

**Literary Historiography and the History of the  
Thai Novel**

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## Abstract

The novel first appeared in Thailand approximately one hundred years ago. But for many years it lacked the cultural prestige of its Western counterpart. When the first histories of Thai literature appeared in the 1950s, they made no mention of the novel and it was not until the 1960s that the first attempts to record its history were made. This study plots the major landmarks in charting the history of the Thai novel in the ensuing thirty years.

Chapter 1 discusses the terms for 'literature' and the 'novel' and looks at the first histories of Thai literature and histories of Thai literature written in English.

Chapter 2 surveys the work of the first 'historians' of the Thai novel, Yot Watcharasathian, Prakat Watcharapho'n and Sathian Chanthimatho'n.

Chapter 3 examines the contribution of academics, and in particular, the works of Suphanni Waratho'n and Trisin Bunkhacho'n.

Chapter 4 presents data based on research into the place of the novel in today's educational curriculum in Bangkok.

Chapter 5 looks at two recent major works on the Thai novel. – Marcel Barang's *The 20 Best Novels of Thailand* and a textbook, *Phattanakan Wannakhadi Thai*.

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M. Simmons

à Agde. Juin 2005

## Introduction

Although the novel first appeared in Thailand approximately one hundred years ago, the genre has never enjoyed the cultural prestige it does in the West and other parts of Asia, such as India and Japan. Knowledge about the Thai novel – the great writers, the major works, a sense of the chronology and development of the genre – is largely absent in even well-educated Thais. Over the last fifty years a number of committed individuals have attempted to rectify this gap in cultural knowledge by tracing the genealogy of the genre and bestowing cultural value upon it. One major piece of evidence of the success of their endeavours can be seen by the fact that the novel is now formally taught as part of the literature curriculum in schools and universities; elsewhere, (but not covered in this thesis) literary prizes and awards (such as ‘National Artist’) offer further proof that the novel is slowly moving towards cultural acceptance and respect.

This thesis looks at the major works on the history of the Thai novel, which have helped to change attitudes towards the genre. It is addressed primarily to the Western student of the Thai novel, and aims to provide an insight into Thai perceptions of the novel and the study of the novel in Thailand.

Time and linguistic limitations have played a greater part in shaping this thesis than I envisaged at the outset. Nevertheless, for all its shortcomings, I hope this thesis will provide the interested reader with an understanding of the historiography of the Thai novel, and perhaps even a foundation for further research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HISTORIES OF THAI LITERATURE

#### *Wannakhadi and wannakam*

Before looking at the way in which the novel has been represented in Thai literary historiography, it is important to look at the Thai terms for 'literature' and the 'novel'.

The English word 'literature', in the sense of 'creative works', can be rendered in Thai by two different, but related words, *wannakhadi* and *wannakam*. Both words are 20<sup>th</sup> century coinings; *wannakhadi* first appeared in 1914, while as recently as 1950 (and in many reprints thereafter), *wannakam* was not included in the Royal Institute Dictionary. Of bilingual dictionaries, Pallegoix (1854) predictably lists neither, while McFarland (1944) has only *wannakhadi*, which is glossed as 'literature, poetical compositions.' Haas (1964) and So Sethaputra, whose first Thai-English dictionary dates from 1965, include both words, and similar glosses of *wannakhadi* as 'literature', and *wannakam* as 'a literary work'; these definitions are repeated by more recent lexicographers, such as Thianchai (1993) and Domnern and Sathienpong (1994).<sup>1</sup> The most recent edition of the Royal Institute Dictionary, first published in

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<sup>1</sup> *Photchananukrom chabap ratchabanthitsathan*, Bangkok: Royal Institute, 1950, p.823; Pallegoix, J-B; *Dictionarium linguae-thai sive siamensis; interpretatione latina, gallica et anglica illustratum*, Parisiis, Jussu imperatoris impressum in typographeo imperatorio., 1854. (Repr. Farnsworth, England: Gregg International Publ., Ltd., 1972;

2000, attempts to provide fuller definitions of the terms. According to the compilers, *wannakam* is a broad term, embracing all kinds of writing, regardless of whether it is written in prose or verse, or the form in which it is published, and the term 'even includes computer programmes'; *wannakhadi* is meanwhile defined as '*wannakam* which has been praised as being well-written and having artistic value ...'<sup>2</sup> The definition of *wannakam* makes no reference to the quality of the writing, but the implication in the definition of *wannakhadi*, is that any piece of *wannakam*, regardless of whether it is written in prose or verse, has the potential to be regarded as *wannakhadi*. However, to most Thai scholars of literature, it would be absurd to categorize any Thai novel, no matter how well-written it might be, as *wannakhadi*; for most Thais, this word can only be used for the ancient texts, predominately classical poetry, which were written over the centuries in the Thai royal court; and which constitute the canon of Thai literature.

Before the word *wannakhadi* was coined, a number of different expressions were used to refer to written works. All of these had a descriptive sense and not an evaluative one. The following three expressions in particular were current at that time: the first used the word *nangsu'* ('parchment, document, writing, letters, books, texts') before the title of a work such as, *Nangsu' Mahapharata* ('The Mahabarata'); the second brought together the author's name, the type of poetic verse

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McFarland, G.B., *Thai-English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1944, p. 762; Haas, M.R., *Thai-English Student's Dictionary*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964, p. 499; So Sethaputra, *New Model Thai-English Dictionary*, (Desk Edition) Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich, 1975, p.372; Thianchai Iamworamet, *A New Thai Dictionary with Bilingual Explanation*, Bangkok: Ruam San, 1993, p. 1042; Domnern Garden and Sathienpong Wannapok, *Thai-English Dictionary*, Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing pcl., 1994, p. 462.

<sup>2</sup> *Photchanamukrom chabap ratchabanthitsathan phor sor 2542*, Bangkok: Royal Institute, 2000, p.1054-5



used, and in some cases also the subject of the work, for example *Klong Nirat Phrayatrang* ('Phrayatrang's Klong Nirat'); the third coupled together the name of the event, which was the subject of the poem, with the type of verse used, for instance *Klo'n Nirat Rop* | *Tha Din Daeng* ('Klo'n Nirat of the Battle of Red Earth').<sup>3</sup>

phama thi

The word *wannakhadi* was coined to correspond to 'literature' in English as part of the name of a literary society, *Wannakhadi samoso'n* ('The Literature Society') that was founded by Rama VI on 23 July 1914. It was a fusion of *wanna*, a Sanskrit word meaning 'to write on paper', and *khadi* meaning 'way, story, account, case' in Thai.<sup>4</sup> At first it was only used in the Society's name, and not in its documents, where *nangsu'* was used to refer to texts in general. In the case of texts which the Society felt were well written, one of two expressions was employed, either *nangsu' di* (a good book) or *nangsu' taeng di* (a well written book).<sup>5</sup> Although *wannakhadi* was not used at this stage to refer to writing, through the activities of the 'Literature Society' a strong association between it and 'good' writing began to be formed.

<sup>3</sup> Chonlada Ru'angraklikhit, 'Wannakhadi wichan rawang 2325-2453' in *Tho' mai sai nam 200 pi wannakhadi wichan thai*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Chonlada Ru'angraklikhit, Ru'nru'thai Satacapahan and Duangmon Cittacamnong, Bangkok: Praphansat, 1998, p.15.

<sup>4</sup> De Fels, J. *Promotion de la Littérature en Thaïlande: Vers les Prix Littéraires (1882-1982)*, Tome 1, Paris: INALCO, 1993, p.159.

<sup>5</sup> Trisin Bunkhacho'n, *Phattanakan kan su'ksa khon khwa lae wichai wannakhadi thai*, Bangkok: Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1987, p.2

Rama VI, like many of his royal predecessors, was a writer, or more precisely a dramatist, poet, essayist and translator of western novels.<sup>6</sup> He took a genuine interest in contemporary Thai writing and the use of the Thai language in it. It was partly due to a wish to defend standards in written Thai that he created the 'Literature Society'. Its objectives were influenced by those of an earlier society, *Borankhadi samoso'n* (Archaeological Society), which had been established in 1907 by Rama V. The Archaeological Society was disbanded in 1910 after his death, with much of its intended work unfinished. Rama VI set up the 'Literature Society' to carry out his father's project to reward, promote and publish well-written Thai works. The King hoped to counteract deteriorating standards in the written Thai language by creating models of 'good' writing for writers to follow.<sup>7</sup> The problem with contemporary Thai writing for both Rama V and his son Rama VI was that writers used language that was too close to colloquial Thai in their works, they disregarded social conventions and moreover they translated foreign texts often copying the sentence structures of the original language.<sup>8</sup>

The King was the president of the 'Literature Society's' committee, which was made up of members of the committee of the Wachirayan Library.<sup>9</sup> The Society was founded on ten clauses, which set out its structure, rules, and objectives. Clause number seven listed five categories of writing under which the best examples of texts would be selected by the Committee and awarded its seal depicting the Hindu

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<sup>6</sup> Rama VI translated popular western novels, for example, by Sax Rohmer.

<sup>7</sup> De Fels, op. cit. p.160.

<sup>8</sup> De Fels, op. cit. p.160.

<sup>9</sup> De Fels, op. cit. p.224.

god Ganesh. These award winning works, models of 'good' writing in each of their categories, would then be published by the Society with its seal stamped on them and made available to the public. The following are the five literary genres which the 'Literature Society' classified Thai writing into for the first time:

1. Poetry: *khlong, chan, kap, klo 'n*.
2. Theatre, drama written in *klo 'n paet* or in *bot na pak*.
3. *Nithan*, tale in prose.
4. Theatre, spoken drama.
5. *Athibai* (i.e. an essay or pamphlet) on a science or arts subject, (however excluding school textbooks and the texts on archaeology which existed in the royal archives).

For a work to be considered for an award it had firstly to be judged as a 'good text' (*nangsu' di*) and 'well written' (*nangsu' taeng di*), by all or at least the majority of the 'Literature Society's' members.<sup>10</sup> In the view of the Society; a 'good text' was one which did not adversely affect the morale of readers, give them immoral thoughts and ideas, or moreover incite political agitation, which would be a problem for the government or his majesty the King. For the Society a 'well written text' was, regardless of its genre, one that was in 'good' Thai that conformed to regulations from the past or the present, and did not resemble a foreign language.<sup>11</sup> Once a text had been selected by the Committee it then had to be submitted to the King to decide

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<sup>10</sup> De Fels op. cit. p.161.

<sup>11</sup> De Fels op. cit. p.162.

whether or not it would receive the Society's seal. In some cases, as well as receiving the seal, an author was rewarded financially by him.

Between 1916 and 1924 the seal of the 'Literature Society' was awarded to the following ten Thai works:

1. *Phra non kham luang*, a poem written by Rama VI, around 1914.<sup>12</sup>
2. *Phra Lo'*, a poem in *lilit* verse, thought to have been written between the late 1400's and early 1500's by an unknown author. It received its award for the beauty of the language used in it and the originality of its subject.
3. *Samutthakhot*, a poem in *chan* verse, which was begun in the mid-seventeenth century and finished in the nineteenth century. It was the work of three different authors, Phra Maha Ratchakru, then King Phra Narai and finally Prince Paramanuchit.
4. *Manachat klon thet*, religious sermons written in *kap* verse by several different authors, and of an unknown date.
5. *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, a poem written in *klon suphap* verse by Rama II (1809-1824) and his committee of poets.
6. *Inao*, a theatre piece in *klon paet (bot)* verse written by Rama II.
7. *Samkok*, ('The Three Kingdoms'), based on a Chinese work, this tale was written at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Chao Phaya Phra Khlang.
8. *Hua chai nak rop*, ('The Heart of a Warrior'), a play written by Rama VI in 1913.

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<sup>12</sup> The poem was re-edited by Rama VI in 1916.

9. *Phra ratcha phithi sip so'ng du'an*, written by Rama V in 1888. It was selected by the 'Literature Society' as the best text in the category, *athibai* (essay, pamphlet).

10. *Matthana phatha ru tamnan haeng dok kulap*, a play written in *chan* verse by Rama VI in 1923.

These ten texts, identified by Rama VI and the Committee of the 'Literature Society' as the best examples in each literary genre, were a mixture of ancient and modern works all originating from the Thai royal court. It is perhaps true to say that the intention of the Society in awarding its seal to these particular works, had more to do with honouring the authors than to creating models of good writing for Thai writers to follow. Most of the texts that were chosen were written in verse, which by the reign of Rama V was steadily declining in popularity as a genre of creative writing, as more writers turned to prose fiction to satisfy new demands for realistic stories.

It's the  
changing  
from  
verse to  
prose  
objective

That said, the importance of the older works among the ten selected, (i.e. those written before Rama V came to the throne in 1868), was established in the minds of literary historians, and these texts subsequently became an integral part of later histories of Thai literature.

Why is it that real stories  
became questionable  
in the royal court?

The first book published on the history of Thai literature was probably *Parithat haeng wannakhadi thai* (Review of Thai Literature). It dated from 1937 and was written by the literature scholar Plu'ang na Nakho'n under the pseudonym, 'Nai Tamra na Mu'ang Tai'. It covered a period in Thai writing from the thirteenth century kingdom of Sukhothai up to the reign of Rama IV (1851-1868). In Plu'ang's book, the word *wannakhadi* was used in a similar way to how it is today. He used it to talk

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about different genres of texts (poetry, prose, plays, religious sermons etc) which dated from before the reign of Rama V and were written in the royal court. Plu'ang's work presented them as the major texts in the nation's literary history.

✓

ประวัติ

Though at this time the word *wannakhadi* was used much as it is at present to refer to ancient texts produced by the Thai court, the definition given of it was different to that usually found in modern Thai dictionaries. In an introductory section to the 'Review of Thai Literature' the eminent Thai scholar, Phraya Anuman Rachatho'n defined *wannakhadi* as, works which created emotion, aroused the imagination and entertained. Those which were not, he added, were works of reason, fact or instruction. It is interesting that Phraya Anuman's definition of *wannakhadi* did not mention anything about 'good' writing as recent definitions do. Moreover, certain works in Plu'ang's book such as, King Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription and the *Triphum Phra Ru'ang* (a treatise on cosmology), were closer to his definition of what *wannakhadi* was not, than his definition of what it was.

U.S.  
O.V.  
definition  
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history  
in

15 yrs later (1937)

In 1952 Plu'ang published what has become the most successful history of Thai literature written, *Prawat wannakhadi thai samrap naksu'ksa* (History of Thai Literature for Students). As the title of the book suggests, the works in it were *wannakhadi*. They were much the same titles as those which appeared in Plu'ang's 1937 book 'Review of Thai Literature'. Plu'ang's work and that of other historians established them as the milestones in Thai literary history. Writing in the 1955 second edition of 'History of Thai Literature for Students', Plu'ang said that the quality (*khun sombat*) of these works had stood the test of time, unlike more recent works whose

quality had yet to be proved.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly this was not something that he had previously said about these works in his earlier 1937 book 'Review of Thai Literature'.

For modern Thai literary genres, novels, short stories, modern poetry and other writing that was not *wannakhadi*, the word *wannakam* began to be used.<sup>14</sup> It first appeared in 1932 in the title of a government act, *Pharachabanyafikhum khro'ng silapa lae wannakam*, which was passed in order to maintain standards in the arts and literature.<sup>15</sup> In 1942 *wannakam* was used by Phibun Songkhram's nationalist regime in the title of a government department, *Samnak wattanatham thang wannakam* (Department of Literary Culture). In a similar way to the 'Literature Society', it was set up to promote the art of writing books and make literature more available to the Thai public.<sup>16</sup> In 1956, both *wannakhadi* and *wannakam* were defined in an official document, which based their difference in meaning on the quality of writing. In this document titled, *Ekkasan watthanatham kho'ng khana kammakan chabap thi 6* (Cultural Documents of the Culture Committee No.6), *wannakam* was defined as, written work of a good standard which had yet to be selected and classified into the category of excellence, which was *wannakhadi*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Plu'ang na Nakho'n, *Prawat wannakhadi thai samrap naksu'ksa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Bangkok: 1955, Foreword.

<sup>14</sup> The beginnings of modern Thai literature can be traced back to around 1874-1875. It was over these two years that two things changed literature in the kingdom. The first was the spectacular development in printing, the second was the appearance of two publications, *Darunowat* (the first Thai magazine) and *The Court* (the first Thai newspaper). Both these publications contributed to the rise of prose in Thailand.

<sup>15</sup> Chuan Phetkeo, *Kan su'ksa Wannakhadi Thai*, Bangkok: 1977, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Khvam ru phu'nthang wannakhadi lae wannakam ek kho'ng thai* by Pracak Praphapithayakorn, (Department of Thai and Eastern Languages, Srinakharinwirot University), Bangkok: Srinakharinwirot University, n.d., p.1.

As already shown, at different times in the past the meaning of *wannakhadi* was not the same. At present it is usually defined in Thai dictionaries as 'good writing' or 'well written works'. If the definition of *wannakhadi* has changed over time, the usage of the word has not. It has always been and is still used for the same group of texts that were written in the Thai courts from the thirteenth century up to the succession of Rama V. These works have become the subjects of the major histories of Thai literature.

### *nawaniyai* and *ru'ang san*

The words *nawaniyai* ('novel') and *ru'ang san* ('short story') were coined to give the Thai language words for the new prose fiction genres which started to appear in Thailand at the beginning of the twentieth century. The word *ru'ang san* was a direct translation of 'short story' in English. *Nawaniyai* on the other hand was a new word created especially for the novel, from *nawa* meaning 'new', and *niyai* which were the traditional tales and legends recited in Thai oral literature. These were different from the *jataka* tales and fables and folk tales which were called *nithan*.

Surprisingly in Thai there exists no equivalent to the English word 'fiction'. This is despite the fact that prose fiction has been the most popular form of writing for over a century in Thailand. Fiction is usually translated by one of three different expressions in Thai, *banthoeng khadi* or *ru'ang an len*, which both mean 'recreational/leisure reading', or *ru'ang sommut* meaning 'fictitious/imaginary stories'. In some Thai/English dictionaries 'novel' is even translated in Thai as *ru'ang an len*.

fiction  
=  
novel  
reading



### **Prince Damrong Rajanuphab and the beginnings of Thai literary historiography**

Prince Damrong (1862-1943) has been described as the founding father of Thai literary historiography.<sup>18</sup> Though he never wrote a complete history of Thai literature himself, his views and work on the subject have nonetheless continued to dominate thinking on it right up until the present.

Whilst director of the Wachirayan Library in 1904, Prince Damrong initiated an ambitious project to restore, conserve and make known to the Thai public ancient works important to the nation's literary heritage. His project consisted of gathering together copies of ancient hand written manuscripts, which were dispersed in various private collections and locations, editing them and then publishing them in the form of books. The Prince was driven by the desire to conserve this heritage in Thailand, and prevent it from falling into the hands of western collectors.<sup>19</sup> In order to resolve the problem of a lack of funds for his project he made use of the Thai custom of distributing books at cremation ceremonies. He offered wealthy families the opportunity to print a biography of their deceased relative in a published version of an ancient text, for which they would pay the publishing costs.

On the subject of literature the Prince was perhaps less interested in studying the artistic merits of a work than in researching its history and the life of its author. During the time that he was director of the Wachirayan Library numerous ancient hand written manuscripts were edited and printed as books with forewords

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<sup>18</sup> Chetana Nagavajara, 'Literary Historiography and Socio-Cultural Transformation: the Case of Thailand' in *Comparative Literature from a Thai Perspective*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1996, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.46.

written by him which talked about their particular histories. In all he wrote around 199 prefaces to books amongst which there were some erudite discussions of the Thai classical poetry genres.<sup>20</sup>

Prince Damrong created periods for Thai literary history, which followed the dates of major events in Thai history. In general the dates of these periods corresponded to the dates of the reigns of kings. In the Prince's view each new reign brought with it a new period in the history of Thai literature. This approach to dividing literary history was copied by many later historians. With the Prince and his work still being accepted as the authoritative voice in the field, Thai literary scholars have not attempted to go beyond him and create periods in the history of Thai literature which correspond to the dates of major works and changes in trends in writing.<sup>21</sup>

*Comment on his  
see footnote*

Prince Damrong's work in the field of Thai literature and its history had its strengths and weaknesses. He successfully resolved questions about the authorship of many ancient works. He also retraced the history of the main genres of Thai classical literature. He however made mistakes, firstly in the dating of certain texts, and secondly in the way in which he edited many ancient manuscripts. By editing out what he saw as 'vulgar' passages in works and rewriting others the Prince created new,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.48.

<sup>21</sup> It is this approach to writing literary history, which allows historians to reconstitute the diachronic and synchronic relationships between works. The approach used by Thai literary historians does not allow this. As the French literary historian, J. Rohou remarks, '...dates must be literary and not political. A war, a change in monarch does not always give rise to a change in literature.' (L'Histoire Littéraire Objets et Méthodes, Nathan Université, 1996, p.42).

modified versions of the ancient texts. Unfortunately many Thai scholars still base their work on his edited texts rather than on the original manuscripts.<sup>22</sup>

Prince Damrong was the first important writer in the field of Thai literary history. He pioneered work into compiling and classifying literary genres, as well as in promoting literature and history as forms of knowledge to be studied and taught. Without his pioneering work perhaps no history of Thai literature would have been written.<sup>23</sup> What he wrote has become a principal source of reference for Thai literary historians, in particular, for Plu'ang na Nakho'n and Paul Schweisguth, both of whose influential histories of Thai literature owed a huge debt to Prince Damrong.

### **Plu'ang na Nakho'n and Paul Schweisguth**

Two of the most important histories of Thai literature were published in the early 1950's. In 1951 *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise* was published by Frenchman, Paul Schweisguth, followed a year later by Plu'ang na Nakho'n's book *Prawat wannakhadi thai samrap naksu'ksa* ('History of Thai Literature for Students'). Neither work had the distinction of being the first history of Thai literature to appear in print. However in the fifty years since their publication both have proved to be influential works on the subject. Schweisguth's book, though limited to around just a thousand copies, is a standard reference for western scholars of Thai literature, whilst Plu'ang's is one for both Thai and western scholars alike on the subject. The content and structure of these two works are similar as their authors had the same view of

<sup>22</sup> Trisin Bunkhacho'n, op. cit. p.271-2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.272.

Thai literary history. They divided up the periods in the history of Thai literature in an identical way and covered the same works and writers. Moreover both Schweisguth and Plu'ang almost totally neglected contemporary writers and literary genres (the novel, short story, modern poetry) in their work.

### **Plu'ang na Nakho'n.**

The first published history of Thai literature was most probably *Parithat haeng wannakhadi thai* (Review of Thai Literature, 1937) by 'Nai Tamra na Mu'ang Tai' (Plu'ang's pen name). According to its author, there was no work before it in which the nation's literature had been collected together and compiled.<sup>24</sup> Plu'ang's work was written in two parts; the first covered the period from the beginning of the Sukhothai period in 1257 to end of the Ayutthaya period in 1767, while the second part covered the Thonburi period from 1767 through to the end of the reign of Rama IV in 1868. Guided by Prince Damrong's work, Plu'ang divided his history into eight periods.<sup>25</sup> Each new period corresponded either to a change in succession, the start of a royal dynasty or the change in location of the royal court, from Thonburi to Bangkok, for instance. Each period was accordingly named after a king, a dynasty or an ancient capital city. Plu'ang's treatment of each period began with a summary of the most notable historical events, followed by a detailed discussion of writers and

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<sup>24</sup> 'Nai Tamra na Mu'ang Tai', *Parithat haeng wannakhadi thai* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Bangkok: Krungthep Bannakhan, 1941, Foreword.

<sup>25</sup> These periods were as follows: Sukhothai (1257-1378), Early Ayutthaya (1350-1628), Phra Naray (1656-1688), Late Ayutthaya (1732-1767), Thonburi (1767-1782), Rattakosin/Phutthayo'tfa (1782-1809), Phutthaloetla (1809-1824), Rama III and Rama IV (1824-1868).

their works, with numerous extracts taken from a wide range of the texts to serve as examples.

Plu'ang's history did not include any mention of oral literature. It focused exclusively on ancient written texts, for which there existed recorded evidence, the texts themselves, and moreover extensive supplementary information on them and their authors which had been put together by Prince Damrong. It should be said that literacy in Thailand was for centuries limited to the royal court and temples. The production of written literature only began to move out of the control of these two locations during the reign of Rama V (1868-1910), when the first steps toward creating general public education were made and the publishing world began to be opened up by entrepreneurs outside of the royal family circle. Plu'ang's 'Review of Thai Literature' covered not only literary works from the Thai court but all sorts of writing that was part of the royal and national cultural heritage. Some of these works, though not important from an artistic point of view, were important from an historical one. One such work was Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription, with which Plu'ang began his history. It was, he said, significant as evidence of the difference between the present day language and that of an ancient period, as well as representing a pure form of Thai which at the time had few borrowed words. The text contained important historical information, Plu'ang added, about King Ramkhamhaeng and the people of Sukhothai.<sup>26</sup>

The 'Review of Thai Literature' was perhaps rather than a history of literature in Thailand, more precisely a history of the knowledge and culture which

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid p.5-6.

existed in the Thai royal court over a period of six centuries. It was a record of the quality of that knowledge and culture over this time. Plu'ang's book was first published in the late 1930's when Thai literature and its history were a single subject on the first B.A. degree courses taught at Chulalongkorn University.<sup>27</sup> It was, according to its author, well-received by students, which resulted in it being republished in 1941.<sup>28</sup>

In 1941 Plu'ang continued to review Thai literature in several articles, which were published in the magazine *Ekkachon*<sup>29</sup> under the title *Wannakhadi thai patchuban* ('Contemporary Thai Literature'). Though the last in this series of articles covered Thai classical literature, the earlier ones discussed subjects related to contemporary Thai writing. In these Plu'ang talked about Thailand in a period after Rama IV, retracing the changes which happened in the country by discussing, the spread of printing technology, the start of western style education and newspapers, the creation of the Royal Library and the Archeological Society and the changing trends in popular fiction. He used the work of two Thai scholar/writers, T.W.S. Wanapho and K.S.R. Kulap to speak about the effects of western influence on aspects of Thai life.<sup>30</sup> Plu'ang later edited and republished the articles which had appeared in *Ekkachon* as the third and the fourth parts of his 'Review of Thai Literature'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The first BA degrees were awarded by this university in 1935. The subject of the history of Siamese (Thai) literature appeared as part of the B.A. programme in this period. (Prospectus, Faculty of Arts and Science, Chulalankarana University, 1937-8, p.81.

<sup>28</sup> 'Nai Tamra na Mu'ang Tai', op. cit. Foreword, dated 6 June 1941.

<sup>29</sup> A weekly magazine edited by Sot Kuramarohit, which was largely devoted to publishing serialized novels.

<sup>30</sup> Trisin Bunkhaco'n, 1987, op.cit. p.54.

In 1952 Plu'ang published his most famous book, *Prawat wannakhadi samrap naksu'ksa* ('History of Thai Literature for Students'). It was specifically intended to be used to study Thai literature in the Thai education system and, 'as the first systematic exposure to traditional Thai literature' for many Thais, it played a major role in shaping their tastes.<sup>32</sup> Having been republished on numerous occasions, it has become a standard reference, if not *the* reference, for the study of Thai literary history. For his 1952 book Plu'ang re-used the structure he had used for his earlier 'Review of Thai Literature', again dividing Thai literary history into eight periods. The main difference between his two histories was that the 1952 one included an extra chapter, (*bot phiset*) in which writing after Rama IV was briefly reviewed.

Plu'ang discussed the periods of writing in his 1952 history in chronological order. He started each with an introduction in which he summarized events at the time and outlined the nature of writing. For example his introduction to his chapter eight, covering the period from Rama III to Rama IV begins with the following paragraph:

"Increased contact with the West, the nation enters a new era, new literature on the whole copies old trends, poetry appears to be in decline, the start of prose writing and of newspapers."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 'Wannakhadi wican rawang 2475-2500' by Ru'nru'thai Satcaphan, in Chonlada Ru'angraklikhit, Ru'nru'thai Satacaphan and Duangmon Cittacamnong, op. cit. p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Chetana, op. cit. p.52-3.

<sup>33</sup> Plu'ang, op.cit. p. 475.

Plu'ang then followed these introductions with discussion of literature, writers and writing. He ended each chapter with a list of princes who were important to Thai history and literature, and another of the notable events which happened during each of the eight periods which he identified.<sup>34</sup>

The 'History of Thai Literature for Students' was divided into two main parts. In the first Plu'ang wrote about the principles of literature study (*Jak haeng wannakhadi*), discussing the genres of Thai classical poetry, and giving a general idea of how literature should be studied and analyzed. In the second part he gave his account of the history of Thai literature. As he had done earlier in 'Review of Thai Literature', Plu'ang filled his later history with extracts from ancient texts. The rarer the text was, he said, the longer was the extract taken from it.<sup>35</sup> As well as repeating the structure of his earlier history in his 1952 one, he also with few exceptions, spoke about exactly the same works and writers. As before his history was an inclusive one, covering all types of writing. For instance in his chapter on the Authaya period he included the work *Kham lu'ang*; though written in verse it was not poetry but a sacred text important for religious reasons.<sup>36</sup>

Plu'ang's 'History of Thai Literature for Students' talked exclusively about the royal court and writing in it. It showed the important relationship that Thai kings had with literature. His history covered a period when kings were not only the main patrons of writers but also authors themselves and key contributors to the

<sup>34</sup> These lists were titled, *Phra orot su'ng song mi khwam samkhan thang prawatisat lae wannkhadi* and *lamdap hetkan samkhan*.

<sup>35</sup> Plu'ang, op.cit. Foreword.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p.57.



Nation's literary patrimony. This was generally speaking the situation up until the reign of Rama IV, in a period after this, (not covered by Plu'ang in his history), writing was no longer dominated by the Thai court and in particular the figure of the king.

Though Plu'ang included a final chapter in his book on twentieth century Thai writers and works, he did not mention either novelists or novel writing in it. By the early 1950's, when Plu'ang's book was first published, the Thai novel had, under the influence of novelists like Siburapha, Prince Akatdamkoeng, Do'kmai Sot K. Surangkhanang and Seni Saowaphong, progressed from being simply escapist fiction, adaptations and translations of western works, to being an established form of comment on Thai society and politics. Novel writing at this time had, however, yet to gain academic acceptance and become part of literature curriculum in the Thai education system. Plu'ang, himself a guest lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, believed that contemporary writing was difficult to criticize and put a value on. For him, unlike Thai classical literature, its quality had yet to be tested by the passage of time.<sup>37</sup>

### **Paul Schweisguth.**

To date the most important western book published on the history of Thai literature is *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise*, 1951, written by Paul Schweisguth. Though it is a standard reference for westerners studying Thai literary history, it is little known in Thailand itself. This is perhaps due to, it being written in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Foreword.

French, its small print-run, and it never having been republished either in France or in Thailand.<sup>38</sup> In addition to this much of the material that it contains can be found in the history books of Thai literature written by Plu'ang na Nakho'n.

Schweisguth wrote his book between 1941 and 1944<sup>39</sup> whilst he was Vice-chancellor at the Legation of France in Bangkok.<sup>40</sup> It was published seven years later in Paris, after he had spent time improving and re-editing it and after post-war shortages in printing materials had come to an end.<sup>41</sup> More than fifty years after its publication it remains the only western work to cover such a long period in Thai literature's history, from the thirteenth century to the 1930's.

In the way of structure and content, *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise* is similar to Plu'ang's anthology, 'Review of Thai Literature' (1937-1942), which appears as a reference in its bibliography. Schweisguth rather modestly described his book as, a bibliography with commentary.<sup>42</sup> Like Plu'ang, Schweisguth also admired Prince Damrong and his work in the field of Thai literary history. Plu'ang in his 'History of Thai Literature for Students', 1952, advised students to treat the Prince's work as the

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<sup>38</sup> The book was published by Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien Maisonneuve, it had a print run of between 800-1000 copies. (Personal correspondence dated 10.4.98).

<sup>39</sup> Schweisguth, P. *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise*, Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien Maisonneuve 1951.

<sup>40</sup> P.B. Lafont of L'Ecole Française d'Extreme-Orient. (Personal correspondence dated 5.3.99).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Schweisguth, op. cit., Preface.

model to follow regardless of the subject he wrote on.<sup>43</sup> Schweisguth on the other hand in his book wrote an entire chapter about his life and his work.<sup>44</sup>

Neither an academic, nor a member of any French research organisation, Schweisguth was a French government official. He was an autodidact, an enlightened amateur in the field of Thai literature, who wrote his history in his free time. For him Thai literature was a hobby.<sup>45</sup> Schweisguth began his book with an introduction in which he talked about the history of the Thai nation, its religion, government and writing. Here he also gave a rather sober view of the literature whose history he was about to discuss, he said:

"... in this literature no criticism, no dissertations on the subjects of religion, politics or literature are to be found. Its drama contains little tragedy, deaths are rarely eternal, the majority of productions have a childish quality and a moralistic goal. There are few shocking scenes to be found, on the contrary however, these productions are full of gaiety and good humour, descriptions are vivid and picturesque. It is these last traits which give this literature its charm."<sup>46</sup>

Schweisguth's introduction to his study was, in the view of the respected Thai scholar, Prince Thani, important for the foreign language material that

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<sup>43</sup> Plu'ang, op. cit. p. 523.

<sup>44</sup> Schweisguth, op. cit. p.343-57. The Prince appears to have been the inspiration for most of Schweisguth's work. To write an article on kite flying, ('Note sur les Jeux des Cerf Volants', *Journal of the Siam Society* vol.34, 1934) he used as his main reference *Tamnan Wao Phanan*, (A Treatise on Kite Flying) by Phraphiromphakti for which Prince Damrong had written the preface. In 1924 the Prince published a biography of the poet Suntho'n Phu. Schweisguth also took an interest in him, giving him much page space in his 1952 history, while in 1969 he wrote a French translation of Suntho'n Phu's poem, *Nirat phu khao tho'ng*.

<sup>45</sup> P.B. Lafont. op.cit.

<sup>46</sup> Schweisguth, op. cit. p.13.

it contained about Thai literature.<sup>47</sup> In the view of the famous French scholar Georges Coedès, his introduction was important for the material that he had translated on Thai prosody, which was for the first time made accessible to western readers.<sup>48</sup>

In *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise*, Schweisguth used Prince Damrong's approach to creating periods for literary history.<sup>49</sup> For the Prince, a new period in Thai literature began with either the succession of a new king, the start of a royal dynasty or the change in location of the Thai court. It was a little surprising for Schweisguth to have accepted this approach, as it had been a long time since French historians had established the use of periods for French literary history, which corresponded not with political events (changes in monarchy, wars etc), but with dates of the publication of major literary works and changes in literary trends which followed.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps in an effort to justify using Prince Damrong's non-literary periods for his history of Thai literature, Schweisguth wrote the following in his introduction to his book:

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<sup>47</sup> Prince Thani in his review of Schweisguth's book in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. XLI, January 1954, p.189. The Prince had also read and corrected the manuscript of the book prior to publication. (Schweisguth, op.cit. Preface.)

<sup>48</sup> The bulletin of L'E.F.E.O., vol.46, no. 2 1954, review of Schweisguth's book by Georges Coedès. Coedès wrote two reviews of the book: the first appeared in the revue, *Diogenes* 1953, no. 2. He later extended and re-edited this review, republishing it in the aforementioned bulletin of L'E.F.E.O.

<sup>49</sup> Schweisguth's periods were as follows: 'Les premiers textes' (i.e. Sukhothai), 'La Fondation d' Ayut'hia (Schweisguth's transcriptions followed), Le règne de Traylôkanat, Le début du XVII siècle, Le règne de P'hra Naray (1632-1657-1688), La dynastie de Bangkok, Le règne de P'huttaleutla, Le règne de Nang Klao, Le règne de Mongkut, Le règne de Chulalongkorn, Le règne de Rama VI.

<sup>50</sup> J. Rohou notes that in nineteenth century France 'literary history' (histoire littéraire), which had been used for the history of all manner of writing, began to be used exclusively for the history of literature, i.e. literary works. (J. Rohou op. cit. p.30.)

"The control of literature by the court has left an imprint on it so deep that it is indispensable to closely follow the history of Siam in order to understand this. It is for this reason that we have been led to divide this work into chapters corresponding to the principal episodes in the history of the Thais of Siam..."<sup>51</sup>

After his introduction, Schweisguth began his history of Thai literature in a rather predictable way with Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription.<sup>52</sup> Though he began in the same way as Plu'ang had in his histories, Schweisguth finished in a later period, covering writing up to the reign of Rama VI (1910-1925). He began discussion of each period with an outline description of events which happened and conditions in the country at the time, he then went on to talk about writers and writing. As was the case with Plu'ang's work, Schweisguth's history included all types of writing and not just literary works. His approach to writing about the period of Thai literature from King Ramkhamhaeng to Rama IV was very similar to Plu'ang's work in 'Review of Thai Literature'. His periods of literature were the same, as were most of the writers and works that he spoke about. The main difference between the works of the two men was that Schweisguth included chapters in his book which dealt specifically with Thai theatre and also what he called 'secondary genres' (*phleng, phleng yao*, lullabies for elephants). Though Schweisguth's *Etude sur la Littérature Siamoise* was very similar to Plu'ang's 'Review of Thai Literature', it was nevertheless a personal work from which an idea of the man's personality could be formed. Schweisguth's book included many of his personal views of the texts he described. In some cases these revealed a refreshing honesty, if not a certain naivety, about the literature that he was

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<sup>51</sup> Schweisguth, op. cit. p.12.

<sup>52</sup> The authenticity of both the dating and authorship of this inscription has been a source of open debate in recent years. Plu'ang's work was important in establishing it as the traditional starting point for histories of Thai literature and helping to establish it as a cornerstone of Thai identity.

writing about. For example, he said that the ancient work called the *Chindamani*, (the first work written about Thai versification) was:

"...without doubt a master piece of its kind, but a very boring read. It contains the rules of twenty-seven different types of khlo'ng verse."<sup>53</sup>

He rather missed the point about this work as it was intended to be a guide for poets to write poetry and not to be read from cover to cover for pleasure.

Another common point between Schweisguth's book and Plu'ang's work was that both used numerous extract examples from ancient texts. In his 1952 book 'Thai Literature for Students', Plu'ang explained that he made use of many long extracts from texts because he wanted to give students access to ancient works, which were otherwise difficult for them to find. He moreover tried to encourage students to read the complete text, by insisting how important reading was to studying literature.<sup>54</sup> Schweisguth on the other hand offered no explanation as to why he had given his history the form of an anthology.

Without any apparent awareness of the difficulties involved in translating ancient Thai poetry into French, Schweisguth boldly translated extracts from several Thai masterpieces, such as *Nirat phu khao tho'ng* by the poet Suntho'n Phu.<sup>55</sup> In the view of the eminent French scholar, Georges Coedès, his translations left much to be desired. A world-renowned South-East Asia specialist, Coedès wrote

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p.106.

<sup>54</sup> Plu'ang, op. cit. Foreword.

<sup>55</sup> In 1969 Schweisguth published a French translation of the whole of this poem, *Sunt'hōn P'hū Nirat P'hū K'hāo T'hong, Essai de Traduction Littérale d'un Poème Thai*.

one page is missing,  
p. 30 to add on  
with footnote 16-60

Schweisguth was particularly complimentary about the novelist 'Do'kmai Sot', identifying her as the first female Thai novelist and describing her works as 'well-conceived'.<sup>61</sup> Of Prince Akatdamkoeng, however, he was less than flattering. The Prince was author of just two novels before his mysterious death, *Lakho'n haeng chiwit* ('The Circus of Life' 1929) and *Phiu lu'ang phiu khao* ('Yellow Skin, White Skin', 1930). The former, in particular, aroused considerable controversy, because of what was regarded as the author's thinly-veiled criticisms of his own family. Schweisguth echoed the views of many conservative Thais when he commented,

"The case of Prince Akatdamkoeng is quite sadly that of a great number of young people whose moral education is insufficient and health too weak to resist the impact of white civilisation, with its selfishness, cruelty and inhumanity. His conclusion is that East and West can never meet."<sup>62</sup>

Schweisguth broadened his criticism of the Prince to embrace the young generation of bourgeois Thais, who like him, were educated in the West. In the opinion of Schweisguth, who seemed oddly resentful, these young Thais were trying to demolish and erase everything that they saw in their country, which they did not understand or no longer understood.<sup>63</sup>

## **Manich Chumsai and Klaus Wenk**

The work of two further authors, Manich Chumsai, and Klaus Wenk, deserve some mention, for as both works are written in English, they are influential in shaping

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid p.365.

<sup>62</sup> Schweisguth, op.cit. p. 364.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



non-Thais' impressions of and attitudes towards Thai literature in general and the novel in particular. Manich was an influential figure in educational, literary, book-collecting and publishing circles from the 1950s until the 1980s. He wrote and published, among others, a number of bilingual dictionaries (Thai/English, Thai/French and Thai/German), phrasebooks and English language histories of Laos, Thailand and Anglo-Thai relations; his *History of Thai Literature* appeared in 1973.<sup>64</sup>

Manich began 'History of Thai Literature' in an original way with a discussion of Thai folk tales. This was not the start of his history however, it was started a few pages later in a much more conventional way with Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription. Manich ended his book with a brief look at writing in the modern period, and a section on the modern novel. When it came to the novel, Manich's work was sketchy, lacking in any detail and in any originality. It owed much to M.L. Bunlu'a's 1971 article *Hua lieo kho'ng wannakhadi thai* ('The Turning Point of Thai Literature').<sup>65</sup> The novel, he wrote, started in Thailand with translations of western works filled with crime, sex and delinquency, while later, novels started to be written about society, politics, common people and poverty. These novels, he added, were against social injustice and even the government.<sup>66</sup>

Manich's discussion of major Thai novelists and their lives was brief and showed his lack of knowledge of the subject. The first original novel worthy of any

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<sup>64</sup> Manich Chumsai, *History of Thai Literature*, Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1973.

<sup>65</sup> M.L Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan, 'Hua lieo kho'ng wannakhadi thai', in *Wanwaitthayako 'n chabap wannakhadi*, Bangkok: Khronkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutsaysat, 1971, p. 55-157.

<sup>66</sup> Manich op.cit. p.8.

note, he said, was M.C. Akatdamkoeng's 'Yellow Skin, White Skin' 1930. Most major historians of contemporary Thai literature however disagree with Manich on this. They usually point to Prince Akatdamkoeng's 1929 novel *Lakhon' haeng chiwit* ('The Circus of Life'), as being the first important Thai novel, and moreover his most significant work. Of this novel, Manich simply says that it was more popular with readers than 'Yellow Skin, White Skin'.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to M.C. Akatdamkoeng; Manich briefly talks about major novelists, Dokmai Sot, Sot Khuramarohit, Yakhop and Kukrit Pramot. However, he leaves out others like, Malai Chuphinit, Seni Saowaphong and K. Surangkhanang, who might be regarded as being equally important. Siburapha, meanwhile, perhaps the most interesting of the early Thai novelists, is not mentioned at all in this context and referred to only briefly in a section on Thai newspapers.<sup>68</sup> In his discussion of novel writing in the 1960's and 1970's, Manich predictably chooses the best-selling authors and winners of literary awards.<sup>69</sup>

Klaus Wenk's *Thai Literature, an Introduction*, was published in 1995.<sup>70</sup> The author, Professor of Thai Literature at the University of Hamburg, followed the approach to writing Thai literary history established by Plu'ang Na Nakho'n some forty years earlier. Following Plu'ang and Prince Damrong before him, Wenk based

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 267.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.282.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.282.

<sup>70</sup> Wenk, Klaus, *Thai Literature, an Introduction*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995. For a perceptive review, see Rachel Harrison's review in *South East Asia Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, March 1996, p. 95-100.

his literary periods on Thai history. He, by his own admission, used this approach out of convenience, pointing out that a lot more research and study was needed before the periods in Thai literature could be determined with validity.<sup>71</sup> Like countless others before him, Wenk took as the starting point of his work King Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription. He then continued with an account of literature in the Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok eras. The first and main part of his history ended in 1932 with the fall of the absolute monarchy in Thailand, which according to Wenk was a turning point in the development in Thai literature.<sup>72</sup> He unfortunately did not go on to explain what he meant by this, and it is certainly not easy to deduce, as at least from the reign of Rama IV onwards, if not earlier, the Thai monarch no longer had a direct control over or significant influence on the direction that Thai writing took.

The publisher's notes on the cover of Wenk's book state that it contains the integral part of the Thai literary tradition, all the essential titles. In Wenk's opinion Thai prose fiction is no doubt an insignificant part of this tradition as he discusses it in just five pages of his book. In the rest of the book he writes exclusively about Thai classical poetry, which he says, was a better way for Thais to express their writing talent than was any genre of prose.<sup>73</sup> On this last point Wenk echoes the views of Schweisguth.

At the very end of his book Wenk makes an attempt to discuss the novel. He divides the novel into two categories: serious 'belles lettres' (written in a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.78.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.83.

good linguistic form) and popular fiction, most of which he regards as literary trash.<sup>74</sup> And rather than discuss novels in terms of their themes, characterization, plots and structures, curiously, he discusses them, as he did Thai classical poetry, on the basis of the language used in them. Thus, the novel, *Phu chana sip thit* by Yakhop, 1932, is worth mentioning because of its high quality of its language.<sup>75</sup> On the subject of major Thai novelists he writes just two or so lines on each of the following: Siburapha, Sot Kuaramrohit, Do'kmai Sot and Malai Chuphinit. Others well-known writers, like Seni Saowaphong, are not mentioned at all.

## Summary

This chapter has attempted to show that the position of the novel in traditional Thai literary historiography is at best marginal. It seemed perfectly reasonable to Plu'ang na Nakho'n, author of the first Thai-language histories of Thai literature, to exclude them from his work. Paul Schweisguth, writing at the same time as Plu'ang, but for a Western audience accustomed to regarding the novel as a serious literary genre, pays lip service to the Thai novel with a brief discussion of some novelists, but his comments – and omissions - suggest that he had little first- or second-hand familiarity with the state of the novel in Thailand at the time when he was writing. More recent attempts to outline the history of Thai literature to foreigners, by Manich Chumsai and Wenk, also reflect the authors' ambiguous attitude to the Thai novel and whether it really deserves to be treated as 'literature'.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.78

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.78.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FIRST HISTORIES OF THE THAI NOVEL

The major histories of Thai literature published between 1937-1952, recorded only writing from the classical literary period; there was little, if any, discussion of contemporary Thai literature in general, and the novel in particular.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the 1970's, and the appearance of works by Chu'a Satawethin, M.L. Bunlu'a Thepayasuwan, Suphanni Waratho'n, Wibha Senanan and Trisin Bunkhaco'n, that academics began to take a serious interest in the history of the novel and to research it in depth and write about in detail.<sup>2</sup> The work of these academics will form the basis of the next chapter. But before the Thai novel became a sufficiently respectable subject for academics to research and postgraduate students to write theses about, chronicling the history of the genre was left largely to a couple of enthusiastic amateurs, Yot Watcharasathien and Prakat Watcharapho'n.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Chu'a Satawethin. *Prawat nawaniyai thai*. Bangkok: Sutthisan kan phim, 1974; M.L. Bunlu'a Thepayasuwan. 'Hua lieo khong wannkhadi thai.' In *Wanwaithhayakon chabap wannakhadi*. Bangkok: Khongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutsayasat, 1971, p. 55-157; Wibha Senanan, *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panit, 1975; Supphani Warathon. *Prawat kan praphan nawaniyai thai*. Bangkok: Khongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutsayasat, 1976. Trisin Bunkhachon. *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai (2475-2500)*. Bangkok: Sangsan, 1980.

Yot Watcharasathien was himself a writer, journalist and translator. He first achieved success with a novel called *Chartchai* which was serialized in the daily newspaper, *Sayam Rat Rai Wan* in 1931 and published in book form four years later.<sup>3</sup> He was a great admirer of 'Siburapha', one of the major figures in the Thai literary world of the 1930s and for a period, worked with him.<sup>4</sup> Thus when he published *Khwam pen ma kho'ng kan praphan lae nak praphan thai* ('The Origins of Thai Writing and Writers') in 1963, he could draw on more than three decades of personal experience of the Thai literary world.<sup>5</sup> Chapters 4-7 in Yot's book focus directly on the rise of the novel, under the titles, *Su yuk nawaniyai* ('Towards the Age of the Novel'), *Nawaniyai lae sammuan roi keo fu'ang* ('The Popularity of Novel and Prose Writing'), *Thammai nawaniyai chu'ng fu'ang* ('Why is the Novel Popular?') and *Nawaniyai chak samai roem raek thu'ng patchuban*, ('The Novel, from its Beginnings to the Present'). Yot was breaking new ground, in providing the Thai novel with a history and devoting considerable space in his book to discussing various aspects of the genre.

Yot's seventh chapter, *Nawaniyai chak samai roem raek thu'ng patchuban*, ('The Novel, from its Beginnings to the Present'), broadly outlines the history of the novel from the 1920s to the 1950s. It traces the origins of the Thai novel back to the early attempts by western-educated Thais to first translate western novels, and then imitate works of such writers as Charles Garvice and Marie Corelli, before finally producing 'genuine

<sup>3</sup> 'Sidaoru'ang', *Lakho'n haeng lok*, Bangkok: Writer Magazine, 1994. p. 84-91. For further details of Yot's career, see P. Watcharapho'n, *Chomrom nak khian*, Bangkok: Dok Ya, 2<sup>nd</sup>.ed. 1993, p 163-77.

<sup>4</sup> Yot Watcharasathien, *Kulap Saipradit -Siburapha- thi Khaphachao ruchak*, Bangkok: Arts and Science, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Yot Watcharasathien. *Khwam pen ma khong kan praphan lae nak praphan thai*. Bangkok: Phrae phitthaya, 1963.

Thai stories'. He describes the importance of journals, such as *Roengrom*, *Suphapburut*, and *Suan Aksorn*, in promoting fiction and providing an outlet for aspiring writers, the role of the 'film books' that accompanied silent movies, and were a pre-cursor to the novel, and the introduction of literary prizes. He identifies different kinds of novels, such as *ru'ang phachon phai* ('adventure stories'), *ru'ang lu'k lap* ('mystery stories'), *ru'ang talok* ('comedy stories') and, most popular of all, *ru'ang rak sok* ('sad love stories'), and gives examples of well-known works in each category. The names of numerous well-known writers are also sprinkled through the chapter, although Yot offers little in the way of biographical details or comment on their works.<sup>6</sup> Drawing upon his long involvement in the literary world, Yot could write from memory, more in the style of a diarist than a historian. Although he was sometimes careless about facts and details, he nevertheless provided an invaluable framework for the more academically rigorous works of Suphani, Wibha and Trisin when they began research on the Thai novel in the following decade.<sup>7</sup>

The second major figure in early writing on the novel is Prakat Wacharapho'n. He was somewhat younger than Yot and does not appear to have been a fiction writer at any stage in his career. Where Yot aimed to provide a broad panoramic view of the modern literary world, Prakat was more interested in assembling details of the lives and works of individual writers. Within the space of five years, he published three volumes consisting of brief biographies of more than one hundred writers. The first volume, *Prawat nak praphan* ('Biographies of Writers', 1962) pre-dated Yot's work by one year, and was quickly followed by two further volumes, *Thamniap nak praphan*, ('Handbook of Writers', 1963), and *Chom rom nak khian*, ('Writers' Club', 1966?). A glance through

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 153-213

<sup>7</sup> For example, when talking about literary prizes, he confesses that he has forgotten the title of the winning novel. *ibid.* p. 180.

the contents of Prakat's work (Table 1) shows that he included many of the writers who would today be regarded as the major figures in the development of the novel, such as Luang Saranupraphan, M.C. Akatdamkoeng, Do'kmai Sot, Malai Chuphinit, Sot Kuramarohit, P. Intharapalit, K. Surangkhanang, M.R. Khu'krit Pramot, Seni Saowaphong, and many who are highly-regarded as short story writers. An obvious omission is Siburapha, although there is reference to him in *Chomrom nak khian* in the entry on the 'Suphaphurut Group' of which he was the founder. At the time Siburapha was living in exile in China, and since he was regarded as a communist, 'the less said about him, the less likely one was to be tarred with the same brush.'<sup>8</sup> Not that this had silenced Yot, who identified 'Siburapha' as a major pioneer of realism in works such as *Man Manut* ('An Evil Person', 1929) and *Luk Phuchai* ('A Real Man', 1929) and his 1932 novel, *Songkhram chiwit* ('The War of Life'), which took its structure from Dostoevsky's *Poor People*, as a 'political novel.'<sup>9</sup>

Two writers, Malai Chuphinit (under his pen names, 'Riam Eng' and 'Mo'. Chuphinit') and Yot Watcharasathian appear in both *Prawat nak praphan* and *Chomrom nak khian*. Although the entries on 'Riam Eng' in *Prawat nak praphan* and 'Mo'. Chuphinit' in *Chomrom nak khian* both appear to be biographies of Malai Chuphinit, they are very different. The first begins by referring to Malai's admiration for Guy de Maupassant and how he had used the French author as a model in

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<sup>8</sup> Smyth, D.A. *A Study of the Major Fiction of Kulap Saipradit (pseud. 'Siburapha')*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Yot. op.cit. p. 196-206.



| <i>Prawat nak praphan</i><br>1962 | <i>Thamniap nak praphan</i><br>1963 | <i>Chomrom nak khian</i><br>1965       |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1. Ko'. Surangkhanang             | 1. Kaew Fa                          | 1. 'Kasae' lae 'Si Siat'               |
| 2. Ko'. Sayamanon                 | 2. Khae na Wangnoi                  | 2. Kriang Kraiso'n                     |
| 3. Kanchala                       | 3. Khru Thep                        | 3. Cho' Kunlaprachip, Si<br>Thong Chat |
| 4. Khaekhai Thewin                | 4. Chamnong                         | 4. Chit Burathat                       |
| 5. M.R. Khu'krit Pramot           | Wongkhaluang                        | 5. Temi Witthaya                       |
| 6. Dr. Chitkasem                  | 5. Chun Praphawiwat                 | 6. Sadet Nai Krom                      |
| Sibunru'ang                       | 6. Cho'. Saengphen                  | Narathippaphanphong                    |
| 7. Phra Ong Chao Chula            | 7. Cha-um Panchaphan                | 7. Nilawan Pintho'ng                   |
| Chakraphong                       | 8. Chuwong Chayachinda              | 8. Narawadi                            |
| 8. Do'kmai Sot                    | 9. M.L. Toi Chumsai                 | 9. Somdet Krom Phra                    |
| 9. Dolok Thiratho'n               | 10. Thano'm Mahapaoraya             | Paromanuchitchinorot                   |
| 10. Somdet Krom Phraya            | 11. Thep Mahapaoraya                | 10. Prasoet Phichansophon              |
| Damrong                           | 12. Nai Tamra na Mu'ang             | 11. Ping Po'ng                         |
| Ratchanuphap                      | Tai                                 | 12. Prem Chaiya                        |
| 11. No'. Mo'. So'                 | 13. Nian                            | 13. Pho'n Photchanat                   |
| 12. Nakhapraphip                  | 14. Po'. Puranapako'n               | 14. Mo'. Chuphinit                     |
| 13. Nitthaya                      | 15. Prasit Siribanthoeng            | 15. Yot Watcharasathian                |
| Natayasuntho'n                    | 16. Phanomthian                     | 16. Mo'm Rachoathi                     |
| 14. Busayamat                     | 17. Phra Nang Thoe                  | 17. Nai Ramkhan                        |
| 15. Po'. Intharapalit             | Laksami Lawan                       | 18. Luan Khwantham                     |
| 16. Pho'. Netarangsi              | 18. Phra                            | 19. Thai Noi                           |
| 17. Putthathat Phikkhu            | Phisanphitthayaphun                 | 20. Krom Mu'n Ratcha                   |
| 18. Manat Chanyong                | 19. Phranbun                        | thipaphongpraphan                      |
| 19. Mae Wan                       | 20. M.C. Phunphisamai               | 21. Suk Haru'thai                      |
| 20. Mai Mu'angdoem                | Diskul                              | 22. Suntho'n Phu                       |
| 21. Yakho'p                       | 21. Yasotho'n                       | 23. Sulak Siwarak                      |
| 22. Yot Watcharasathian           | 22. Ro'. Chanthaphimpha             | 24. Khana 'Suphaphurut'                |
| 23. Rong Wongsawan                | 23. Ro'. Wutthathit                 | 25. So'. Sethabut                      |
| 24. Riam Eng                      | 24. Lamun Attiphayak'               | 26. Seni Saowaphong                    |
| 25. Ratana Yawapraphat            | 25. Wannasiri                       | 27. O'. Sanitwong                      |
| 26. Wilat Maniwat                 | 26. Luang Wichit                    | 28. Achin Panchaphan                   |
| 27. Dr. Wit Siwasiyanon           | Wathakan                            | 29. Wannakhadi samoso'n                |
| 28. Sirat Sathabanawat            | 27. Wethang                         | 2457                                   |
| 29. Supho'n Bunnak                | 28. So'. Asonchinda                 | 30. Samakhom                           |
| 30. Sathian Koset                 | 29. Sanit Ekkachai                  | wannakhadi 2474                        |
| 31. Sot Kuramarohit               | 30. Sansiri                         | 31. Wannakhadi                         |
| 32. Suda Nakharanurak             | 31. San Thewarak                    | samakhom 2485                          |
| 33. Supha Thewakun                | 32. Luang Saranupraphan             | 32. Wong wannakhadi                    |
| 34. Saengtho'ng                   | 33. Suphatra                        | 2489                                   |
| 35. Amarawadi                     | 34. Suwat Woradilok                 | 33. Chomrom nak praphan                |
| 36. Orawan                        | 35. Sathian Phantharangsi           | 2493                                   |
| 37. M.C. Akatdamkoeng             | 36. Seni Butsapaket                 | 34. Samnak watthanatham                |
| 38. Asa                           | 37. O'. Chaiworasin                 | thang wannakam 2495                    |
| 39. Ing-o'n                       | 38. O'. Ro'. Do'.                   | 35. Samakhom phasa lae                 |
| 40. Hiwmer-rit                    | 39. O'. Udako'n                     | nangsu' 2501                           |
|                                   | 40. Adun Ratchawangin               | 36. Nak khian satri thai pai           |
|                                   |                                     | prachum rawang chaht                   |

|  |  |                                                                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  | 37. Sahaphan nak plae rawang prathet<br>38. Samakhom phu khai nangsua' rawang prathet |
|--|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Figure 1. Contents of Prakat Watcharapho'n's three volumes of literary biography*<sup>10</sup>

developing his own writing skills. Prakat outlines Malai's reputation as a prolific writer and master of the language and then, strangely, lists the contents of Malai's latest volume of collected short stories. Prakat concludes with a lengthy discussion of the novel, *Lo'ng Phrai* by 'Noi Inthanon', assuming that his readers will realize that 'Noi Inthanon' and 'Riam Eng' are one and the same person.

The second entry, 'Mo'. Chuphinit', in *Chomrom nak khian* is a considerably longer and a more serious attempt to put together biographical details on the writer. Prakat acknowledges the difficulties of trying to write comprehensively about such a prolific writer as Malai, when so much documentation no longer exists. He provides basic details of Malai's family background and career, including lists of committees he served on, overseas visits he made and even his hobbies; and he quotes a glowing tribute from Malai to Prince Wan Waitthayako'n, the owner of *Prachachat* daily newspaper, where Malai was deputy editor in the years leading up to World War II. The entry ends with a reprint of Malai's short story, *Du'an sip so'ng* (The Twelfth Month).

Prakat's three works of literary biography included the first accounts of the personal lives and careers of some of Thailand's foremost writers and often contained the

<sup>10</sup> This, and other tables in this chapter are reproduced with permission from lecture handouts prepared by David Smyth.

first hand recollections of the subjects themselves. In none of the three books did the author seriously try to analyse and discuss his subjects' works. He was principally interested in recording details of their lives, their writing careers and listing their major works, rather than examining what they had actually said in their works. His approach was based on the belief that by knowing a writer's life history, his or her works could be better understood and appreciated; it was an approach familiar to students of classical literature who would be taught about the lives of poets such as Suntho'n Phu before beginning to study their works.

Prakat's work on modern Thai writers has proved a useful record of the lives and works of 20<sup>th</sup> century Thai writers, some who have grown in importance since the time when he wrote, others who have faded from memory. An interesting aspect of his work, especially for later generations of researchers, is that he often wrote with the aid and full co-operation of the subjects themselves. His biographies of Thai writers have influenced Thai literary studies, both in providing a standard source of information, and in inspiring similar collections of biographical essays. Most notable amongst the latter, are the three volumes of literary biographies produced by the Department of Literature and History, of the Ministry of Education between 1977 and 1996, under the title *Prawat nak khian thai*, ('Biographies of Thai Writers') and the more recent publications of Achin Chantarampho'n, *Nak khian thai nai wong wannakam* ('Thai Writers in the Literary Circle') and *Nak khian thai nai 'suan nangsu'* ('Thai Writers in 'Book Garden)').

Although Prakat's biographies are valuable, their flaws and omissions are soon apparent to anyone with a serious interest in literature. One such person was Sathian Chanthimatho'n. Sathian, born in 1943, was considerably younger than Prakat and still a

student at Prasarnmitr College of Education (now a part of Srinakharinwirot University) when Prakat's books appeared.<sup>11</sup> Like Yot Watcharasathien and Prakat Watcharapho'n, Sathian was not a professional academic or literature teacher. His background was in journalism, but he also wrote short stories; and as part of the radicalised Thai youth movement that emerged in the latter half of the 1960s, he had a serious interest in studying earlier generations of writers, especially those who had aroused the ire of the government. He was much more methodical and rigorous than Yot and Prakat in the way he wrote and conducted his research. He produced three books, all published in pocket-book format, surveying the modern Thai literary world, namely *Khon khian nangsu'* ('Writers', 1974), *No'n nangsu'* ('Bookworm', 1976) and *Saithan wannakam phu'a chiwit khong thai* ('The Thai's Stream of Literature for Life', 1981). Of these, *Khon khian nangsu'* is perhaps the most well known and widely quoted, appearing on recommended reading lists at university level.<sup>12</sup>

*Khon khian nangsu'* had its origins in a series of articles published in the monthly magazine *Cho' Fa* around the year 1965; which were subsequently published under the title *Khon khian nangsu'* in 1968. This first edition, according to the author, lacked a systematic analysis and contained many faults and weaknesses.<sup>13</sup> The second edition of *Khon khian nangsu'*, published in 1974, begins with three essays, entitled *Wannakam kap sangkhom thai* ('Literature and Thai Society'), *Rung arun wannakam samai mai*;

<sup>11</sup> For biographical details on Sathian, see *Siburapha* vol. 4, May 2001, p.94. Much of this issue of the journal devoted to the life and work of Sathian, who was, at the time, the latest recipient of the annual 'Siburapha Award'.

<sup>12</sup> *Nawaniyai lae ru'ang san*, ('Novels and Short Stories'), 1998 course syllabus, Chulalongkorn University, Thai Department, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> Sathian Chanthimathon. *Khon khian nangsu'*. Bangkok: Praphansan, 1974, 'Introduction', p.6-7.

*wannakam kho'ng chon chan klang* ('The Dawn of Modern literature; the Literature of the Middle Class') and *Naeo khit kho'ng nak khian thai rawang 2475-2488* ('The Way of Thinking of Writers between 1932- 1945'). These essays provide not only a sound discussion of the historical development of prose fiction in Thailand and the social and political context in which it emerged, but also discuss a number of issues that were important in the world of contemporary Thai literature in the 1970's, such as, the 'Art for Life' movement, literary criticism and the censorship of political writing. He quotes from a variety of authors, ranging from Plu'ang Na Nakho'n's classic *Prawat wannakhadi samrap nak su'ksa* (see Chapter 1) and less well known contemporary works, such as Witthayko'n Chiangkun's *Wannakam kap sangkom* ('Literature and Society', 1973), and *Wannakhadi thai wannakhadi kho'ng khrai* ('Thai Literature, Whose Literature is it?', 1973), by The Centre for Thai students.<sup>14</sup> The introductory essays are followed by biographies of seven 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, then another lengthy essay, *Wiwattanakan roi kro'ng samai mai* ('The Development of Modern Verse') and an index of names. The main part of *Khon khian nangsua'* consists of the seven biographies. Five of these writers - Mo'm Chao Akatdamkoeng, Ko'. Surangkhanang, Seni Saowaphong, Sirat Sathabanawat, and O'. Udamko'n - had also appeared in Prakat's volumes. The new additions were Kulap Saipradit and Chulada Phakdiphumin. Sathian's approach to literary biography was very different to that of Prakat. For Sathian, it was a writer's works that were of most importance and his essays focus on

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid* p.7.

*Khon khian nangsū'*

1974

Wannakam kap sangkhom thai

Rung arun wannakam samai mai  
Wannakam kho'ng chon chan klang

Naew khit kho'ng nak khian thai rawang 2475-2488

Mo'm Chao Akatdamkoeng

Kulap Saipradit

Ko'. Surangkhanang

Seni Saowaphong

Sirat Sathabanawat

O'. Udako'n

Chunlada Phakdiphumin

Wiwatthanakan roi kro'ng samai mai

Namanukrom

Contents of *Khon khian nangsū'*

trying to identify common themes in an author's works or developments in their thinking as reflected in their novels; the personal lives of his subjects had only secondary importance, and he refrained from using events in a writer's life to directly interpret their work. Sathian's discussion of Seni Saowaphong is typical of his approach.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 121-41

Sathien divided Seni's writing career into three distinct periods, each characterized by a particular work or group of works. For each period Sathien talked about not only the style and character of Seni's writing but also the ideas his work contained and the beliefs that he held at the time. The first period Sathien identified in Seni's career was that of his 1943 novels, *Chai chana kho'ng khon phae*, ('The Loser's Victory') and *Mai mi khao chak tokeo*, ('No News from Tokyo'). Both of these novels were set in foreign cities, Shanghai in the case of the first, and Tokyo in that of the second. Sathien said that they made Seni part of a long-standing trend in novel writing which used foreign locations as settings for stories. This trend included the works of some of Thailand's most important novelists. It had started fourteen years before the publication of Seni's two novels with M.C.Akatdamkoeng's 1929 novel *Lakho'n haeng chiwit* and was later continued with novels by Siburapha and Malai Chuphinit.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1940's when the novels, *Chai chana kho'ng khon phae* and *Mai mi khao chak tokeo* were published, Seni was a young man and a new face on the Thai literary scene. He, in his own words, had nothing in life but struggle. The Thai heroes of his two novels were travellers, strangers in foreign lands and victims of broken romances. Their stories reflected the young Seni's preoccupation with travel and tragedy. Sathien remarked 'how the young novelist saw life as a journey, and that through writing tragedies writers like himself could bring comfort to those who felt rejected by society.'<sup>17</sup>

The second period in Seni's career started, Sathian said, with the novel *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya*, ('Walaya's Love') and ended later with *Pisat*, ('Ghosts'). Sathian

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 122..

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 123.

explained that after the Second World War new ideas began to circulate in Thai literary circles, and many of these ideas appeared in Seni's work at the time. In the post-war period Seni was one of a group of writers who believed that art could and should be used to pass on social and political ideas to the Thai public. They started to write with this as their primary objective. The change from the first period in Seni's writing career to the second period in fact happened, Sathian said, with an article titled, *Cintaniyom lae atthaniyom*, ('Romance and Realism', 1952), which showed the new direction that his writing was going in, it was followed by the novel *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya*. This novel was a romance that was similar in many aspects to others which he had written before, however with the important difference that its characters and story line were more realistic.<sup>18</sup> Rather than invent an elaborate plot and involve the characters of *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya* in action and different situations, Seni made them static, and concentrated on creating occasions for them to converse and express different opinions about Thai society.<sup>19</sup> The novel's story line followed the lives of a group of middle class Thai intellectuals; it gave Seni the opportunity, through their conversations, to discuss art, and the effects of materialism on Thai society, social values, traditions and culture in Thailand. Sathian in his biography of Seni felt the following extract from *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya* important enough to quote:

"I'd like you to be an artist for the people, the poor, the abandoned and the neglected; An artist for the workers and not for a small group who do nothing but sit, eat and grumble about other peoples' misfortune."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.128-9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 130-2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.134.



This extract taken from a conversation between two of the novel's characters showed Seni's belief in the responsibility of artists towards helping the under privileged in society. It was proof of his commitment to the 'Art for Life' movement.

The third and final period Sathian identified in Seni's writing career started after 1958. It was in this year that, following a coup d'etat, Field Marshal Sarit established himself at the head of an oppressive military government in Thailand. If the second period in Seni's work had been characterized by the novel *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya* in which he criticized Thai society and politics, then the third period was, in contrast, one of self-censorship. Restrained by the threat of imprisonment,<sup>21</sup> Seni avoided all controversy in his work. As Sathian pointed out in his biography of the novelist, it was during Sarit's rule 1958-1962, that serious writing was brought to an abrupt end and the way was opened up for escapist writing to dominate the Thai book market.<sup>22</sup>

Sathian's emphasis on the importance of *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya* and *Pisat*, contrasts sharply with Prakat's chapter on Seni in *Chomrom nak khian*, where the only mention of the two novels is in a list of the author's publications.<sup>23</sup> Sathian's portrayal of Seni as a writer who was opposed to injustice, class divisions, the oppression of women, and lack of democracy made Seni an attractive figure for many young Thais in the 1970's, who shared the novelist's dissatisfaction for the established social and political systems in Thailand.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 136.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p.135.

<sup>23</sup> Prakat , *Chomrom nak khian*, p. 287

Another writer whose ideals and intellectual development Sathian highlighted was Kulap Saipradit or 'Siburapha'. Today, 'Siburapha' is widely and openly acknowledged among Thais, as one of the country's most important novelists. But, as can be seen from the work of Prakat, this has not always been the case. Sathian's chapter on 'Siburapha' was not only significant in bringing his works to a wider audience, but also in tracing the author's development as a writer and thinker. Referring to Siburapha's earlier novels, *Luk phuchai* ('A Real Man', 1929), *Prap Phayot* ('The Taming of a Shrew', 1929), *Songkhram chiwit* ('The War of Life', 1932), and *Khang lang phap* ('Behind the Painting', 1938), Sathian observed,

'Siburapha' was at this time still a humanitarian in his thinking. He had not yet developed beyond that. He himself once admitted that at the beginning of his writing career, he wrote because he wanted to write, and each story that he wrote was like a searching for the right way.<sup>24</sup>

Two pages later, Sathian comments that the short novel, *Chon kwa rao cha phop kan ik* ('Until We Meet Again', 1950),

... showed the development of Siburapha's ideas to a new level. Even though the form of writing was full of conversations exchanging opinions, the content declared quite clearly that the path of socialism could help to solve the problems of the nation. This was a more focused novel, which aimed to do more than simply entertain, as in the past.<sup>25</sup>

In all his 'biographies' Sathian uses details about a writer's life sparingly; in the case of 'Siburapha' this is extremely effective, because the details he chooses – the closure of the newspaper *Si Krung* because of 'Siburapha's' article *Manutsayaphap* ('Humanism'), his arrest in connection with his opposition to the Japanese occupation, his opposition to the Phibun regime through his serialized history of the 1932 coup, his

<sup>24</sup> Sathian 1974 p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.90

involvement with the Peace Movement and subsequent arrest and imprisonment, and his seeking political asylum in China - all provide evidence of 'Siburapha's' increasing political commitment and mirror the intellectual development that Sathian identifies took place between the early novels of the late 1920s and works like *Chon kwa rao cha phop kan ik* and *Lae pai khang na* ('Look Forward', 1951, 1955).

Sathian's essay on 'Siburapha' was later reprinted as one of three introductory essays in later reprints of a collection of 'Siburapha's' later short stories, *Siburapha: ruam ru'ang san rap chai chiwit* ('Siburapha: short stories for life', 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1979) and together with the various writings of Rungwit Suwannaphichon, writing at almost the same time, provided the basis for later writers on 'Siburapha'.<sup>26</sup>

Biographies of novelists have continued to appear regularly since Sathian's *Khon khian nangsū*.<sup>27</sup> Books devoted to a single author are relatively rare, although Orasom Sutthisakho'n has written full-length biographies of M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat and O. Udako'n.<sup>28</sup> More common are books that deal, in varying levels of details, and with varying levels of reliability, with a number of authors. Among the better-researched works are two recently published volumes by Roengchai Phuttharo, *Nak khian thai* ('Thai

<sup>26</sup> Rungwit Suwannaphichon's articles on 'Siburapha' date from the early 1970s; a collection of these appeared in 1979 in the volume, *Siburapha: si haeng wannakam thai* (Bangkok: Phasiko), which in turn served as a major source for, among others, Batson, B.A. 'Kulap Saipradit and the War of Life', *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 69, p. 58-73, 1981, and Smyth, op. cit. 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Much of the information that follows is taken from, 'Literary Biography in Thailand', a forthcoming paper by David Smyth

<sup>28</sup> Orasom Sutthisakho'n, *Lakho'n chiwit: chao chai nak praphan*, Bangkok: Dok Ya, 1987; *Nak Fan Khon Kla: O Udako'n*, Bangkok: Dok Ya, 1989.

Writers’) and *Nak khian thai 2* (‘Thai Writers 2’).<sup>29</sup> The first contains biographies of the artist and writer Hem Wetchako’n, the mystery writer Luang Saranupraphan, and the editor Chaloem Wutthikosit, while the second consists of three better-known writers, ‘Ing-o’n’, San Thewarak and Malai Chuphinit. Each ‘biography’ is from 70-100 pages long and is accompanied by numerous illustrations of the author and his works and a list of works that have been consulted in compiling the entry.

Less detailed, but nevertheless a useful starting resource for the student of the Thai novel, is Prathip Mu’annin’s *100 nak praphan thai* (‘100 Thai Writers’, 1999). The author, an assistant professor at the Rachabhat Institute in Lopburi has produced standard entries under the headings, ‘birth’, ‘education’, ‘work history’, ‘pen-names’, ‘works’ and ‘references’. The format is perhaps mechanical but the entries are solid and in providing the list of references, often, for example, to articles in the magazines *Lok nangsui* (‘Book World’) and *Thanon nangsui* (‘Book Street’) the author has performed a valuable service to future researchers.

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<sup>29</sup> Roengchai Phuttaro, *Nak khian thai*, Bangkok: Saeng dao, 1998; *Nak khian thai 2*, Bangkok: Saeng dao, 1999.

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Kanokphong Sangsomphan       | 36. Prakhin Chumsai na Ayutthaya                       | 70. Sirat Sathabanawat          |
| 2. Kanha Khiangsiri             | 37. Prachim Wongsuwan                                  | 71. Sakkasem Hutakhom           |
| 3. Kan Phu'ngbun na Ayutthaya   | 38. Praphatso'n Sewikun                                | 72. Sakchai Bamrungphong        |
| 4. Kittisak Misomsu'p           | 39. Pramun Unahathup                                   | 73. Siwakan Pathumsut           |
| 5. Kulap Saipradit              | 40. Prayo'm So'ngtho'ng                                | 74. So' Bunliang                |
| 6. Khamphun Bunthawi            | 41. Prasatpho'n Phususintho'n                          | 75. Supho'n Bunnak              |
| 7. Khamsing Sino'k              | 42. Pricha Intharapalit                                | 76. Song Thephasit              |
| 8. M.R. Khu'krit Pramot         | 43. M.L. Pin Malakun                                   | 77. Sot Kuramarohit             |
| 9. Chantri Sibunro't            | 44. Phat Netarangi                                     | 78. San Thewarak Komonbut       |
| 10. Chang Sae Tang              | 45. Krom Luang Phichit Prichako'n                      | 79. Luang Saranupraphan         |
| 11. Chit Phumisak               | 46. Phibunsak Kakho'nphon                              | 80. Sukannya Chonsu'k           |
| 12. Chiranan Prasoetkun         | 47. Phaiwarin Khaongam                                 | 81. Suchit Wongthet             |
| 13. Charoen Malarot             | 48. Makut Oraru'di                                     | 82. Suchat Sawatsi              |
| 14. Chatchai Wisetsuwanphum     | 49. Mananya Thanaphum                                  | 83. Suphan Thongkhloi           |
| 15. Chaloe Rongkhaphlin         | 50. Manat Chanyong                                     | 84. Supha Sirising              |
| 16. Chamaipho'n Saengkrachang   | 51. Malai Chuphinit                                    | 85. Supha Thewakun              |
| 17. Chai Ru'angsin              | 52. Maitri Limpichat                                   | 86. Phraya Surinthaacha         |
| 18. Chat Ko'pchitti             | 53. Rong Wongsuwan                                     | 87. Sulak Siwarak               |
| 19. Chin Bamrungphong           | 54. Liew Sisawek                                       | 88. Suwanni Sukhonthiang        |
| 20. Chum na Bangchang           | 55. Wanna Sawatsi                                      | 89. Suwat Waradilok             |
| 21. Chot Phraephan              | 56. Wasit Detkhuncho'n                                 | 90. Op Chaiyawasu               |
| 22. Narong Chanru'ang           | 57. Wanit Charungkitchanan                             | 91. Angkhan Kalayanaphong       |
| 23. Thano'm Mahapaoraya         | 58. Luang Wichit Wathakan                              | 92. Anchali Wiwatthanachai      |
| 24. Thawip Waradilok            | 59. Wit Sutthasathian                                  | 93. Asani Phonlathan            |
| 25. Thep Mahapaoraya            | 60. Witthayako'n Chiangkun                             | 94. Atsiri Thammachote          |
| 26. Chao Phraya Thammasakmontri | 61. Win Licowarin                                      | 95. M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat |
| 27. Thanya Sangkhaphanthanon    | 62. Winai Bunchuay                                     | 96. Achin Panchaphan            |
| 28. Nikhom Raiyawa              | 63. Winita Dithiyon                                    | 97. Anon Phiromanukun           |
| 29. Nimit Phumithawo'n          | 64. Prachao Waraongthoe Phra Ongchao Wiphawadi Rangsit | 98. Amphan Chairwarasin         |
| 30. M.R. Nimitmongkhon Nawarat  | 65. Wimon Siriphaibun                                  | 99. Itsara Amantakun            |
| 31. Naowarat Phongphaibun       | 66. Luang Wilat Pariwat                                | 100. Udom Udakan                |
| 32. Luang Bunyamanopphanit      | 67. Wilat Maniwat                                      |                                 |
| 33. M. L. Buppha Nimmanhemim    | 68. Wirawat Wanlayakun                                 |                                 |
| 34. Pako'n Buranapako'n         | 69. M.L. Sifa Mahawan                                  |                                 |
| 35. Pako'n Pinchalieo           |                                                        |                                 |

Appendix: index of pen names

Contents of *100 nak praphan thai* by Prathip Mu'annin (1999). Writers are listed by real name, not pen name.

## Chapter Three

### The Academic World and the Thai Novel

#### M.L.Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan

M.L.Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan, educationist, scholar and former Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Silapakorn University, was perhaps the key person behind the awakening of the educational establishment in Thailand to the validity of the Thai novel as an appropriate subject for serious academic study. A member of the Thai aristocracy, a half-sister of Thailand's foremost female novelist, Do'kmai Sot, and a novelist in her own right, M.L. Bunlu'a was widely respected in academic circles for her knowledge of both Thai and Western literature.<sup>1</sup> When the Thai novel first appeared on the university Thai Department curriculum in 1966<sup>2</sup> and was later in the 1970's accepted as a subject for M.A. dissertations, it was due in no small part to her influence.

In the late 1960's Silapakorn University published a book of her essays titled, *Nae neo thang rian wannakam wicak lae wannakhadi wican*, ('Guide to Studying

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<sup>1</sup> M.L.Bunlu'a's most famous novels are *Saphai maem* (1961) and *Tutiya wiset* (1966).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4.

Literary Analysis and Literary Criticism’).<sup>3</sup> It consisted of three essays, based on lessons that she had given whilst Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Silapakorn University. The three essays, individually titled, *Nae neo thang an nawaniyai*, (‘Guide to Reading Novels’), *Nae neo thang wican wannakhadi praphet roi kro'ng* (‘Guide to Literary Criticism, Poetry’), and *Nae neo thang rian wannakhadi wicak lae wannakhadi wican* from which the title of the book was taken, aimed to introduce students to a western approach to the study of literature. In her essays she gave students a clearly defined method for reading fiction, and at the same time encouraged them to analyse and judge what they read. M.L.Bunlu'a believed that it was important for students to develop critical ideas of their own.<sup>4</sup> For example in her essay, *Nae neo thang an nawaniyai* she set down a series of simple to follow steps, in order to help students analyse the content of novels and the approaches used to write them.<sup>5</sup> In this particular essay she tried to guide students towards thinking about the ideas and messages which novels contained, as well as their structural elements, (plot, theme, characters, setting etc).

The approach to literature study which M.L.Bunlu'a was teaching students through her essays, was completely different to that taught in Thai literary studies in the education system. Her approach was based on having students develop their own ideas about literature, by guiding them towards reading and analysing texts methodically. Thai literary studies at the time when M.L.Bunlu'a's essays were

<sup>3</sup> M.L Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan *Nae neo thang rian wannakamwican lae wannakhadi wican*, Bangkok: Sinlapakorn University, n.d. The three essays were later reprinted in a volume of collected essays, *Waen wannakam thai*, Bangkok: An thai, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> *Nae neo thang rian wannakamwican lae wannakhadi wican* Preface.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.140.

published, and still even today, was dominated by the study of Thai classical poetry. In the traditional approach to studying this type of text, students are expected to learn about the personal histories of the great poets, together with memorizing extracts of poems and the archaic vocabulary necessary to understand them. In no way does this kind of study encourage students to develop their own opinions about what they read; on the contrary they are simply taught to passively appreciate it.

In the 1970's M.L.Bunlu'a published two works of particular importance to the study of the Thai novel. The first was a long essay, *Hua lieo kho'ng wannakhadi thai*, ('The Turning Point of Thai Literature') which appeared in 1971, in a 2-volume festschrift for Prince Wan Waitthayako'n, and the second, a book, *Wikhro' rot wannakhadi thai* ('Analysis of Thai Literary Taste') which was published in 1974. In her 1971 essay, admirably described as 'the first history of contemporary Thai literature' by literary scholar Trisin Bunkhaco'n, M.L.Bunlu'a outlined the development of the genre and discussed the works of popular female novelists of the late 1960s, such as 'Thomayanti', 'Botan', Krisana Asokesin and Kanchana Nakkhanan. M.L.Bunlu'a's 1974 book, *Wikhro' rot wannakhadi thai*, was significant to contemporary Thai literature, because she wrote about modern and classical Thai literature on equal terms. In her book she critically analysed and discussed contemporary and classical works in the same way, and moreover with equal interest. In it M.L.Bunlu'a used a chapter to analyse Siburapha's novel, *Khang lang phap*, ('Behind the Painting') and also included two essays that were particularly relevant to the novel, *Phattanakan haeng konwithi*, ('The Development of Technique') and *Konwithi kho'ng nawaniyai thi tang kan*, ('Different Techniques of Novels'). In the first of these essays M.L.Bunlu'a used Do'kmai Sot's works to discuss the historic



changes in approach to Thai novel writing. In the second she analysed novels by, amongst others, Sot Kuramarohit and Khuakrit Pramot, and talked about the particular methods of writing that were used by some novelists. A major idea expressed by M.L.Bunlu'a in this book was that, Thai writers, faced with growing Western influence, should rediscover their historical roots, national or regional.<sup>6</sup>

### **Chu'a Satawethin and *Prawat nawaniyai thai***

Another prominent academic who became involved in promoting the Thai novel at the higher education level was Chu'a Satawethin, although his role was in no way as important as that of M.L.Bunlu'a. Chu'a was a well-respected figure in Thai literary studies with a long writing career dating back to the 1940's. Most of his writing focused on Thai classical literature, but in 1974 he published *Prawat nawaniyai thai*, ('The History of the Thai Novel'); this was in fact the sub-title of the first of a two-volume work *Phasa thai udorn su'ksa* ('Thai Language for Higher Education').<sup>7</sup>

Chu'a's history included slim chapters on early fiction in Thailand, official attitudes to the novel, brief biographies of major writers, and brief summaries of a number of novels. Most of the biographical entries are not very informative, amounting to little more than half a dozen lines followed by a list of major works; a

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<sup>6</sup> This idea was followed by many of the new generation of Thai authors. F. Maurel, 2003, op. cit. p.202.

<sup>7</sup> The second volume was sub-titled *Sarakhadi thai (Non-Fiction)*, and covered the principles of writing different kinds of articles, including critical and biographical pieces.

few, however, notably M.C. Akatdamkoeng, Luang Wichit Watthakan and M. R. Khu'krit Pramot are much longer and include lengthy discussions of their works.

There is a carelessness in the compilation, with 'Mai Mua'ng Doem' appearing twice, and the second, much shorter, entry numbered '28' in Thai when there are in fact only twenty six entries (including two for Mai Mu'ang Doem).

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| 2.  | Siburapha              | p. 35  |
| 3.  | Malai Chuphinit        | p. 36  |
| 4.  | Ayankot                | p. 38  |
| 5.  | Song Thephasit         | p. 39  |
| 6.  | M. C. Akatdamkoeng     | p. 43  |
| 7.  | Do'kmai Sot            | p. 54  |
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| 20. | Ing-o'n                | p. 91  |
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| 26. | Mai Mu'ang Doem        | p. 94  |

*List of influential writers identified by Chu'a in Prawat Nawaniyai Thai*

Despite the title of Chu'a's book, the fictional works which he lists as 'worthy of study' does not restrict itself to novels, and includes plays and a number of short stories.

- |     |                                                          |        |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1.  | <i>Hua Chai Nak Rop</i><br>drama – Rama VI               | p. 98  |
| 2.  | <i>Ta Ngo'</i><br>drama – Khru Thep                      | p. 104 |
| 3.  | <i>Songkhram Chiwit</i><br>novel – Siburapha             | p. 110 |
| 4.  | <i>Khrut Dam</i><br>novelette – Luang Wichit Watthakan   | p. 115 |
| 5.  | <i>Ruang Tho'ng</i><br>novelette – S. Thammayot          | p. 122 |
| 6.  | <i>Champun</i><br>short story – Thep Mahapaoraya         | p. 128 |
| 7.  | <i>Si Phaen Din</i><br>novel – M.R. Khu'krit Pramot      | p. 131 |
| 8.  | <i>Phatthaya</i><br>novel – Dao Hang                     | p. 138 |
| 9.  | <i>Fon Du'an Ha</i><br>short story – Wetan               | p.144  |
| 10. | <i>No'k Bot</i><br>short story – Manat Chanyong          | p. 147 |
| 11. | <i>Soi Sayamanwadi</i><br>long short story – Ayankhot    | p. 150 |
| 12. | <i>Nak Ong Sumawadi</i><br>short story – Yasotho'n       | p. 156 |
| 13. | <i>Phaen Din Kho'ng Rao</i><br>novel – Mae Anong         | p. 160 |
| 14. | <i>Dap Sak Lek Nam Phi</i><br>novel – Ayankhot           | p. 169 |
| 15. | <i>Thahan Ek Phra Banthun</i><br>novel – Mai Mu'ang Doem | p. 180 |
| 16. | <i>Sam Liam</i><br>short story – Riem Eng                | p. 190 |

|     |                                                                  |        |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 20. | <i>Thang Loki</i><br>novel – M.C. Akatdamkoeng                   | p. 193 |
| 21. | <i>Makoerit Mu'ang Yong Lim</i><br>short story – S. Thammayot    | p. 201 |
| 22. | <i>Wongwian Chiwit</i><br>novel – Si Fa Laddawan                 | p. 208 |
| 23. | <i>Nang Phongsā</i><br>drama – Somphop Chantharaprapha           | p. 216 |
| 24. | <i>So'ng Chiwit</i><br>television drama – Luang Wichit Watthakan | p. 219 |

*List of fictional works identified by Chu'a in Prawat Nawaniyai Thai as worth studying.*

For all its shortcomings, Chu'a's history of the Thai novel was nonetheless significant for two reasons. It was the first work in which the novel, *Phattaya* by Dao Hang (1951), described as Thailand's first political satire, was discussed.<sup>8</sup> The second reason and perhaps the more important of the two, was the fact that a classical literary scholar like Chu'a had begun to take an interest in the Thai novel. This was a clear indication that the novel was in the early 1970's beginning to breach conservative barriers and become more accepted by the establishment of Thai literary scholars.

At much the same time as Chu'a's book appeared, a small number of graduate students were writing theses on the Thai novel in London and Bangkok. At SOAS, University of London, Wibha Senanan and Kwandee Rakphongse were completing doctoral theses on the emergence of the novel in Thailand and the novels of Do'kmai

<sup>8</sup> Trisin Bunkhachon, *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai 2475-2500*, Bangkok: Sangsan, 1980, p.179.

Sot respectively. At Chulalongkorn University Suphanni Waratho'n was also researching the emergence of the Thai novel for her M.A. dissertation in the Department of Library Science, which she submitted in 1973, while in 1978, Trisin Bunkhaco'n, submitted her M.A. dissertation on the novel and society to the Thai Department of the same university. The theses/dissertations by Wibha, Suphanni and Trisin were subsequently published in book form. Suphanni's book *Prawat kanpraphan nawaniyai thai tang tae roem raek con thu'ng 2475*, ('History of Thai Novel Writing from the beginning to 1932'), published in 1976, and Trisin's, *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai 2475-2500*, ('The Novel and Thai Society 1932-1957') by Trisin Bunkhaco'n, published in 1980, have since had enormous influence on every Thai writer on the history of the novel. Though they were structured and written completely differently, these two books are rather like two volumes of the same history, Suphanni's book covering the history of the Thai novel from around 1900 to 1932 and Trisin's volume covering its history from 1932 to 1957. Together these works give a well-researched picture of the first sixty years of novel writing in Thailand. But it was Wibha's English-language thesis which became the first published history of the Thai novel. Wibha submitted her Ph.D thesis in 1974 and a year later it was published in Bangkok as *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*. Although Wibha's book has become a standard reference for westerners researching the Thai novel, it is rarely cited by Thai scholars. ✓

### **Wibha Senanan and Suphanni Waratho'n**

Wibha's book and Suphanni's cover much of the same ground, both dealing with the emergence and development of the novel up until 1932. Structurally, they

are almost identical, though this is not at all apparent from reading the contents pages of their books. For instance, Wibha's book consists of nine chapters whilst Suphanni's just five. Both began with a discussion of writing in Thailand before the arrival of the novel. Wibha in her Chapter One titled, *The Poetic Tradition*, wrote about ancient Thai poetry, then in her chapter which followed titled, *Prose* she talked about Thai prose writing before Thai prose fiction. After introducing and defining the novel to readers in her Chapter One, Suphanni continued her book in a similar way to Wibha's. In her Chapter two titled, *Wiwattanakan kho'ng kanpraphan thai su yuk nawaniyai*, ('The Development of Thai Writing up to the Era of the Novel'), for example Suphanni talked about writing before the modern period, the poetry and early prose that was written in the Thai royal court before the reign of Rama V, 1868-1910. The content of this chapter was much the same as that of Wibha's two opening chapters.

In the following sections of their books both Wibha and Suphanni analysed the positive effects that the following factors had on the development of modern prose fiction in Thailand: the beginning of public education and the increase in literacy, the introduction and spread of printing technology in the country, and the start of journalism. Drawing on the periodicals and magazine archives of the National Library, both provided an impressive amount of data on the subject. Wibha wrote about these influences on early Thai prose fiction in two chapters, her Chapter Three titled, 'The Consequences of the Introduction of Printing Technology', and her fourth chapter titled, 'Journalism and the Novel'. Suphanni on the other hand discussed them in one long chapter, her third titled, *Sing thi mi ittiphon to' kanpraphan nawaniyai thai*, ('Things Which had an Influence on Thai Novel Writing'). Generally speaking subjects Wibha covered in her book in two chapters, Suphanni covered in one in hers.

Such similarities between the structures of Wibha's and Suphanni's books, can perhaps be explained by the fact that both scholars used the same two important sources, Yot Watcharasathien's 1963 book, 'The Origins of Thai Writers and Writing' and M.L. Bunlu'a's 1971 essay, 'The Turning Point of Thai Literature.' These two works, containing the first sketchy histories of the Thai novel, were useful guides to what was significant in the history of novel writing in Thailand.

good point.

In the following sections of their books Wibha and Suphanni outlined the history of the novel from around the turn of the century to 1932. The way in which they approached this subject was very different: Suphanni in her book divided the history of novel writing, 1900-1932 into four shorter periods, 1900-1910, 1911-1919, 1920-1925 and 1927-1932. In each one she identified what the major trends in writing were, and compared the works in one period with those in the previous one. In this way Suphanni was able say which trends in novel writing, were new, continuing or had come to an end. By using this simple approach Suphanni successfully created a clear picture of the changing character of Thai novel writing over the 1900-1932 period.

In contrast to Suphanni, Wibha in her history was not interested in either identifying periods or trends in novel writing. She instead started her account of the novel's history in Thailand with the appearance of the first Thai novels, (original works by Thais that were neither translations nor adaptations of western novels), in the late 1920's, and then retraced and discussed the genre's development from this point onwards. In Chapters Five and Six of her book Wibha argued that the first Thai novels, which first began to be published between 1928 and 1929 by Siburapha,

Dokmai Sot and M.C.Akatdamkoeng, were as much influenced by Thai didactic tales as they were by novels from the West. Wibha's history of Thai novel writing thus began with discussion of the didactic tales published in the Wacharayan library's magazines between 1885 and 1900. In their time the authors of these tales broke new ground in fiction writing, by introducing characters who were, for the first time, ordinary people with realistic lives.<sup>9</sup> Despite the poor literary quality of these works, Wibha said that these tales were historically important because they represented a new form of prose writing that had begun to emerge during the reign of Rama V.<sup>10</sup> They contained, she went on, elements that were essential to the development of the novel in Thailand.<sup>11</sup>

Wibha next looked at the magazines published by the Wacharayan Library between 1894 and 1900, and the stories that were printed in them. The hundred or so tales which appeared in print were part of the history of novel writing in Thailand. They were similar structure to the modern Thai short story, which Wibha pointed out was a forerunner of the Thai novel.<sup>12</sup>

The first Thai translation of a western novel was, *Khwam phayabat* published in 1902. The original work was a now little-known English novel titled, *Vendetta* by Marie Corelli. This translation started a trend amongst Thai writers in translating foreign literature, first western and then Chinese. Wibha sees the twenty-five years

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<sup>9</sup> Wibha Senanan, *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 1975, p.52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p.55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.54-5.



between the publication of this translation and the first Thai novels, as an experimental stage. This was shown in particular in 'No Mo So's' novel of the period, *Chotmai Changwang*.<sup>13</sup> The story of this novel, taken from a western one, was based on the exchange of letters between a father and his son. While it was striking in its ~~the~~ *out* imagery, its syntactic style, idioms and vocabulary, it was nevertheless proof that at that time Thai writers had yet to integrate foreign ideas and material well enough into their work for them to produce works of quality.<sup>13</sup>

In Chapters Five and Six of her book Wibha argued that prose writing in Thailand was undergoing a change before the arrival of prose fiction from the West. The influence of Western fiction on Thai writers and the introduction of new western literary genres such as the novel, according to Wibha, became part of the changes that were already under way in Thai prose. Wibha's view of the origins of the Thai novel was in this way original, as she managed to trace them back to sources in both Thai literature and western literature. In her words, she concluded that the novel emerged as a spontaneous mutation in the evolution of the Thai literary tradition.<sup>14</sup>

In her Chapter Seven, Wibha critically analysed the first examples of the Thai novel. These were, *Luk phuchai* by 'Siburapha', 1928, *Sattru' kho'ng chao lon* by 'Dokmai Sot', 1929, and *Lakho'n haeng chiwit* by M.C.Akatdamkoeng, 1929. For each of these novels she gave a detailed synopsis of its story line, and then discussed its strong and weak points. Her criticism was scholarly and without reverence for the major novelists that she was writing about. For instance in her criticism of *Luk*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.126.

*phuchai*, Wibha said that the novel's secondary characters were poorly written, and existed only to contrast with the principal characters and make them stand out more clearly. She went on to criticize Siburapha's style of writing, and dared suggest that it would be fairer to him to consider *Luk phuchai* as the work of a student aspiring to be a writer.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Wibha, Suphanni made only a limited attempt to analyse individual novels. The strength of her work lies in the fact that she has looked at a large number of early novels – her work is full of names of authors and titles of works – so that the conclusions she draws about changing trends in novel writing between 1900 and 1932 seem persuasive. The four chapters comprising the major part of Suphanni's history gave a clear view of the novel's progress over its first thirty years in Thailand. In her first chapter titled, *Nawaniyai kheu' arai*, ('What is the Novel?'), she defined the literary genre, traced its European origins, described its literary elements and identified the different categories of it, (romances, crime stories, political novels etc). Perhaps due to her background in library science, Suphanni was able to organise in a systematic way a large amount of data on early Thai novel writing. She made use of western classifications and grouped Thai novels into eleven different categories, and cited particular novels that had been published between 1927 and the 1970's as examples of each type. The following are the categories which Suphanni used:<sup>16</sup>

#### 1. Romance novels.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.88-91.

<sup>16</sup> Suphanni Warathon. *Prawat kan praphan nawaniyai thai*. Bangkok: Khongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutsayasat, 1976, p. 14-20.

2. Novels which reflect society, e.g. *Phu di* by Dokmai Sot and *Songkhram chiwit* by Siburapha.
3. Novels which express an opinion or show problems, e.g. *Lakho'n haeng chiwit* by M.C. Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat.
4. Heroic adventure novels.
5. Crime novels.
6. Adventure novels.
7. Humourous novels.
8. Historical novels.
9. Political novels, e.g. *Khabuan/saeri chin* by Sot Khuramarohit, and *Mu'ang nimmit* by Nimmitmongkhon Nawarat.
10. Religious novels.
11. Science Fiction novels.

By classifying the Thai novel into a variety of different types, Suphanni showed that it had developed into a literary genre which was almost as artistically diverse as that in the West.

In her next chapter titled, *Wiwattanakan kho'ng kan praphan thai su yuk nawaniyai*, ('The Development of Thai Novel Writing up to the Era of the Novel'), she described literature in Thailand before the introduction of the novel. Suphanni began this second chapter by talking about the most ancient examples of Thai writing and finished it with discussion of literature in the reign of Rama 5, 1868-1910. Unlike

nearly all authors of histories on Thai writing before and after her, Suphanni did not begin her work with King Ramkhamhaeng's thirteenth century stone inscription. She instead started it by writing about traditional Thai folk tales. Popular oral literature, she pointed out, had inspired many of the classics written in the Thai royal court, such as, *Phra lo'* and *Manora*.<sup>17</sup> With its roots in popular story telling, written literature in Thailand, Suphanni said, had evolved in the same way as literature in many European countries.<sup>18</sup> In this second chapter, she tried to show a connection between the modernisation/westernisation of Thailand that was happening around 1900 and the introduction and early popularity of novel writing. She identified the following four factors as having paved the way for the successful start which the novel had in the country:

1. The beginning of schools for commoners at the turn of the century, which created a wider literate public who were interested in reading for leisure.
2. Scholarships which had been given to the children of dignitaries to study abroad. These students returned home with western ideas and introduced western literary/writing genres, (novels, short stories and journalism). They were the first to be involved in novel writing and journalism in Thailand.
3. Progress in printing technology and the increase in the number of printing works.
4. The encouragement Rama V gave to translating writing from the West.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid p.22.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

Suphanni began her actual history of the Thai novel in her fourth chapter titled, *Wiwattanakan kho'ng kanpraphan nawaniyai thai*, (The Development of Thai Novel Writing). In it she divided the 1900-1932 period, into four shorter periods, 1900-1910, 1911-1919, 1920-1925 and 1927-1932.<sup>19</sup> Suphanni was not interested in focusing her attention on major works, so the starting and finishing dates of these periods did not correspond with the publishing dates of any important novels. These dates were instead notable dates in Thai history, 1910 was the start of the reign of Rama 6, 1927 was the date of the succession of Rama VII to the throne, and in 1932 the absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional one.

For the four literary periods in her work, Suphanni analysed novel writing during each of them and defined its general character. She compared writing in one period with that in the preceding ones, identifying the differences and similarities between them. In this way she was able to identify the significant changes in novels from 1900-1932.

Suphanni's approach to analysing works was based on a detailed study of each of their literary elements, i.e. structure, characters, atmosphere and dialogues. By studying a group of novels published at around the same time like this, she could say what was typical in novel writing in each of her four periods. For instance she found that in the period 1911-1919, the stories of novels were predominantly romances with either a happy or a sad ending, characters were easily identifiable for readers as either

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid p.115.

heroes, heroines or villains, and novelists in this period often finished their works with a moral that was written in verse.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1920-1925 novels, according to Suphanni, began to change with story lines becoming more coherent and realistic.<sup>21</sup> Actual events which happened in the country and made news were woven into the plots of stories by novelists.<sup>22</sup> The settings and scenes which novelists created were, she said, more original than before.<sup>23</sup> The approach to writing characters and dialogues in this period however remained unchanged from the previous one.<sup>24</sup>

During the first twenty-five years of novel writing in Thailand, 1900-1925, Suphanni remarked that there was little innovation. It was not until after 1927 that story structures, styles in writing and ideas in general began to evolve.<sup>25</sup> These changes were due to the work of three young Thai novelists at the time, Siburapha, M.C.Akatdamkoeng, and Do'kmai Sot. The standard of Thai novel writing that was improving during this period, she said, contrasted with the deterioration in social, political and economic conditions in the country. There were more writers who were professional than at any other time, more Thai novels were original works and not

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 153-71.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.180.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.193.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p.212-13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 202 and 216.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p.292.

simply copies of novels from the West.<sup>26</sup> Between 1927 and 1932 important new subject matter about the problems in Thai society started to appear in novels.<sup>27</sup> The new trend in novel writing was realism, dialogues were natural,<sup>28</sup> settings were real,<sup>29</sup> and characters were given contrasting good and bad facets to their personalities. In the novels written by the young Siburapha, ordinary poor people were for the first time made to be the heroes of stories.<sup>30</sup> This fourth period in Suphanni's history, she described as, *Yuk tho'ng* (The golden era), with the novels and novelists from it still being admired up to the present day.<sup>31</sup>

### **Trisin Bunkhacho'n and *Nawaniyai thai kap sangkhom thai 2475-2500***

Five years after Suphanni's 1973 M.A. dissertation was submitted in the Department of Library Science of Chulalongkorn University, Trisin Bunkhacho'n submitted her own thesis in the Thai Department, which was published as, *Nawaniyai thai kap sangkhom thai 2475-2500*, (The Novel and Thai Society) in 1980. Despite the fact this book had been out of print until only very recently, it has nonetheless become the definitive work for scholars researching the history of Thai novel writing during the period 1932-1957.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 233

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.274.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 270.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p.269.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p.283

The 1932-1957 period Trisin wrote about, was, perhaps, more interesting from the point of view of Thai literature, than almost the whole of the 1900-1932 period covered by Wibha and Suphanni. Wibha herself said in her work that the Thai novel proper only began to emerge in the late 1920's.<sup>32</sup> The novels which appeared in Thai before this were unoriginal, adaptations or translations of often second rate novels from the West. Bearing this fact out Suphanni described the pre-1925 period in the Thai novel's history as one of little innovation.<sup>33</sup> It was during the 1932-1957 period, the subject of Trisin's work, that Thai novelists started increasingly to reflect aspects of Thai life in their stories. More novels were original works, and more novelists progressively began to develop their own style of writing. Certain amongst them, such as Siburapha, Seni Saowaphong and Malai Chuphinit, moreover used their works to express their dissatisfaction with Thai society and government. It was these novelists and others like them who pioneered Thai novel writing which carried social and political themes and messages.

Suphanni, Wibha and Trisin had their own individual approaches to writing about the novel and its history in Thailand. Suphanni was interested in identifying general trends in novel writing between 1900 and 1932, and discussing the reasons for them having started. Her method was firstly to analyse a group of novels from the same period, in order to identify the common approaches to writing (characters, dialogues, plots, scenes and settings etc), which existed between them. She then

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<sup>32</sup> Wibha, op. cit. p. 82.

<sup>33</sup> Suphanni, op.cit. p.292.



compared novel writing from one period with that of the next to say which trends had continued, had ended or were new. Suphanni made no attempt to use literary criticism to analyse the novels which she wrote about.

Wibha on the other hand was chiefly interested in writing about how the Thai novel had evolved in Thai literature, i.e. how original stories for novels came to be written by Thai authors. In her work she traced the Thai novel's origins back to Thai didiatic tales and short stories; and translated novels from the West. A student of Thai literature, Wibha critically analysed major novels by Siburapha, Dokmai Sot and M.C.Akatdamkoeng which dated from between 1928 to 1929.

Trisin's approach to writing about the history of the Thai novel was radically different to both Suphanni's and Wibha's. She was principally interested in discussing the relationship between certain novels and the conditions in Thai society and politics which inspired their authors to write them. In Trisin's work Thai history was as important as Thai literary history. For each of the novels which she wrote about she identified precisely why it was significant in the development of social/political novel writing in Thailand.

Focusing on novels published between 1932-1957, Trisin did not uncover any novels which were not already known. It was, however her, who for the first time, stated the importance of some novels to the history of Thai writing on society and politics. For example M.C.Akatdamkoeng's 1929 novel, *Lakho'n haeng chiwit*, had been described by one critic at the time it was published, as a touching love story.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wibha, op. cit. p. 103.

Trisin, however, saw it differently, as a critique of Thai upper class values and customs.<sup>35</sup> She said that it, together with two other works, *Luk phu chai* by Siburapha and Dokmai Sot's *Sattru kho'ng cao lo'n*, was at the forefront of a new trend in intelligently written sentimental novels. They were distinctly different from other romantic novels of the late 1920's period.<sup>36</sup>

Trisin's book, 'The Novel and Thai Society, 1932-1957' was five chapters long. In Chapters One and Two of it, titled 'Novels and Society' and 'Novels before 1932', Trisin gave general background information about Thai novel writing. She dealt directly with the history of the Thai novel in two long chapters, the third titled, 'Novels from 1932 to 1949' (p. 49-295), and the fourth, 'Novels from 1950 to 1957' (p. 296-445). The fifth and final chapter of her book was a conclusion.

In her Chapter One, 'Novels and Society', Trisin talked about the role that novel writing served in society and the social responsibilities that novelists had. For Trisin a 'good' writer was not only someone who had writing talent, but was at the same time someone who was independent, who resisted economic and political pressures exerted on his/her work.<sup>37</sup> These 'good' writers were leaders of public thinking, and moreover she added, though they were representatives of their particular eras, their work still remained relevant to future generations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Trisin 1980, op. cit. p.41.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

The novels which were the most important in Trisin's history, were those which were the first examples of new ways of writing on Thai society and politics, when they first appeared during the 1932-1957 period. These major works as well as being proof of their authors' originality, were also proof of their courage to speak out. They were the following novels: *Songkhram chiwit* (Siburapha 1932), *Ying khon chua* (K.Surangkanang 1937), *Khang lang phap* (Siburapha 1937), *Mu'ang niy'mit* (Nimmitmongkhon Narawat 1939), *Phattaya* (Dao Hang c.1934-1938), *Phaen din kho'ng rao* (Mae Anong 1943), *Chai chana kho'ng phu phae* (Seni Saowaphong 1943), *Nak bun-khok bap* (Isara Amanattakun 1943), *Chon kwa rao ca phop kan ik* (Siburapha 1949), *Khwam rak kho'ng walaya* (Seni Saowaphong 1952), *Phaen din kho'ng khrai* (Sirat Sathaponawat 1951), *Pisat* (Seni Saowaphong 1953), *Lae pai khang na* (Siburapha 1955).

Though these novels were very much products of their time, dealing with specific political events or social conditions of the day, their general themes were nevertheless timeless and universal. In them their authors spoke about injustice and inequality in society<sup>39</sup> and the abuse of political power<sup>40</sup> for example, which were issues as relevant to the 1970's when Trisin was writing her history as when Siburapha and others first wrote stories about them.

In order to discuss Trisin's history in more detail her third chapter, 'Novels from 1932 to 1949', one of her key chapters, will now be looked at. Trisin's Chapter

<sup>39</sup> These subjects were approached by Siburapha in particular in his works.

<sup>40</sup> A subject dealt with in the political satire, *Phattaya* by 'Dao Hang'.

Three was the longest in her book. It covered the first seventeen years of her twenty-five year history of the novel and Thai society. In this chapter she analysed the effect which three particular events in Thai history had on Thai novel writing 1932-1949. These events were, the fall of the absolute Thai monarchy in 1932, Phibun Songkhram's crackdown on the opposition to his ultra nationalist government 1938-1942, and the cultural mandates that were proclaimed by the same oppressive regime. Trisin firstly described each of these three historical events in detail, then discussed their relationship with the novels which they inspired. She opened Chapter Three with an analysis of the connection between the novels, *Songkhram chiwit* and *Ying khon chua* and the end of the absolute monarchy in Thailand. Similarly she went on to analyse the relationship between Phibun's 1938-1942 period of totalitarian government and the novels, *Mu'ang nijimit* and *Phattaya*. Over the years Trisin's approach to writing literary history, which focused on the analysis of novel writing in its political and social context, has been copied by many Thai literary historians with much less success.

Trisin began Chapter Three by describing the background and aftermath of the abdication of Rama 7 in 1932, this was the end of the absolute monarch in Thailand and the start of a constitutional one. Though this change did not affect the lives of the majority of Thai people, she said,<sup>41</sup> it did have an impact on educated Thais. For them the dream of democratic government and a more equal society became a real possibility with the start of a constitutional monarchy. Writers, who were part of this group became increasingly aware of the social injustices and inequalities around them, she added. These writers began writing realistic stories

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<sup>41</sup> Trisin 1980, op. cit; p.54-55.

about those who suffered the most. The poor and prostitutes for example, were for the first time made into characters by novelists, who dealt with their plight sympathetically.<sup>42</sup>

Trisin identified two novels in particular as having been influenced by the events of 1932, *Songkhram chiwit* (1932) by Siburapha, and *Ying khon chua* (1937) by K. Surangkhanang, the former, she claimed, being the first 'humanitarianist' novel to have been published in Thailand.<sup>43</sup> She echoed Yot Wacharasathien's 1963 work in comparing this novel to Dostoevsky's *Poor People*, thereby placing Siburapha on an equal footing with a world-renowned 'classic' author.<sup>44</sup>

*Ying khon chua*, the second of these novels, tells the story of a country girl who was tricked into prostitution. K. Surangkhanang criticized the way people judged others as being either 'good' or 'bad' on face value. For Trisin, the novelist's sympathetic portrayal of the plight of the prostitute broke new ground in Thai novel writing.<sup>45</sup>

In the following section of Trisin's book she described the effect which Phibun's 1938-1942 government had on the work of two novelists in particular, Nimitmongkhong Narawat and 'Dao Hang', whose novels, *Mu'ang nimit* and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.66.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 68

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.90.

*Phattaya* were directly inspired by this sombre period in Thai politics. In 1937 Nimitmongkhon Narawat was arrested alongside other political opponents of Prime Minister Phibun. He later wrote *Mu'ang nimmit*, which Trisin compared to Plato's *Republic* and Sir Thomas Moore's *Utopia* and said was the first novel to offer a solution to Thai society's problems.<sup>46</sup> *Mu'ang nimmit* was about an ideal society. The hero, Rung, was released from prison and had to struggle to survive in a material world.<sup>47</sup> He rapidly became disillusioned with a way of living that was dominated by money, and turned his back on society to write a book titled, 'The Sight of the Future Siam'.<sup>48</sup> Nimitmongkhon used this book in his story as a vehicle to express his own opinions on how society and politics should be organised.

The second novelist to have been inspired by the Phibun period of government was 'Dao Hang', the author of *Phattaya*. Neither the date when it was published, nor the real identity of the novelist, is known for certain, while the book itself is almost impossible to find. According to Trisin, *Phattaya* was a satire on the Phibun government's cultural mandates, (*Rattaniyom*), which were introduced between 1939-42 in an attempt to superimpose an official version of Thai culture and cultural norms on popular culture and subcultures. One of these mandates which affected writers imposed new moral standards for literature, introduced changes to Thai grammar and established new rules for the settings for stories.<sup>49</sup> They in effect restricted the artistic freedom of writers, and gave the government new powers to censor and bring into line

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.146.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.140-1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.166.

those authors who did not share their views. The reaction of certain novelists at the time was to stop writing or try and find ways around the new regulations.<sup>50</sup> Phibun's cultural policy, Trisin said, had the result of reducing the number of novels produced and at the same time end the trend in novel writing that was aimed at helping to improve conditions in society.<sup>51</sup>

'Dao Hang's' novel, *Phattaya*, took its title from the name of a real town situated in South-eastern Thailand. The town in the story was tranquil up until the arrival of a group of Buddhist monks, one of whom was also a militant socialist. This monk during the course of the story tried to convert the town's people to Socialism. 'Dao Hang' in the novel skillfully used the character of a second monk, who was anti-socialism, to narrate the story and at the same time cast a critical eye on what took place. One of 'Dao Hang's' targets for satire in this novel was the seemingly endless conflict between supporters of different and irreconcilable political ideologies, i.e. fascists and Socialists/Marxists, or more specifically Phibun and his political opponents.<sup>52</sup> Another target was the irrational fear of communists and communism which existed amongst the Thai public. This was started and encouraged by the Phibun regime, which used it as a pretext to round up their opposition on the grounds that they were part of a communist threat.

In the final section of Chapter Three Trisin briefly looked at Thai novel writing in a post World War Two/post Phibun period. It was from 1946-1949, she said,

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<sup>50</sup> 218

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.166

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

that the publication of novels increased. This was the result of the end of war time paper shortages and also a result of novelists who had been discouraged by Phibun's censorship laws, returning to writing.<sup>53</sup>

Trisin's work in her third chapter proved how valuable analysing literature in its social/political context was for Thai literary studies. She showed that by studying certain novels in this way, students could be led to understand more about Thai society and politics of the recent past. This could at the same time help them make more sense of the social and political institutions which exist in Thailand in the present. Perhaps the main achievement of Trisin's work was that it established the importance of social/political writing in the history of the Thai novel. It is largely due to her that it has become generally accepted in Thai literary studies that the major Thai novels are those which reflect Thai society and its problems.

### **Writing on the History of the Thai Novel in the 1980's and 1990's**

The history of the period 1900-1957 in Thai novel writing, which is currently taught in contemporary Thai literary studies, is based on a combination of Suphanni's and Trisin's works. In addition to the influence which these two scholars have had on contemporary literature teaching in the Thai education system, their works have also become the main references for other Thai literary historians writing on the history of the Thai novel.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 245.



During the 1980's and 1990's the history of the Thai novel has been included in a number of textbooks dealing with contemporary Thai literature. The authors of such works typically provide their readers - normally students – with a brief history of the development of the novel, short story and modern poetry in Thailand. This is not based on any new research but is more often than not a patchwork of other writers data and ideas, most notably those of M.L.Bunlu'a, Trisin, Sathien and Suphanni. The authors of these books have therefore played an important role in disseminating the aforementioned writers' ideas to a wider public.

A random sample of these books, published between 1980-1996, selected from the library at Chulalongkorn University, will be looked at to see how Suphanni's and Trisin's works in particular have influenced the histories of the novel in them. The sample of books are: *Wannakam thai patcuban* ('Contemporary Thai Literature', 1980) by Prathip Mu'anin (ed.), *Wannakam thai patcuban* ('Contemporary Thai Literature', 1982) by Sumpho'n Mantasut, *Wannakam patcuban* ('Contemporary Literature', 1987) by Ru'nru'thai Satacapahan (ed.), *Wannakam thai patcuban* ('Contemporary Thai Literature', 1996) by R.S.Saithip Bununkit,<sup>54</sup> and *Wannakam patcuban* ('Contemporary Literature', 1996) by Phairot Loetphiriyakamon..

The main differences between the histories of the novel in these books, is the length of period covered and, needless to say, the quality of the author's work. For example, Prathip concentrates most attention on novel writing up to 1932, whilst Sumpho'n is mainly interested in the 'art for life' movement and therefore focuses the

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<sup>54</sup>. This book is a best seller in the field having been published three times between 1991-1996.

discussion on novels of the 1940's and 1950's. Nearly all of these short histories of Thai novel writing are disjointed and lack any real coherence. Their authors fail to organise the data, which they have to hand in a structured way. Perhaps the sole exception to this is Ru'nru'thai's work, which is used as a textbook by Ramkhamhaeng University.<sup>55</sup>

All these literary historians use Suphanni as a key reference in their works and the majority also use Trisin. Without exception all make some attempt to write about the relationship between novel writing and society and politics. It is evident from their histories that most of them are more comfortable writing about Thai history than Thai literature. On many occasions they give lengthy details about historical events without making any connection between them and literature. Amongst these histories there exists a clear consensus of opinion over which were the events in history which had an impact on the novel's history in Thailand. This can probably be put down to the fact that their authors borrow principally from the same two sources, Suphanni and Trisin. The change from the absolute monarchy system in 1932, a key date in the works of the two aforementioned scholars, is for Ru'nru'thai the turning point in contemporary Thai writing, when conditions in society gave rise to political novels.<sup>56</sup> Sumpho'n meanwhile echoes Trisin in suggesting that the events of 1932 inspired writers to start writing about the poor and social problems.<sup>57</sup> Both Sumpho'n and Saithip quote directly from Trisin on how the Thai novel developed between 1932-

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<sup>55</sup> This is a set book for the course, 'Contemporary Literature' at Ramkhamhaeng University.

<sup>56</sup> Ru'nru'thai 1987, p.8.

<sup>57</sup> Sumpho'n, 1982, p. 89.

1957, from romances written to entertain, to novels of ideas, written to initiate social change.

Although written almost thirty years ago, the works of Suphanni and Trisin continue to be a major influence on both researchers and textbook writers. On the one hand this reflects very positively the high quality of their works, which, it should be remembered, were produced as MA dissertations, in partial fulfilment of the degree requirements; on the other hand, it reflects rather negatively on the state of the study of the Thai novel in Thailand today that no senior academic in the field of literary studies has felt inclined to try to build upon or improve on their work.

## Chapter Four

### The Thai Novel and the Educational Curriculum.

In 1966 the status of the Thai novel in Thai literary studies was given an important boost when it was introduced into the B.A. curriculum of the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the first time that Thai novels were to be formally studied in a university Thai department in Thailand. Two factors made this innovation particularly significant. Firstly, university Thai departments have an important role in defining what constitutes 'Thai Literature' and disseminating it to a wider audience of students, many of whom in turn later become teachers and pass their knowledge on to a still broader audience. Secondly, the Thai Department at Chulalongkorn University was the country's oldest and most prestigious. This chapter looks at the way in which the novel has since been absorbed into the Thai Literature curriculum at both university and secondary school levels.

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<sup>1</sup> The novel (not specified Thai or otherwise), appeared on B.A. curriculum in the Department of Siamese and Ancient Languages at Chulalongkorn University between 1937-38. It was part of the course described — in English — as follows: 'Literature and language criticism, history of Siamese literature, texts relating to religion and history, dramas, dialogues, essays and novels. A course in external reading which deals with these topics'. The Prospectus, Faculty of Arts and Science, Chulalankarana University, Session B.E. 2480 (A.D. 1937-38), p.81. The novel was not mentioned in curriculum dating from the 1940's and 1950's of the same university department. In 1959 it however reappeared as an elective subject on the B.Ed programme in the Education Department of Chulalongkorn University, i.e. 'Thai Novel; ref. Thai 371 (2)'. Chulalongkorn University Announcement, 1959, p.161.

## University Thai Departments

The centre of Thai literary studies in Thai universities is called, *Phak wicha phasa thai*, which is normally translated as 'Thai Department' but which literally translates as 'Thai *Language* Department' (my italics); Thai literature is not taught in a department of its own; it is regarded as a part of the Thai (*Language*) Department.<sup>2</sup> The close relationship between these two fields of study dates back to the start of university level education in Thailand. The single department that they share, their common curriculum and complementary study in subjects about Thai poetry, all have their origin in the organisation and teaching of the first B.A. degree courses in the 1930's.<sup>3</sup> In 1937, for example as part of the B.A. taught in the Department of Siamese and Ancient Oriental Languages of Chulalongkorn University, 'Siamese'<sup>4</sup> was a compulsory subject which included the study of the Siamese language, its alphabet and Siamese versification.<sup>5</sup>

The close connection between the study of Thai literature and language can be traced back to the literary culture of the Thai royal court. It was here that the study of language became essential to writing verse. Before the arrival of printing technology in the mid-nineteenth century in Thailand the court was the centre for the production

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<sup>2</sup> Thai literature is also taught in the Education Department and the Department of Comparative Literature, in Thai universities.

<sup>3</sup> The first BA degrees in Thailand were awarded in 1935 by Chulalongkorn University; although founded in 1917, it at first offered only diploma courses

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'Siam' and 'Siamese' were replaced by 'Thailand' and 'Thai' by the ultra-nationalist government led by Phibun Songkhram, 1939-42.

<sup>5</sup> Prospectus, Chulalongkorn University, 1937-38, op. cit. p.81.

of written literature, which was mainly poetry. Thai kings patronised its production and their tastes had a strong influence on what was written. Over time in the royal court a body of poetical knowledge was developed that would-be poets had to learn in order to appreciate the work of master poets and write poems of their own. In short this knowledge consisted of firstly a poetic vocabulary of homonyms, synonyms and words borrowed from languages such as Pali, Sanskrit and Khmer, and secondly a set of rules which regulated how it was used and the way in which it was arrangement into a variety of verse meters. According to this knowledge the aesthetic qualities of classical poetry lay in its music, the sounds of different word arrangements. This music was heard when the poems were recited, (i.e.sung).

The Thai Departments in Thai universities have, for decades, been the centres for academic thinking and writing on Thai classical literature. Many of Thailand's most respected thinkers and writers on the classical period have taught in them, most notably Phra Worawet Phisit and Phraya Rajadhon Anuman amongst many others.<sup>6</sup> In 1966 when the Thai novel became part of the syllabus of the Thai department in Chulalongkorn University, it was taught as an elective subject on an undergraduate curriculum that was clearly focused on the teaching of Thai classical literature and the Thai language.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Phra Worawet was head of the Department of Siamese and Ancient Oriental Languages at Chulalongkorn University. Phraya Rajadhon Anuman was a lecturer in the same department. Ibid. p.5.

<sup>7</sup> It appeared as a subject in two of the four years of a 'B.A. Thai'. Taught as a third year subject over two semesters in the course 'AT 3024b Classical Literature and Contemporary Novels' the course consisted of 'the study of two classics and four novels for external reading.' It was also taught as a fourth year second semester elective subject titled 'AT414b Modern Thai Novels' and described as 'a study of the development of Thai novels during the last fifty years.' (Curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts Degree, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, June AD 1966.)

## **The 1973-1976 Period of Democracy in Thailand and Thai Literary Studies.**

Thai literary studies at all levels of the education system have always been and are still dominated by study of the classical period in Thai literature, which for most starts with writing from the thirteenth century kingdom of Sukhothai and finishes with that in the reign of Rama IV, 1851-1868. During the brief period of democracy in the 1970's this situation in Thai literary studies looked as if it would change.

### **Thai Students and Politics in the 1970's.**

The early 1970's were, for many Thai students, a period of disillusionment and frustration, when a university education no longer automatically led to employment.<sup>8</sup> Though at the time Thai students were assumed to be politically quiescent, they proved to be the opposite when on 14 October 1973 they revolted and forced the then military government out of power. The period of democracy which followed was brief and ended on 6 October 1976 when a new military regime seized back control of the country.

Behind the Thai government's plans to expand higher education in the 1960's and 1970's was its aim to have the country's universities turn out the qualified manpower needed to develop the nation. The programme of expansion increased the number of institutions, enrolments, subjects taught and students graduating. But the

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<sup>8</sup>Watson, K. *Education and Development in Thailand*, Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1980, p.206.

failure of the government to link courses to the needs of the economy, or real employment opportunities, created an educated workforce that was unemployable in the sectors where it was needed. The promise of secure employment, particularly in the civil service, had always encouraged students to accept the status quo of a system of which they saw themselves future members. This security disappeared with the 1970's' recession in the Thai economy and cutbacks in both public and private sector jobs.<sup>9</sup> The result was an increasing number of students graduating without having any hope of finding work.

From 1971 onwards, student groups began to organise themselves in a better way,<sup>10</sup> and were more politically active than ever before. Initially they demonstrated on different campuses against minor grievances such as, codes regulating how they dressed and the nature of their examinations. Later they unified their protests against major targets like the government's economic policy and institutional corruption. Spurred on by the success that their actions were having, they intensified their activities.<sup>11</sup> In October 1973 a demonstration for the restoration of the constitution,<sup>12</sup> which included student groups, ended in open conflict with the army. Sixty-five people were killed and hundreds more were wounded. The military government's extreme action against the demonstrators proved a costly mis-calculation when the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 206-8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p.206.

<sup>11</sup> In November 1972 students demonstrated against Japan's 'economic domination' of Thailand. The government gave in to student pressure and publicly warned Japan about her trading behaviour. The government also issued a decree regulating foreign companies and prohibiting aliens from owning certain types of business.

<sup>12</sup> The group of demonstrators was initially made up of students, academics and politicians.



King intervened, ordered the prime minister Field Marshall Thanom and his powerful interior minister, Field Marshall Prapas into exile, and installed a civilian government.

A phenomenon of the early 1970's was the politicization of many young Thais. For the first time the number of students who took an interest in politics on university campuses was no longer negligible. A new student readership developed for socio/political writing that was both recent and from the past. Around 1972 books and articles previously published by earlier generations of Thai intellectuals and novelists began to be rediscovered and reprinted by student groups. Works dating from the 1950's by socialist-influenced writers such as 'Siburapha' and 'Seni Saowaphong' and the Marxist-influenced poet, historian and critic, Jit Phumisak were such examples. With virtually no censorship existing during the 1973-1976 period of democracy,<sup>13</sup> works which would once have been considered subversive and suppressed, could circulate without fear of reprisal.

The democratic interval between a succession of Thai military governments opened the door to the free expression of diverse social and political views. This had an effect on both Thai literary studies and writing on the Thai novel. It was during this period that new, alternative ways of studying Thai literature were put forward in

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson, B.R. O'G. and Ruchira Mendiones. *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in the American Era*, Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1985. p. 37.

articles,<sup>14</sup> debated in seminars,<sup>15</sup> and included in a new B.A. curriculum published by Chulalongkorn University. The common point between all this different activity was the aim to make contemporary Thai literature important in the education system, and give it a role in, amongst else, developing students' awareness of politics and society.

In May 1973 just prior to the Student Uprising in October, a seminar was organised in Chiangmai to discuss the teaching of contemporary Thai literature in higher education. This seminar was, as well as being proof of the dissatisfaction with the existing curriculum, a precursor of the steps taken to change Thai literary studies.

The seminar was organised by the Department of Humanities, Chiangmai University at the Railway Hotel in the centre of town. Amongst those who attended were members of the teaching staff of the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University, most notably, M.L.Bunlu'a, Suwanna Kriangkraipheth, Trisin Bunkhaco'n and Chonthira Satayawathan. Later, in 1977, these important figures in contemporary Thai literary studies, together with two other colleagues, Bencawan Suntho'nkun and Kancana Nakhasakun, published a radically revised undergraduate curriculum, which gave new direction to teaching in their department. In this new curriculum contemporary Thai literature was, for the first time, made equally as important as the classics. Both the 1973 seminar in Chiangmai and this curriculum dating from 1977 are significant in the history of the Thai novel in the Thai education system.

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<sup>14</sup> e.g. Wittayako'n Chiangkun, 'Klap pai an nawaniyai kho'ng Siburapha' in *Sangkhomsat parithat*, 1973, vol.11, no. 7, p. 68-72. This article suggested using Siburapha's novels in school level Thai literary studies.

<sup>15</sup> A seminar was held in Chiangmai in November 1975, titled, *Khuan phao wannakhadi thai reu mai* ('Should we burn Thai Classical Literature or Not?'), in which speakers took the bold step of suggesting replacing classical texts with contemporary ones in Thai literary studies.

**The Seminar on Teaching Contemporary Thai Literature in Higher Education,  
Chiangmai May 3-5 1973.**

The 1973 seminar in Chiangmai brought together speakers from both inside and outside the education system. Some, like the educationist, literary scholar and novelist, M.L.Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan and the writer, Suchart Sawatsi, who was at the time editor of the leading intellectual forum *Sangkhomsat Parithat* ('Social Science Review') were influential figures in the Thai literary scene of the time.<sup>16</sup> The stated aim of the seminar was to gather together new ideas and suggest improvements to contemporary Thai literature teaching at its highest level. However, it had no official power, and no representatives of the Ministry of Education attended.<sup>17</sup>

Of the papers that were presented at the seminar and published in its report, several were well written essays on subjects related to contemporary Thai literary studies and the Thai novel. M.L.Bunlu'a's paper on the structure and content of the literary curriculum, *Nu'a ha lae kho'p ket withi ni nai/sut*, ('The Content and Scope of Curriculum')<sup>18</sup> made a plea for a clear understanding of the teaching objectives. She argued that the aim of literary studies was to teach students to understand and

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<sup>16</sup> Suchart later went on to edit the enormously important *Lok nangsu'* magazine in the late 1970s and more recently, the *Cho' Karaket* short story magazine.

<sup>17</sup> *Rai ngan kan summana kan so'n wannakam thai patcuban radap udomsu'ksa kho'ng khana manutayasat mahawitthayalai chiangmai* ('Report of the seminar on the teaching of contemporary Thai literature in higher education, Faculty of Humanities, Chiangmai University, 1973, p.161-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.103-9.

critically evaluate books and that any literature curriculum had to be drawn up with this objective foremost in mind.<sup>19</sup>

In another paper in the seminar report, *Kan pramoen kha wannakam patcuban* ('Evaluating Contemporary Literature') by Chonthira Klatayu and Rancuan Intharakamhaeng, the authors advised teachers to change their approach and allow students to express their opinions, to appreciate what students had to say, and to encourage them to think critically about what they read.<sup>20</sup> The approach to teaching Thai literature that was outlined in both M.L. Bunlu'a's and Chonthira and Rancuan's papers, gave students an active, thinking role in the learning process. It differed markedly from the rote-learning of obscure words and complex rhyme schemes that characterized much of traditional Thai literary studies.

In a paper titled, *Naeo khit kho'ng nak khian thai tang tae 2475-2488*, ('The Ideologies of Thai Writers 1932 to 1945'), Suchart Sawatsi analysed the influence that Thai society, politics and the economy had on certain novelists of this time.<sup>21</sup> Novels, he argued, besides their value as literary texts, could be used to give alternative views on Thai politics, society and history and help broaden student thinking on these subjects. Discussing 'Seni Saowaphong's 1953 novel, *Pisat*, ('Ghosts'), for example, he pointed out how the rebellion of Seni's characters against traditional views and customs relating to love and marriage, and the expression of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid p.104

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p.98.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 27-55.

gratitude to parents reflected a significant shift in social attitudes that accompanied the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932.

### **The 1977 Undergraduate Curriculum in the Department of Thai of Chulalongkorn University.**

First published in 1977, the revised B.A. curriculum in the Department of Thai of Chulalongkorn University aimed to implement some of the main proposals that had been put forward at the 1973 seminar held in Chiangmai, including giving as much importance to the study of contemporary literature as the study of the classics. A number of new courses were to be set up that were intended to introduce students to the Thai novel, Thai short story and modern Thai poetry, as well as literary criticism and literary analysis. The authors of this new curriculum significantly abandoned the obligatory study of Thai classical literature, which was traditional in university Thai departments.

This new B.A. curriculum in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University was part of a revised Faculty of Arts curriculum, which appeared in 1977. Behind the revisions that were made was the intention to improve and update the content of the Faculty's undergraduate courses.<sup>22</sup> The principal change was to give students the freedom to study what interested them on the B.A. programme. To

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<sup>22</sup> *Laksut akso'rasat banthit, Khana akso'rasat chulalongko'n mahawitthayalai 2520* ('B.A. Curriculum, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 1977'), p. 1.

achieve this, the number of credits from elective courses was more than doubled, while the number of credits from compulsory courses was dramatically reduced.<sup>23</sup>

That part of the revised Faculty of Arts curriculum related to Thai literary studies was revolutionary. It completely changed the emphasis of study in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University. Up to then, the focus of teaching had been on works from the classical period in Thai literature; in the revised curriculum this was ended, as was the obligation to study language and literature together.<sup>24</sup> Students could now study one or the other, or both language and literature if they so wished.<sup>25</sup> As its new objective the Thai Department aimed to teach all eras and genres of Thai literature, as well as the methodical analysis and criticism of the literary works to be taught. To do this, new courses on the Thai novel, short story and modern poetry contemporary Thai writing were devised, covering their histories, major works and major authors, with critical analysis an integral part of each of them.<sup>26</sup> The majority of new courses dealt with the Thai novel. Examples of these were, *Wiwattanakan*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid p.29. Before, compulsory courses made up 72 of the 144 units that were needed to graduate and elective courses were worth just eight units. On the new 1977 curriculum the target figure of 130 units would be made up of 16 units from compulsory courses and 18 units from elective ones. The rest would be accumulated from taking general study, major and minor courses.

<sup>24</sup> In the curriculum before the 1977 revisions, Thai majors had to study the following subjects, all of which were classical literature or language related: Characteristics of the Thai Language in Different Periods (AT 302), General Sanskrit (AT 303), *Pathamasambodhikatha* (AT 320), The Art of Writing (AT 304), Cambodian Loan Words in Thai (AT 403), Thai Dance Dramatic Literature (AT 321), The Royal Version of the Vessantara Jataka (AT 420), and Literature of the Rattanakosin Period (AT 426). *Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University Announcement, 1974-75*, p. 90-4.

<sup>25</sup> B.A. curriculum 1977, op. cit. p.39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

*nawaniyai* ('The Development of the Novel'),<sup>27</sup> *Wannakam lik ni* ('Escapist Literature'),<sup>28</sup> *Nawaniyai klum nak khian ying* ('Female Novelists'), and *Nawaniyai klum nak khian chai* ('Male Novelists').<sup>29</sup>

Most of the newly created contemporary literature courses made the analysis of the relationship between literature, society and politics part of teaching. This was particularly the case with the course, *Wannakam kap sangkhom* ('Literature and Society').<sup>30</sup> Students would, through the in depth analysis of selected works, learn about the impact that society had on writers and vice versa.<sup>31</sup>

But the new curriculum of the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University, which promised to radically change the study of contemporary Thai literature, was never used and moreover it appears, quietly forgotten.<sup>32</sup> The abrupt end to the democratic period in Thai politics, brought by the return to power of the military on 6 October 1976, stopped change in its tracks. It was the end of a period when left-wing political ideas were openly expressed and conservative institutions like the Thai Departments in Thai universities looked set to accept change. In the period that immediately followed, 'politics' became a dirty word. Keeping quiet and maintaining

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<sup>27</sup> Course nos. 111 452, B.A. curriculum 1977, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Course nos. 111-381, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Course nos. 111 281 and 111 282.

<sup>30</sup> Course nos. 111 392, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p.53.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Trisin Bunkhaco'n, 5.4.99.

the status quo became the sensible way to avoid being singled out, damaging one's career prospects or being ostracized.

## **University Level Thai literary Studies: the Case of Chulalongkorn University.**

In order to discuss what literature is being taught and how it is being examined for the Bachelor and Masters degree levels of Thai literary studies, the case of Chulalongkorn University will be looked at. Chulalongkorn is Thailand's most prestigious university and responsible for a number of firsts in the history of Thai education. It was the country's first university having been founded in 1917, it was the first to award Bachelor of Arts degrees in 1935 and its Thai Department was the first in Thailand to teach the Thai novel in 1966.

### **B.A. Level Thai Literary Studies at Chulalongkorn University.<sup>33</sup>**

The B.A. taught by the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University is titled, '*B.A. Phasa thai*' (B.A. Thai Language). In the majority of Thai universities, Chulalongkorn included, this degree title is followed in parenthesis by either, *Wannakhadi* (Literature, (classical)) i.e. *B.A. Phasa thai (wannakhadi)*, or by *Phasa thai* (Thai Language), i.e. *B.A. Phasa thai (phasa thai)*. The choice between these two

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<sup>33</sup> For this discussion, *Laksut akso 'nsat banthit (laksut prap prung 2538)* (Bachelor's Degree Curriculum (Revised curriculum, 1995) will be used. In this curriculum, the list of subjects taught in the Department of Thai, Chulalongkorn University is, with few exceptions, the same as that used since 1983. This curriculum therefore gives a picture of Thai literary studies in this department from the early 1980s and through the 1990s.



alternatives depends on whether the graduate's major subject was literature or language. There is therefore no degree titled 'B.A. Thai Literature' as such, which is awarded by universities in Thailand.

Universities in Thailand are organised, both academically and administratively, on a system of faculties. The faculty to which a Thai department belongs varies from one university to another. For example, the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University is part of the Faculty of Arts, whereas the Thai Department of Chiangmai University is part of the Faculty of Humanities. The structure of teaching in Thai universities is close to the American model, with a credit course system being used. In general an academic year is divided into two long semesters of around sixteen weeks each. In the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University, courses are taught over a single semester, with examinations being held mid-way through the course and again at its end. Each course subject is given a credit rating, with one credit representing a one hour-a-week lecture plus assigned reading or research. Most courses are rated with three credits.

Over the four years of all B.A. programmes taught at Chulalongkorn University, students are expected to accumulate 144 credits in order to graduate. This total is made up of the credits of three main categories of course, *Muat wicha kan su'ksa thua pai* ('General Study Courses'), *Muat wicha lu'ak seri* ('Elective Courses'); and *Muat wicha chapho'* ('Specialising Courses'). This final category is further divided into two, namely *Wicha phu'n than akso'nsat* ('Basic Arts Subjects') and *Wicha chapo' su'ksa* ('Specialising Branch Subjects').<sup>34</sup> It is the latter of these two

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid p.1-16.

categories, which is the most important for students, as it relates to the subject that they have chosen to major in, for example, History, Geography etc. This category of subject will now be discussed more fully and in relation to students who major in Thai.

The Specialising Branch Subjects that are taught in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University are separated into those which are elective and those which are compulsory. They are a mixture of language and literature subjects, which for the most part are directly or indirectly related to teaching classical Thai literature. Of the ten courses that are compulsory to the B.A. Thai the majority concern the Thai language. These cover either its practical use, for example, *Silapa kan khian roi kaeo khan sung* ('Advanced Thai Prose Writing'), its relationship with other languages such as Pali, Sanskrit and Khmer, or its use in classical poetry, for instance the course, *Silapa kan chai phasa thai* ('The Art of the Use of Thai').<sup>35</sup> There are only two compulsory literature courses amongst the ten, namely, *Wiwattanakein wannakhadi thai* ('A Survey of Thai Literature') and *Wiwattanakan wannakam thai* ('A Survey of Thai Literary Works'). In both of these courses students are given an historical overview of Thai literature; in the first they learn about its genres, content and ideas,<sup>36</sup> and in the second, about works written from the reign of Rama V (1868-1910) up to the present.<sup>37</sup> 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works' is one of the few courses on the B.A. programme to include some study of the Thai novel. This perhaps being unavoidable

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<sup>35</sup> Official English translations of the titles of subjects are used where available.

<sup>36</sup> B.A. Curriculum, 1995, op. cit p.27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 27. The reign of Rama V is widely regarded by Thai scholars as signalling the beginning of modern Thai literature

as novel writing was the most popular form of literary expression during the period of Thai literary history that this course covers.

The list of elective courses taught on the B.A. Thai programme is divided between those relating to language and those to literature. Amongst the latter, none focus exclusively on the Thai novel. The Thai novel is either taught together with the Thai short story in the course, *Nawaniyai lae ru'ang san* ('Novels and Short Stories') or as part of the course *Wannakam kap sangkhom* ('Literature and Society'). The overwhelming majority of literature courses are related to the works of royal authors, (kings or members of their family) or court poets. A small sample of these courses includes *Phrarachaniphon nai phrabatsomdet phraphutthaloetlanphalai* ('King Rama II'),<sup>38</sup> *Phrarachaniphon nai phrabatsomdet phrachulaco'mklaao cao yu hua* ('King Rama V'), *Wannakhadi lilit nirat lae phleng yao* ('Lilit, Nirat and Phleng yao').<sup>39</sup> The texts used for all of these courses are ancient, part of the prestigious culture of the court and part of the nation's literary patrimony. Students are taught to appreciate and admire them, rather than analyse and evaluate them for themselves.

On the B.A. programme taught in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University, the Thai novel, Thai short story, modern Thai poetry and Thai folk or local literature are all subjects of secondary importance. Because of insufficient courses devoted to them, students are forced to take classical literature courses in order to accumulate the 144 credits that are required for graduation.

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<sup>38</sup> Rama II, 1809-1824.

<sup>39</sup> Genres of classical verse

## The Thai Novel and Undergraduate Thai Literary Studies at Chulalongkorn University.

In the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University, the Thai novel is principally taught in just two courses, the first an elective course, *Nawaniyai lae ru'ang san* ('Novels and Short stories') and the second a compulsory course, *Wiwattanakan wannakam thai* ('A Survey of Thai Literary Works'). As already mentioned the Thai novel is also studied in the elective course, *Wannkam kap sangkhom* ('Literature and Society').

The course 'Novels and Short Stories' is offered to undergraduate students as an elective in the fourth and final year of the B.A. Thai programme. According to its syllabus students learn about the historical development of the novel and short story, approaches to their analysis and criticism, and about their relationship with society.<sup>40</sup> The course offers a comprehensive history of the genre, from the beginnings of the novel, around 1900, up to the present.<sup>41</sup> For teaching purposes, this period is divided into three shorter ones, 1900-1932, 1933-1957 and 1958-the present. In the first of these periods students analyse and criticize selected novels by 'Do'kmai Sot' and M.C. Akatdamkoeng; in the second, they work on novels by 'Siburapha' and Sot Kuramarohit; and in the third, novels by Krisana Asoksin, 'Sifa' and 'Botan'.

The designers of the course 'Novels and Short Stories' were clearly influenced by the work of by M.L.Bunlu'a Thepyasuwan, Suphanni Waratho'n and Trisin

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<sup>40</sup> 'Novels and Short Stories' (course reference: 2201 482), course syllabus 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 1

Bunkhaco'n. The first period in the course's syllabus, from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1932, coincides with the period covered by Suphanni, while the second, 1932-1957, is the same as that covered by Trisin. Novels selected for study of the final period, from 1958 to the present, are limited to works by best selling and award-winning novelists of the late 1960's and the 1970's. More recent novelists, such as the highly successful Chart Korbjitti, are not studied.<sup>42</sup>

Both Trisin's and Suphanni's histories are recommended reading for the course 'Novels and Short Stories'. Its full reading list is as follows, *Prawat nawaniyai thai* (1974) by Chu'a Satawethin, *Nawaniyai kap sangkhom thai* (1980) by Trisin Bunkhaco'n, *Rangwan wannakam nai prathet thai prawat lae rai chu'a nangsu' thi chana kan prakuat (2450-2522)* 1985, by Nawalacan Rattanako'n *Lae Khana*,<sup>43</sup> *Wannakam thai patcuban* (1980) by Prathip M'uannin, *Saithan wannakam : ruam bot wican nangsu' lae wannakam* (1979) by Prasit Rungru'angratanakun, *Khon khian nangsu'* (1974) by Sathian Canthimatho'n, *Prawat kan praphan nawaniyai thai tang tae samai raek roem con thu'ng 2475* (1976) by Suphanni Waratho'n.

The following observations can be made about this list of recommended books for the course 'Novels and Short Stories'. Firstly, most of the books deal with the novel, rather than the short story. Secondly, many of the books listed have been out of print for decades. Thirdly, and importantly, students could have answered the majority

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<sup>42</sup> Chart's work has been influenced by existentialism. Born in 1954 his most famous books are *Kham phiphaksa* ('The Judgement'), 1981, about an innocent victim of a public rumour, *Pan ma ba* ('Mad Dogs and Co.') 1988, about Thai hippies and *Wela* ('Time'), 1993, a reflection on the theme of the passage of time and artistic creation.

<sup>43</sup> Published by the Department of Humanities, Ramkhamhaeng University.

of questions that were set in examinations for this course during the 1990's, by having read certain of the listed books, in particular those by, Trisin, Suphanni and Nawalacan, without actually reading any novels or short stories. Generally speaking, examination questions that were set in the 1990's for the course 'Novels and Short Stories', tested biographical knowledge of major Thai novelists and the history of the Thai novel, rather than the ability to analyse and comment on texts. Three typical questions taken from examinations set at this time are:

The period of the novel 1927-1957 saw many interesting developments. Describe the important writers and characteristics of this period.<sup>44</sup>

and

Describe the following writers and their work: 'Do'kmai Sot', M.C.Akatdamkoeng, 'Siburapha'.<sup>45</sup>

and

Krisana Asoksin is currently the writer whose work has won the most writing awards. Describe that work. In what way is it interesting?<sup>46</sup>

Though class discussion is not part of the traditional Thai approach to teaching, it is part of the syllabuses of all the courses dealing with Thai novel in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University. For instance, in the course 'Novels and Short Stories', students are expected to present their opinions to their class about the set books they have to read,<sup>47</sup> while in 'Literature and Society' marks for participation in class discussions count towards the final grade.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> 'Novels and Short Stories', Mid-semester examination, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> This was a frequently set question in 1990's examinations for the courses, 'Novels and Short Stories' and 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works'.

<sup>46</sup> 'Novels and Short Stories', Examination, 1996.

<sup>47</sup> 'Novels and Short Stories', course syllabus op. cit.

The elective course 'Literature and Society' is offered to students in the third year of the B.A. Thai programme. The syllabus gives its content as, 'the study of the relationship between literary works and society and its reciprocal effects; an analytical study of some prominent works. At the end of teaching this course it is hoped that students will be able to, understand and explain, how literature is consumed and created in Thai society and culture; the influence of factors inside and outside of Thai society on literature, the relationship between society and particular works.'<sup>49</sup> This course is divided into weekly topics each with a list of recommended books. The full list of topics and book lists for the thirteen-week course is as follows:

- Week One: Basic knowledge about Thai literature (*Wannakam*). The boundaries of the meanings of the words, 'society' and 'culture'.
- Week Two: 'Literature and Ideology in Society', recommended works, *Tripum Phra Ru'ang*, *Suphasit Phra Ru'ang*, and some didactic texts.
- Week Three: 'Literature, Religious institutions, and Governing Political institutions', recommended works, *Ongkan chaeng nam*, *Mahachat khamlu'ang*.
- Week Four: 'Creating Capital Cities-Creating Literature', recommended works, *Wannakhadi phrarachaniphon*, *Nirat kham klo'ng* *Sutho'nphu*.
- Week Five: 'The Literary Scene and Its New Social Role', recommended works, *Nirat no'ngkhai*, *Sanuk nu'k*, *Mu'ang Nip'imit*.
- Week Six: 'Ideas in Poetry, Poetry for Life', recommended works, *Khlong klo'n kho'ng Khru Thep*, *Kawiniphon ru'am samai*.
- Week Seven: 'Value Conflicts:Reflections in Novels', recommended works, *Phu di*, *Pisat*, *Songkhram chiwit*.

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<sup>48</sup> 'Literature and Society' (Ref: 2201393), course syllabus for 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p.1.

Week Eight: 'The Cultural Path: Confusion and Change', recommended works, *Si phaen din*, *So'ng fang khlo'ng*, *Cotmai cak mu'ang thai*.

Week Nine: Examination.

Week Ten: 'Literature and Rural Society', recommended works, *Fa bo' kan*, *Chabon*, *Chak lae chi wit*, *Ma kan kluay*.

Week Eleven: 'Contemporary Society in Literature I: The Family', recommended works, *Pun chit tho'ng*, *Mani rao*, *Banthu'k cak luk (phu) chai*. pit

Week Twelve: 'Contemporary Society in Literature II: The Cultural Dimension', recommended works, *Phai phrang thian*, *Phaen din u'n*, *Thale rom lom sok*.

Week Thirteen: 'Contemporary Society in Literature III: The Outlandish', recommended works, *Kham phiphaksa*, *Nangsu' lem so'ng*, *Mai het ruam samai*.

The twelve recommended reading lists for the topics of the course, 'Literature and Society', are made up of a mixture of contemporary and classical works. Among these are a few works once considered subversive, namely the poem *Nirat no'ngkhai* by Nai Thim Sukkhayang, the short story *Sanuk nu'k* by Prince Phichit Prichakorn, and the novel *Mu'ang Nimmit* by Nimitmongkhon Nawarat, which are all listed under the topic, 'The Literary Scene and Its New Social Role'.

The first of these works, *Nirat no'ngkhai*, was suppressed soon after being published, in 1878, and made the basis for a lese majesty charge brought against its author by high ranking members of the Thai military. In this poem the poet took the bold step of chronicling an unsuccessful military expedition to the North-Eastern Thai frontier in 1875. It was written from the point of view of the ordinary soldiers and recorded the hardship and suffering that they went through. The expedition's organisers were outraged and claimed that the poem was defamatory. A respected



western historian recently described this poem as being fertile material for Thai social history.<sup>50</sup>

The second of these works, the short story *Sanuk nu'k*, dates from 1886 and is considered by scholars to be the first example of Thai fiction.<sup>51</sup> When it was first published in the court run journal, *Wachirayan wiset*, it caused an outcry amongst members of the Thai clergy. The story was set in a real temple, Wat Bowo'nnivet, and written in the form of a conversation between four novice monks. What they had to say was judged frivolous by the abbot of the real temple, who petitioned the King to punish the author for defamation.

The third, 'once-subversive' work is the novel *Mu'ang nimmit*, written in 1939, which, with its theme of utopian society, Trisin identifies as introducing political idealism into Thai novel writing.<sup>52</sup>

The social/political context in which these three works were written, their content and reaction to them at the time when they first appeared, offers the basis for potentially interesting classroom discussion and opens the door to the study of the social role of literature, as well issues such as censorship and freedom of expression.

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<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, C.J. 'Sedition in Thai History: a nineteenth-century poem and its critics', in Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton (eds), *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, London: SOAS, University of London, 1991, p. 15-36.

<sup>51</sup> De Fels, J. op. cit. Tome I, p.94

<sup>52</sup> Trisin, 1980, op.cit. p. 149.

On the list of elective courses offered on the B.A. Thai programme at Chulalongkorn University is one titled, *Wannakam wican* ('Literary Criticism'). For this course a mixture of western and traditional Thai approaches to literary criticism are taught to students; the major part, however, focuses on Eastern, rather than Western approaches. An example of a theory of criticism from the east which is taught is, *Thritsadi rot lae alangkan*, ('Theory of Taste and Elaboration'), which covers Thai literary conventions about form, content and the aesthetics of language,<sup>53</sup> teaching students to recognise and appreciate the aesthetic value of Thai classical poetry rather than question it. Western theories taught on this course are psychologically and socio-culturally based.<sup>54</sup>

## Examinations

For all courses on the B.A. Thai programme at Chulalongkorn University, including the two which most concern the Thai novel, (i.e. 'Novels and Short Stories' and 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works'), there are two examinations, the first mid-way through the course and the second at its conclusion. On 1990's examination papers for both 'Novels and short Stories' and 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works', only questions requiring extended essay responses were used. On none of the papers looked at for these two courses during this period were any of the following types of question set: multiple choice, true or false questions or matching given answers to given questions.

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<sup>53</sup> 'Literary Criticism' (Course reference no 2201 353), Course syllabus 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.2.

Two papers for the course, 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works', the first dating from 1989 and the second from 1997, provide an idea of what students are expected to know by the end of the course.<sup>55</sup> The eight-year difference was used for gauging any changes that might have been introduced. The 1989 end of year examination for the course 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works' was two hours long and consisted of the following four questions:

1. Discuss writers in the era of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) whose approaches to writing broke with tradition.
2. Describe the development of 'Thai short stories for life'.
3. Select two of the following writers and describe their ideas and their works: Angkan Kalayanaphong, Naowarat Phongphaibun, Cang Saetang, Khru Thep.
4. How do contemporary novels reflect society and its problems? Explain with examples.

The 1997 end of year examination of this course, unlike the 1989 one, was three and not two hours long. It consisted of the following four questions:

1. The work of Naowarat Phongphaibun and Angkhan Kalayanaphong has merited the S.E.A. Write Poets' award. Explain using examples. (20 Marks).
2. Contemporary novels can reflect society in many ways. Explain this, using examples from the work of Krisana Asoksin and 'Sifa'. (20 Marks).
3. Describe the important characteristics and works of the following writers: 'Do'kmai Sot', M.C. Akatdamkoeng, 'Siburapha'. (30 Marks).
4. Write a critical analysis of *Kradan Fai* by 'Lao Khamho'm'. (20 Marks).

<sup>55</sup> *Kan sō'p pracam phak plai pi kan su'ksa 2532*, and *Kan sō'p lai pracam plai pi kan su'ksa 2540*.

In the eight years between the 1989 and 1997 examinations for the course 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works', there was hardly any change, apart from the fact that the more recent exam lasted an hour longer. Generally speaking, both examined students' knowledge of important authors and works in the three main contemporary literary genres, the Thai novel, short story and modern poetry.

When comparing 1990's examination papers for this course with those of the course 'Novels and Short Stories', the similarity in the questions set is striking. In general, papers in the 1990's, for both courses, tested a student's knowledge of the Thai novel in the following areas: the history and development of Thai novel writing, the lives and works of the major Thai novelists, M.C.Akatdamkoeng, 'Do'kmai Sot' and 'Siburapha', and how novels have been used to write about Thai society. This last type of examination question is particularly interesting, as it shows the emphasis that contemporary Thai literature studies puts on teaching a view of novels as simple 'mirror reflections' of Thai society and its problems. This view of Thai novel writing, which is not shared by all Thai scholars,<sup>56</sup> has influenced the subjects of numerous M.A. dissertations by students who analyse how different Thai novelists have used their works to talk about Thai society.

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<sup>56</sup> Trisin Bunkhaco'n in her paper, 'The Development and Trends of Literary Studies in Thailand', says on the subject of students writing M.A. dissertations on contemporary Thai literature that, 'their approaches are confined to the analysis of literary elements or the analysis of relationships between literature and society by seeing literature as merely a reflection of society', p.282.

The type of questions used on 1990's examination papers for the two courses, 'A Survey of Thai Literary Works' and 'Novels and Short Stories' all required an extended essay as a response. This kind of unrestricted subjective response is, according to a handbook produced for teachers at Chulalongkorn University,<sup>57</sup> suitable for testing students' ability to select material and evaluate and compile ideas.<sup>58</sup> In the view of this handbook, this type of question could encourage constructive thinking in students and measure a level of their ability to reflect higher than multiple choice, true or false questions, or those requiring students to match given answers to given questions.<sup>59</sup>

### **M.A. Level Thai Literary Studies at Chulalongkorn University.**

The M.A. Thai programme, (major subject Thai literature), at Chulalongkorn University attracts graduates of other universities and higher education establishments from all over Thailand. The profile of a typical graduate applicant is someone with a B.A. Thai, who as part of this degree studied more Thai classical literature than any other literature, and who passed a course on at least one of the following: contemporary Thai literature, literary criticism or folk literature.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Staff Development Section, Chulalongkorn University, *Khu mu' asan dan kan rian kan so'n samrap kan patibatkan phak kan cat kan rian kan so'n samrap acan mai 2524*, ('Guide to Teaching for New Lecturers, 1981') The terms 'extended essay response' and 'unrestricted subjective response' are taken from this handbook.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 1-2

<sup>60</sup> To build up this picture of a typical candidate, a survey was carried out of the academic records of twenty-five applicants from the following Thai universities and higher education institutions: universities: Kasetsart, Ramkhamhaeng, Srinakharinwirot, Silapakorn, Bangkok, Thammasat, Prince of Songkhla, Burapha,

To be accepted on this M.A. programme students have first to pass an entrance exam. This examination is particularly interesting as, having been devised to test candidates from universities country-wide, it can give an idea of what is generally taught in undergraduate Thai literary studies, as well as what Chulalongkorn University expects students to have learnt in them.

The 1999 entrance examination for the M.A. Thai programme (major: Thai literature), at Chulalongkorn University was three hours long with three compulsory questions, each carrying a mark of one hundred. To be able to answer these questions, candidates required a broad knowledge of Thai literature, as the questions covered Thai classical literature, contemporary Thai literature and Thai folk literature. The three questions on the 1999 paper were as follows:

1. Traditional Thai literature had what kind of form? What kind of important changes did it undergo and in which periods? What factors were they due to?
  2. Popular contemporary literary genres are:
    - i. Poetry
    - ii. Novel
    - iii. Short story
    - iv. Essay.
- Select one which interests you and explain the following, giving examples as necessary:
- a. Origin. (20 Marks).
  - b. Characteristics. (25 Marks).
  - c. Its development in the sphere of contemporary literature. (25 Marks).

d. Its relationship with other branches of Art as a medium of expression, (painting etc).

3. How has the study of folk literature (oral and written), helped enhance the study of the nation's literature and make it more complete?

None of these three questions specifically tested a candidate's ability to use recognised methods of literary analysis in order to discuss texts. Question 2, it should be pointed out, could be answered by having read any one of a large number of books which cover contemporary Thai literature in a superficial way, and contain outline information about the origins, development and principal features of the Thai novel, short story, essay and modern poetry.

The M.A. programme at Chulalongkorn University can be studied over a minimum of two academic years and a maximum of five.<sup>61</sup> The full title of a postgraduate degree for those whose major is Thai literature, is *M.A. Phasa thai (wannakhadi thai)*, which can be literally translated as M.A. Thai language (Thai literature). It is however usually translated into English as, M.A. Thai (Literature). In order to pass this degree, students need to accumulate forty-eight course credits, thirty from course work and eighteen from the submission of a dissertation and an oral exam.<sup>62</sup> The thirty course work credits are divided between compulsory courses (twelve credits) and electives (eighteen credits). Compulsory courses related to literature, mostly concern literature from the classical period for example, 'Eastern Theories of Literary Criticism' and 'Literary Relationships'. In this latter course students study the relationships between foreign literary works such as the Indian

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<sup>61</sup> Chulalongkorn University Graduate School Announcement, 1984-1985 p. (n).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p.616.

classics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabhrata* and their Thai versions.<sup>63</sup> There is only one course about the Thai novel on the M.A. programme at Chulalongkorn University called 'Contemporary Thai Literary Works'. In this, students are taught to critically analyse prose and poetry dating from the reign of Rama VI up to the present. Study focuses on the historical development and content of these works.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that just one course relates to contemporary Thai literature on the M.A programme shows the lack of importance that it has in postgraduate Thai literary studies at this prestigious university. Though contemporary Thai writing is largely neglected by teaching, it has nonetheless over the years become the most popular subject for student M.A. dissertations. Examples of these include, *Kan.satho'n panha sangkhom chonabot nai nawaniyai thai 2519-2529* ('Reflections of Rural Problems in Thai Novels 1966-1976') by Priyapho'n Nusanan, 1988,<sup>65</sup> and *Wikhro' naeo khit lae konwithi kho'ng nawaniyai naeo kan mu'ang lae sangkhom kho'ng du'ang cai nai chuang 2513-2523*, ('Analysis of the Ideas and Techniques in Political and Social Novels by Du'ang Cai During the Period 1960-1970'), by Pathama Canthacaroensuk, 1990.<sup>66</sup>

In general student dissertations written about contemporary Thai literature in the Thai Department of Chulalongkorn University have followed two main trends.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 620.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 620.

<sup>65</sup> *Ruam bot khat yo' wittayaniphon phak wicha wannakhadi priap thiap*, ('Collected Thesis Abstracts', Comparative Literature Department, Chulalongkorn University, 1998) p.22.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid p.27.



The first trend is of students who analyse the literary elements of works by studying them separately and in detail, i.e. their themes, characters, style of writing used. The second is of students who study the relationship between literature and Thai society through the works of particular authors. Students who follow this latter trend usually go no further than to look into the ways in which Thai social values are represented in writing.<sup>67</sup>

Because Chulalongkorn University is the only Thai university to offer a PhD Thai literature programme, (titled *PhD Phasa thai (wannakhadi)*), it attracts postgraduate applicants from all over Thailand. To enter the programme all candidates have to pass an entrance examination. This exam is interesting for the same reasons as the M.A. entrance examination, in that it can give an idea of what is generally taught in M.A. level Thai literary studies and also what Chulalongkorn University expects students at this level to know.

The 1999 entrance examination for the Ph.D Thai literature programme at Chulalongkorn University was three hours long, and consisted of one compulsory question, and one other question selected from a choice of two. The three questions were as follows:

1. In literature (*wannakhadi*) there exists that which is simple (*ngai*) and that which is complex (*yak*). Deciding on whether a text is simple or complex is nevertheless up to an individual; standards for measuring literary complexity or simplicity cannot be set down. The case is similar for beauty and harmony in literature.  
Discuss. Support your opinions with examples.

***Answer one of the following two questions:***

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<sup>67</sup> Trisin, op.cit. p. 282.

2. The study of contemporary literature (*wannakam patcuban*) is unnecessary for scholars. It is not as complex as ancient literature (*wannakhudi boran*) and does not have the same value as classical literature (*wannakhadi*). It does not have the status of being a national treasure. It is therefore better to focus literary studies on ancient literature. Give your opinions with examples and justify all the points that you make.
3. Folk literature (*wannakhadi tho'ng thin*) is not national but local; it is produced regionally and reflects the social and cultural character of its locality. In fact a 'region' is linked to 'the centre'. In this way folk literature therefore reflects the relationship between the centre and a region. It can help in the study of central literature, taking it to a deeper and fuller level. What are your opinions? Give them with specific examples.

Several observations can be made about this 1999 PhD entrance examination paper. Firstly, question 3 is almost identical to question 3 on the 1999 M.A. entrance examination. These two questions required students to assess the contribution which folk literature has made to Thai literary studies. Both put the emphasis on the unity of Thai literature rather than the diversity of it. The questions encouraged candidates to consider folk literature as being part of a national literature, and did not direct discussion towards either what makes a literature 'folk', or why the literature of the Thai royal courts, the centres of political power, dominates the notion of 'Thai literature', the nation's literary patrimony.

A noteworthy difference in terminology on the PhD and M.A. examination papers, (lost in translation), is that on the latter paper candidates were asked to discuss the contribution of folk literature to the study of the 'nation's literature' (*wannakhadi kho'ng chat*) and on the former paper its contribution to 'central literature' (*wannakhadi suan klang*).

Question nos. 1 and 2 on the 1999 PhD entrance examination paper required candidates to discuss the subject of literary evaluation in the context of Thai literature. The first question asked for candidates' opinions about writing being complex or simple. These two notions have for decades fuelled the debate on the value of classical poetry and contemporary prose writing in Thailand. Much of the literary value of classical poetry, for those who appreciate it, lies in the poet's complex use of language. On the other hand prose fiction is often criticised for the simple use of language in it. Generally speaking Thai prose writers use an everyday, realistic style of language, which can be understood by ordinary readers, even if they do not necessarily understand it on the same level. Those who read classical poetry, however, are mainly an educated elite, who have studied its archaic vocabulary and forms of verse and can therefore make sense of it and appreciate it.

The second question on the 1999 PhD entrance examination paper brought the debate on assessing literary value into the sphere of education. This question asked candidates to discuss the importance of classical and contemporary literature as subjects in Thai literary studies. Questions no 1 and 2 in the PhD entrance exam had a great deal of overlap in the answers which could be given for them.

### **Secondary School Level Thai Literary Studies.**

School is the first formal environment where attitudes to literature are formed. It is where children gain their first ideas of what literature is and which writers and works are important. Thai secondary school education is divided into two levels, *Mathayom su'ksa to'n ton* (Lower Secondary School) and *Mathayom su'ksa to'n plai*

(Upper Secondary School). The end of Lower Secondary School is an important point in education, where a child can either leave the system, or continue their studies in preparation for higher education.

Upper secondary school in Thailand normally lasts for three years and comes after a child having spent three years in lower secondary school, and before that, six years at primary school (*Prathom su'ksa*). Education at school level is often seen by the authorities as being preparation for further more advanced studies rather than an end in itself.<sup>68</sup> The curriculum for the three class levels of upper secondary school (*Mathayom* 4, 5, 6) is produced by the Department of Academic research of the Thai Ministry of Education. One objective stated in the curriculum is to cultivate in pupils a sense of conservation of Thai art and culture.<sup>69</sup> This objective has an apparent consequence on what writers and texts are taught in Thai literary studies and the approach to teaching them. Generally speaking, literary studies at school level do not aim to develop a pupil's own ideas and attitudes towards writing, but instead give them knowledge about the canon of Thai literary works, their history and their authors.

Thai literary studies in upper-secondary schools is focused wholly on teaching works from the classical period in Thai literature. Pupils are not given an opportunity to form their own opinions about the extracts of classical texts which they are expected to learn by rote. They are however taught to admire what they read as being model examples of writing, and moreover, treasures of the nation's cultural heritage.

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<sup>68</sup> Watson *op. cit.* p.166.

<sup>69</sup> *Laksut mathayom su'ksa to 'n plai 2524 (chabap prap prung 2533)* ('Upper Secondary School Curriculum, 1981, (revised ed. 1990)'), p. 1

Subjects on the Thai upper secondary school curriculum are classified into two main categories, *Wicha bangkhap* (Compulsory subjects) and *Wicha lu'ak seri* (Elective subjects).<sup>70</sup> 'Thai Language' (*Phasa thai*) is both a compulsory and an elective subject on it. As a compulsory subject its syllabus includes literature; as an elective it is taught in a sub-category of subjects called *Klum wicha phasa*, which includes languages such as English and French as well as literature subjects.

The compulsory subject *Phasa thai* is taught at all three levels of upper secondary school, M.4, M.5 and M.6. At each level its teaching programme is divided into two school terms. The works studied date almost exclusively from the classical period (pre-Rama V). Contemporary prose fiction is practically non-existent on the programme, with no Thai novels and just one short story - *Mo'm* by M.R. Khukrit Pramot- taught.<sup>71</sup>

The classical works which are taught to pupils in upper secondary school come from the canon of literature of the Thai royal court. At M.4 level, for example, the poem *Nirat Phrabat* by Prince Thammathibet and the play *Inao*, both dating from the early 1800's, are on the syllabus. At M.5 and M.6 levels, in addition to classical poetry, are King Ramkhamhaeng's thirteenth century stone inscription and *Maha Wetsundo'n Chadok*, the story of the Gautama Buddha.

The majority of works on the syllabus of the compulsory subject *Phasa thai* appear in the major histories of Thai literature, by Plu"ang Na Nakhorn and others.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid p.10-11.

<sup>71</sup> In some revision aids, this short story is described as a novel.

These histories in general gave little or no mention of contemporary Thai literature, such as novels, short stories or modern poetry.

Strictly speaking, not all the works which were discussed in these histories of Thai literature or which appear on the syllabus of *Phasa thai* are literature i.e. imaginative writing. For instance King Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription is a factual/historical record of life in the kingdom of Sukhothai, and *Maha Wetsundo'n Chadok* is a religious text.<sup>72</sup> These two works are perhaps not intended to teach pupils about creative writing, but about the Thai people and their language, in the case of the former, and the Buddhist religion in that of the latter.

### **The Thai Novel and Upper Secondary School Literary Studies.**

Modern Thai literature is covered in the upper secondary school curriculum in the subject, *Wannakam patcuban* (Contemporary Literature), an elective course in the sub-category of subjects called *Klum wichha phasa*. In this course pupils study novels, short stories, articles and biographies. The objective of the course is to teach pupils to learn to think about the meanings of texts, the approaches used to write them and the eloquence and beauty of literature.<sup>73</sup> The textbook used on the course is also called

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<sup>72</sup> While the authenticity of the Ramkhamhaeng inscription has been heatedly contested by both Thai and foreign scholars, such debate has had no influence upon the way the inscription is presented in the school curriculum as a founding pillar of national identity.

<sup>73</sup> Upper Secondary School Curriculum, op. cit. p.12.

*Wannakam patcuban* ('Contemporary Literature').<sup>74</sup> The brief outline history of the Thai novel in this textbook clearly shows the influence of the works by Yot Watcharasathien, Suphanni Waratho'n and Trisin Bunkhaco'n. The authors divide the history of the Thai novel into two periods, 1900 to 1927 and 1927 to the present, characterizing the first as a period of adaptations of western works, and the second as the period of the Thai novel proper, when novelists began to write about society, the problems and conflicts in it, politics and the economy. The authors point out that novels have more than just an entertainment value, claiming that they can play a part in changing social and political conditions for the better.<sup>75</sup>

An important section in this textbook sets out how to analyse a novel.<sup>76</sup> In this section, pupils are taught to analyse the elements which make up a novel - theme, message/plot, setting, characters, dialogue, the novelist's views and style of writing - and then to think about the relationship between these elements. The novels on the syllabus of the subject 'Contemporary Literature', to which such analysis is to be applied are, *Nu'ng nai roi* by 'Do'kmai Sot', *Sai lom siang so'* by Nimit Phumithawo'n and *Phuying kon nan chu' bunro't* by 'Botan'.<sup>77</sup> The authors give a summary of the storyline of each novel and then divide work on them into three areas: comprehension questions, group activities, and supplementary work. The aim of this type of teaching is to help pupils form their own opinions about what they read, and moreover encourage them to express their ideas in class.

<sup>74</sup> Citralada Suwatthikun and Monathana Watanatano'm, *Wannakam patcuban radap mattayom su'ksa to'n plai* ('Contemporary Literature, Upper Secondary School Level') Bangkok: Akso'n Charoenthat, (7<sup>th</sup> ed) 1997.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 84-5

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.78-84.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p.16.

The comprehension questions, which require written answers, test a pupil's understanding of the novel's characters, its theme and structure, whilst the group activities focus on oral expression, and include debate and discussion. The aim of the supplementary work is to broaden a pupil's general knowledge, and includes project work related to the novels taught, such as further work on their themes or the periods in which they were written. All three areas of work on the novels will now be looked at in detail.

Starting with the novel *Nu'ang nai roi*, the authors of the textbook tell pupils that its author, 'Do'kmai Sot', was a famous Thai novelist whose novels portrayed aristocratic life in the reign of Rama VII.<sup>78</sup> They go on to say that this novel gives an idea of the values of the upper class and how they spoke and thought, and point out that the main interest of the novel is not its subject matter but its characters and the consequence of their actions on one another. The textbook advises pupils to think about the method which 'Do'kmai Sot' used to create her characters, the way she structured the story, and the language and dialogue that she used. A selection of some the questions set in the textbook, on *Nu'ang nai roi* are as follows:<sup>79</sup>

1. What is the theme of *Nu'ang nai roi*?
2. Is the novel escapist or realistic?
3. Form groups and analyse and discuss the personalities of the following characters in the novel:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.93.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.94.



- i) Wichai
- ii) Chat
- iii) Anong
- iv) Nang Siwichai

4. Discuss the importance of the secondary characters in the development of the story.
5. Do you think that it was appropriate for Anong to have revealed his feelings to Wichai? Why?
6. In life is it possible to encounter people like Wichai or Chat? Give your reasons.

The group activity section for *Nu'ng nai* is divided into the following two parts:<sup>80</sup>

1. Divide into groups and discuss, and give your opinions about the influence which Nang Siwitchai's patronage had on Chat's and Wichai's personalities and behaviour.
2. Divide into groups and analyse firstly how 'Do'kmai Sot' builds her characters and secondly the point of view which she takes in her novel.

The supplementary work section on 'Do'kmai Sot's novel, in the textbook is as follows:

1. Write a short essay about the characters who impressed you most in the novel.
2. Put together a chart setting out the history and works of 'Do'kmai Sot'.
3. Research and study different aspects of life in the reign of Rama VII, i.e. the use of language, dress and living conditions of Thai people living in Bangkok.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.95.

The second novel which the authors of the textbook present to pupils, *Phuying khon nan chu' Bunro't* by 'Botan',<sup>81</sup> is, according to the authors, a realistic portrayal of the life of women in present day society, and their struggle to build a life and not be discouraged by barriers put in their way. The authors also say that 'Botan's' novel talks realistically about the relationships between Thai women and American soldiers, and the problems of women in Thailand who are prostitutes and have foreign husbands. Pupils are told to pay special attention to the conversations and dialogues in the novel, *Phuying khon nan chu' Bunro't*, and how the words of the characters reveal their personalities and move the story along. The following are some examples of the questions given on 'Botan's' novel in the textbook.<sup>82</sup>

1. In what way is *Phuying khon nan chu' Bunro't*, a realistic novel? Do you agree that it is? Justify your answer.
2. Compare the characters Wichachuda and Bunro't. Analyse 'Botan's' reasons for making them how they are.
3. Is there any aspect of Bunro't's personality which you admire? Which could she improve on?
4. Who has an important role in Bunro't's success? How does Bunro't show gratitude to this person?
5. Compare Bunalam's and Bunro't's ways of showing their devotion and obedience to their mother.
6. Compare the family lives of the two couples, Cin/Bunalam and Robert/Bunro't.

For pupils studying the novel, *Phuying khon nan chu' Bunro't*, the textbook sets down just one group activity:<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> 'Botan' is one of the pseudonyms used by Supha Sirising.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid p.96

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

1. Divide into groups of 4-6 pupils and analyse 'Botan's novel using the following, and present your work to the class:
  - i. The structure of the conversations.
  - ii. Character construction.
  - iii. The method that the writer uses to express her point of view.
  - iv. The style of writing.

The supplementary work for 'Botan's novel in the textbook is divided into five tasks:<sup>84</sup>

1. Discuss what an ideal woman is.
2. Graduating from a professional/technical college is more financially rewarding than having a university education. Discuss.
3. Write an essay on 'success in life'; what is it?
4. Write about the life and works of the novelist 'Botan'.
5. Discuss the subject of choosing a spouse. Think about the couples in the novel.

The third and last of the novels is *Sai lom siang so'*, by Nimit Phumithawo'n. The authors of the textbook describe it is a folk novel, written to show how valuable nature and Thai music are, and they draw particular attention to the language Nimit employs to describe both. Examples of the questions on this novel, which are in the textbook are as follows:<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid p.97.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid p.98.

1. What does *Sai lom siang so'* mean in the novel? Do you think that it is an appropriate title for the novel? Explain.
2. Discuss the structure and theme of the novel. Do they work together?
3. Do you agree that Nimit's novel is an example of folk literature? Give your reasons.
4. Which characters in the novel have the most realistic personalities and behaviour? Justify your answer.
5. Do you agree with the criticism levelled at the novel, that its author created more characters than were necessary? If you agree, which characters would you remove? Why? If you do not agree then why not?
6. How does the novelist compare music to life?

The group activities set in the book on the novel *Sai lom siang so'* asked pupils to do the following:

1. Divide into four groups. Each group is to choose one of the following to study and report back on to the class:
  - i) Analyse the settings and the atmosphere of the story. Do they work together?
  - ii) What is the nature of the conflict which the writer brings out in the story?
  - ii) Analyse the use of language and dialogues in the story.
  - iv) Summarise the points of view and values which are contained in the story.

The supplementary work section on *Sai lom siang so'* consisted of the following four tasks:<sup>86</sup>

1. Divide into groups and discuss the following topics:
  - i) Nai Khiem is bad because of the parents he has.
  - ii) Wisdom and virtue govern life.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 98-9.

- iii) Thai rural life and values, what is the picture given of them in *Sai lom siang so'*.
2. Divide into study groups and research the subject of Thai music, its instruments etc. Compare your findings.
  3. For those pupils who can play Thai music, take the opportunity to play in class.
  4. Choose the character you find the most impressive in the story. Write about him or her.

As can be seen from these examples given from the textbook, the work suggested for the three novels, *Nu'ang nai roi*, *Phuying khon nan chu'a Bunro't* and *Sai lom siang so'*, is varied and interesting. The exercises that are suggested give pupils the opportunity to develop their own ideas about these works and, moreover, to express their view in class. The supplementary work sections suggested by the authors of the textbook, take the positive step of encouraging pupils to study subjects related to the novels but outside of the field of literature.

### Postscript

As a postscript to this part of Chapter Four, on the novel in upper secondary school Thai literary studies a brief word should be said about lists of recommended books produced for pupils by the Ministry of Education.<sup>87</sup> The thinking behind the preparation of these lists, which include Thai novels, is to encourage pupils to read more in their own time.<sup>88</sup> The Ministry hopes that teachers will select books from the

<sup>87</sup> Publishers use the fact that a book appears on these lists to promote sales. For example, a recent reprint of the play *Hua cai nak rop* by Rama VI by the publishers Ton Or Grammy states that the book is 'outside reading for Thai M1 – M3'.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. The novel *Khang lang phap* by Siburapha was included on the 1995 list of Recommended Reading for the course *Phasa thai*, M.4 level.

lists to recommend to pupils. The books listed are not, however, part of any syllabus, they form no part of any examination, nor is any formal teaching support provided to pupils who choose to read them.

## Chapter Five

### Recent Writing on the Thai Novel.

In Chapter Two of this thesis writing on the Thai novel dating from the 1960's and early 1970's by pioneers Yot Watcharasathien, Prakat Wacharapho'n and Sathien Canthimatho'n was discussed. They were not from the academic world, but rather, writers interested enough in the Thai novel to write about its history, the principal novelists and their works. The next Chapter looked at the contributions of academics, in particular the works of Suphanni Waratho'n, Trisin Bunkhaco'n and Wibha Senanan, which have become the major sources of reference for the history of novel writing in Thailand, 1900 to 1957. This chapter looks at two recent works, which represent interesting new ways of promoting the Thai novel. *The 20 Best Novels of Thailand (an anthology)* (1994), by Marcel Barang<sup>1</sup>, and *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* ('The Development of Thai Literature', 1990), a multi-authored book published by the Faculty of Arts of Sukhothai Thammathirat University.

#### Marcel Barang and *The 20 Best Novels of Thailand (an anthology)*

Marcel Barang, like his fellow countryman Paul Schweisguth (see Chapter 1) took the bold step of writing about Thai literature, despite no apparent formal

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<sup>1</sup> Barāng begān his career as a teacher of French, English and Art and later became a journalist.

qualifications in the field of literary study. Thai literature was a hobby for the civil servant, Schweisguth, while Barang, a one time journalist,<sup>2</sup> was in his own words simply, an amateur translator of Thai.<sup>3</sup> Barang nevertheless wrote with the admirable intention of making the Thai novel known to the English-speaking world<sup>4</sup> and of dispelling the perception that there was no such thing as good Thai literature.<sup>5</sup> Like his predecessor, Barang succeeded in writing about his subject in an unpretentious, highly readable way.

Marcel Barang's book, *The 20 Best Thai Novels*, was the fruit of a more ambitious project to write an anthology and history of novel writing in Thailand. Its focus was to be on the hundred or so novels which he believed were the most representative of the literary genre.<sup>6</sup> This project titled, 'Thai Modern Classics Programme', has to date never been realised, as is also the case of another of his projects to translate the twenty best Thai novels.<sup>7</sup> Barang's book thus represents only a small part of a larger project he had to promote Thai novel writing in the West.

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<sup>2</sup> Barang worked for the French section of the press agency Reuters in London. Interview with Barang in, *Autour de la Nouvelle* (Club Nouvelle Bureau d'Action Linguistique Ambassade de France), 1994, p.339.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 338

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.355

<sup>5</sup> Barang, M. *The 20 Best Novels of Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai Modern Classics, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> *Autour de la Nouvelle*, op. cit. p.338-339.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 359.



According to Barang the number of Thai novels which are 'flawless classics'<sup>8</sup> are limited to only fifty, this taking into account all periods and all genres of Thai novel writing. Because the number of good Thai novels is so limited, selecting the twenty best ones was not an impossible task for Barang. To do the same for European or American novel writing, he says, would on the contrary be preposterous as the number of classics to choose from is too great.<sup>9</sup>

Though Barang's irreverent style of writing is far from that of a detached academic scholar, this does not detract from the fact that he tried to judge and select the novels in his book in an objective way. He made it clear that although the novels he chose are in his opinion outstanding, the selection of the twenty best Thai novels was made as independently as possible of his own personal tastes, with the help of ten professional readers. These people, who were either professors of literature, literary critics or writers,<sup>10</sup> pre-selected a hundred Thai novels for Barang to assess and make his own choice of the best twenty. His method of assessing these works was he says, to read them as discriminatingly as he could using literary criteria as guidance, and moreover to read at least a hundred pages of each one by which time if his attention was not captured the novel was set aside. (A part from using a set of criteria to guide his judgement, Barang also followed what had already been written about certain

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<sup>8</sup> He describes a 'flawless classic' as a work 'to be read by this and future generations for pleasure and intellectual profit'. Barang, op. cit. p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.11.

amongst these novels in manuals of literature and literary criticism.<sup>11</sup> The criteria Barang used for assessing the novels were, he says, neither political nor moral, but literary, an idea he adds, rather provocatively, that would elude many Thai readers, writers and even critics.<sup>12</sup> A summary of the basic literary criteria which Barang used to judge and select the best Thai novels is as follows:<sup>13</sup>

1. The quality of writing, meaning style and not correct syntax and precise semantics. Barang remarks that hundreds of Thai novels would qualify for selection in terms of writing style, the trouble being that too many qualify on this count only and on no others.
2. Internal coherence, which he describes as a balance between form and content, and between the various components of the work.
3. Vision, meaning scope and originality. Great literature, he says, is merely a matter of sharpness and originality of vision. According to Barang scope means a writer's outward view of society, and their inward study of the complexity of man.
4. International compatibility. None of the twenty novels that were chosen were, he says, 'culture specific'.

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<sup>11</sup> Besides the work of M.L. Bunlu'a and Wibha, whom he acknowledges in footnotes, Barang also draws on the third chapter of Trisin's history of the novel, although no mention is made of her work.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 11-16.

Barang's book is divided into three parts. The first part gives what he refers to as, a bird's eye view of today's literary environment or rather the lack of it.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, in this section Barang takes a candid look at literary production in Thailand, the book market, the tastes of the reading public, the interests of publishing houses and the struggle of writers to make a living. This rather negative picture offers a vivid and well-informed view of the industry that has grown out from contemporary Thai literature. According to Barang, the main problem facing Thai literature at the moment is the fact that no 'bookish culture' has developed in Thailand as it has in western countries. There is simply no great interest in books. The most serious consequences of this are that, the majority of Thailand's most talented novelists have a problem making a living and important novel writing of the past risks being lost for future generations of the Thai reading public.

Unlike in the West, in Thailand there is no significant interest in, and therefore market for, new editions of the major novels of the past, nor even sets of the complete works of important Thai writers.<sup>15</sup> These kinds of book are therefore absent from Thai bookshop shelves. The book market for Thai literature is dominated by new works, which are printed in runs of 2,000-3,000 copies, and then reprinted in the same numbers if a work is successful. A best selling book in Thailand is one that would have sold in the order of just a hundred thousand copies, an extremely low figure when compared to bestsellers elsewhere, even other Asian countries.<sup>16</sup> The most

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> This explains the difficulty which Barang had in obtaining copies of at least fifty of the hundred novels pre-selected for him to assess, by Thai experts.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

successful books in terms of sales are romances, Barang says, written by ladies for ladies.<sup>17</sup> The novelists who in Barang's words 'churn out' this type of work, are the most likely to make a living out of writing. Those who do not usually have to write novels part time, doing this with other work such as being newspaper columnists or reporters, amongst else.

The current situation with the literary industry as described by Barang, makes it difficult for Thai novelists to survive from what they do and devote their time to developing their talents as fiction writers. In addition to this publishing houses for financial reasons do not contribute to keeping alive the memory of major Thai novelists of the past by republishing their works.<sup>18</sup> This has unfortunately been left down to just the Thai education system, specifically Thai literary studies, which as discussed in Chapter Four largely neglects the study of contemporary Thai writing, focusing teaching time almost entirely on classical literature.

In the second part of his book Barang gives a brief presentation of literature from the classical period, and in the third, and key part he discusses the twenty novels that he selected, together with their authors. This discussion focuses on Thai society, politics and naturally literature itself. Barang's selection of Thailand's twenty best novels was fixed at this number because it allowed him to select a broad group of works, which was, at the same time, of a manageable size for him to translate. Moreover he says it is only these particular novels that he would care to translate.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid p.30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p.11.

1. *Lakho'n haeng chiwit* (The Circus of life), by M.C.Akatdamkoeng, 1929.
2. *Khang lang phap* (Behind the Picture), by Siburapha, 1937.
3. *Phu di* (A Person of Quality), by Dokmai Sot, 1937.
4. *Ying khon chua* (The women of Easy Virtue), by K.Suranghanang, 1937.
5. *Phlai maliwan* (An Elephant Named Maliwan), by Thano'm Maha Paoraya, 1937(?).
6. *Thu'ng maharat* (The Field of the Great), by Malai Chunphinit, 1954.
7. *Khwam rak kho'ng wanlaya* (Wanlaya's Love), by Seni Saowaphong, 1951.
8. *Pisat* (Ghosts), by Seni Saowaphong, 1953-54.
9. *Si phaendin* (Four Reigns), by Kukrit Pramot, 1954.
10. *Ru'ang kho'ng can darra* (The Story of Jan Darra), by Utsana Phleungtham, 1966.
11. *Thutiyawiset* by M.L.Bunlu'a, 1968.
12. *Khamhipaksa* (The Judgement), by Chart Kopjitti, 1981.
13. *Phan ma ba* (Mad Dogs & Co), by Chart Kopjitti, 1988.
14. *Taling sung s<sup>v</sup>ng nak* (High Banks, Heavy Logs), by Nikhom Raiyawa, 1984.
15. *Ngu* (Snakes), by Wimon Saininuan, 1984.
16. *W<sup>a</sup>ela nai khuat kaeo* (Time in a Bottle), by Praphatso'n Seiwikun, 1985.
17. *Thalae lae kanw<sup>a</sup>ela* (Time & Tide), by Atsiri Thammachaoat, 1985.
18. *Mae bia* (The Hood of the Cobra), by Wanit Jarungkitanan, 1987.
19. *Thang su'a* (The Path of the Tiger), by Sila Khoamchai, 1989.
20. *Ngao si khao* (The White Shadow), by Daenaran Saengthong, 1994.

The list of Barang's twenty best Thai novels is without particular surprise. It could be said that it is a surprisingly non-controversial, even conventional choice for a non-conventional character such as himself. Internationally recognised present day novelists, Chart Kopjitti and Atsiri Thammachot are on the list, as are all the major Thai novelists of the past M.C. Akatdamkoeng, Dokmai Sot, Siburapha, K. Surangkhanang, Malai Chuphinit, Seni Saowaphong and Kukrit Pramot.

Perhaps the main problem with Barang's otherwise well conceived book, is the fact that he dispensed<sup>20</sup> with a bibliography and failed to give footnotes which were adequately detailed. He made these two errors because he believed that his work was not an academic one.<sup>21</sup> Similarly to Barang, Paul Schweisguth also neglected to write a bibliography for his book, *Etude Sur la Littérature Siamoise*, 1951. In both cases this a shame as although these authors did not intend their books to be read by scholars of Thai literature, the lack of writing in this field has meant that scholars actually read and use them as reference.<sup>22</sup>

Because of the absence of a bibliography and detailed footnotes, the fact that Barang owes some debt to Trisin Bunkhaco'n's 1980 history of Thai novel writing, 'The Novel and Thai Society 1932-1957', passes without the acknowledgement by the

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<sup>20</sup> Barang op.cit.p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The fact that Barang does not use detailed footnotes also makes it difficult to accept some of the information that he gives. For instance he says that Thai language teaching was reformed in 1978 and 1981 which reduced the study of the classics in favour of more modern works, (Barang, *ibid* p.35). In the research carried out to write Chapter Four of this thesis nothing was found to substantiate this.

author himself. The connection between Barang's and Trisin's works will thus now be briefly discussed.

As already said, Barang used a set of basic literary criteria to guide his selection of Thailand's twenty best novels and this made his work different from Trisin's, whose basis for selection was the unashamedly political. To fully understand the motivation behind the approach that Trisin used in her work, the social/political context of mid-1970's when she was writing it has first to be understood. Trisin's history of the Thai novel 1932-1957 had as its focus social/political novel writing in Thailand in this period. In her work she was anxious to highlight the role each of the novels that she chose, had in the development of this genre of Thai novel writing. For Trisin, Thai novelists who wrote about the problems in Thai society and politics in their works deserved special recognition. The 'art for life' movement of the 1950's for instance, was she says a step forward for Thai novel writing. According to her the Thai novel progressed from escapist novels to 'novels for life', i.e. from entertainment novels to intelligent ones.<sup>23</sup>

Barang's views on the novels which both he and Trisin wrote about were not always the same as hers. For example, he was not very impressed by the political novels associated with the 'art for life' movement in Thailand. He said that the offerings of the novelists who followed this movement were less believable than E.T.<sup>24</sup> or Mickey Mouse, and a lot less endearing.<sup>25</sup> Yet Seni Saowaphong's *Khwam*

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<sup>23</sup> Trisin, 1980, op. cit. p.454.

<sup>24</sup> 'Extra Terrestrial' – a character from a popular 1980s film of the same name directed by Steven Spielberg.

*rak kho'ng wanlaya* (Wanlaya's Love), Barang describes as being ahead of its time with its modern structure and existentialist ideas. For him it was an intellectual 'cum' political novel,<sup>26</sup> and unlike Trisin, who describes it as another step forward for 'novels for life',<sup>27</sup> he does not link it with the 'art for life' movement. In a discussion of another of Seni's novels *Pisat* (The Ghosts), Barang in general remains close to Trisin's earlier discussion of the same novel, but he does add some interesting comments of his own. Trisin said that this novel represented the first use of symbolism in Thai novel writing.<sup>28</sup> For her Seni in this novel showed that change is unavoidable even if people object to it, or do not accept it. Like ghosts, she went on, change scares people.<sup>29</sup> Barang also sees the ghosts of the title as symbols of impending change, scary new forces endangering the established powers and notions,<sup>30</sup> but he then goes on to criticise the novel from a literary point of view, something Trisin never attempted to do, by pointing out that the major fault in its construction is a lengthy flashback which breaks the narrative flow. This flashback is he adds, irrelevant to the story of the Thai farmers struggle.<sup>31</sup> As is the case with Seni's other novel 'Wanlaya's Love' Barang does not mention the connection between

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<sup>25</sup> Barang, op. cit. p.15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 240.

<sup>27</sup> Trisin, 1980, op. cit. p.334.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 389.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p.390.

<sup>30</sup> Barang, op. cit. p. 256.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p.256-7.



the novel 'Ghosts' and the 'art for life' movement. In Trisin's work 'Ghosts' is discussed under the sub-title, 'The Development of Novels for Life Towards Novels for the Working Class'.

Marcel Barang's *The 20 Best Novels of Thailand* is an invaluable introduction to Thai novel writing for the English speaking audience. However, its limited print run of just three thousand copies, meant that like every other important work on the Thai novel, it quickly went out of print. Barang is currently rumoured to be making the book and his other translations available on CD Rom in the near future.

### *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai*

*Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* ('The Development of Thai Literature') was published by the Faculty of Arts, Sukhothai Thammathirat University in 1994. It consisted of 15 study units, published in two volumes. It is unfortunate that this work was printed in a run of only 500 copies, which is small even by Thai standards. Its textbook format may not be attractive to the general reader, but the minuscule print run, even by Thai standards, suggests that the publishers had little faith that students of literature would go out and buy the book; it seems, rather to be a sourcebook for the teacher. It does deserve, however, to be read by a wider Thai public, for it is perhaps the first history of Thai literature to cover in detail, and without bias, all periods of writing, from the classical period up to the contemporary one.

An interesting point about this book is that the authors use the Thai words *wannakhadi* and *wannakam* interchangeably to refer to contemporary Thai literature

in general. This perhaps shows their refusal to accept the mainstream idea that the word *wannakhadi* refers to work of exceptional quality, which moreover dates exclusively from the classical period of Thai literature when the centre of literary production was the Thai royal court.

The two volumes of *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* are divided into 15 study units, units 1 to 7 in Volume I and 8 to 15 in Volume II. At the beginning of each unit the authors list the trends which appeared in writing during a period and then go on to detail what a unit is going to teach students. At the end of the study units questions are set to test students' knowledge. Much of the teaching in a unit is focused on giving students an understanding of the social and political conditions that existed in a particular period of writing. The authors believe that their work will give students a view on the changing conditions in society and culture in each era.<sup>32</sup> From the point of view of Thai literary history Volume I is the most important as it covers the development of Thai writing from the thirteenth century up to the 1970's.

The 15 study units of *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* are divided into four different sections according to their teaching objectives. Units 1 to 7 teach students about the nature of literature in the various periods and identify what writing was important. Units 8 to 9 discuss the development of literature by giving a broad picture of content, aesthetics and form. Units 10 to 13 show the relationship between literature and society, and the nature of the relationship between folk literature and

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<sup>32</sup> *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* Introduction.

rural society. Finally units 14 to 15 give a summary of the factors which influenced development in writing, and explain the various approaches to the study of literature.

In order to talk in more detail about *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai*, section 4 of Unit 6 will be looked at.<sup>33</sup> In this section the authors discuss the development of contemporary literature from 1964-1973, a period which falls outside Suphanni and Trisin's framework and which is not covered in any other significant literary history.. The authors, who for much of Volume I of their book rely on the work of the major historians of the classical and contemporary periods of Thai literature, have thus had to use much of their own research and ideas to write about the 1964-1973 period in contemporary Thai writing.

To start section 4 of Unit 6 the authors give a summary of the nature of literature between 1964 and 1973. This summary is presented to students in the form of a list:

1. The oppressive conditions in society caused by the military government of Thanom Kittikachon initiated the return of the 'literature for life' movement. Writers were professionals and also students in various institutions, their writing had a part in initiating the events of October 14 1973.
2. Writers of the period belonged to two large groups either, students in universities or professional writers.

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<sup>33</sup> Unit 6 (p. 423-505) is divided into the following periods: (i) 1932-37, (ii) 1938-57, (iii) 1958-63 and (iv) 1964-73. For each period students are taught about the conditions in society, the literary climate, the important writers and works, and the relationship between writing and society.

3. Student writers in universities were a free group, who produced work that built up a market. As for professional writers, some wrote escapist work, others reflected the truth about society in their writing.
4. Work of this period reflected different aspects of social and political problems. Significant literature of the period was that which incited social change.
5. Literary competitions and prizes had a part in improving the quality of writing.
6. Many different types of literature in the book market reflected the divisions between the old and young generations.<sup>34</sup>

The authors follow this introductory list with another, which tells students what they should be capable of doing after studying section 4 of Unit 6. According to this list they should be able to:

1. Describe conditions in society and those in literature during the 1964-1973 period.
2. Identify the group of writers who had important work in this period.
3. Describe the origins of the different groups of writers.
4. Analyse the characteristics of the different groups of writers.
5. Compare the differences between the professional writers and student writers in universities.
6. Describe the relationship between literature and society.
7. Identify the factors which promoted the development of literature.
8. Analyse how literature of the period reflected the conflict between the old and young generations.<sup>35</sup>

The first of these two lists sets out the main ideas contained in section 4 of Unit 6 simply, whilst the second clearly indicates the information that students should

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid p.484. This is not a direct translation

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

retain from this particular section. Both show how easily *Phattanakan wannakhadi thai* can be used for self-study.

As with most histories of contemporary Thai literature, the authors begin their discussion of the 1964-1973 period by talking about conditions in Thai society and politics before looking at important writers and works. In this discussion they identify a gradual revival in serious writing following the end of Field Marshal Sarit's despotic rule during the 'dark age' (*yuk mu't*) of 1958-1963. According to the authors this writing became part of a 'source of energy', which pushed for change at the end of the 1964-1973 period.<sup>36</sup>

The focal point of this section, however, is the start of writing amongst students in universities, the effect that this had on the Thai short story and modern Thai poetry, and the part it had in the movement against the military government of the early 1970's. The 1964-1973 period in the history of Thai literature as it appears in this book, was not an important one for either Thai novelists or the Thai novel as neither are written about in any detail. The link between Thai student writers, short stories and poetry is the magazines published by student literary groups on different campuses in the 1960's and early 1970's. These magazines gave new writers the opportunity to publish poetry, short stories and articles. Some went on to become important figures in the Thai literary world in the decades that followed. In the 1964-1973 period magazines, both student and those produced for a wider audience, were important to Thai writing and to the fight for change in Thai society and politics; magazines that were published both inside and outside of universities, i.e. by writers

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 485.

who were students and those who were professional. The authors point out that there was more freedom of expression for writers on university campuses than off them.<sup>37</sup> The first magazine discussed in section 4 is *Sangkhomsat parithat*, whose first editor Sulak Siwarak described it as a platform for changing knowledge and ideas about society.<sup>38</sup> This magazine, which had as its second editor Suchart Sawatsi, a major figure in the sphere of contemporary Thai literature, was an important forum for intellectuals to voice their views and its appearance in the early 1960s initiated a revival in serious Thai prose writing, both non-fictional and fictional.<sup>39</sup>

Apart from *Sangkhomsat parithat*, there were other magazines that were important in the 1964-1973 period. These were produced by Thai university students, whose interest in writing, the authors of section 4 say, had begun at the end of the Sarit period.<sup>40</sup> It was at this time that a new literary culture began to develop in Thai universities. Students began to set up their own literary groups on campuses and found their own magazines such as, ~~Anasawansin~~ <sup>Wana</sup> *Anasawansin* (printed by Chulalongkorn <sup>๑๓๕๖๙</sup> University) and *Cet sathaban* (the work of several institutions). By the end of the 1960's the content of student magazines began increasingly to reflect students' interest in social and political problems, with more and more works on these subjects appearing in print.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid p.496

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 485.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 486.

The most important of the student literary groups which established their own magazines had the following Thai names, *Phracan siaw*, *Num nao sao suay*, *Theknik khorat*, and *Wannakham phu'a chiwit*. Writer members were not exclusively students nor members of only one group. The work that these literary groups produced, according to the authors of section 4, showed the reality of life in society.<sup>41</sup>

The history of the 1964-1973 period in 'The Development of Thai Literature' highlights the importance of writing which developed in universities, magazine publishing on and off of university campuses, modern Thai poetry writing and above all the Thai short story for which this period was a golden era.<sup>42</sup> The authors of section 4 uphold the idea, championed in the work of Trisin Bunkhacon that significant Thai writers were those who tackled social, political problems in their work. The authors in their history make apparent the connection between student writers and the movement for social, political change which culminated in the riots of October 14 1973 and the start of a brief democratic period in Thai government.

Section 4 finishes with two main questions set for students to answer:

1. What kind of relationship did literature have with society in this period?
2. What factors had an impact on the development of literature in this period?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 491.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p.493.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p.489.





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NOTE: In a few entries above it has not been possible to give full publication details when the title page was missing from the photocopy edition used.