



PHLAI KAE0 ORDAINS AS A NOVICE: A CHAPTER FROM *KHUN CHANG KHUN PHAEN*

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Khun Chang Khun Phaen is a story developed in the late Ayutthaya period by troubadours who recited episodes for local audiences and passed on the story by word-of-mouth. It became the most popular text for such performances, probably because the troubadours incorporated local tales and constantly adjusted the story to please the audience. It is thus a product of the culture of its time, rather than of the imagination of a particular author. It is also unusual among old Thai literary works in two ways: it is an original and unique work, not an adaptation from another language; and it is set, not in the court or the heavens, but among relatively ordinary people—the minor provincial gentry of the lower Chaophraya basin.

The story was later written down as a poem, possibly beginning in the late Ayutthaya period, though the surviving versions mostly date from the second to fourth Bangkok reigns. The written versions are unsigned, but the authors of various chapters are believed to include King Rama II, King Rama III, and Sunthon Phu, as well as some recitation masters such as Khru Jaeng. In 1917–18, Prince Damrong Rachanuphap oversaw editing of a printed version that has become the standard.¹ This version is written in *klon* meter (mostly *klon paet*), and consists of 23,000 lines divided into 43 chapters.²

The poem has never been translated in full. There is an incomplete précis in English, a summary version in French, and one chapter rendered sternly word-for-word in German.³ The extract presented here is a sample from the first attempt to translate the whole poem. This chapter (the third) has been selected as it is representative of the flavor of the early part of the poem, and because it includes a novice ordination, monastic education, celebration of Songkran, and recitation of the Mahachat. The poem seems intent on recording details of weddings, funerals,

¹ *Sepha Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is currently available in several versions, including a 3-volume set from Khurusapha, a 2-volume set from Sinlapa Bannakan, and a single volume from Ek Phim. The main source of information on the development of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is Prince Damrong's preface to this version. A draft translation of this preface, summary of the full story, and working translations of other chapters are available at <http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~ppasuk/kckp/index.htm>. We welcome any comments, criticisms, and suggestions on the translation to chrispasuk@gmail.com.

² Prince Bidyalankarana wrote two articles about the poem in *JSS* (1926, 1941). He noted that he refused to take part in a proposed translation project as 'it would take more time than a lazy man can afford.'

³ Prem Chaya 1955, 1959; Kasem Sibunruang 1960; Wenk 1985. Part of the latter, though not the translation, appeared as Wenk 1986.



household ceremonies, festivals, court cases, dress, preparation of food, local beliefs, and other ethnological detail of its time. The authorship of this chapter is unknown, but internal evidence (vocabulary, construction) suggests it is among the earliest chapters to be written down, possibly dating from the first Bangkok reign, and transcribed from troubadours with relatively little modification.

The rhyming unit of *klon paet* is a stanza of two lines. Each line consists of two hemistiches of eight syllables, with several mandatory rhymes which the poet can embellish with further rhyme and alliteration. This translation makes no attempt to reproduce the rhyming scheme, but retains the stanza as a unit. Within a stanza, we sometimes rearrange clauses to suit the flow in English, but we retain the division into stanzas in the translation and in the layout.

The story so far: Phlai Kaeo (later Khun Phaen), Khun Chang, and Phim Philalai (later Nang Wanthong) were childhood friends in Suphanburi, and are now grown to teenage. Phlai Kaeo is handsome and clever, but poor because his father was executed by the king and his family ruined. Khun Chang is fat, bald, and crass, but comes from a rich family and has connections at the Ayutthaya court. Phim is the beauty of the town. In this chapter, the two men start competing for her in the love triangle which is the plot framework for the entire poem.

Principal characters:

Phlai Kaeo, later Khun Phaen

Khun Krai, his father, executed by the king a decade earlier

Thong Prasi, his mother

Khun Chang

Kaen Kaeo, his wife

Phim Philalai, later Nang Wanthong

Siprajan, her mother

Saithong, her foster-sister

Master Bun, abbot of Wat Som Yai, Kanburi

Master Mi, abbot of Wat Palelai, Suphanburi

Chapter 3: Phlai Kaeo ordains as a novice

When Phlai Kaeo's father died, his mother, Thong Prasi, fled with her son to Kanburi.⁴

They lived there until he grew up to age fifteen.⁵ He could not stop thinking of his late father, Khun Krai. For over a year, he could not get him out of his mind.

He wanted to be a valiant soldier like his late father, so begged his mother, 'Please, I'd like to gain knowledge.'⁶

Mother, please take me to a learned monk and put me under his care as a teacher. Let me ordain as a novice.'

Thong Prasi had no objection at all. 'If you want a teacher skilled in the inner ways,⁷ the abbot of Wat Som Yai is good.

You have the right idea, dear Kaeo. I'll take you to Master Bun. Once you learn about the military arts and invulnerability, you can be a real descendant of your father Khun Krai.'

She gave orders to the servants without delay. 'My most beloved son is going to be ordained. Go out and get some good-quality cloth to make his *jiwon*, *sabong* and *sabai*.⁸ Also, get the right sort of cloth bag and a bowl. Get on with this all today. Ai-Thi and I-La, come and help me.'

The servants went off to fetch betelnut, paan, and banana leaves. They all helped to stitch leaf cups, peel betelnut, coil and bind paan leaves, and roll wax candles.

They measured white cloth, cut and sewed it into a *sabong* with a nice flat hem. They cut out the *jiwon* and *sabai* neatly with scissors, and sewed the pieces together.

⁴ กาญจนบุรี, old Kanchanaburi, was around 18 kilometers west of the current site. It was a strategic town guarding the route up the Khwae River and over the Three Pagodas Pass into Burma. The city was destroyed and the site abandoned in the wars of the late eighteenth century.

⁵ The traditional Thai way of counting ages begins with one rather than zero, so this would be fourteen in Western reckoning.

⁶ วิชากร, *wichakan*, meaning the disciplines, or *taught* knowledge. This included reading, writing, and numerical skills, religious and ethical teachings, astrology, and military skills. At the time of King Taksin of Thonburi (1767–82), and probably in the preceding Ayutthayan era too, there was a *krom wichakan*, a department of knowledge, which looked after texts on warfare, and distributed charms and formulas for invulnerability to soldiers.

⁷ Meaning skills in tapping exceptional forces, believed to be latent within the individual, through various methods, including meditation, yoga, and formulas (mantra). These skills stem from a tantric tradition embedded in Thai Buddhism.

⁸ The three cloths of a monk's robes. *Jiwon* is the outer robe; *sabong* is an inner lower cloth, from waist to shin; *sabai* is a breastcloth (today usually called *sankati*).

They made an inner cloth⁹ from soft chicken-skin silk,¹⁰ and sewed on silk toggle buttonholes. They all sat round in a circle, making lots of noise, but working busily with devotion.

Some went out to get turmeric, pounded it all up, then went back for more. ‘Oh, have you never done this before? You’ve dyed the cloth too light so it doesn’t look good.

Pour some vinegar in. That’ll make the ochre color deeper and brighter.’ ‘That’s fixed it!’ Laughing merrily, they tied a clothes-line for drying the dyed cloth, then put the triple robes on a pedestal tray.

A team of the very best cooks steamed and boiled frantically, their faces burnt black from the wood-stove. They cleaned the rice and put it in pans; fried and boiled; made *phanaeng*;¹¹ curried river-snails; mixed spicy salad; made sweets; arranged fruit for offerings; and set everything on many rows of trays.

When all was ready, Thong Prasi shouted at the servants to come quickly. ‘Ai-Mong, I-Ma,¹² why are you so slow? Take the big bowl and fill it with water.

What have you done with the turmeric and *dinso*¹³ powder? Yesterday I put them in the crock.’¹⁴ She bathed her son, getting rid of all the sweat and grime, than rubbed him with turmeric, powdered his face, and combed his hair. Phlai Kaeo was dressed in a *yok*¹⁵ lower cloth with a pleated front like folded leaves, a gown¹⁶ with gold embroidery, a conical hat¹⁷ with waving flowers, a belt embroidered in two rows, and a diamond ring with a beautiful glittering stone. He was given incense, candles, and lotus flowers to hold in a folded pouch.

⁹ อังสะ, *angsa*, a monk’s inner cloth.

¹⁰ A fine silk which crinkles like chicken skin.

¹¹ A thick red curry. The name is probably distorted from Penang.

¹² Ai- and I- are prefixes denoting commoners, male and female respectively.

¹³ A fine powdered clay, used to cool the body.

¹⁴ ถ้ำ, *tham*, a pottery or lead container used to retain fragrance and exclude damp, mostly used for tea (K&NT: 656).

¹⁵ ยก, *yok*, means to raise or lift, and is used for a cloth with a raised design such as a twill weave.

Throughout the poem, *yok* is used to refer to a smart lower cloth, generally of silk.

¹⁶ เสื้อครุย, *seua khruai*, an outer garment worn on ceremonial occasions.

¹⁷ ลอมพอก, *lomphok*, a tall, tapering conical hat with an upturned brim decorated with golden flowers. It originated from Persia, where it was known as *taj*, and was formerly a royal head-dress that later became a standard part of court attire (Floor 1999: 277–89). It became part of Siamese noble regalia during the era of King Narai (1660–88), as recorded by the illustrators of the French diplomatic missions in the 1680s.



Strapping Nai Dam was summoned to carry him aloft with an umbrella overhead. Thong Prasi walked along beside. The gaggle of servants carried the offerings.

At Wat Som Yai, the offerings were placed in the front sala. Mother took bright-eyed Phlai Kaeo to pay respects to the abbot.

‘Lord Abbot, I’ve brought my son to be ordained. Please teach him to be something of substance so he can make merit and share some of it with his father Khun Krai whose time was up.

Also, teach him to read and write so he can learn from an early age.’ Abbot Bun sighed heavily before he spoke.

‘Such a pity Khun Krai passed away. His son Phlai Kaeo is very much like him. His looks makes me sorrow for his father. I’ll take care of him, don’t worry.’

He turned to give instructions to Novice Khong. ‘Call the monks downstairs. Lay mats and arrange the seating. Shave Phlai’s head and bring him back.’

Then he went down to the big sala, and the monks all came down together. Phlai Kaeo carried his triple robes and paid respects. Master Bun initiated him as a novice.

When the ordination was over, Thong Prasi chivvied the cooks so loudly her body shook. All the monks’ bowls were lined up, and the pots of rice were carried in.

Everyone helped place food into the monks’ bowls, and then presented the usual offerings.¹⁸ After eating, the monks chanted the offertory blessing.¹⁹ Novice Kaeo and Thong Prasi poured water on the ground.²⁰

After the ordination, Novice Kaeo studied diligently. He had a quick and nimble mind. Whatever he studied, he got down so quickly that the teachers were intimidated by his cleverness. Among all the many elders and novices there, none could match him. Within less than one year as a novice, he had things by heart, every book without exception including translated texts. The abbot had nothing left to tell him. He patted Kaeo on the back and the head and said, ‘That’s the end of my gut,²¹ my dear Novice Kaeo.

¹⁸ Meaning everyday articles for the monks’ use. Today this includes things like soap and toothpaste. Probably at that time it included candles, fire-making equipment, cloth, etc.

¹⁹ ยถาสัพพี, *yatha sapphi*, a Pali formula chanted after monks have been fed or received offerings (K&NT: 656).

²⁰ A way of sharing some of the merit made with spirits stranded in hell (K&NT: 656).

²¹ Meaning that’s the extent of the knowledge he can impart.



There's only the big treatise with the heart²² formulas. I've been collecting them since I was a youth. Until now in my old age, I haven't shared them with anyone.

This is the limit of my knowledge. Because I love Novice Kaeo, I'll pass it on to you. There's everything - invulnerability, robbery, raising ghouls²³ - something for every occasion.'

Novice Kaeo took the master's treatise, but in his own interest, he still wanted to study some more. So one day he went to pay respects and beg leave to go to Suphanburi.

'I want to study further.' The abbot was pleased and laughed heartily. 'The abbot of Wat Palelai²⁴ is very able. He and Thong Prasi know one another.'

Novice Kaeo took his leave and went to his mother. Thong Prasi rushed out to welcome him. 'Why have you come, darling son?' 'Mother dear, the abbot sent me.'

My studies there are finished. He told me that Wat Palelai is very good. He said you've known the abbot there for ages. Please take me and put me under his care.'

Thong Prasi laughed with pleasure. 'That's right, dear novice. As I recall, in Suphan there are two good at the inner ways - the abbot of Wat Palelai and the master at Wat Khae.²⁵ I used to send food over there. He and Khun Krai loved one another a lot. It's no problem to place you under his care.'

²² หัวใจ, *hua jai* or heart mantras, were abbreviated forms used for purposes of memorization, and for quick application. Often these were two or three syllables taken from a longer version and formed into a mnemonic, e.g. i-sawa-su. A collection of 108 heart formulas was well-known (K&NT: 308; Thep III: 136–42).

²³ โทงพราย, *hong phrai*, a spirit resulting from a violent death, and susceptible to control through mantra.

²⁴ A large and very old *wat* situated 4 kilometers west of the river, outside the old town site of Suphanburi. Its massive main Buddha image, known as Luang Pho To, is claimed by some to date back to the U Thong era. Initially the image was probably in the open air, deteriorated quickly, and went through repeated restorations; as a result any trace of its old style is obscured. The *wihan* was built to enclose the image in the Ayutthaya period, possibly on orders from King Phetracha at the end of the seventeenth century. By the late Ayutthaya era, the *wat* was substantial. Several other Ayutthaya-era structures, now ruined, are scattered around the *wat* compound, including another *wihan*, an *ubosot*, and a *chedi*. The latter are known as *bot mon* and *chedi mon*, possibly recording a long past back to the time the population of Suphan spoke Mon. (Manat 2004: 133–45). It would have been a forest *wat*. When Sunthon Phu visited in 1841, he described walking through forest between the town and the *wat* (*Nirat meuang suphan*, stanza 140, in Sunthon Phu 2000: 185).

²⁵ A *wat* on the west bank of the Suphan river in the northeast of the old town of Suphanburi. It is probably an Ayutthaya-era *wat*, which was abandoned for a long time and revived after the Second World War. To attract visitors, the *wat* has recently built a 'House of Khun Phaen' in the compound (Manat 2001).

She immediately instructed the servants to bring elephants. ‘Harness the cow-elephant Bu for me and bull-elephant Kang for the novice.

Put things in the howdah, including enough to feed the monks both morning and noon. Ai-Sen and Ta-Phum will go along to look after matters.’

When everything was ready, they left the house at Cockfight Hill²⁶ and crossed the grassland towards the forest. In three days they reached Suphanburi.

Entering Wat Palelai, they went straight to the *kuti*²⁷ of Master Mi. Thong Prasi paid respects to him. ‘I haven’t come to see you for a long time.’

The abbot was pleased and laughed merrily. ‘I haven’t seen your face for many years. Whose son is this novice? I don’t know him.’ Thong Prasi said, ‘He’s my own son.

Since Khun Krai passed away, I’ve been a widow on my own. I had my son ordained so he could study and be something.²⁸ But he’s shooting up like a beanpole and I’m too far away to help.

I want to put him under your care, Master. Please give him knowledge and look after him. If he’s lazy and doesn’t study, punish him with the cane.’

The abbot said, ‘Don’t be impatient. If he doesn’t listen to the teaching, why should I look after him? But I’m not the sort of person to use threats. I’ll teach him what his own mind can take.

If he’s good, he alone will get the praise; if bad, they’ll blame the teacher. He has a respectable name and pedigree. If he sullied that, it would be a mistake.’

Thong Prasi chuckled at the master’s words. ‘Dear Novice Kaeo, remember this well.’ She left her son, took leave, and returned home to Cockfight Hill.

Novice Kaeo had an agile mind without comparison, and was diligent without being told. After three months of practice, he had sermons down by heart.

²⁶ *Khao chon kai* lies to the north of old Kanburi, and was probably once the city’s sacred hill. There is a stone circle on the flat summit, which is legendarily called Khun Phaen’s cockfighting arena, but was probably a shrine.

²⁷ กุฏิ, residential building for monks in a *wat*.

²⁸ เป็นมทเพลง, *pen bot phleng*, to be the lyrics to a tune.

Whether it was the Mahachat,²⁹ sermons on the teachings, or anything, he spoke beautifully with peerless choice of words, and a voice as charming as a flute.³⁰ Wherever he gave sermons, people loved to come and listen.

He soon gained such a reputation for his proficiency that villagers and market folk were almost crazy about him. Elders and novices would skip the noon meal and sit waiting to beg him to recite something.

He studied hard on reading, writing, recitation, and questioning. He absorbed the major treatises on the arts of war, the sun and moon, auspicious times of day, invulnerability, invisibility, and illusions used in fighting. He also liked studying love charms for captivating a woman's heart without any chance of escape.

His master laughed. 'Young Kaeo, I know you're interested in the stuff about being a lover. Don't do damage to people's wives, but old maids and widows, take them!

I'll teach you everything about sacred mantras and formulas. You'll be a real gem.' He spat out the betel he was chewing and passed it to Novice Kaeo to eat the remains. Then the master hit him with a pestle, almost chipping his skull. 'There! It didn't crack or bruise. Like hitting a stone.' The master rolled about with laughter.

Kaeo regularly fanned and waited upon the abbot, who loved him more and more. The abbot taught and tested the novice until his mind was quick, and his confidence grew by the day.

²⁹ Mahachat means the 'great birth' or 'great Jataka.' The Jataka or birth stories are accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha before his final incarnation as Siddhattha, the historical Buddha. In the popular religious tradition throughout Buddhist Southeast Asia, the Jataka stories were the main form of moral instruction, expounded in sermons, recited at festivals, dramatized in various forms of performance, and depicted in *wat* decoration. The Buddha is said to have had 550 prior lives, and in the Jataka, these are presented as recalled and recounted by the Buddha himself. The last ten Jataka are of special importance, for they are the stories of how the Bodhisatta or Buddha-to-be achieved the Ten Perfections (*thotsabarami*) – giving, moral conduct, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity – as a result of which he could be reborn as the Buddha. Most important of all is the tale of Prince Vessantara (Phra Wetsandon), the very last life before his incarnation as Siddhattha. This Jataka illustrates the Perfection of Giving, and in the Thai tradition is known as the Mahachat. Annual recitations of the Mahachat were a major form of merit-making in the late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods (Anuman 1980; Jory 2002; Nidhi 2005: 199-226).

³⁰ เไร, *rerai*, a simple blown instrument.

When Khun Chang was in his youth, his head was as bald as an adjutant stork,³¹ while his chin and chest were a mess of whiskers and hair. His face looked like a forest monkey.

He fell for Kaen Kaeo, the daughter of Muen³² Phaeo from Bigfence³³ village. He asked the parents for her hand and they consented, so Khun Chang got himself a wife.

She came to live in his house as bedmate, sharing pillows side-by-side for over a year. Then she fell sick with a fever which lasted a long time, and developed into dysentery and piles.

She grew thin, her face turned hard and scaly, and her eyes became sunken. She had a huge craving for duck, chicken, and unwholesome things. Khun Chang was lonely and miserable.

Watching his wife ache with fever, he gradually lost heart. In desperation, he sent for doctor Don, left money on a tray beside the bed, and pleaded with the doctor to give her medicine.

The doctor said, 'The disease has passed into the fatal stage. Treatment would be useless. The fever is so severe she's close to death. Why didn't you send for me at the beginning?'

After the doctor took his leave, Khun Chang was depressed and full of remorse. He felt he was burning inside, and did not know what to do.

Before long, Kaen Kaeo's life was snuffed out. Khun Chang sat and cried. He arranged a noisy cremation, and frequently made merit for her.³⁴

In Suphanburi at Songkran time,³⁵ everybody came to Wat Palelai to make merit and give alms with devotion.

Crowds of men and women, young and old, shuttled back and forth with sand to build *chedi* all around the *wat*.³⁶ The monks, who would be fed the next day, chanted prayers in the afternoon. Everybody celebrated the sand festival noisily, then returned home

³¹ ตะกรุม, *takrum*, *leptoptilos javanicus*, technically called a 'lesser adjutant', has a dark grey head with a fringe of light grey round the back, which gives the impression of a bald dome.

³² หมื่น, literally ten thousand, a low military-official rank.

³³ ไร่ใหญ่, *rua yai*, Khun Chang's home village, immediately southwest of Suphanburi town.

³⁴ He performed some deed or ceremony believed to make merit (such as feeding the monks), and prayed that part of the merit be shared with Kaen Kaeo to improve her status in her next life.

³⁵ Thai new year, which falls around mid-April.

³⁶ Building a *wat* or other religious building is believed to result in a great gain in merit. Building temporary *chedi* from sand became a custom practiced on the eve of the new year in many parts of Buddhist Southeast Asia (Anuman 1975: 94–6).

to prepare food for the monks. They got everything ready - grilling, roasting, making *namya* sauce,³⁷ river-snail curry, plain soup, and chicken *phanaeng*. They sliced gourd, carved marrow, baked *ho-mok*,³⁸ boiled eggs, fried dried fish, and prepared offal curry.³⁹

They made jelly in syrup, sago, and sticky rice with pork topping. On benches they laid out rows of rice fritters, popped young rice in syrup, oranges and other fruits, *maprang*,⁴⁰ *langsat*,⁴¹ rattan fruit, banyan fruit, pomelo, sour orange, and finger bananas. Every house was busy until late at night when all fell asleep in a trice.

At dawn, golden sunlight lit up the sky. Everyone got dressed quickly. Young and old, men and women, crowded noisily into Wat Palelai.⁴²

Among them were Phim and her mother, followed by their servants carrying food to put in the alms bowls, and trays set out ready with incense, candles, and flowers.

At the *wat*, they all sat down at the sand *chedi* and paid their respects. The *wat* was full of people laying out mats to wait for the monks.

Elders and novices donned their robes, came down to the main *sala*, and sat in order. The faithful paid their respects happily.

Each monk was presented with a tray of medicines. They arranged their shoulder cloths properly, and began the prayers. Abbot Mi chanted the precepts, and the monks gave a blessing with clasped hands raised. All the women scurried to fetch pots and get ready to offer alms to the monks one after the other.

They gave offerings by placing food in front of the pupils, elders, and novices, then watching to see who finished their curry so they could ladle another portion.

³⁷ A curried fish sauce, often eaten with *khanom jin*, a form of rice noodles.

³⁸ Originally a mixture of fish and herbs, wrapped in banana leaves, covered with mud, and baked with charcoal in a hole in the ground.

³⁹ แกงจืด, *kaeng buan*, an old dish made with pork offal and pork skin (Suphon 1975: 26).

⁴⁰ *Bouea burmanica*, a fruit about the size and shape of a small egg with a fine, smooth skin which turns from yellow to orange when ripe.

⁴¹ *Aglaia domestica*, a berry-like fruit with a fawn skin and translucent white flesh.

⁴² On normal days, monks went out to collect alms, but on Songkran, families cooked food and took it to the *wat* in the morning to feed the monks. This was a chance to give the monks a treat. It was also an opportunity for young girls to dress up and show off (Anuman 1975: 87–8).

Phim devoutly brought bananas, sweets, and sharp oranges on a large tray. She carried a bowl of rice and walked gracefully to offer from the seniors downwards.

Coming to Novice Kaeo, she glanced at him and hesitated, remembering something from the past. ‘This novice and I seem to know one another.’ She ladled a big scoop of food with a heap of fried pork, dried fish, chicken curry, halved boiled eggs, sausages, dried fish, watermelon, and a bowlful of curry – enough to fill him up.

Novice Kaeo had his head bowed and did not know who it was. Seeing so much food, he lifted his head with eyes opened wide. He saw Phim’s face, smiling with her eyes averted. ‘Is she teasing me or what?’

‘You’re giving me so much my bowl is packed to overflowing. How can I pick it out to eat? There’s too much, both sweet and savory, but you don’t give me what I really like.’

Phim broke into a smile. ‘Oh novice, when I saw the empty bowl, I thought it was an old beggar,⁴³ so I put in heaps. You accuse me of teasing. Would you rather have me lose merit?’

Phlai thought for a moment with his heart thumping. ‘I can remember. I think you used to play with me. Your name is Phim Philalai. You’ve grown up so beautiful it makes my eyes hurt.’⁴⁴

The monks finished eating. The abbot said the offertory blessing, repeated by the other monks. The lay faithful poured water on the ground.

Everybody merrily bustled off home, noisily singing songs and dancing to celebrate the almsgiving.

Time passed. In the tenth month of the seventh year of the cock,⁴⁵ just one day short of the Sat festival,⁴⁶ the Buddhist faithful in Suphan had the idea of staging a devotional recitation of the

⁴³ หลวงเถน, *luang then*, an old person who stays in a *wat* in order to eat from the alms donations.

⁴⁴ บาดตา, wounding the eyes, an old phrase meaning ‘irresistibly beautiful... A most charming, fascinating beauty enslaving all male hearts’ (Gerini 2005: 239).

⁴⁵ ปีระกาสิบตศก (*pi raka sappata sok*), meaning the seventh appearance of a cock year. There is a 120-year cycle consisting of ten iterations of the twelve animal years. Since the cock is the tenth year in the animal cycle, this would mean the $(12 \times 6) + 10 = 82^{\text{nd}}$ year in a cycle. By derivation from a similar date mentioned in *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat* (2004: 172), such years would fall in 1549/50, 1669/70 and 1789/90.

⁴⁶ สารท, autumnal merit-making festival at the end of the tenth month (early October).

Mahachat⁴⁷ in all thirteen episodes at Wat Palelai on the next holy day. The lay elders held a meeting at the *wat*.

Certain persons agreed to sponsor the episodes of the *Ten Blessings*, *Himaphan*, and *The Gifts*. Someone with lots of kids took over the *Chuchok* episode in daytime. Siprajan⁴⁸ was allotted the Matsi episode.

The *Great King of a Thousand Lives* episode, which always had the audience rolling with noisy laughter, was scheduled for the middle of the night. Old Muen Si agreed to take on the nicely quiet and restful episode of the *Six Princes*.

Nang Wan took the *Small Forest* episode, to be recited by Novice On, a new and very accomplished performer. Abbot Jai would recite the *Great Forest* episode, and Grandpa Tai immediately agreed to be the sponsor.

Grandpa Phae and Grandma Khli took on the *Entering the Forest* episode by the abbot of Wat Khae. 'Eh, who should we give the big episode to? It's not easy for just anyone of the faithful to sponsor.'⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See footnote 29 above on the Mahachat. In the usual form of these recitations in late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok, the whole story was recited in the space of a single day, in thirteen *kan*, or episodes. Local dignitaries sponsored episodes to make merit and display their status. Sponsorship included decorating the *wat* to appear as the Wongkot forest in which the story is set, and making offerings to the monks. The thirteen episodes are: 1. *The Ten Blessings*. A prologue. 2. *Himaphan*. Wetsandon is born and ascends to the throne of Sonchai. When a neighboring city suffers a drought, Wetsandon gives away his rain-making white elephant, and as a result is banished by his furious subjects. 3. *The Gifts*. Wetsandon gives away his possessions to the needy before leaving, and then gives away his horses and chariot along the way. 4. *Entering the Forest*. Wetsandon and his wife Matsi travel to the Wongkot forest and take up residence in a hermitage. 5. *Chuchok*. An old Brahmin, whose young wife is ridiculed by the neighbors for having to do all the housework, decides to go and ask for Wetsandon's two children to be his slaves. 6. *Small Forest*. Chuchok travels. 7. *Great Forest*. Chuchok travels and displays his bad character. 8. *The Children*. Chuchok arrives at the hermitage while Matsi is away. He asks for the children, and Wetsandon consents. Chuchok takes the children and beats them before Wetsandon's eyes. 9. *Matsi*. To prevent Matsi returning in time to chase after the children, Indra delays her return. 10. *The Powerful One*. Indra disguises himself and asks for Matsi. Wetsandon consents, but Indra returns her to him. 11. *The Great King of a Thousand Lives*. Wetsandon's father sees the children and ransoms them from Chuchok, who dies from over-eating on the proceeds. 12. *The Six Princes*. The children lead an expedition which finds Wetsandon at the hermitage. 13. *The City*. They return to the city where Wetsandon is restored to the throne and rules until he is 120 years old.

⁴⁸ Phim's mother.

⁴⁹ Traditionally, the scale of the offerings and decorations for each episode was in direct relation to the episode's length in verses. For example, the sponsor was expected to decorate the *wat* with the same number of flags and candles as there were stanzas in the episode (Anuman 1975: 286–7). With 101 stanzas, *The Children* was one of the longest episodes and thus required heavy investment.

‘*The Children*? Yes, that’s true. Give it to the bald fellow from Bigfence village. Nai Bun, you know him well. Pop over there.’ Nai Bun went to Khun Chang’s house and presented the request:

‘The Mahachat in thirteen episodes will be performed at Wat Palelai on the next holy day. Sir, would you not like to show your devotion and make some merit?’

Siprajan and Phim have the *Matsi* episode. There is still no taker for *The Children*.’ Khun Chang laughed with pleasure. ‘I’d be happy to have the great, great episode!’

Don’t spare a thought about the expense. Even if it costs me some five chang⁵⁰ I won’t run away. I’ll be born rich in my next life. I’m only too willing to make merit in such a way.’

Nai Bun hastened back happily. Monks were asked to distribute the notice: ‘All thirteen episodes in sequence.’ The villagers began making preparations.

Khun Chang was expansive and generous to the point of extravagance. ‘You lot, go and fetch wood and don’t take too long about it. You, weave some hampers⁵¹ in preparation.

And you, take this cash and buy all the everyday stuff to offer to the monks. Find some good quality cloth to make triple robes. You women, go and find the offerings for the episode.

You pound the rice and sift the flour to make wheel sweets.⁵² Do it straightaway. And don’t stint. I want a hundred of everything. Don’t worry about using lots of oil. Just go and buy some more, and every type of orange and fruit. Cheap or expensive is not a problem. Don’t be stingy and create gossip. I’m considered gentlefolk.’

Siprajan called out, ‘Phim, come over here and give some help.’ She shouted at the servants, ‘Come in here and lend a hand at once.’

They mixed the sweets, coated them in flour, and fried them in sputtering oil. ‘Hey, this fire is too hot! Pull some firewood out.’ I-Khong scooped them up saying, ‘Done to a turn!’

⁵⁰ ชั่ง, a monetary unit equal to 80 baht.

⁵¹ กระจาด, *krajat* is a basketwork receptacle woven from bamboo with a small round base and much wider mouth. Those used for carrying offerings for the Mahachat were very large and ornate. The rim of the mouth was fashioned in the shape of lotus petals, decorated with colored paper, and hung with tassels (Anuman 1975: 286–7).

⁵² ขนมหกง, *khanom kong*, bean paste shaped like a *chakra* wheel of the law, and deep-fried.

The *chamot*⁵³ and wheel sweets were laid out neatly. Candles were cut and lined up so they would not get crushed. Shortbread and crackers were tossed in Phetburi⁵⁴ sugar and placed alongside, looking good.

Young rice mixed with flour was deep fried, then hollowed out with a stick for inserting egg, coconut, and sweet palm sugar. ‘When they’re done, pierce them on sticks, Ai-Luk-Khon.’

The crowd of servants milled around, scooping flour, helping one another with this and that, and making a racket like a mask-play.⁵⁵ Siprajan scolded and chivvied them, ‘Pass them over carefully! Don’t throw them or they’ll break!’

The sponsor of the *Ten Blessings* episode woke and got up before the cock. As dawn broke, he rushed over to Wat Palelai with all the offerings for the episode,

and laid them out on trays in the preaching hall. He lit incense and candles to offer to the Buddha and left them smoldering. The abbot chanted precepts, spoke of sharing the merit, and recited the *Pali junniyabot*.⁵⁶

The episodes of the Ten Blessings, *Himaphan*, and *The Gifts* were soon over, and the stage was set up anew for the *Great Forest* episode by Abbot Jai. When that was over, he returned to the *kuti*.

Khun Chang woke late and washed his face in a panic. ‘You lot, come over here everybody. Oh, I’ve forgotten the betel for the episode.’⁵⁷

⁵³ ขนมชะมด, coconut rolled in sugar, coated with flour, and fried. These sweets could be decorated with colored flour to make them attractive as festival offerings (Anuman 1975: 287–8).

⁵⁴ พรินพรี, *Phripphri*, an old spelling. Then and now, Phetburi is famous for palm sugar.

⁵⁵ โขน, *khon*, a dramatic genre in which masked actors play stories from the Ramakian, the Thai version of the Ramayana. This genre probably developed in the middle Ayutthaya era, and was enthusiastically revived by the court in early Bangkok.

⁵⁶ จุณณียบท, phrases from the Pali version of the story, pronounced at the start of the episode and other break-points. It was considered more meritorious to chant the Mahachat in Pali, but few could understand it. Sometimes, all or part of the Pali text would be chanted by the monks prior to the Thai recitation. The *junniyabot* were probably retained in the Thai version to allow some listeners to follow the story in the Pali text, or just as a stylized reminder of the more meritorious Pali version (Nidhi 2005: 204–7).

⁵⁷ The ‘betel’ here means a bowl or tray which the sponsor of the episode offered while paying respects to the Buddha image in the hall used for the chanting. This tray contained paan leaves folded and inserted in a leaf pouch, whole betelnuts, candles, and incense. Sponsors showed off by adding other decorations (such as the carved figures mentioned below) to catch the eye (Anuman 1975: 298).



I've been a widower for many years, and there's nobody to do these things. Shaping animals from papaya has me stumped. Is there anybody here who can do it?⁵⁸

If there's no one in our household, we'll have to go and find some carvers elsewhere.' Nang Meuang spoke up, 'Me. I can give it a try. I'll soon get the hang of it.'

They bought a Chinese basket of papaya, and in no time she sliced them all and carved them into shapes. At the top were placed folded banana leaves⁵⁹ and bunches of mulberry⁶⁰ seeds.

In front was a carving of an abbot riding on an elder, novices in the middle, and then vultures eating a corpse. *Rak* flowers were slotted in among them, mixed up with *daoruang*.⁶¹ It all looked very odd.

Khun Chang was delighted. As reward, he gave Nang Meuang a ring made of brass, which was not that expensive but worth several feuang.⁶² She took it and put it on her finger.

He then ordered the servants to carry the offerings for the episode in a noisy procession along the road so people would see. 'Be careful with all the offerings for the episode.

If you drop or lose anything, I'll kick you along like a ball.' The servants carried the offerings to Wat Palelai, shouting as they went.

The offerings were set down in rows in front of the main *sala*. Everybody milling around there in a noisy crowd had to take a look.

Phim Philalai summoned the servants. 'Make the betel for the episode for me. Go and fetch betelnut, paan leaf, and cotton.'

They brought lots of papaya to slice and carve, added color to make the figures bright and attractive, and set up the whole display as a mountain range.

⁵⁸ Figures carved in raw papaya had become a customary part of the offerings at the festival. The point of this passage is to show Khun Chang's crassness in flaunting his wealth without understanding the aesthetics.

⁵⁹ บังใบ, *bang bai*, the rows of neatly folded segments of banana leaf used in making *baisi*, *kratong*, and similar decorations.

⁶⁰ ยาด, *yo*, *morinda citrifolia*, noni, Indian mulberry.

⁶¹ *Calotropis gigantea* (*rak*) and *tagetes erecta* (*daoruang*). These two flowers are very different and would not usually be used together in decoration.

⁶² เฟื้อง, one eighth of a baht.

The carvings included a lion with a full face standing in a majestic pose; deities worshipping Brahma; Indra soaring through the air holding a crystal; and Narai mounted on Garuda,⁶³ leaping across the sky. ‘Carry them along for everyone to see.’ The servants set off immediately, and put them on display at the *sala*. The lay faithful crowded around to look. ‘Oh, they did everything and so beautifully!’ ‘All that hard work was certainly not wasted!’

‘The animals look real, both the standing ones and the sitting ones.’ ‘Outstanding! As neat as a painting.’ ‘They know how to carve!’ The whole preaching hall was full of loud praise.

Approaching the time, Khun Chang ordered his servants to take turns carrying water to fill a big tub to the brim.

He bathed cheerfully. Servants crowded around scrubbing him until the grime flowed away, then rubbed his body all over with turmeric.

But his skin was still as green as water hyacinth. ‘Quick, the *Great Forest* episode is almost finished.’ Back in his room, he dissolved *dinso* powder in water and patted it all over his body, making a pattern on his belly.

He scooped up pomade,⁶⁴ shaped his hair like a wing, then swept it across to hide his bald pate, but the middle was still as bare as a buffalo’s water-hole.⁶⁵ ‘My head’s a disaster! I’m so ashamed.’

He put on a *yok* in a *kanok*⁶⁶ pattern with golden swans, like a royal garment that nobody else could possibly have. He added a woolen⁶⁷ waist sash embroidered with gold and flower garlands, and a pink handkerchief to dab away perspiration.

⁶³ สุบรรณ, *suban*, Suparna, a name for Garuda, the mythical bird which is the mount of Vishnu, who is called Narai throughout the poem.

⁶⁴ มุหนาย, *munai*, a hair cosmetic, made from Tani oil (a type of coconut oil) mixed with soot and lime.

⁶⁵ Farmers often make a water hole in their rice fields for buffalo to keep cool. The animals’ wallowing denudes the surrounding area, creating a bald patch.

⁶⁶ กนก, a traditional flame-like motif.

⁶⁷ สาน, *san*, from the Persian word, *shal* (and possibly further back from Syriac, *sa’r*), which is the origin of the English word, shawl. *Shal* meant a patterned twill-woven fabric made from spun wool using a technique similar to European tapestry weaving. Earlier the word applied to rough, thick fabrics but later was mainly used for cloth made from fine goat-hair, such as those known as cashmere or pashmina (Floor 1999: 296–7, 314). In Siam, the term seems to have acquired more broad meaning as a fine, expensive fabric, generally made from wool or similar material. In modern Thai, the word means ‘wool.’

‘Today, I’ll dress to the hilt. I’ll show off to Phim and make her smile.’ On his little finger, he put a snake ring in wasp-nest shape; on his index finger, a diamond ring; and on his wedding finger, a ring decorated with rubies. ‘Like this, Phim is almost mine! This set of rings with five jewels belonged to my father. The people of Suphan will quail before such a rich man!’

He crept over to look at himself in the big mirror. ‘Ugh! My head is as horrid as a shithole.⁶⁸ Yet a ghastly head can still belong to a gentleman. You lot, come here and take the mats.

About ten of you, come with me. But follow my arse and don’t go off anywhere. Ai-Jit, carry the water jug and the *nak*⁶⁹ betel tray, and don’t give yourself airs and graces.’

Khun Chang came down from the house, and strutted along with his head in the air, nodding in greeting to bystanders. Before long he was bathed in sweat like a butting buffalo.

At the main preaching hall, the lay elders were gathered in front. They made way for Khun Chang to enter. His servants laid a reed mat, and Khun Chang sat down, striking a dignified pose.

A group of friends came over to greet him and chat. Some of them had big mouths and talked too much. ‘My god, why are you sweating like this?’

Khun Chang was offended and snapped his face away. ‘People should not pass remarks.’ He looked away and called for pillows, pointing his hand, ‘Hey you!’

He ordered his servants, ‘Pile up the offerings for the episode - all the taro, potato, white sugarcane, red sugarcane, water melon, pomelo, *maduk*, *mafai*,⁷⁰ *chamot* and wheel sweets, red sticky rice, touchstone sweets,⁷¹ clam sweets,⁷² and big melons. Put things in order outside the *sala*! Don’t muddle things up!

Bring in the monks’ robes and bowls, the mats, mattresses, seats and cushions! And don’t hide away the betel tray for the episode! Place it out in front of the tray for the triple robes.’

⁶⁸ ล่องคี่, *long khi*, a hole cut in the floor of a house on stilts.

⁶⁹ นาก, an alloy of gold, silver, and copper.

⁷⁰ The fruits of *Beilschmiedia roxburghiana* and *baccaurea ramiflora*.

⁷¹ หินฝนทอง, *hin fon thong*, a round sweet with a dimpled top filled with some grated coconut, named for similarity to a goldsmith’s touchstone.

⁷² ครองแครง, *khrong khraeng*, flour paste shaped as clam shells, then either cooked in coconut milk, or dusted with sugar and fried.

Incense and votive candles were lit. The abbot made the recitation. The lay elders and faithful lit candles and offered flowers in worship.

Phim said, 'It's almost time for our episode. Let's go, mother.' She hurried off to bathe and change her clothes.

She briskly rubbed turmeric all over her body, shaped her hairline, put oil on her hair, and powdered her face so it glowed like the sheen of a gourd.

She polished her teeth with *chi*⁷³ so they glinted shiny jet black in the mirror. She put on a *yok* with a *kanok* pattern on a red background and a shimmering golden *kanyaeng*⁷⁴ motif.

She wore a soft inner *sabai*⁷⁵ in pink, overlaid by an elegant ruby-colored cloth with gold stripes and brilliant flowers, bound to delight the men.

She added a diamond ring decorated with rubies, and a snake ring with a moving tongue on her little finger. 'Come here, kids. Bring the *nak* betel set and the enamel bowl.'

The servants powdered themselves, got dressed, combed and oiled their hair, and trimmed their hairlines. When everything was ready, they assembled in front of the house in good time.

When Siprajan saw her daughter, she said, 'I'm already grey-haired and past it. Why should I get dressed up? A Tani⁷⁶ *yok* and an upper cloth with gold flowers are enough.'

Her daughter laughed out loud. 'Mother dear, aren't you ashamed you'll look out of place?' Siprajan looked at herself and cried, 'Karma, karma!' She changed into a lower cloth in black check, and a *pakoma* as upper cloth.

Siprajan led the way with Phim following, looking as beautiful as a court lady. The ranks of servants brought up the rear, carrying the offerings for the episode.

⁷³ *ฉี่*, an old toothpaste made from ground charcoal and salt.

⁷⁴ A symmetrical pattern with intertwined flowers and stems inside a grid of squares or diamonds. In the eighteenth century, cotton dyed in this pattern was made on the Coromandel coast of India for shipment to Siam (Choti 2005: 59; Barnes 2002: 74–7).

⁷⁵ A woman's breastcloth.

⁷⁶ Meaning Pattani, an important port and Muslim settlement mid-way down the eastern coast of the peninsula. Cloth from Pattani was popular in the late Ayutthaya era (Maxwell 1990: 249). Near Wat Lotchong, at the northeast corner of Ayutthaya on the opposite bank, was a settlement of Pattani people who wove and dyed silk and cotton cloth (*Khamhaikan*: 180).



The preaching hall was bright with incense and candles. Siprajan and Phim laid out their mats, sat down, and happily prostrated to pay their respects.

The monk finished recitation of *The Children* episode. The bald-headed sponsor rushed to make his offerings while a music ensemble played.

Phim and Siprajan had their servants carry in the offerings for their episode - almsbowls, cloth-bags, articles for everyday use, trays, triple robes, oranges, many other fruits, and various sweets. Everything was set out in rows with the betel for the episode in front. The music ensemble played louder.

The abbot summoned Novice Kaeo and said, 'I've been sick for several days, and I'm not up to it. You give the Matsi recitation instead of me.'

Novice Kaeo paid his respects and rushed off in a flap. He grabbed *Matsi* and began reading. He memorized the words and practiced reciting in the style of his teacher, until he had got it down pat.

He even committed the Pali verses and *junniyabot* accurately to memory. Then he called Novice On. 'Come and carry the text for me.'⁷⁷

Novice On agreed and went off to arrange his colored chicken-skin upper cloth. Then he paid his respects to the texts, wrapped them up, and waited ready at the stairs.

It was evening. To give the recitation, Novice Kaeo changed clothes, putting on a novitiate robe which clung tightly to his body. He went to pay respects to Master Mi.

Leaving the abbot's room, he prayed to enchant beeswax, and rubbed it on his lips.⁷⁸ With Novice On carrying the text in front, he walked from the *kuti* to the *sala*.

He sat at a lower level than the monks and composed himself. His eyes slid sideways and saw Phim's soft face. She glanced up and their eyes met. Shyly, she bowed her head and kept still.

⁷⁷ The text, written on *bailan*, would be treated with great respect, and always carried to the recitation in front to emphasize its greater importance over the reciter.

⁷⁸ He applied the enchanted beeswax to his lips to enhance the impact of his words on the listeners.



Mural from Wat Palelai, Suphanburi, by Acharn Muangsing Janchai, reproduced with permission



Novice Phlai repeated a love formula to join their hearts and eyes by special power. The force of the mantra made Phim succumb and drew her gaze irresistibly to his.

As their eyes met, he nodded to her with warmth and desire welling in his heart. 'Please come closer. The abbot is not coming. He's sick, so he had me come to give the recitation. As patron of this episode, what do you say?' Phim smiled and replied, 'Whoever does it, it's the same to me.

I'm not saying whether master or novice is bad or good. As long as it follows the Pali.'⁷⁹ While speaking, she smiled, and met his eyes. She pushed the betel tray to Saithong,⁸⁰ who knelt and placed it as offering. The novice went up to the pulpit, picked up the text, cradled it carefully in his hands, and read faultlessly from the *junniyabot* up to the passage when Queen Matsi comes across a lion and tigers on her path; she goes on begging to pass by until night falls and a moon shines brightly;⁸¹ she reaches the hermitage, and is chilled not to find her beloved children; sobbing with grief, she sets out to search for them.

The sound of '*Sathu!*'⁸² rose from the audience in unison as all were inspired to devotion. Nang Phim took off her ruby upper cloth, folded it, paid respects three times, and joyfully laid it on the offering tray. She remained prostrate with hands clasped offering prayers full of devotion.

⁷⁹ A stock phrase meaning as long as it's accurate. The Mahachat, as other Jataka, is written as being related by the Buddha himself, and thus the words are considered especially sacred. To approximate this sacredness, any translation from the Pali must be absolutely faithful. This phrase probably dates from a time when the reciting monk read from a Pali text and improvised the Thai on the spot.

⁸⁰ Saithong appears here with no explanation of who she is. Over the next few chapters, it becomes clear she is someone who has been adopted into the family to serve as a companion to Phim - part foster-sister, part maid.

⁸¹ To test Wetsandon, Indra delays Matsi's return until it is too late for her to chase after the children. He transforms three deities into two tigers and a lion, which block her path. Matsi pleads with the animals, but they wait until nightfall before relenting. Arriving back at the hermitage, Matsi is distraught to find the children missing. Wetsandon refuses to speak. She searches around all night in despair, returning to the hermitage at dawn. She collapses, and Wetsandon believes she has died. After a time, she recovers and Wetsandon tells her the truth, which she accepts. This is one of the most poignant passages of the story.

⁸² A word meaning 'good' or 'I approve,' uttered to show appreciation during sermons, recitations, etc.

‘I salute the almighty power. I offer alms. May I have rank and servants into the future, and be rich and joyful in every way.’ She sat up and listened attentively.

Khun Chang saw her offer the cloth. ‘Oho! Even a woman can do that! If I sit here quietly, I’ll lose face by comparison. People will gossip.’

He spoke out, ‘*Sathu mothana!*⁸³ Such deep devotion! Even though I’m not the patron of this episode, I feel moved to great piety.’

He turned to look at Phim with a smile, and took off his embroidered upper cloth. He folded it, raised it above his head in clasped hands, and made a prayer.

‘I salute the almighty power who has a heart of loving kindness. Please grant fulfillment to my mood of love, quickly, as my heart desires, within this evening, without fail.’

He placed his cloth beside that of Phim. ‘May the ruby cloth not escape me. May it miraculously float this way, before too long, within the evening of this day.’

Phim felt disgusted and gravely offended. She clicked her tongue, spat in shame, and ordered servants to pick up the tray.

I-Phrom and I-Bu understood their mistress’ feeling. They walked straight over, lifted up the tray with the cloth, and passed it over the head of Khun Chang in the middle of the *sala*. Khun Chang stared angrily into their eyes.

Saithong cried out, ‘Hey, I-Phrom! The end of the cloth brushed the gentleman’s head. Didn’t you see? Your manners are so wretched! Let’s go, Phim. Don’t listen.’

Phim strode out. ‘I’m so ashamed. Really and truly. Oh dear me. He’s worse than a farmer’s son but knows no better!’ She returned straight home, cursing him.

After Phim left, Novice Kaeo was love-struck and in turmoil. He skipped through the rest of the recitation, cutting it short.

⁸³ โหมทนา, another cry of affirmation.



He reached the final verses of the episode, brought the recitation to an end, and came straight down from the pulpit. They launched quickly into the *Powerful One* episode,⁸⁴ and continued until all thirteen episodes were complete.

The lay faithful, male and female, poured water onto the ground from cups and bowls, expressed their appreciation of the abbot, and left at the second watch.⁸⁵

Deep in the night, a gentle wind blew and a brilliant moon shone. In the quiet stillness of Wat Palelai, the little novice could not get her out of his troubled mind.

‘Oh my soft, fair Phim, after you left, did you think of me at all? Or did you forget me without any feeling?’ He moaned and groaned over half the night.

‘What must I do to get Phim?’ His mind would not stay still. He sobbed, ‘I love you so much I want to swallow you, Phim. All the millions of other women don’t interest me at all.

If we can share a pillow, I’ll sweep you up and enjoy you so there’s no single night without love. What must I do, precious Phim, to talk with you just a couple of words?

I don’t even know where you live. When I met you it was almost dark. I saw your face only in the middle of making the recitation. That accursed Khun Chang messed things up.

You took the servants off home in a boiling rage. I lost my cool and made lots of mistakes in the reading. After you disappeared, I felt so miserable. I’ll seek you out by guesswork tomorrow morning.

Even if you’re hidden away in some hill or valley, I’ll find you wherever you are.’ The more he thought of her, the worse it got. The cock hastened the passing of the night.

He hugged Phim’s ruby cloth, kissing it, stroking it, and inhaling its fragrance to bathe his heart, becoming ever more mixed-up all through the night until almost the first streaks of the sun.

⁸⁴ สักรบรพ, *Sakkarabap*, meaning the chapter of the Powerful One (*sakra*), one of the appellations of Indra.

⁸⁵ สองยาม, *song yam*. The night is counted in three watches, the first running from 6 to 9 p.m., the second from 9 p.m. to midnight, and the third from midnight to 3 a.m.

Near dawn, while Phim was sleeping soundly, she began to dream. She and Saithong were swimming briskly across a stretch of water;

at the shore, her feet touched and she stood up; Saithong handed her a golden lotus flower; she inhaled its fragrance, awash with joy, wrapped it in her upper cloth, and made her way back across the water.

As the dream ended, she woke up. Missing the golden lotus, she groped around for it. 'Oh what a pity! It's gone.'

She promptly shook Saithong awake and told her the dream. 'What's going to happen? Tell me what it means, please, pretty please!'

Saithong knew the meaning without a shadow of doubt. 'I've been noticing things for some time. Don't be worried, my darling.'

Dreaming about having a lotus means you're going to have a lover. It seems this man isn't far away, and perhaps you'll get him very soon.

The fact that you dreamed I picked the lotus and handed it to you probably means you'll depend on me in the time ahead. If you get what you desire, please be kind enough to let me have some benefit too.'

Phim cried out, 'Oh, Saithong! Why do you come up with this interpretation? Where did you see any hint of such a thing in the years we've been together?'

Have you ever seen me all het up and restless and irritable? Is that why you're teasing me? I may have dreamed of a golden lotus and it may still be there in my mind's eye, but I don't agree this means a man for me.

In the dream it was you who picked the lotus. If the man goes straight for you, I'll laugh. Please give an interpretation more to my liking and you'll get a pot of silver or pot of gold.'

Thinking of Phim, Khun Chang could not go to sleep. He tossed and turned, pined and longed. 'Oh my Phim Philalai!'

When you shouted at me, it sounded so mellow and bright. You're so elegant with your slender waist. Among thousands of girls, there's none other the same.



You were wearing a ruby upper cloth trimmed with gold over your green inner *sabai*.⁸⁶ Your arm is shapely, and your bottom enchanting. Your eyes were beautiful when you glanced my way.

What must I do to hold you tight! I'll raise you over my head. I'll fondle and caress you all the time. I'll place food in your mouth to eat, provide you with an elephant to ride, surround you with perfume while you sleep, make you a shower-spray to bathe, and not allow you to walk on the earth lest it irritate you.

I love you as much as my own life, but I worry I'm wasting my thoughts, as they'll come to nothing. I fear you'll hate my ugly body. Even if you loved me, you'd worry about your reputation.

Stop thinking about it. Why fret now? Let's find out first whether things turn out well or badly. If you're free, I'll find some way to plead my case so you soften up.'

He opened his mosquito net. 'Is it dawn yet? Oh, the moon's still high in the sky. This is a sign that I'll find my radiant Ketsuriyong⁸⁷ for sure!'

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⁸⁶ Her *sabai* was pink, but this passage is painting Khun Chang as a buffoon.

⁸⁷ The heroine in a popular story titled *Suwannahong*, composed as an outer drama by Prince Phuwanetnarit (1801–1856), a poet and son of King Rama II. The hero *Suwannahong* flies a kite which comes down in Mattan land at the palace of Queen Ketsuriyong. *Suwannahong* follows the string, meets her, and makes love to her (K&NT: 658; Nidhi 2005: 49).

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