





Remembering local history: Kuba Wajiraphanya (c.1853–1928), Phra Thongthip and the *Müang* way of life¹

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Abstract

This article sets the life of an important religious leader from Mae Sruay, Chiang Rai, Kuba Wajiraphanya (c. 1853–1928) in the context of the history of the latter years of the Chiang Mai kingdom. It links personal biography with the famous image of Phra Thongthip, brought from Luang Prabang to Mae Sruay in the sixteenth century, and with the efforts of Princess Dara Rasmii and Kuba Srivichai to revitalise *Müang* culture in the early twentieth century. It also reflects on some of the means by which local memory is perpetuated, and how biography and local history are combined and memorialised in present-day popular religious practice and secular knowledge.

Remembering Lannatai history

In an essay written more than ten years ago, Tanet Caroenmuang raised the issue of lack of public concern for the history, and historiography of Northern Thailand, the Chiang Mai kingdom or Lanna, as it is variously known. The following excerpt can stand as an epigraph and motive for my own essay.

The life and role of Cao Dara Rasmii, whom we may regard as a person of the greatest importance for the recent history of relations between Chiang Mai and Bangkok, is similar to that of Phaya Mangrai, who founded the Lanna state nearly 700 years ago, in that

¹ This paper is dedicated to the memory of Kuba Wajiraphanya who was the teacher of the late Pho Nan Nuan Mahawudh (of Ban Dorn Salii, Tambon Padeed, Amphur Mae Sruay, Chiang Rai; who was my own most important teacher of *Müang* knowledge and practices. Pho Nan Nuan, was *acan wat* at Wat Ban Pong and was, in turn, called *kuba acan* by many people. He was interested in comparative, speculative and critical thought. But he also made things happen, and helped people with their physical, spiritual and existential well-being. He was in addition a good farmer, particularly good with cattle, and an entrancingly beautiful dancer. In the *Müang* manner this dedication has also to be an apology: *kho suma karawa kuba acan toe*.



the people of Lanna—despite their living at a time of unprecedented volume and up-to-dateness of information—nonetheless know extremely little about these two persons. This is notwithstanding [the existence of] the monument [*anusornsathan*] to Phaya Mangrai. This is smaller than the forecourt of any filling station in Chiang Mai, and its whereabouts are known to hardly anybody. We do not have a memorial to Cao Dara Rasmii for the general public to pay their respects and learn some history.

Anyone who has been to the highest point in Thailand, to the summit of Mount Inthanon and site of the stupa containing the ashes (*sathup bancu athi*) of Cao Inthanon—which Cao Dara Rasmii [his daughter] played a leading part in setting up—will discover that this stupa has not been seriously looked after, much as Phaya Mangrai's memorial has been treated.

In educational institutions in Lanna there is no study of local histories so that people of the region might know the history of their forbears and their institutions, in order that they might be proud of the past as the origin of the present, and so help one another to care for, and preserve, their common heritage. (Tanet 1993: 194; present author's translation)

Regional and historical context

Phra Thongthip

The present district of Mae Sruay, Cangwat Chiang Rai, is part of the valley of the river Mae Lao which rises in the region of Doi Langka and Doi Maetho on the Mekong watershed where the borders of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lampang provinces meet, some 50 kilometres to the northeast of Chiang Mai city. The Mae Lao flows into the Mae Kok, which is a tributary of the Mekong River. Mae Sruay is approximately one-third of the way between Chiang Mai and Chiang Tung and was formerly on the route from Luang Prabang to Chiang Mai. It was also on one of the itineraries of Phra Naresuan, as is attested by the royal visit to Mae Sruay on 25 January 1969 to perform a *phithi buangsuan winyan* Phra Naresuan. This occurred just three weeks after my first arrival in the district.

Mae Sruay is a relatively small, quiet and naturally well-endowed place, which has been a refuge for many independent migrants, but has clearly been involved in many wars and invasions. There are ruins of several *wiang ho*, Chinese (Yunnanese) fortified hill towns. Villagers tell stories of being conscripted to defend against the Shan rebellions of the early twentieth century, and I have heard



first hand accounts of participation in the Thai army in support of the Japanese advance on Chiang Tung in the Second World War. During this war the villagers dug air raid shelters, and a Japanese pilot crash landed (and survived) in the wide and shallow Mae Lao not far from where I lived later.

The Phra Thongthip chronicle (*damnan*) tells the story of how the image of Phra Thongthip was brought from Luang Prabang about AD 1576 or so and installed on the west bank of the Mae Lao about two kilometres from Ban Pong, in present-day Mae Sruay. This was the place where a convoy of small boats coming from Luang Prabang up the Mekong, the Mae Kok and the Mae Lao, had become stuck and was unable to go any further. The boats were bringing the young Prince Chaicetana Rajakuman, son of the ruler of Luang Prabang and his queen, who was the daughter of the recently deceased king of Chiang Mai, to Chiang Mai to assume the throne. He had 'invited' Phra Thongthip to come with him, as Phra Thongthip was particularly sacred to him, having granted his parents' wishes for a child, himself, fifteen years earlier. The prince promised to return to pay his respects to Phra Thongthip whenever he took this route again. The *damnan* records other critical dates when Wat Phra Thongthip was rebuilt, in 1782, and 1854. According to the *damnan*, it was once again rebuilt in 1877 when:

Phra Rajaya Cao Dara Rasmii and Cao Kaeow Nawarat Cao Phu Khrong Nakorn Chiang Mai came to venerate Phra Thongthip. They stayed many nights in the forest. They saw that the *vihan* had fallen seriously into disrepair. So they asked (*naenamhai*) Khruba Chaiwudh Wajiraphanya, Wat Ban Pong, to rebuild it, and gave 200 rupees (*thaep*) to help in the construction. Khruba Chaiwudh Wajiraphanya accepted (*phrom duai*). The monks and the congregation (*khanna satha*) completed the *vihan* that year. (Sanguan 1965: 613)

This *damnan* version contains several obvious anachronisms. The settlements around present-day Ban Pong were known as Ban (or Müang) Nong Khwang until well into the twentieth century. Wat Ban Pong was formerly (and probably at that time) called Wat Salii Bunlyan, only fairly recently adopting the trend to name *wat* after the chief administrative village. It may well have other inaccuracies. Cao In Kaeo Nawarat was Cao Chiang Mai from 1911 until 1939, and was the last of his dynasty, a cousin (*luukphunong*) of Princess Dara Rasmii. Princess Dara was born in 1873, and her visit to Phra Thongthip was almost certainly some time after 1914, when she returned at the age of 41 to Chiang Mai from Bangkok. She had been at court in Bangkok since she was about 13 years old.



In 1914 Kuba Wajiraphanya might have been about 60 years old. At least one old lady I spoke to in 1969 remembered clearly having seen Princess Dara when she visited Phra Thongthip. It is probable that villagers presented the princess with gifts, including their fine woven cotton cloth, as they did on the occasions of royal visits to the district in 1957 and 1969 (which latter occasion I witnessed).

Müang Nong Khwang

Ban or Müang Nong Khwang features in the journal of possibly the first *farang* visitor, Captain W.C. McLeod, on a mission in 1837 from Moulmein in British Tenasserim to Chiang Mai, Chiang Tung, Chiang Rung (and beyond if he had been allowed) (see Turton and Grabowsky 2003). He departed from Chiang Mai with elephants, oxen and horses on 29 January 1837 and reached ‘the village of Nónquan’ in six nights and seven days (exactly the time I was told by a retired trader that it used to take his caravan of oxen). His descriptions of what are present-day Wiangpapao and Mae Sruay districts, especially economic specialisations, coincide with much of what I encountered some 130 years later. An exception was the high proportion of distinctly Lawa villages on the earlier occasion (a population he estimated at 4,000 locally in 10–12 villages), many of whom McLeod reports as ‘becoming Buddhist’.

Of Nónquan itself McLeod writes:

(Nónquan) ... is inhabited by people belonging to [sc. owing *suay* tax to the respective princes of] Zimmé, Labong, and Lagong [Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Lampang], all eager to be in advance to participate in the profits from hunting elephants, the sale of the flesh of wild animals (with which the woods abound) and the clandestine trade with Kiang Tung, with which place there is constant communication.

My ethnographic field notes have many references to the former ownership of elephants in the area and the particular skill of the Ban Pong people in catching wild elephants, some of whose equipment I inspected. Ban Pong in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth was largely—perhaps at times exclusively—a (*ngieo*) *khoen* population, similar in culture to the people of Chiang Tung, where they are also referred to as (a type of) Shan. Even today outsiders refer to people of Ban Pong as *ngieo*, although not many people even speak that language. Most villagers during my visits would call themselves (*khon*) *müang* or *khon müang* and *ngieo*



(*khoen*), others as *ngieo dtae dtae* ('true' *ngieo*). Local people say that 'people from Chiang Mai' came to live in the already settled area in the mid-nineteenth century or so, and there are longstanding kinship links with villages in Doi Saket. But we must recall that these too might have also been *khoen* settlements, given the frequent forced movement of people from Chiang Tung into the Chiang Mai kingdom after 1774. Following the 1803-4 Siamese invasion of Chiang Tung, some 100,000 people are said to have been moved from the Chiang Tung state to northern Thai or Siamese territories. The 'clandestine trade', as McLeod calls it, refers to avoidance of trade tax or monopoly prohibition. The trade between Müang Nong Khwang and Müang Chiang Tung, especially in betel nut, apparently, would have reinforced and been facilitated by other *khoen* associations of language, kinship and so on (for *khoen* solidarities see Tanabe 1984). At the same time, people would have accompanied the annual journeys to Chiang Mai and elsewhere, to take tax goods (*suay*, such as rice, dried and smoked game, ivory, honey, etc.). And there were links with various *wat* and teachers to the south. So the area was both well integrated into a wide economic and cultural region between Chiang Tung and Chiang Mai-Lamphun and at the same time relatively autonomous in the century up to the 1920s.

Kuba Wajiraphanya's adult life coincided almost exactly with a period in which the northern Thai region as a whole went through a cataclysmic process of events for the old 'Lanna Kingdom'. These all had their reverberations in the locality and some of their capillary effects may well lie behind some of the local events and attitudes I could ascertain during my fieldwork in the years 1969-70, 1976 and later. The following notes sketch some chronological reference points. The year 1874 saw the appointment of the first Siamese Commissioner in Chiang Mai, and in 1883 the British Consulate was established and exercised extraterritorial powers. The unsuccessful Phaya Phap rebellion, possibly supported by some of the Chiang Mai aristocracy and royalty and involving many people of *khoen* origins (Tanabe 1984), occurred in 1889-90. From 1894 to 1904 various treaties between Siam, Britain and France fixed the present international borders. Then 1902, also the year of an uprising in Phrae province, is recalled locally as the first establishment of a rudimentary system of village headmen, but it was not until 1917 that the first Siamese district officer was installed in the present location. From 1902 '... the local character of Lanna was progressively and comprehensively destroyed in every respect: political, administrative, economically, socially, and in terms of religion and culture' (Sopha 1991: 54-5, drawing on Somchot Hongsakun). The latest social uprising in this period, of the sort that the authorities reported as being led by a *phumibun* (spiritual leader) was in Chiang Kham, Cangwat Chiang Rai in 1907. It moved to several other districts, including Phayao (Sopha 1991).



Up to about 1942 most headmen were not literate in central Thai, and administrative documents were frequently bilingual, written in both *dtua müang* and Thai scripts. As far as I can tell, there was no village school until after the Kuba's death in 1928. Forms of communication were changing continuously in the region as a whole (telegraph Bangkok to Chiang Mai in 1888, telephone Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai 1905, railway Bangkok-Chiang Mai 1919). But at the time of my first visit in January 1969 there was no reliable all-year road from Mae Sruay to Chiang Rai. There was no hard surface road between Amphur Doi Saket in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai via Mae Sruay; and the track was impassable for most motor vehicles much of the time. Electricity was produced on a very few small portable generators – mainly used for important religious festivals (*poi luang*) – with the exception of the district office and police station, and immediately surrounding the market area. Villagers recount that as early as 1921 village labour was requisitioned to help build an airstrip in Chiang Rai, and in the same year the landing of a biplane in the district was the occasion of a six *satang* aeroplane tax!

Outlines of a biography of Kuba Wajiraphanya

dtio mo noeng khai pen hai kham

[the pot cloth becomes a golden rice steamer]

Kuba Wajiraphanya is referred to in the Thai language version of the *damnan* of Phra Thongthip as 'Khruba Chaiwudh Wajiraphanya'. In conversations I had he was usually referred to simply as *kuba* or *kuba acan*. If speakers gave him a personal name, it was with only one exception Kuba Wajiraphanya. I recorded only one use of the name Kuba Wudh Wajiraphanya. I know of no other personal or family name. It was only when I looked at a photograph of a drawing of him that I had not seen for many years, that I saw the caption 'Luang Pho Chaiwudh Wajiraphanya', the name, if not the title, given him in the *damnan*. I shall refer to him as Kuba Wajiraphanya, or 'the Kuba' for short.

The name Wajiraphanya has a powerful resonant for the later reputation of the Kuba. Wajrapāni is the name for the Bodhisattva who is often represented as a protective figure at the side of the Buddha in ancient iconography. He is also identified with Indra, king and god of the lowest of the heavens, who can be beseeched to intervene in human events. In iconography and literary reference he is known as 'the one who holds the thunderbolt'. Etymologically the name contains *wajra* (thunderbolt) and *pāni* (Skt. and Pali 'hand') (see Seckel 1964, and photograph p. 109)

Kuba Wajiraphanya was born about B.E. 2396 (1853), if we accept the oldest estimate of his age at death in 1928, namely 75. I think the year of his death



is, however, likely to be remembered quite precisely. This date of birth would then make him approximately 24 years old in B.E. 2420 (1877) which is the year the *damnan* of Phra Thongthip states he was commissioned to rebuild Wat Phra Thongthip. This may have been the date of a reconstruction, though, as we have seen, the visit by Princess Dara Rasmii was unlikely to have been until after 1914. It is quite likely that both 1877 and 1914 (or soon after) were dates of reconstruction by the Kuba. We might recall that Kuba Srivichai started his series of major works at the age of 26.

I heard that Kuba Wajiraphanya was born into a very poor family - *mee saat kap morn phai bo naphyy* (had only a mat and a pillow, no one respected them). He was born in Ban San(khilek), then a relatively new settlement in the cluster of settlements that was Ban Nong Khwang or Ban Pong. His father suffered from leprosy ('was a leper', *pen khitoot*) and took his own life by hanging himself from a tree at the edge of the Mae Ta Cang river on the path from the village to the *pa hieo* (cremation grove). Kuba Wajiraphanya *buat pha* (was ordained a novice) at the age of 15 in Wat Ban Pong. He would almost certainly have spent at least two years previously as a *khayom* (in central Thai *dekwat*, a non-ordained 'temple boy' or postulant) in the *wat*, and as such to have begun to learn to read and write *tua müang* before ordination.

When he was about 20 years old, the age when *pha* either *sik* (*laa sikkha*, leave the *wat*) or *pek dtu* (are ordained a *dtu* [*cao*]) a rich man named Phu Yee, from a village a few kilometres away (Huai Mo Tao), on the death of his father, and on the instructions of his father, looked for someone of the right age to *pek*, as a meritorious act. The young novice, later Kuba Wajiraphanya, was chosen and *pek* at the expense of this family at a *poi khao sang*. It was said that he rode (*aeo pha naag*, *aeo luk kaeow*) to Huai Mo Tao on an elephant. This may have been to visit his *pho ork* (sponsor) and other senior people and/or to have spent some time in another *wat*, but he is also said to have spent his entire ordained life in Wat Ban Pong. On one occasion when I was told some of these details, the speaker—a man who had never been ordained—used the quite common saying *dtio mo noeng khai pen hai kham* (the pot cloth becoming a golden rice steamer).

saksit dtae dtae

[really sacred and powerful]

It is not possible to say with any accuracy when Kuba Wajiraphanya became *dtu luang* (central Thai *cao awat*, or senior monk in the *wat*) or began to be referred to as *kuba*, *kuba acan*, etc. In some usages Kuba may be used to mean any most senior monk whatever their age or reputation (see McFarland 1944: 183, 478; Met 1965: 58; Udom 1990: 220, 672; Sun Watanatham 1996: 120, 408). It may in



a transitional period have been used to refer to a Cao Khana Amphur or a Cao Khana Tambon. But I think in the most ordinary, popular usage it does connote a degree of special respect. It can also be used of any especially respected lay teachers of local knowledge. The *damnan* and the people I heard no doubt used *k(h)rubā* anachronistically to refer to him in retrospect at any time of his life. The following paragraph [in which the square brackets contain my comment] is a near-verbatim transcript from my notes. The speaker is Ooi Nan Pan, aged 78, Ban Nong Yen, Tambol Padeed, Amphur Mae Sruay [26 Mar 70]. Ooi Pan was born in Ban Nong Yen. His father came from Lamphun. He is an artist and craftsman; I regard him as an intelligent man with a seemingly good memory. He was ordained (*pek dtu*) in Wat Padeed in about 1912 and was a *luuksit* (pupil) of Kuba Wajiraphanya, which suggests that the Kuba taught more widely than just in one *wat*. Ooi Nan Pan would have known the Kuba as an adult for about sixteen years.

Kuba Wajiraphanya was a *luuksit* of Kuba Sooriya. [Note the need to establish this pedagogical and perhaps ordination genealogy.] Kuba Sooriya came from Wat Srikert, Chiang Mai. [So we can assume that he came as a monk. If so, then in retrospect he came perhaps with a mission to (re-)found and revitalise, rather like the mission of Kuba Srivichai.] At that time Wat Mae Phrik and Wat Mae Sruay Luang probably existed already. He spent three *wassa* in Wat Ban Sop (now deserted); three *wassa* in [Wat] Phakhwao (now no more). Then he founded [my notes have the English word but I think the Thai word *sang* was used] Wat Padeed, then Wat Ban Pong, and then Wat Srithoi. [It is not clear whether these were regarded by the speaker as reconstructions or new foundations. Almost certainly the former in the case of Wat Ban Pong, whose *thammat* (pulpit, see Plate 3), for instance, was said to long pre-date the Kuba]. After Kuba Sooriya [at Wat Padeed?], followed by two Kuba before Kuba Wajiraphanya: Kuba Tha (at Wat Thakencan) and after him Kuba Phom (at Wat Mae Sruay Luang).

Since Kuba Sooriya was titled *phrarajakhrū* (and a senior one at that, specifically I heard *Phra Rajakhru Kào*) he may have been a ‘missionary’ for the *müang sangha*, a ‘wandering’ (*carik*) or forest monk (*pha tudong*) looking to settle, or the advance guard of the centralisation movement in the Thai Sangha. This latter began formally with the Sangha Administration Act of 1902. Sopha says that as early as 1896 the northern *sangha* began to be drawn into the centralised bureaucracy. Kuba Srivichai resisted this to the end, with major episodes of confrontation in 1908–10, 1911–21, and 1935–36 (Sopha 1991). He was charged most specifi-



cally with conducting ordination without permission and carrying out construction projects all over the north without reference to the formal, externally imposed local *sangha* hierarchy. There were other specific charges, such as not attending meetings or refusing to conduct a household survey, not to mention creating a personal following and constituting a charismatic popular focus of power outside the system preferred by the increasingly absolutist Siamese state. Official reports expressed concern that such religious leaders may be *phumibun* (Sopha 1991; see also Chatthip 1984) which, it occurs to me anachronistically, is not unlike the official fear and excommunication of anyone branded as *communit* and *phukokanrai* in the 1960s and 1970s (Turton 1984).

From the accounts I heard, Kuba Wajiraphanya was regarded as having been a staunch adherent of the *müang sangha* and its liturgy. Those of his pupils whom I met showed an enthusiastic preference for the *müang* liturgy. During fieldwork in 1969–70 and in 1976 when the reputations of senior monks were discussed—in itself a frequent and much enjoyed topic it seemed to me—one of the key markers was whether the monks in question *thoe thai* or *thoe müang* (i.e. followed, or respected, the Thai or the *müang* liturgy). In Wat Ban Pong, Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh made sure that the longer, vernacular and altogether more *muan* (enjoyable) and therefore popular *müang* texts were used, the *khampi bailan* in *dtua müang*. I was surprised, therefore, when on looking at the photograph of the drawing of the Kuba many years later (on 25 May 1999) I saw not only the appellation *Luang Pho* (which I had never heard used of him) but also *adit cao khana amphur Mae Sruay* (former head of the district *sangha*), which is to say, presumably, an appointee under the 1902 Sangha Administration Act. This seems to reflect the specific meaning given to ‘Kuba’ by Ooi Nan Pan when he said that there were two *kuba* (two holders of that office) between Kuba Sooriya and Kuba Wajiraphanya. I can only interpret this as yet another example of the endless ‘cross hatching’ of Thai cultural discourses that I emphasised in my introduction to the papers on ‘Thai constructions of knowledge’ (Turton 1991). That is to say, that the Kuba was both an official appointee of the new Siamese order, and at the same time a resister of that order.

When Kuba Wajiraphanya died he received a funeral peculiar to senior monks in the north. His funeral bier was ‘fired at’ along paths and across the dry rice fields at a range of about 50 metres with rockets (*bork fai*) tied to a two wheeled vehicle (the whole thing being referred to as *chaluad*). The rockets were decorated with the animals of the twelve year cycle, some cut-outs (paper or cloth) in the shape of people ‘and images of cats and dogs because he liked them’. The rockets never hit the bier, which is assumed to be a sign of power and invulnerability. Two vultures (*iiheng*) were seen to descend into the smoke of the funeral pyre, taken as an omen that had ‘never been seen before’. He was—at least in retrospect—*saksit*



tae tae (most sacred, truly powerful). He was said to have known and visited Kuba Srivichai (*nak bun haeng lannathai* was the phrase I heard, the rather Thai-sounding title on his memorial, rather than *ton bun*). Kuba Wajiraphanya was, in the words of one person—no doubt evincing a very local loyalty—one of ‘the two most *saksit* men in the North’. Several villagers had visited Kuba Srivichai’s memorial in Chiang Mai, though in 1969 the majority had never travelled to Chiang Mai and quite a few had never left the district.

waa hyy dtai dtai lyi

[if he wished their death, they would die]

Kuba Wajiraphanya was a monk who tried to adhere to the *vinaya*. He was a skilled and knowledgeable man, well versed in the arts and practices of building construction, livestock management, agriculture, and community leadership. In local terms he was a *kuba acan*, a teacher of all sorts of knowledge and proven practices (medical—*yaa müang*—control of spirits and a range of other ‘ritual’ practices, knowledge of ‘magic’ for invulnerability, etc.) He was said to be *kham* (‘invulnerable’; see Turton 1991b); he was feared and respected (even *caonai kua*, the officials feared him, regarded him with awe); he was rather ‘fierce’ (*suak pong*) and sharp tongued (*paak cep*). The remarkable drawing, Plate 1, in pencil and charcoal of the Kuba, which I have no means of dating, is worthy of more careful analysis than I can offer. It suggests a strong and possibly ‘fierce’ personality, an intense, perhaps charismatic personality, and if not an ascetic, then at least not a self-indulgent person. Apart from likeness and personality, the draughtsman is clearly concerned to represent the cultural markers of *müang* robes and the *banap* around the neck.

The Kuba is remembered as raising horses and liking cats and dogs. He displayed certain signs of special powers or abilities. He would return from a long walk in wet conditions with clean feet while his companions were all muddy; ‘he walked a little bit above the ground’. Photographs of him never came out (‘he could not be photographed’). He could produce or prevent rainfall over Ban Pong, when it fell or did not fall elsewhere in the valley [I noted that patchy and variable rainfall of this sort was an observable phenomenon during my stay]. He (re-)built at least one *wat* (Phra Thongthip) and probably others (including Wat Ban Pong).

Above all, he was a strong and protective person, whose powers derived from his religious knowledge or at least the knowledge he learnt from the *tham* (*bai laan* scriptures) and *damraa* (mulberry paper textbooks on a great variety of more and less ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ subjects, mostly copied and stored in the *wat*). Some of these he undoubtedly found in the *wat* when he was ordained; others he probably collected and copied from visitors and other *wat* and knowledgeable



persons in the locality and beyond, perhaps in Chiang Mai. It is certain that some of the manuscript texts I saw, copied, had transcribed, and discussed with Pho Nan Nuan Mahawudh, were collected and written by the Kuba.

This knowledge, combined with experience and practice, made him a leader. The following two episodes at least suggest this. Whether they are two emblematic events, two among many such events, or just the only ones that occurred or were remembered, I cannot tell. They may have acquired an iconic status since I heard these on a number of occasions.

Kuba Wajiraphanya was remembered as having made an inventory of the Buddha images in several local *wat*, perhaps as part of his duties as Cao Khana Amphur and to forestall the ‘requisitioning’ of any of them by outsiders. As we know from the Phra Thongthip story and elsewhere, particular Buddha images were regarded as the epitome and palladia of kingdoms, and they were no less so those of smaller localities. The following story was told as it emerged from a more general talk about forms of ‘magic’, especially *kham* magic. The speaker had been talking about how he learnt *kham* (*hien kham*) and other *katha*, which can provide extraordinary protection and at the same time be dangerous to the owner. The conversation continued:

One day a Chinese person came to purloin or obtain Buddha images for the *cao nai*. The Kuba would not give them up. The person attempted to fire a gun in the *vihan*, at the Kuba, but his gun failed to fire [*ying bo ork*, which is the commonest example given of the *kham* power of the person fired at]. Villagers assembled with guns and swords, but Kuba Wajiraphanya said *yaa yaa* (don’t [do it]) let him go, don’t kill him, *tham bo dii dtay bo dii* (do ill die badly) [i.e. he will get his just reward as a result of the workings of karma—an utterance which seems to me to be somewhere between a warning and a curse].

There was another version of this, or possibly it was a later, similar event, since it was told to me by a man who would have been a very young child at the time of the previous event. It is both shorter and more detailed in some respects:

The *cao nai* and Kuba Srithoi [this possibly suggests Kuba Wajiraphanya was not present, i.e. it was after his death] wanted to get them [some Buddha images]; drum(s) were beaten; a meeting was held; ‘we were ready to fight; if they had entered [the *vihan*] we would have fought them off’.



One other story seems to epitomise people's respect for Kuba Wajiraphanya's powers. Khween Coom, a state-appointed headman living in Ban Klang (one of the settlements of 'greater' Ban Pong), had ordered the cutting of a branch of the ancient *dton salii* (Bodhi tree, *ficus religiosus*) which is just outside the *wat*. This was to allow the more convenient passage of a *rajathut* (literally, an ambassador, conceivably a *farang*, more likely I think to be a senior royal emissary, just possibly even the occasion of Princess Dara's visit, though I think that would have been told me). Making easy the path and caring for the well-being of senior travellers was of course a major obligation of local officials. This was the time when Chiang Mai's autonomy was being steadily eroded by 'the Thai', as villagers still called the 'Siamese'. Kuba Wajiraphanya was not consulted and he disapproved of the action. One can only speculate that his wrath combined a sense that this was metaphysically a bad thing to do (possibly *khoet*, loosely 'taboo'), and likely to lead to worse consequences, together with his being offended at not having his authority recognised by the Khween. He may well have had in mind the story of how the cutting of the tutelary tree of Chiang Mai (a banyan tree in this case) led to the fall of the kingdom to the Burmese in the sixteenth century (see Tanabe 1999). The Kuba cursed (*daa, caeng*) Khween Coom, who, although he was a rich man at the time, later died in poverty (without a grain of rice, *bo mii khao sak met*). This assumed power was generalised in other conversations. If he cursed someone they would die or become poor (*waa hyy dtai dtai loei*).

Kuba Wajiraphanya exercised a kind of sovereignty, even if this was localised and perhaps contested (by Khween Coom at least, and by the Sangha Act). People would come from all over the district to pay their respects (*dam hua*), 'even the *caonai*'. This would have most likely been in the context of the annual ceremony to venerate Phra Thongthip in the eighth month or at New Year, or both. He travelled all over the district on the horses which he is said to have raised. Both these examples of the exercise of his powers of life and death seem to be of leadership exercised in defence of religious values, and even their defence as against specific secular and state powers.

Religious leadership and local autonomy

In my assessment, this small valley *müang* had a great capacity for an autonomous existence within a wide social, cultural and economic region. For much of its existence over the past 100 years or so, maybe much longer, it had been remarkably autonomous. This was probably enhanced by the fact that the end of the old overarching political order, the Lanna kingdom, seems to have occurred before there was a strong implantation of the new order, whether in political-administrative, economic, or cultural and educational terms. The period of the



Second World War, which reinforced a return to economic and technological autarky in some respects, was no doubt another brake on the Bangkok government's modernisation project in the locality. In this kind of situation local figures, basing their authority on cultural and religious knowledge, could emerge as leaders. It seems that this is a very ancient potentiality in Tai cultures, as the eminent historian Charnvit Kasetsiri makes clear:

It seems that in the early stages of Thai history it was religious men, either monks or laymen, or people who led a different way of life from ordinary laymen, who were the most important leaders of the society. Besides monks, other types of religious men were known, such as *risi chipakhao* or *chippakhao*, and *khru-ba-acan*. The *khru-ba-acan* was simply a teacher to a large number of people. This kind of teacher had gone through a form of religious education; he might at one time have become a monk or have had an intense educational life with monks. These three types of religious men were the most active leaders of the old society. They had the advantage of high education and yet they were free from the strict regulation of Buddhism since they no longer remained within the Sangha. (Charnvit Kasetsiri 1976: 5; see also Swearer 1976)

..... power in pre-Ayudhaya times was relatively accessible to any potential leaders, ... there was no close circle of families dominating political development in the area. Claims to kingship derived from the successful assertion or demonstration of power, whether by religious leaders such as *rusi*, *khru-ba-acan*, or laymen, such as *setthi*, *khahabodi*, and *phumibun*. In short, sources of leadership were varied and political power was quite open to different contenders. (Charnvit 1976: 107–8)

Shalardchai Ramitanondh and John Ferguson, who conducted research on 'monks and hierarchy' in Amphur Müang Chiang Mai in the early 1970s, found a situation not too dissimilar in many respects from the one I am describing. In their interpretation:

Left to itself [i.e. without state interference] the Sangha, following its ancient guidelines and laws in the Vinaya, builds its minimal sociological structures on the basis of seniority, honor due to teachers and ordinator [upphachaya], and charismatic qualities of particular monks who attract followers...



The nature of the abbot's role has undoubtedly changed over the last three-quarters of a century in this area of Thailand. A number of senior monks, particularly those with over 40 years (*phansa*) of experience, referred to the days when the abbot's word was the law from which there was no appeal and with which there was no interference. We were told that, justly or unjustly, the abbot handed out his decisions, but now his traditional power has been slowly but surely modified...

Certainly each abbot no longer reigns like an absolute ruler in the old style, but he retains the powerful support of his laity. (Ferguson and Shalardchai 1976: 107–8, 121, 140)

Kuba Wajiraphanya remembered and venerated

kuba uu wai waa

[the Kuba said ...]

We have already begun to see some clues as to how Kuba Wajiraphanya is remembered—at least in the ethnographic present of 1969–1976. Fragmentary though they are, when assembled they constitute a fuller biography than most younger people would have had at the time of fieldwork. I had many opportunities to appreciate the pervasive sense of awe and awareness of his power and importance. People used his name or just referred to 'Kuba' when they referred to particular attributes and powers. I never heard any mention of *ton bun*, *phu wiset*, or *phu mi bun*. The commonest reference was the phrase '*Kuba waa ...*' or '*Kuba uu wai waa ...*' (the Kuba said...) at the beginning of many a statement about why or how something was done or should be done, or was or should be believed. The listing of his skills and attributes resembles quite closely that of Kuba Srivichai. The latter is reported as having skilled knowledge in the fields of medicine, building, astrology, defensive and other magic (*saiyasat*, *wetmon katha akom*), boxing, and weaponry. In any case mention of these things may be the result of the construction of oral biography with more or less conscious reference to textual, formulaic lists of marks of distinction. Kuba Srivichai seems to have deliberately cultivated them in order to be seen as *ton bun* (Sopha 1991). Some of them are specifically mentioned in references to Kuba Wajiraphanya, and others feature prominently in his textbooks and the practices of his pupils.

I have formed the impression that Kuba Wajiraphanya probably did not have a reputation for abstemiousness, at least to the degree of Kuba Srivichai, who is said to have eaten only one meal a day, no raw meat or fish, no animals 'that have



souls' (*winyan*) and very little in the way of condiments (Sopha 1991). But then it was specifically pointed out to me that Kuba Wajiraphanya ate only two meals a day, except 'once or twice a year', whereas, to say the least, it was not at all uncommon to hear that *pha* and *dtu* normally ate an evening meal.

I heard nothing about his practice of meditation (*phawana*). Kuba Srivichai practised concentration meditation (*phatibat dan smathitham*). But some such meditation is a part of advanced *kham* knowledge and practices, which we know he used. And he was strict in insisting on the *müang* practice of requiring *pha mai* (newly ordained novices) to *yuu kam* for three days following their ordination, when they are not allowed to move more than 2.5 metres forward or 1 metre to the side, and had to recite 'long phrases' (*kham yao*) while moving the beads of their *banap* or *maknap*—a string of 108 'beads' made from the wood of a *kao salii* (or clay and a mixture of the wood). The beads represent: 56 for Phracao, 38 for Phratham, and 14 for Phrasong (see Plate 1, in which Kuba Wajiraphanya is wearing one, and Plate 4 of a *dtu cao* meditating (*phawana*) with *banap* inside the *bot*, or ordination hall).

On ordinary days, so to speak, the Kuba must have performed functions rather like those of a primary and secondary school headmaster, in addition to everything else. This observation is prompted by a rather charming anecdote by Acan Nan Nuan, who was a *pha noi* about fourteen years old when the Kuba died. This version is slightly composed, given the number of diversions and interspersed comments in the original.

When I was a *pha noi*, there was no school and the wat usually had 30–40 *pha* and 7 or 8 *dtu*. The congregation (*sathaa*, 'the faithful'), which was only about 100 plus households, *liang bo pae* (could hardly feed us all). The novices used to hunt [probably with cross-bows and arrows or *thano*, bows using stone shot] very close to the village: big birds in the rice fields opposite the *wat* and monkeys in the trees around the villages and in the gardens of the villagers' houses. Kuba cursed us (*daa*) when we went too far or went home too frequently (*aeo nak lumpai*). Once I shot and wounded a bird and put it in a cage in the field so that Kuba would not see it. Of course he did. I said I was trying to heal it. So Kuba helped me heal it and it recovered. When Kuba said let it out and release the bird (*poi man*) I did ... and the novices ate it.

*cedi kuba and kao salii*

Acan Nan Nuan led the congregation of Wat Ban Pong in regular acts of paying respects and asking for forgiveness at the *cedi kuba*, a brick and cement structure built to the northeast of the *wat*, the *bot*, and the *dton salii*, which is the most auspicious and powerful direction or location in *müang* geomancy. The *cedi* in 1969 had a *dton salii* growing out of it. Some villagers seem to think that these trees are not deliberately planted but are naturally seeded or *ork eng*. Ooi Nan Pan told me a story about the old *dton salii*:

Ya Khamun [Ya = mother's older sister and father's older sister] died when still a *sao num* (unmarried teenager). She was buried in the *pa hieo*. A *kao salii* grew out of her chest. [On another occasion the speaker assumed it had grown out of her skull.] It was replanted in the present site. When the branches of this young tree and those of the venerable old *kao salii* one day grow to intertwine [which they were not far from doing], the monks in Wat Ban Pong will *ao phong, len sao* (will have a go, flirt with the girls).

On hearing this story my companion said humorously 'Oh, it's a *sao*, that's why people say that if you pass the tree three times you'll want to stay' (a story told me often to explain why I chose to stay in that village—I could see the tree from my rented house). Another person, Mae Ooi Cy (Grandmother Cy), said the tree grew out of Ya Phom, a *sao thao* (old maid) who used to send food to the *wat* every day and so was buried near the *wat*. It is possible that the old tree was planted (if it was) and grew to maturity before the first *wat* was built on this site, because there are other *wat* sites in the vicinity (at or below ground level, indicating the antiquity of the overall site), in which case the *wat* was sited in relation to the tree rather than vice-versa. The Kuba's tree was apparently male in that it had been *buat*, that is to say ordained by being the subject of an ordination ceremony in which the monk's yellow robes had been tied round the trunk. Recall that the Kuba's bones—or ashes—were said to be in the *cedi* and the link made with *dton salii* growing out of human remains. Recall too that some of the Kuba's pupils who had learned from him various forms of special knowledge—still circulating—for personal attractiveness and immunity (e.g. *mahaniyom* and *kham*) had reputations for being or having been generally bold, strong, talented, attractive young men. But at this remove what now interests me is the predominantly female gendering of the old tree and the re-telling of this in different ways (e.g. whether it grew out of a *sao num* or *sao thao*) by both men and women. One hardly needs the benefits of a now largely discounted structuralist approach to note that the tree was treated as the



male ‘offspring’ of an unmarried local woman, as the ‘mother’ who in death offered her ‘son’ for ordination. A further gendered connotation is in the practice, said to be rare, of a young man writing a girl’s name on a *bo* tree leaf and putting it into a *yan* to make that girl fall in love with the owner of the *yan*. The young man who told me this said he disapproved.

Recall again the story of the Kuba’s curse on the Khween who cut the tree—I heard from a non-ordained man and women that if anyone cut the tree they would become *phikan* (disfigured, blinded, crippled, etc.). This was followed in conversation, I noted, by the often repeated remark (a kind of ‘Homeric epithet’) that the Kuba was *saksit dtae dtae* (really, really sacred/powerful). Almost inevitably, I also heard tell that some people thought the tree had been planted by the Kuba himself, though others thought it was much too old for that to be the case. In any case, by its location and multiple uses and meanings—which we have far from exhausted here—this particular tree is deeply implicated in processes of remembering the Kuba, as is this species of tree generally in remembering the Buddha and his teachings.

The ceremony at the Kuba’s *cedi* is a relatively simple matter. On about five occasions each year, offerings (*khao tork dorkmai*) are brought to the *wat* by nearly every household. They are placed in ‘offering trays’, *khan dork*, either at the ‘altar’ or, if it is an especially big event (such as New Year or *khao wassa*), in one of the ‘cloisters’ or on the ground outside the *vihan*. They are put in trays, one for Buddha, one for Dharma, one for Sangha, one each for the *acan wat* and his assistant, and one for *kuba acan*. They are all placed by the altar in the morning ceremony; after the *wentan* they are offered by hand to each recipient who touches it in receipt (*pha song* and *acan*), or it is placed in contact with the recipient (*pha cao*, *pha tham*). When the Triple Gems and the *acan* have been thus venerated, perhaps more usually at a second part of the ceremony in the afternoon, the latter leads the congregation (*khana satha*) and the monks and novices (*khana song*) out of the *vihan* to the *cedi kuba*. I attended three such events. The first occasion was at New Year on 14 and 15 April 1969, when I had been living in the village, without interruption, for about three months. I noticed and noted that the preparations (on 14 April *wan nao*, the day of putrefaction) of bringing sand from the riverbed of the Mae Ta Chang for the making of elaborate *cedi sai* (see further discussion of this ceremony below) in the *wat* compound on 15 April (*wan phayawan*, the prince of days). I noticed that sand had also been scattered tidily around the boundaries of other locations: the *vihan*, the *bot*, the *dton salii*, the *cedi kuba*, and the *ho cao luang khamdaeng* and other tutelary spirits (see Turton 1972). I further noted that after the ceremony in the *vihan*, ‘Some people go home but most stay to *karawa* (pay respects to) ‘Phrakhru Wajiraphanya’. All monks and novices chant and one group of older men place offerings at the foot of the *cedi*. Ceremony over in five minutes.’



On the second occasion (*khao wassa* 1969) the offerings to the Kuba were first made in the *vihan* in the morning (*uthit pai hai kuba acan*) in the *wat*. In the afternoon, led by Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh, a few men and women and monks and novices took out the *khandork* (also in this instance referred to as a *khan suma*) for the Kuba. My notes then say that the *dtu luang* ('abbot') 'sacrifices to the kuba' by which I meant placed the *khandork* against, in touch with the *cedi* with a chanted offertory address. This is to *karawa*, or *suma karawa kuba acan*. Candles are stuck (with their own molten wax) onto the *cedi* and flowers rested up against the *cedi*. I noted that the *khandork* contains (in addition to the 'minimal' flowers, candles and 'popped rice', *khao tork* or *khao taek*) small amounts of money and food offerings.

My third entry is for *ork wassa* 1969. The afternoon ceremony in the *vihan* started at about 2.00 pm. 'At 3.00 pm the *acan wat* (Acan Nan Nuan) and most women and very few men go out to *kho suma kuba* at the *cedi kuba* and ask for blessing. I am sitting next to Phi Nan Pan (Ban Klang) throughout. He says *kho suma* is for any offence caused the Kuba since his death, such as walking too close to his tomb.'

I used 'tomb' and 'shrine' in my notes, as well as *cedi kuba*, which is the word I heard. The *cedi* was said to contain the ashes of the Kuba, presumably recovered after cremation using firewood. Neither bones nor ashes are normally the subject of any post-funerary attention.

Wat Phra Thongthip

Another very material set of practices that specifically invoke the Kuba are those connected with Phra Thongthip, and Wat Phra Thongthip. The story of Phra Thongthip or parts of it, seem to be quite widely known. A copy of the printed version of the *damnan* Phra Thongthip in the edition edited by Sanguan Chothisukarat cited here was kept in the library of Wat Hua Fai, Ban Hua Fai, sometimes called Ban Neua (the village at the head of the irrigation weir, or north village in relation to Ban Pong). On my first visit to the present *wat*, accompanied by a young former novice, I was told it was *wat kao wat derm* (an ancient *wat*) founded by *khon lao* [Lao people from Luang Prabang] who came by boat and brought the image with them, and that it was formerly a *wat pa* and had burned down some 20 years earlier. I have recorded a number of dates when it had burned down, no doubt due to forest fires. It had been partly rebuilt, and all the trees around it cut down. A possible combination of both meteorological conditions and religious associations is suggested by the comment that on the very same day that Wat Thongthip burnt down in B.E. 2481 (1938), a fire occurred on Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai. Only after writing this, at the moment of converting the BE to an AD date did I realise that this was the year of the death of Kuba Srivichai. Perhaps this was taken as an omen.



When the Kuba was alive people from all over the district would come for the major festival at Phra Thongthip, *phrapheni doen 8 peeng*. A mark of the size and heterogeneous congregation on this occasion was that there was regularly some fighting or fisticuffs between young men at the event. Thongthip was the name given also to a new village settlement set up in 1962 when it had some 30 (later the headman told me 46) households that were formerly part of Ban Pawai. The *wat* had a rather old and attractively plastered wall round a very large space. The *vihan* was incomplete and had a partly grass roof. The congregation of Wat Ban Pong had contributed an altar which had the village name and a date on it. At the time of fieldwork it had over 70 households. Three years earlier the congregation of Wat Ban Pong had decided to (re-)construct the *vihan*. A prominent Ban Pong man and builder (a highly intelligent former *dtu luang* whose lifestyle had somewhat spoiled his reputation) had the building contract. On 8 December 1969 he organised a *thot pha pa* visit to Wat Phra Thongthip. The day before he had used the *wat* loudspeaker to encourage donations (I have a fairly detailed record of his skilful rhetoric). About 150 people were announced as having contributed sums from 25 *satang* to 20 *baht*, including one visiting Lahu man. The participation of hill villagers of other ethnicities recalls the good relations Kuba Srivichai had with them.

On the day itself about 70 people made the journey, setting out at 5.30 pm and returning home by about 9.30 pm. The journey on foot took little more than half an hour each way and several ‘grandmothers and grandfathers’ were among the group, which included about 14 monks and novices from Ban Pong and one from Hua Fai, together with the *acan wat* Hua Fai, Pho Nan Phanya, another pupil of the Kuba. The loudspeaker was put on an ox cart. There were six musicians (woodwind, string, and percussion), another processional (*hae*) group with drums, gongs and cymbals, and four young girls were dancing, wearing their best clothes and heavy make-up. There was dancing and singing all the way, mainly in single file. A few young men rode motorbikes, but not many people owned these at that time; the bicycle was still the key to courtship! Many of the men were pretty tipsy when we left; drinking continued on the way and even inside the *vihan* after arrival. The *acan wat* and host headman partook of alcohol and ‘apologised’ for it too.

The headman had been a novice at Wat Ban Pong. The two *wat* are *wat phi wat nong* (brother/sister *wat*). The headman of Ban Pong apologised—as all good hosts must—for a *thot pha pa* offering that was not small but not big either; Ban Pong had made seven *thot pha pa* this year (and none were made to Ban Pong). The host headman apologised for the food offered to the visitors. The ceremony of offering was conducted by the *acan* of Wat Hua Fai. My notebook records that he chatted about Kuba Wajiraphanya and bits of history (e.g. ‘the days when there was only one oxcart in the area’, and so on) in between *tawai tan* and the blessing



by the monks and the final dedication to the dead. Interestingly, the *acan wat* Ban Pong did not attend. Both these men and others I knew were said to *khoen kuba acan* (to be his dependents and supporters) and *yang mii amnat yuu* (were still powerful men). It is normally the case that two senior and powerful experts do not both attend, and certainly not officiate at the same function. Only one can officiate; there is a professional etiquette and sensitivity, not to mention personal rivalry, involved in such matters.

On the last occasion when Wat Phra Thongthip burnt down, the image was partly molten and taken for storage in Wat Comcaeng Mae Sruay (the location which is mentioned in the printed *damnan*). Villagers expect that one day the image will be returned to Wat Phra Thongthip, though they express some anxiety and doubt about this. In June 1970 the Cao Khana Amphur called a meeting in Wat Comcaeng, which was attended by *acan wat* Ban Pong (Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh). The Cao Khana asked everyone if the image of Phra Thongthip was the genuine one; all present agreed. *Acan* Nan Nuan specifically agreed and used the opportunity to ask about another image kept by the Cao Khana, which he claims belongs to Ban Pong; everyone concurred with this too. This seems in retrospect to be a good example of official accountability—unless there is more to it than meets the eye.

Localising history, historicising locality

The previous sections have made much use of the methods of narrative and biography. Here I wish to offer reflections on some of the rich, multi-layered words and concepts in the Buddhist and Müang culture that have been introduced. There are two overarching images: the Kuba as a remembered person, and the Cedi Kuba, a physical memorial to that person. These are linked, and indeed embodied in various practices and discourse. If one were to offer a single overarching concept, it would be that of memory, or the less historical ‘mindfulness’. But that will not suffice on its own, and the following is an attempt to amplify and deconstruct the notion in the particular historical practices that are the subject of the essay.

The simple Thai word most readily used to gloss the English word ‘remember’ is *cam*. One of the most culturally and historically sensitive Thai-English dictionaries, McFarland (1944), also gives many combinations, such as *cam sin*, *cam wassa*, etc., where the sense is recollecting, ‘keeping’, observing (a practice, rules, teaching), obligation and so on. This has links with an important cultural cluster of terms for various degrees and practices of ‘respect’. There is a kind of crescendo of strength of meaning, for example: *naphoe*, *khaorop*, *sakkara*, *bucha*. Some terms are used in doublets: *karawa dam hua*, *sakkara bucha*. The field covers such English notions (again in a rough order of strength) as: courtesy,



esteem, respect, honour, reverence, veneration, worship. Of course, history and local cultures play havoc with any structured model ideas. For example, the *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, includes under *sakkara* such nice glosses as: hospitality, attention, and appreciative action.

Various modes and degrees of respect have their own specific forms and practices such as *wai khru*, *dam hua*, *khan bucha*, *bucha thien*, *ruup khaorop*, *phithi thaanhua* and so on. The notion of apology as a part of respect is quite emphatic: the *khan bucha* or *khan dork* can be also called *khan suma*. The notion of discipleship or allegiance is present, especially with the word *khoen*, as in: *khoen khru*, *khoen thao thang sii*, *khoen kuba*, *khoen cao Chiang Mai* and so on.

Buddhist teaching reminds us of the impermanence of phenomena. This sharpens the question as to what does, or is considered to, 'remain' after individual life and collective action have passed by in time, and what our attitudes might be to such relics or survivals. In a simple sense, what remains is what endures physically or in memory (in a very wide understanding of the term). Remembering previous existences is a discipline practised by some Buddhist adepts. Remembering—and taking refuge in—Buddhist teachings is at the heart of regular and popular Buddhist practice. This is remembering with respect. There is also a remembering of things that are not in themselves worthy of respect. This might be seen nonetheless as a respectful remembering of the 'lessons of history', edifying tales of the unedifying. This is one of the points insightfully discussed by Nidhi in his article on secular and religious imagery, monuments and memorials, where he alludes to the way in which say Nazi war crimes are memorialised (Nidhi 1995 especially pp. 89–124 *songkhram anusawari kap rat thai*; see also Evans 1998)

cetiya

This brings us to the practice of making three dimensional memorials such as tombs, statues, buildings and so on, or designating as sacred certain natural objects, such as trees, rocks, and mountains.

The Mahachulalongkorn University *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Phrarajaworamuni 1985) gives as a first set of meanings for the term *cedi* (*cetiya*): 'person, place or object worthy of worship; reminder', and only as a secondary set the specific memorialising objects themselves: 'a sepulchral monument; pagoda; shrine; dagoba; stupa; Phra Cedi'.

So perhaps the most basic, and historically earliest, sense of *cedi* is that of a funeral mound covering the ashes of a dead person worthy of veneration. The notion precedes Buddhism, but it is in Buddhist practices that it assumes its greatest importance. The most sacred sites are those held to contain relics of the Buddha (*Phra That*). *Cedi* may also hold the remains of any distinguished religious persons, or copies of Buddhist teachings. Buddhist buildings (e.g. the *vihara*), images



of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and sacred trees may all be analogous to or have resonances with the *cedi* (see McFarland 1944; Anuman 1952; Seckel 1964, Sommai et al. 1981). The most lofty definition is given by Seckel (1964: 126), the *cedi* is 'the body, the very essence of the Enlightened One; it represents the Buddha in the state of nirvaṇa, and itself becomes a symbol of nirvaṇa, i.e. of the Absolute'. Such symbols, Seckel argues, have at the same time 'a "historical", biographical and narrative function'.

The form of the *cedi* may be varied, according to local traditions, but there is a common structure. They have a ground plan which indicates a cosmic design with a centre, in a horizontal configuration. The vertical dimension is always multi-layered and represents a progression, towards a topmost point, of levels of existence and levels of attainment. The levels therefore represent an axis of time, of progressive incarnations and eventual nirvana. The form and function partly resemble the frequently used ad hoc structure made for the ceremony of *khoen thao thang sii*, at which offerings are made to Indra, Nang Thoranii and the four *lokapalas*. This precedes most other ceremonies in *müang* culture. It can be seen to some extent as a localised version of the *sao inthakhin* ceremony in Chiang Mai, which has been documented and discussed by Tanabe (2000). There is a semi-permanent structure inside the *wat* compound used before major *wat* festivals, including the annual village-wide 'exorcism' (*song khro ban*) held at New Year. It is also performed in a sort of nesting structure of localities (named sub-villages, neighbourhoods, multi-household compounds, and individual houses). It is a prerequisite for house-building ceremonies. It is used in several forms of exorcistic ceremonies. The officiant in both the *thao thang sii* ceremonies was Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh.

Temporary *cedi* are found also in the sensually attractive ceremony of *cedi sai* at New Year. Sand from the riverbed is brought into the *wat* compound and little *cedi* made of sand—with careful gradations—are decorated and attached with cotton to the key structures of the *wat*, such as the main Buddha image in the *vihan*. Every grain of sand is said to represent the life of a sentient being, with the intention of recalling and asking for forgiveness for each life taken. Each household brings sand and water to the *wat* in this way and afterwards scatters the same around their houses.

Analysis could be deepened and extended much further, but I hope to have shown some of the multiple connections and resonances of ideas and practices that constitute the memorialisation of Kuba Wajiraphanya and combine with a wide range of elements of Buddhist Müang culture. I hope too to have shown that these practices also constitute local mnemonics, or *mnemesis* (see Alting 2000), ways in which people recall and rehearse their own, local, or 'internal' histories. They are ways that, to the academic outsider, may not always be recognisable as forms of historiography and living transmitters of history.



‘Public intellectuals’ in ‘contested spaces’

Princess Dara Rasmii, Kuba Srivichai, Kuba Wajiraphanya

The ‘partial connections’—a term used by Strathern (1998) to indicate the impossibility in both physics and social relations of complete congruence or adherence—between Kuba Srivichai, Kuba Wajiraphanya and Princess Dara Rasmii that have been alluded to in this account are of course to some extent partial because of the inevitably fragmentary nature of my record. But in a strictly biographical sense they were indeed partial. Each of them had met the other two. Princess Dara had commissioned both Kuba to reconstruct a historically famous *wat*, namely Wat Phra Singh, Nakorn Chiang Mai, and Wat Phra Thongthip, Müang Nong Khwang. They were all three enthusiasts for *lanna* or *müang* culture. Each according to their considerable powers and opportunities contributed to the consolidation, flowering and transmission of various aspects of *müang* culture. Of course, their contributions varied greatly in scale. But it seems to me not to be useful to distinguish their social location or the status of their social action by such terms as elite and popular, central and peripheral, religious and secular, or ‘great tradition’ and ‘little tradition’ (see the discussion in Turton 1991a). Princess Dara was ‘active’ so to say, in the north for some 20 years, from 1914 until her death in 1933; Kuba Srivichai for some forty years from the time he *pek dtu* in 1898, but more particularly from 1904 until his death in 1938; and Kuba Wajiraphanya for about fifty years from the time he *pek dtu* in about 1873 until his death in 1928. Their periods of activity all overlap during the years 1914–1928 (see Nongyao 1996; Sopha 1991).

My own links with this whole narrative are also ‘partial’. I nonetheless talked with people who were the spiritual descendants of these three distinguished persons, some of whom were the pupils of Kuba Wajiraphanya, in particular my principal teacher Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh. So my connections were both partial *and* participatory. Such links are always already partly there. I thought I might have been the first Englishman to have written about the district until I discovered that Captain W.C.McLeod (well, a Scot) had beaten me to it by nearly 150 years.

The rubric of the Conference on Thai Studies (held in Amsterdam 1999), for which an earlier version of this paper was prepared, spoke of the theme of the growth of ‘civil society’, where this is interpreted as to do with the ‘autonomy and freedom of citizens within a state’, and of ‘a shift of the boundaries between government control and individual or communal initiative’. The more detailed rubrics for some panels spoke of ‘public intellectuals’ operating in ‘contested’ and ‘manoeuvrable space’.

All three distinguished persons I have referred to seem to me to have operated within the constraints of various state, societal, and *sangha* structures,



cross-hatching civil and state, religious and secular, ancient and modern (I owe the useful notion of cross-hatching to Craig Reynolds (Reynolds 1991)). They all three seem to me to be ‘public intellectuals’. All three were working in ‘contested space’, where boundaries between government and, in this case, regional as well as local or communal political and cultural control were in question. I am not sure to what extent each saw their work as a kind of defence. There is some evidence that they all compromised in some ways, perhaps not much, but perhaps in the interest of maintaining local (regional) interests under the new dispensation. We know that, in brief, the region lost out fairly comprehensively. But in 1969-70 and again in 1976 I witnessed remarkable resilience of Khon Müang culture—if I may be permitted momentarily the convenience of this inadequate reification—as distinguished from, and sometimes opposed to, that of *Thai dtae dtae* or *Thai dtai* (the real Thai, or the southerner Thai) terms used at the time to describe non-Khon Müang officials. It will be interesting to follow other contributions to the debate on this theme of regions and regionalism within an emerging civil society, and to see whether and how all this might be involved in a new round of discussion and social action in which new social forces draw upon the old in new configurations and transformations of ‘civil society’.

Epilogue

In February 2000 I returned to Ban Pong. I was made welcome by many friends, especially Pho Dterng and Mae Nang Saengin Srikhamlert, who have been my generous hosts over many years since my first visit in 1969. I was also welcomed by Pho Luang Kaeo Srikhamlert, for many years the headman (*kae baan*) of Ban Pong. Alas, my revered teacher Pho Nan Nuan Mahawudh had died, aged over 80, a few years earlier, in an accident in which he had been knocked off his bicycle, by a speeding motorcycle, as he was turning into the *wat* compound.

The vihan of Wat Ban Pong was being rebuilt. A large wooden structure, the *ho* (palace) Cao Luang Khamdaeng - the chief ‘locality spirit’ - was nearing completion. These projects gave me the welcome opportunity to contribute to their completion as a former member of the congregation.

One of my most enduring memories of this visit, however, was being able to pay my respects at the Cedi Kuba. This had been slightly refurbished and there were signs of previous offerings of respect. Together with Pho Dterng, I tied a monk’s yellow robe round the cedi, lit a candle and spoke some words—in the *kham müang* language—dedicated to the memory of Kuba Wajiraphanya, my teacher’s teacher.



Portrait of Kuba Wajiraphanya (c. 1853–1928).



Portrait of Acan Nan Nuan Mahawudh, aged 62.





Phra Phut, Phra Tham—the ancient *thammat* (C. Thai *thi thet tham*, lectern throne).



A monk (*dtu cao*) meditating in the ordination hall (*bod*), using his string of beads (*banap*). He is sleeping (*cam wat*) in the *bod* during the rainy season retreat (*wassa*). His pillow is visible on his right.





The *cedi kuba*, with Acan Nan Nuan leading monks and congregation in paying respects to Kuba Wajiraphanya.

Offerings (*khan dork*) by householders to the Triple Gems, *acan wat* and the Kuba, in front of the main Buddha image in Wat Ban Pong.



Offerings by householders to *tao thang sii* (the four lords or *lokapala*, guardians of the four corners of the universe, also to Indra and Mae Thoranii). This is a village-wide exorcism (*song khro ban*) at New Year, with participation of monks. Each large tray of offerings is from one of four village sections.



Offerings by householders in remembrance of the souls of all departed sentient beings, *cedi sai* (sand *cedi*) in the *wat* compound at New Year.



Offerings to *tao thang sii*, a more local and informal version of that shown above, made by a single village section, in a rice field. Acan Nan Nuan is again leading, but without participation of monks.



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