



OBITUARIES

Thanpuying Lursakdi Sampatisiri

1919–2010

Thanpuying Lursakdi was one of the most prominent persons of the post-Second-World-War Bangkok elite who never forgot, thanks to her enterprising father's coaching, that with privilege comes obligations to help those less fortunate.

Nai Lert Sresthaputra, her father, was a highly successful entrepreneur whose business interests covered transport (his White Bus Company was still going strong in the 1960s, as was the White Boat Company), refrigeration (local ice factories obviated the need to import ice from Singapore), and real estate, mostly within the Nai Lert Group, founded in 1894. He sold the land on which the British Embassy now stands and, according to hearsay, offered the British government the whole block running back to Saensap Canal, a much larger piece which they didn't take, indicating the extent of his properties. Nai Lert also planned carefully his daughter's education and career.

Lursakdi was sent to Japan to study home economics in Tokyo (1938–1941). She then worked in the Thai Civil Service Commission (1941–1944), learning how the Government functioned. Nai Lert died suddenly when Lursakdi was 27, whereupon his only child was tipped into running the huge family business. This she did with the same acumen as her father. The group came to include what is now the prestigious Swissotel Nai Lert Park.

Thanpuying Lursakdi married in 1930 Khun Binich Sampatisiri, who worked in the Fine Arts Department in the Ministry of Education. The couple had two daughters, Bilaibhan and Sanhapit.

Thanpuying became ever more prominent in business circles and moved into political circles as well. She was invited to become Minister of Transport, after the nationalisation of the Bangkok bus companies, by the then Prime Minister, Thanin Kraivixien. She thus became the first woman minister in Thailand in 1976, paving the way for the further involvement of women in business as well as politics.

Thanpuying became closely involved in charities, notably in the foundation and expansion of the Lerdsin Hospital, named after her mother, Khunying Sinn, and its concomitant Lerd-Sinn Foundation. She was a strong supporter of art and artists. She received several decorations for her considerable charity work. Her garden-ing interests found outlet in working with a United-Nations–sponsored foundation charged with nature conservation and environmental protection.

She was a most gracious hostess besides being a perceptive entrepreneur. The author of this notice can remember a most pleasant evening at a dinner party in the old wooden family house in the early 1960s, when Khun Binich and Lursakdi (then perhaps just a *khunying*) received and delighted their guests with a mixture of tales of yore and the unrecorded present.

Thanpuying Lursakdi joined the Siam Society in 1962 and participated in many study trips, lectures and special events. As a loyal and concerned member she made significant donations in support of the Society's activities. She was one of the first to visit the site after the fire on 20 November 2009 and made the very first contribution to the Rebuilding Fund. Thanpuying and her family made donations to help build the Society's auditorium and the Chalerm Phrakiat Building. She helped fund the Society's textile project and the publication of *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, among other projects. She gave her support to fund-raising social occasions that brought members together for a good cause. Whenever the Society approached her for help, she always obliged.

Thanpuying Lursakdi will be long remembered and much missed.

Yoneo Ishii
1929–2010

My wife Jane and I first met *sensei* or *ajarn* Ishii in 1962, not long after we had arrived in Thailand. Ajarn Ishii was then working at the Japanese Embassy. We all were on a trip to Kanchanaburi organized by the Siam Society. I heard him speaking in Thai with others and assumed he was Thai. After my fumbling attempts to converse with him in Thai, he shifted to impeccable English and I learned that he was actually Japanese. At that first meeting he told us he had spent some time as a Buddhist monk and was planning to leave the Japanese diplomatic service to become a scholar. From that very first meeting, I knew that Ajarn Ishii was the model of the student of Thailand that I hoped to become.

We met next in Japan in 1967 after he had joined the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto. He, together with Dr. Koichi Mizuno—whom we had also met when he, like Jane and me, was engaged in ethnographic research in northeastern Thailand—arranged for us to visit Kyoto. I still recall answering the phone in our hotel room shortly after we arrived and hearing fluent Thai spoken. I wondered what Thai who knew me was in Kyoto—but, again, it was Ajarn Ishii.

As I began my own scholarly career, I recognized even more that Ajarn Ishii was a truly exceptional scholar. Although I have not been able to read the large number of works he published in Japanese (for a discussion of this work in English, see the posting on H-ASIA by Dr. Junko Koizumi of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University), but I have avidly read much of that which he published in English and some of what he published in Thai as well. Although he identified himself as an historian, he also contributed to the anthropology and sociology of Thailand. Over the years, I have found myself often re-reading his essays on Buddhism and society such as those collected in *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (1986).

After Ajarn Mizuno died way too young of cancer, Ajarn Ishii oversaw the continuation of Mizuno's research in Ban Don Du, Khon Kaen province. The volume he edited, *Thailand: A Rice-Growing Village*, published in English as well as in Japanese, remains a seminal work on understanding the transformation of rural northeastern Thailand.

I personally observed him interact easily with villagers in Ban Don Du and also was present when he held a conversation with Princess Sirindhorn using *rajasap*, the royal language. I learned with deep admiration that he was the interpreter for the Japanese Emperor many years ago when the King and Queen visited Japan. Ajarn Ishii was able to move easily in all strata of Thai society.

In February 2008 Khun Vasana Chinvarakorn of the *Bangkok Post* published a long article based on an interview with Ajarn Ishii. She noted that he “is a truly

learned man but one who is also full of humility and diplomacy when dealing with others.” After Ajarn Ishii passed away in February 2010, Ajarn Chalong Soontravanich at Chulalongkorn University joined with others in organizing a memorial for him. Like those who spoke at that memorial, I also wish to express my great debt to him for providing a model for being a student of Thai culture and history.

Although Ajarn Ishii has left behind his mortal remains, his karmic legacy will continue to have very positive influences on generations of scholars of Thailand to come.

Charles Keyes

Constance Wilson

1937–2010

Constance M. Wilson, 72, passed away on 17 February 2010, at Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine, USA. A New England girl, she was born on 7 October 1937 in Blackstone, Massachusetts, a daughter of Robert W. and Eleanor L. (Nichols) Wilson. She attended local schools and graduated from The Lincoln School, Providence, Rhode Island. Constance earned her bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College in 1959 and received her doctorate in Thai history from Cornell University in 1970. She was a classmate of the late David Wyatt, who also specialized in the history of Thailand.

Constance's dissertation, "State and Society in the Reign of Mongkut, 1851–1868: Thailand on the Eve of Modernization," with its 1,100 pages of exquisite detail, remains one of the defining works on the socio-economic history of Siam in the mid-19th century. Following the completion of her doctorate, she continued to pursue pioneering work on Thai economic and demographic history. She was senior editor of *Thailand: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (1983) and the volume, *Royalty and Commoners: Essays in Thai Administrative, Economic, and Social History* (1980). Charles Keyes, another Cornell classmate, considers both to be foundational works for the study of late pre-modern Siamese history. In the 1980s, she undertook a new project on the study of history of the Thailand–Burma–Yunnan frontier. She was senior editor of two volumes resulting from this research: *The Burma–Thailand Frontier over Sixteen Decades: Three Descriptive Documents* (1985, with Lucien M. Hanks) and *The Middle Mekong River Basin: Studies in Tai history and Culture* (2009).

Constance came to Northern Illinois University (NIU) in 1967 after an initial year of teaching at San Francisco State University that she reportedly did not find congenial. She was encouraged to move to NIU by then-Chair of the NIU Department of History, Emory Evans and a newly minted Asian history PhD from the University of California at Berkeley, George Spencer, who became her closest colleague and confidant, and later became department chair. George had the following to say about her in his recent recollections.

She did indeed find a niche for herself at NIU, developing a remarkable range of Southeast Asian history courses and helping to enrich Northern's growing Southeast Asia program until her 2003 retirement and subsequent move to Seattle. In the early 1970s, when the NIU Department of History suffered a catastrophic decline of enrollment and majors (plunging from roughly a thousand majors to slightly over a hundred, a 90-percent decline within roughly

three years, due in part to curriculum changes in the university), the department Chair at the time, Carroll Moody, informed the three Asia specialists (including James Shirley, in Chinese history) that in order to save the Asian history program and our jobs, we would each have to teach a large section of American history (either before or after 1865, our choice) each semester as part of our normal teaching load, along with courses in our respective specialties. I regarded teaching “American History to 1865” as an interesting challenge. Constance, who was the most traumatized by this news, reluctantly agreed to teach “American History Since 1865” (in which she had little training), but characteristically did it *her* way, as an Asia-centric foreign policy course. Predictably, a large part of the course was devoted, to the dismay of many undergraduates, to the Vietnam War, taught from a Vietnamese (and her own Quaker) point of view! After about a decade, Asian history enrollments—and history enrollments generally—revived, and the Asia historians no longer had to teach courses on the exotic West. Far more than any other NIU historian, Constance routinely subsidized her research out of her own pocket rather than undertake the hassle (and possible disappointment of rejection) of applying for research grants. She was also an intrepid traveler, journeying anywhere from the tropical lowlands of Southeast Asia to the stark highlands of Tibet. Although never in robust health, she was not to be deterred in visiting remote parts of the world.

An enthusiastic (but not uncritical) devotee of art and music (especially opera and ballet) and a strong supporter of libraries and museums, Constance in retirement provided to her distant friends (by e-mail) detailed descriptions of the many cultural events that she attended in Seattle. When she moved to Portland, Maine in 2009 to be near her ill, widowed mother (not realizing that she herself would soon be terminally ill), she lamented the relative paucity of cultural events there, but made the best of what was available.

Nature was not entirely kind to Constance. She was born with a malformed right hand of 3 digits and a kind of scoliosis of the right shoulder that became more pronounced as she aged. That might have been one reason why she never drove a car; or maybe she simply decided she didn’t need or want one. She was instead a great walker and hiker, moving slowly but deliberately in a posture that reflected her well-paced research and publication mode—day by planned day. Her Maine blood doubtlessly steeled her to the harsh winters of DeKalb; she could be seen

making her way from her apartment to campus office some 4–5 blocks away on the most blustery of days, bundled up in an oversized parka and booted up with footwear tested by use and time. But her physical deformity failed to deter her from writing steadily by hand, or pecking out pages on a typewriter, and eventually moving up to using a computer—the latter for her data compilation and analysis and manuscript preparation. She began with the dawn of computer punch cards and something called “SuperWylbur” at NIU and struggled to convert her data to Microsoft as time moved on.

Shortly before she died, Constance orally bequeathed her scholarly papers and books to Northern Illinois University, a sign of her true affection for the institution she served so well. I came to know most of her graduate students and some of the exchanges between her and them from both sides. She was determined to make “critical thinkers” of her students from Thailand who had, by and large, learned by rote memory, which, in at least one instance tilted in the direction of what she considered plagiarized papers. From her students I learned that she tracked down their references and quotations by going to the actual source they used to make sure they met professional standards.

In her own work, which I observed from the manuscript preparation of her last book, I could see that she checked and rechecked every line and citation of her own scholarship up to the day it was sent to the printer. She had the mind of a historian and was guided by the ethics of the best of her profession and the conviction of her Quaker roots. She quietly opposed the war in Vietnam on both historical and religious grounds. As things often turn in circles, there is a poignant irony in her description to the course on the Vietnam War that she was set to teach in March of 2010, namely that it was “not a military history.” And there was also her final worry that, in the event that should she not be well enough to teach the course herself, that it should not fall into the hands of a “facilitator [who] could misuse the materials if he/she were particularly anti-Communist.”

Well, nature intervened once more and visited her with untreatable cancer of the liver. She lived only a few weeks after diagnosis, having the last word in her own history by deciding against any life-extending treatments. Her legacy lives on in those who knew her, succeeding generations of students of Thai history who follow her, and in her gift of an extensive collection of books and articles she leaves to Northern Illinois University Founders Library.

John Hartmann

Hans Penth

1937–2009

Hans Penth was born in Berlin, Germany on 6 May 1937. In 1964, he earned his doctorate at Frankfurt University in the languages and history of Southeast Asia, with additional studies in Chinese and ethnology. His thesis was a translation and cultural-historical analysis of a part of the Sumatra chronicle of Hikajat Atjeh and was printed in German as a book in 1969. Soon after, he came to Thailand.

From 1965 until 1970, Hans studied old Lan Na Thai chronicles under the abbot of Wat Phan Tao in Chiang Mai. He settled in Chiang Mai as a philologist-historian specialising in northern Thai history, and married a Thai professor in the French Language Department of Chiang Mai University.

From 1970 to 1980, Hans researched Lan Na Thai historical documents at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. In 1981 he became “Foreign Expert” at the newly established Social Research Institute, Archive of Lan Na Thai Inscriptions where he served until 1997.

Hans retired at the age of 60 years and was nominated Honorary Member of the Siam Society in 1997, being a close associate of Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana, the elder sister of His Majesty the King of Thailand.

Needless to say, Hans continued to work as a “temporary employee” and was charged with research on Lan Na Thai history, in particular the publication of microfilmed inscriptions. Lan Na Thai is the name of a conglomerate of city-states that covered roughly the area of modern northern Thailand between the 13th and 16th centuries. Mostly under the leadership of the city-state of Chiang Mai, Lan Na influence reached far into neighbouring regions, covering parts of present-day Myanmar, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the southern part of China.

Dr. Hans Penth has to his credit over 100 scholarly publications, including the Jinakalamali index. In his lectures and writings, he emphasised culture and everyday life in Lan Na Thai.

After such hard work that sadly was never fully recognised in the ivory tower of Thai studies in Germany, Hans succumbed to brain cancer after a long struggle at the Suan Dok Hospital in Chiang Mai. He has passed away on Wednesday, 17 June 2009 at the age of 72. Buddhist funeral ceremonies were held at Wat Suan Dok, Chiang Mai. The cremation was held on Sunday, 21 June. His wife Nengnoi and son Bernhard survive him. May Hans rest in peace!

Reinhard Hohler