameters that have been fundamental in Thai religiosity".

¹⁸ Two pages of undated typescript, addressed to the writer of this memoir, were found among Tom's papers. He had decided to make some biographical observations as well as note "some of the thematic notions that run through the several essays the program might consider bringing out". He added that "after all, this is not the greatest story ever told and can, under any circumstances, always be changed". He may have foreseen that others might have to edit the final version. Alas! The typescript got no further than his M.A. and never explained why he chose Thailand. All he says, and rather mysteriously, is that, when students ask him how he "happened to

choose Southeast Asia as the region where I would work, the answer is not so clear as how I got into anthropology as a discipline. The path to both was not especially straight".

¹⁹ "The Quest for Tai in Tai Context: Forethoughts and Afterthoughts", *Crossroads* 2, (1990), 69–79.

²⁰ I am grateful to Tom's students for sharing their fine tribute with me.

²¹ The poet's wife, Pranee Wongthes, was among the first group of Tom's students, and his daughter, Tom's last Thai student. Professor Pranee organised a symposium at Chiang Mai University to express the gratitude of Thai anthropologists for Tom's contribution in encouraging the discipline of anthropology in their country. The symposium, titled "Friends in the Field: Four Decades of Anthropological and Sociological Studies in Thailand", was held on 28 January, 2000, and about fifty scholars were present to honour Tom.

²² The poet is invoking the Theravada teaching of the three levels of existence, well-known in Tom's village in the Isan, or northeastern Thailand. According to Lao belief there, the world beneath the earthly plane is where the powerful Phya Naga lives. The Isan has special access to that world, and the poet is conveying an Isan impression of Tom and seeks to lay him to rest in his beloved northeastern Thailand. "The highest heaven in the skies" is reserved for those who have only done good deeds. I am grateful to Dr. Kamala Tiyavanich for bringing the poem to my attention and for discussing it with me, and I am also grateful to Dr. Craig Reynolds and two of his Thai friends for a translation that gives effect to the Isan animist belief that the river links the three different levels of existence. The poem appears in "Ajan Kirsch of Cornell: A death that left us speechless", *Sinlapa Watthanatham* [Art and Culture], 20, 9 (July 1999), 130–131.