

THAI NARRATIVE POETRY:
PALACE AND PROVINCIAL TEXTS OF AN EPISODE
FROM "KHUN CHANG KHUN PHAEN"

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Introductory

In 1950, when taking examples of song and chant styles, by means of a disc-recorder, in the western part of the central plain of Thailand, the writer acquired a specimen of a recital of the narrative poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.¹ According to Thai literary tradition this poem, though now well known in an "established" printed text, has behind it a history of oral composition and transmission. The existence of country bards still reciting episodes from *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* may be thought to provide a good reason for examining the nature and evolution of this type of narrative poetry in Thailand.

The story appears to be a local one. At least it cannot be traced easily to an external source or sources like the *Ramakian*, the *Dalang* or *Inao* poems taken from the Indonesian *Panji* cycle or the romances developed from *Paññasa Jātaka*. The certain existence in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* and other Thai poems of secondary Indian influence is another matter.²

Was *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* originally a simpler tale or lay, expanded in the course of time and under literary influences so that it became a narrative of greater length and complexity, thus paralleling, in some degree, the evolution of the heroic and romance tales of Europe?

What is the relationship between palace and provincial texts? To what extent were the country reciters the makers of the poem?

Although definitive answers to such questions cannot be expected from the evidence provided by short extracts, some pointers to the probabilities may be seen if these provincial fragments are examined side by side with the palace texts.

The episode

The episode under consideration forms a part of chapter thirteen of

¹ Transcription of Thai terms is according to the General System of the Royal Institute of Thailand except for common place-names, and the names of certain Thai authors for which spelling conventions personal to them have been adopted.

² Briefly discussed by E. H. S. Simmonds, *Siamese Dawn Songs*, in Eos, A. T. Hatto ed., Mouton, The Hague, in press.

Prince Damrong's text of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.³ This chapter is concerned with the return of Phlai Kaeo from the Chiang Mai region of northern Thailand after winning a victory over the ruler of the minor principality of Chiang Thong. Phlai Kaeo arrives in the capital city of Ayuthaya with the prince of Chiang Thong as his prisoner. He is ennobled by the king and is given the title of Khun Phaen. After the royal audience he sets out for his home at Suphanburi in western Thailand, taking with him Lao Thong, a new wife whom he has acquired during his campaign. On arrival he is greeted by Wan Thong, his first wife.⁴ In Khun Phaen's absence a rival, Khun Chang, has manufactured false evidence of his death in battle and has tried to marry Wan Thong. As Wan Thong relates her distressing experiences to Khun Phaen she discovers the presence of the new wife. A violent quarrel ensues. Khun Phaen accuses Wan Thong of infidelity. She attempts suicide. At length she becomes, for a time, the wife of Khun Chang.

This part of the story, involving as it does important developments in the hero's personal and official life, is very popular in Thailand. The episode discussed here ends with the arrival of Khun Phaen at Suphanburi.

The texts

Three texts of the episode are considered in this article. A. The "established" text produced by Prince Damrong with the assistance of Prince Kaviboch-Suprija and first printed in 1917. The genesis of this text is explained in Prince Damrong's introduction to *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.⁵

Briefly, he used:

1. A 111rd reign (1824-51) text from the palace, in the hand of a royal secretary.
2. A 14th reign (1851-68) text, that of Somdet Ćhao Phraya Boromaphichaiyat.
3. A 7th reign palace text dated C.S. 1231 (A.D. 1869), written by a royal secretary.
4. A 7th reign text also dated C.S. 1231, that of Somdet Ćhao Phraya Borommahasisuriwong.

This last-named text, of which Prince Damrong had only a fragment, was, he thought, the original of the first version ever to be printed. This, comprising a limited number of episodes, was produced by a missionary Samuel J. Smith, in Bangkok in 1872.

None of the mss. used is likely to have been earlier in date than 1825

³ *Sepha Ru'ang Khun Chang Khun Phaen* three-volume (second) edition of Krom Phraya (Prince) Damrong Rajanubhab, Department of Fine Arts, Bangkok, 1939, vol. 1, pp. 267-89. Differences between this text and that of the original edition of 1917 are minor. Variants which are significant for the present argument are duly noted.

⁴ In the texts Wan Thong is sometimes referred to as Phim, her original name. This was changed for reasons of medical magic in order to avert the dangers arising from serious illness.

⁵ Damrong, *op. cit.*, introduction p. 37.

except that a few additional fragments were taken into account. Some of these may have been of earlier origin. A few fragments of country texts were used also.

Thai tradition holds that the first organized attempt to write down a series of episodes of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* was made by a committee of poets at the command of King Rama II (1809-24) who himself took part in its composition. Such a text would have been produced as part of the literary revival of the early reigns of the Ratanakosin period. It does not appear to have survived in the original ms. It is believed to have contained only some of the episodes of this now enormous poem which, in the Damrong text, is connected metrically from end to end.⁶ In earlier times only isolated episodes are thought to have been recorded; the writing down from time to time of favourite passages of a widely known popular tale.

It is clear from Prince Damrong's comments on the principles of editing adopted that the established text is a highly synthetic one.⁷ Changes were introduced, "good" verses selected, vulgar passages omitted and so on.

B. The "Second King's" text

This is a play-book for theatrical representation (*lakhon*) written by the so-called Second King of the 111rd reign.⁸ The sophistication of the language, which has a very high proportion of non-formulaic Indic derivatives, clearly shows it to be primarily a literary production.

There is no evidence that *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* was used as a subject for drama before the nineteenth century. While the serious drama was the prerogative of kings it was rare, though not unknown, for themes to be introduced that would challenge the supremacy of the *Ramakian*. However, the indifference to the stage of King Rama III, a devout and perhaps rather narrow Buddhist, resulted paradoxically enough in the stimulation of theatrical activity. This took place outside the Grand Palace. Princes and nobles no longer felt that they were challenging the king by instituting theatrical companies of their own. A number of these were established in the 111rd reign and the search for new subjects was a feature of this period.

C. The provincial text from Amphoe Wiset Chai Chan⁹

This text was recorded in the Wiset Chai Chan district of Ang Thong

⁶ The length is approximately 20,000 lines, a line being taken here as one *kham khon* (< ? *gama* Skt.) of sixteen syllables. In *khon paet*, the metre in which the poem is written, a *kham* is composed of two *wak* (< *varga* Skt.) each of, theoretically, eight syllables. Two *kham*, which complete one phase of the rhyme scheme, make up one *bot* (< *pada* Skt.). Length estimates of c. 40,000 lines made by some Thai writers are evidently based on the *wak*.

⁷ Damrong, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, introduction pp. 38-41.

⁸ *Bot lakhon Ru'ang Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. Phraratchaniphon Somdet Phra Bawon Mahasakdiphonjasep. National Library Bangkok, 1924.

⁹ School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Department of South East Asia and the Islands. Record No. CSI 1, Song 14, recorded in 1950.

province. The reciter, a woman of middle age, did not use a written text. Amphoe Wiset lies near the border of Suphanburi province which, curiously enough, is the geographical setting for much of the story of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.

The recorded extract consists of two cantos which may be compared with passages in the Second King's text and with chapter thirteen of the Damrong text.¹⁰ These passages are: Text A. Damrong text: Chapter thirteen, lines 1-104. Text B. Second King's text: First episode, lines 1-48 (pp. 1-3).

The text of the two recorded cantos is given below transposed into Thai script so as to make easy the comparison with the relevant passages from the other texts which are not reprinted here.¹¹ Lettered notes to the Thai script text refer only to differences arising from the use of regional or aberrant forms.

The Amphoe Wiset text (C).

Canto 1.

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. 1 | ครานี้จึงโฉมเจ้าพลายแก้ว | มาเลื่อนยศศักดิ์แล้วเป็นขุนแผน |
| 1. 2 | ที่ทัพเนียงใหม่ไค้ บันแค้น | มรรษาทานีคอมหนออันพิสน์ |
| 1. 3 | จะเข้าไปสู่กลางคันทน์บ้าน | มาสู่สาวอาญปริเปรมเกษมสันต์ |
| 1. 4 | มาลงเรือที่นอนใหญ่ไค้พร้อมกัน | ขุนแผนนั้นนั่งในกัญญาภา |
| 1. 5 | จึงสาวทองน่องที่น่องอยู่เคียงข้าง | หิ้งสองนางที่เลี้ยงทางซ้ายขวา |
| 1. 6 | พวกผีพายมาฆ่ามากจะหาหมา | มาหย่อนเฝ้าว่าวว่าสนันสำ |
| 1. 7 | ถึงเวลาตะวันมาหยอกผีพายกินข้าว | คนท้ออันมาแล้วเล่าจวนจะค่ำ |
| 1. 8 | เอาประวิชุดสั้นสนันสำ | แล้วมาไล่เจ้าเอาลาปสามถ่มมา |

a. for พระราชทาน b. for รางวัด

c. Damrong text has โยน but ทโยน appears to be a well-attested form.

It is perhaps more colloquial. The Damrong text has โยน in other formulae of this type.

¹⁰ The parts or *ton* of the poem, here called chapters, deal with sets of episodes which are naturally linked in the narrative. Each was intended for one night's recitation and, when written down, filled one or two "black books" or *samut dam*, sometimes called *samut thai*. The *ton* are divided into sections of irregular length, here called cantos.

¹¹ A text transcribed from the record is given in conjunction with the specimen musical transcriptions on pp. 293-294.

Canto 2.

- | | | |
|-------|--|---|
| 1. 1 | พระจันทร์ทรงปลดกุหลาบเมฆ | แล้วมาลอบวิเวกส่องสว่างกลางเวหา |
| 1. 2 | พระจันทร์แจ่มแจ้งกรจ่างตา | มาคองหน้าดาวทองระของนวล |
| 1. 3 | ลมพรพายชายพัดเมื่อยามตก | สำนึกถึงแก่ทมิฬนอยระห้อยนวล |
| 1. 4 | ปานจะน้เจ้าพิณที่มีคอยครวญ | เจ้าสำจวนเริบไซ้ก็ไม่วุ่น |
| 1. 5 | อยู่ไกลศาสนาพักรยังซัดผาง | มีเบื้องอย่างเขาวัวไว้ก็ยังมิอยู่ |
| 1. 6 | ฉ้านอนสูงเข้าให้คว่ำชำเลื่องดู | มีเหตุย่อมจะรู่อยู่ภายใน |
| 1. 7 | มีเมียงามถึงเขากมีกวากก็ว่าไว้ละเมื่อย | โอแม่สายสุคที่รักจะคองไกลศา |
| 1. 8 | จะมาอยู่คนเกี่ยวเปลี่ยออกแสนในอ้วงว่าง | เพราะอ้ายขุนช้างอนมิตรมาอักษษา ^h |
| 1. 9 | พอพักหนึ่งเราก้เร่งปีพายมา | พอรุ่งแจ้งสุริยาถึงสุพรรมพลัน |
| 1. 10 | จอกเรือเรียงเคียงประตัมกับหน้าท่า | เห็นสายทองน่องลงมาอยู่กับทัน |
| 1. 11 | เมื่อคิใจขึ้นไปบอกกับเจ้าพิณพลัน | บอกว่าพลายแก้วนั้นเขากลับมา |
| 1. 12 | ฉวยเข้ารักนอยมาเฝยหน้าค่าง | เรือที่นอนจอกผางที่ตะพานใหญ่ |
| 1. 13 | กระหม่อมแก้วมาแล้วให้คิใจ | ฉ้ามักมิบไค้จะร่อนราเอย |

d. for วิชฺวาน

e. for ขวาง realization of Central Thai /kw/khw as f/fw/ is common in western Thailand and the northern part of the peninsula.

f. for เบียง อย่าง

g. for ผาก here the realization of C.T. /f/ is /kw/.

h. อักษษา /itsayáa/ for ฉษษา /ritsayáa/ ? but the form may result from a confusion of อิจฉา /itcháa/ and /ritsayáa/.

Pallegoix has อิจฉาวิศยา /itcháa ritsayáa/ invidia tabescens—envious, dried up with envy. *Dictionarium Linguae Thai*. Bangkok, 1854, p. 176.

i. Damrong text has นารอญมา

j. see note e.

k. for Mod. C.T. สะพาน

The texts compared

Canto 1 of Text C covers in an extremely summary fashion the incidents from the victory of Phlai Kaeo over the northern states to his return to Ayuthaya and his ennoblement by the king, but has more detail on the departure with Lao Thong for his home in Suphanburi. The relevant passage in Text B deals equally briefly with most of these aspects but introduces a passage of teasing and love-making when Khun Phaen and Lao Thong are in the boat. Text A has little on the departure for Suphanburi but 9 cantos (84 lines) are employed to the end of the royal audience. In this text the political relations between Ayuthaya and the states of the north are introduced. The dispositions of the army for and during its return journey to Ayuthaya, court ceremonial and procedure in the royal audience are described in considerable detail.

A natural difference of purpose and intention could account for this disparity in the three texts. Text C, the provincial text, emphasizes the physical side of the boat journey. Text B, the play-book, is mainly concerned with the emotive aspects of the relationship between Khun Phaen and Lao Thong. Also, there is some reason to limit, in a dramatic text, diffusion of interest over a succession of incidents widely separated in space and time. Text A, appropriately enough for a palace text, deals at length with those aspects of the introductory episodes in the chapter which would be of interest to a court audience.

At this point the three texts stand independently of each other. This is most clearly revealed by the versification. All texts are written in *klon*; B in the dramatic style and A and C in a form suitable for recitation as *sepha*.¹² In the syllables comprising the structural rhyme (*samphat nok*) there are no lexical correspondences between any of the texts and only one case (between A and C) of a rhyme-type similarity.¹³

Text C, canto 1 and Text A—lexical content

The common epithet โฉมเจ้าทลายแก้ว is used in both texts (A, lines 1 and 85; C, line 1). The bestowal of the title of Khun Phaen upon Phlai Kaeo is a feature of both texts.¹⁴ But the technical terms of rank and degree ยศ (< *yaśa* Skt.) and ศักดิ์ (< *śakti* Skt.) which occur in C, line 1, are not used in the relevant passage of Text A.

A variation of the A text formula โยนบ่าวจาวถันสนั่นมา is used in C, line 6, but the departure for Suphanburi is more detailed in C. The conventional association of home with happiness occurs in both A and C. In

¹² See below p. 289.

¹³ Using lines 85–8 of the A text as the index of comparison, though no group of lines in A (or B) is directly comparable with canto 1 of C.

¹⁴ In Text B he is referred to as Khun Phaen throughout.

A it is used in reference to the prince of Chiang Thong but in C to Khun Phaen. The formula is extended to a full half-line in C.

Text C, canto 1 and Text B—lexical content

The obviously aberrant form มงราชทาน (C, line 2) is closer to the ทงราชทาน, "royal gift", of B, line 3, than to any expression occurring in Text A at this point. Moreover, B, line 3 continues with รางวัลศรี which may be compared with the aberrant อังอันพสน์ of C, line 2., รางวัล, "reward" in A is used in connexion with the friendly principalities (A, 81).

The formula เสด็จสามแล่มมา (C, line 8) may be compared with สามแล่มจก้วยยาวถั่วโต (B, line 17).

Observations of this kind by no means suggest that the country reciter was influenced by the B text. This was a literary production of the 111rd reign and it may be presumed that the manuscript, which was not of the type likely to be copied, would date not later than 1850. It was printed once only in a limited edition. It is not likely that the reciter could have had any direct, or even indirect, knowledge of this text. The important point is that both texts show the use of comparable formulae. Text A can here be associated with the other two both in terms of the remarks made in the preceding section above and in such matters as the existence of boat-song formulae in other contexts in Text A comparable with that of C, line 8, and B, line 17.

This evidence suggests that a common body of poetic material existed. Differences in the details of verse-structure bear out the theory that we are concerned with independent composition within the general framework of a common story expressed through common themes and formulae which are, nevertheless, used in an individual way. This seems to point clearly enough to a background of oral composition.¹⁵

Text C, canto 2

The subject of this canto, the arrival of Khun Phaen at his home, cannot be called introductory. The episode is essential, the first in a linked series which culminates in the attempted suicide of Wan Thong.

In all three texts the content at this point is generally similar but the situation revealed by textual comparison is very different from that which applies in the case of canto 1. Commencing with C, canto 2, line 1, a direct

¹⁵ See, particularly, Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1960 and C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, London, 1952. No thorough examination of the thematic and formulaic content of Thai narrative poetry has yet been made. In these circumstances the statement on this point has the status of an impression and must still remain somewhat tentative.

point of contact can be made with Text A: at chapter 13, line 89. C then continues for an additional 12 lines, a total of 13. This is to be compared with 16 lines in the equivalent passage of Text A.

A study of the versification is again of value. Lines 89-104 of Text A are in correctly constructed *klqn paet* with a variation of 7-9 syllables in each half-line. C, canto 2, with a variation of 8-11,¹⁶ has a break in the verse-structure after line 6. The expected structural *bot* link, present in A, does not occur in C. In this section line 7 of C is therefore to be compared with line 8 (96) of A. A further break in the verse-structure of C after line 11 points to the fact that this text contains no equivalent of lines 13-14 (101-2) in Text A. Thus 16 lines in A are represented by 13 in C.

The regular structural rhyme of Text A provides 7 *bot* link, 8 *kham* link and 16 *wak* link rhyming pairs. Because of the breaks in the C text, the 13 lines of canto 2 provide only 4 *bot* link, 6 *kham* link and 13 *wak* link rhyming pairs. Of these pairs, in terms of rhyme-type, Texts A and C have the maximum possible number in common. More than this, 8 of the *bot* link, 11 of the *kham* link and 24 of the *wak* link rhyming syllables in Text C are lexically identical with those in equivalent positions in Text A; that is 100, 91 and 92% respectively.

The relevant lines in the passage of Text A contain 183 institutionalized words. In C, canto 2, 112 or 66% of words occurring in comparable grammatical situations are lexically identical with those of Text A.¹⁷

Features of this kind provide strong evidence that the country reciter had some knowledge, however indirect, of A or of a text very similar in content and construction.

The two breaks in C, canto 2, confirm this. The first break results in the omission of the second half of the "sleeping high, sleeping low" proverb which occurs in full in Text A. In this connexion the semantically weak closure of C, canto 2, line 6 should be noted.

The second break leaves nothing in C to be compared with lines 101-2 of A. A failure of sense results in that the action switches without warning

from Sai Thong to Phim. C, line 12 has *ให้ใจ* for *ไม่ใจใคร* in the 1939 Damrong text but the 1917 edition has *ใจ*.

On the other hand, certain types of variation between Texts A and C suggest that the country reciter was by no means dependent on material

¹⁶ In Thai poetics the permitted variation for a half-line in this type of *klqn* metre is 6-9 syllables. It may be suspected that this is a late stricture resulting from the regularizing tendencies to which a "written" literature is subject. The longer, less regular line of Text C sounds natural in its recitative context and may be taken as one of the signals of the underlying oral tradition.

¹⁷ Forms occurring more than once are counted each time an occurrence establishes a separate grammatical context for comparison. Instances where there is variation of a regional or aberrant nature have been included in the count.

learnt directly from a known written text. Such features are the use of regional variants, indicated by notes, e, g, j and k to the text in Thai script, possibly the occurrence of *ปลอก* in canto 2, line 1 for *กรก* in Text A, and the presence of aberrant forms, notes d, h and i. This last instance

deserves further comment. Text A has *ผ้าหอบผ้า* "(patterned) shoulder-cloth", a nominal of normal generic + specific structure. C, canto 2 is aberrant in terms of grammar. There seems to be confusion with an

expression like *รักหอบ* "to love a dear one" which is grammatically inappropriate in the context. Moreover the proper referent for this is not the A text form, nor any expression occurring in B, but the more precise *ผ้ารักหอบผ้า* "a cloth wrapped across the breasts and thrown over the shoulder". The additional rhyme scheme (*samphat nai*) requires that a form with /aa/ is retained at this point. A feature of this kind certainly indicates that the version has a more complex history than would have been the case if it had been learnt from a written text by the reciter.

In two cases of aberrant forms, notes a and b, the referent is in Text B.¹⁸ The form *กะพาน*, indicated by note k, occurs in B, line 45 suggesting age in addition to regionality. At this point (and at line 37) Text B has the unfixed and earlier orthographical form *น้ำ* for *หน้า*.

Certain differences also indicate that there was some freedom of composition left to the country reciter. These are the slightly longer line of C, canto 2¹⁹ and 5 instances of the use of variant formulae:

C, canto 2, line 2: *แจ่มแจ่มกรจ่างกา* for *กลากพร่างสว่างกา*

6: *มีเหตุบ่อจะรู้* for *มีเหตุที่จะรู้*

7: *แม่สาย* for *เจ้าสาย*

จะทองไกลกา for *อยู่ไกลกา*

9: *นึ่งสุพรรณพลัน* for *นึ่งสุพรรณ* B, line 37 has:

นึ่งสุพรรณพลัน

Other formulaic variants, for which the referents are in Text B, are:

¹⁸ See above p. 285.

¹⁹ In C, canto 1 the length variation is 7-11 syllables per half-line.

C. canto 2, line 8: อ้ายขุนช้างอนมิตรมาอิกษมา for อ้ายขุนช้างทวารวิจิตรณาใจ

10: จอกเรือเรียงเคียงประทักษิณหน้าท่า

for ถึงสุทรรณพลันประทักษิณหน้าบ้าน

12: เรือหินอนจอกผวางสะพานใหญ่

for เห็นเรือจอกอยู่บนสะพานใหญ่

Though there is no single line in C canto 2, that does not show some influence from a text of the type of A, there is a striking departure from such influence in the second half of line 13.

ถ้ามีปีกบินไ้จะร่อนราเอย

"Oh! if I had wings and could fly, I would swoop gaily down to him."

This, in place of the far more prosaic:

ลงจากบันไดรีบเค้นมา

"Going down the steps she hastened to him",

of Text A and the more complex, consciously "literary" version in Text B, lines 47-8.

It is at least possible that this is the work of the country reciter. When effective phrases like this are struck out in simple Thai it cannot be said that the tradition of the bard is altogether lost.

Taking the two recorded cantos together it can be seen that a conflict of evidence exists. On the one hand the country reciter exhibits considerable freedom of treatment while, in the bardic tradition, remaining within the general framework of the story and making use of common themes and formulae. At the same time, in a passage much loved by Thai audiences, the influence of written texts is plain to see. Scholars in Thailand are agreed that the publication of texts of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* has interfered with pure oral transmission. The extracts considered here afford an illustration of the manner in which this has happened. Equally they demonstrate the way in which oral tradition continues.

In the *Singer of Tales*, Albert B. Lord is somewhat contemptuous of the "bard" who acquires his tales from literary sources, who does not compose but merely performs.²⁰ In the rather different Thai situation no such condemnation is necessary. For one thing the Thai bard is very much concerned with technique for its own sake because this is greatly appreciated by audiences. The account of the *sepha* recital at Phlai Ngam's tonsurate affords an example of this.²¹ Originality is not the only consideration.

²⁰ See e.g. Albert B. Lord, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8.

²¹ See below p. 291.

Moreover, the Thai reciter is not performing only for entertainment in the simple sense. He may do so. There are instances recorded in literature where the story of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is recited to while away the time on a journey in the forest or on the river.²² But this has not been its main purpose. It has formed part, albeit in the guise of entertainment, of a ceremonial procedure and ought to be looked at in that context. It was used at tonsurates and other royal hair-cuttings. It had a part to play in connexion with Brahmanistic ceremonial and thus is at only one remove from religion. For this reason an established text may well have been regarded with respect. It carried the authority of the palace and of the palace religion which had a strong Brahmanistic component in its ceremonial aspects.

It may be suspected, too, in a land where religion, in this case Buddhism rather than Hinduism, has had a widespread educative effect for centuries, producing literacy outside the capital at least in the few, that a mixed oral and written tradition has existed for longer than Prince Damrong and other scholars seem to imply.

In pre-modern Thailand, and that is not so very far in the past, Brahmanistic practices extended from the court into the country. They were the practices of the people. Even today many villages have their *mō tham khwan*, the adept who produces beneficent influences. Dressed in Brahmanical white, he invokes not only the Buddha but also Vishnu and Śiva in the setting of the Ganges and the Yamuna. Such references occur in the preliminary invocation to *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.²³ The reciter has links with religion as well as with entertainment and poetic art.

Recitation technique

Khun Chang Khun Phaen is the most important of a number of narrative poems grouped by the Thai themselves under the general heading of *sepha*. This term has come to be used for the method of recitation. According to Schweisguth, *sepha* is a term of Indic origin used for poetic recitation where changes in the tone and quality of the voice are employed to realize different emotional impressions as the narration proceeds.²⁴ Prince Damrong accepted that *sepha* was an ancient recitation technique which evolved for the telling of tales in verse.²⁵ Such tales may have been related originally in non-versed form as *niyay*.

Sepha may be a derivative of an Indic form associated with the Sanskrit

²² E.g. in Sunthon Phu: Nirat klaeng p. 30 in *Prachum klɔn nirat tang tang. phak thi 1*, Bangkok, Vajirāna Library, 1922.

²³ Damrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3. Prince Damrong explains that he was unable to find a palace example of an invocation though the opening of the text proper clearly implies its use. He prints a fragment, the nucleus of which originated, interestingly enough, at Phak Hai on the Mae Nam Nqi, only a few miles downstream from Amphoe Wiset Chai Chan.

²⁴ P. Schweisguth, *Étude sur la littérature siamoise*, Paris 1951, p. 62.

²⁵ Damrong, *op. cit.*, introduction pp. 1-3; 12-17.

root *sev* in its connotation of "worship, service, attendance upon". As has been said, *sepha* recitations are used in connexion with religious activities like the tonsure ceremony where the presence of the gods is invited. An important aspect of worship is the provision of suitable entertainment for the gods. This gives a new dimension to the idea of entertainment. It is not the human audience alone that is entertained.

In the reign of King Rama IV (Mongkut) (1851-68), *sepha* recited in the provinces were of two types, either *samnuan doem* "old style", the more common, or *samnuan luang* "royal or court style".²⁶ Provincial renderings may have been affected by court style texts before this date. Plausibly, these texts might have acquired a certain authority outside the capital, especially when recitations were made in the country at ceremonies such as top-knot cutting or celebrating the building and occupation of a new house, occasions which had their analogues at court. The influence of court style texts may have been spreading as early as the 11th reign or even earlier, to the detriment of original country composition. However, according to Prince Damrong, *sepha don*, a form of extempore *sepha* composition was still common in the provinces in the 11th reign.²⁷

It is probable that *sepha* recitations were known early in the Ayuthaya period. Nai Pleuang na Nakorn quotes a reference to the practice from the *Kot monthian ban*, the Palace law.²⁸ Prince Damrong was of the opinion that the practice of introducing interludes on the percussion orchestra developed only in the 11th reign and that prior to that time the *sepha* itself was the most important part of the performance.²⁹ The use of *kráp*, short bars of polished hardwood which are rattled together at intervals by the reciter, appears to be a fundamental feature of *sepha* recitation.³⁰ Certain types of *kráp* are used to keep the rhythm in various country songs. Small bronze cymbals known as *ching* are frequently used and a further alternative is to employ the clapping of hands.

In *sepha* the function of *kráp* in normal narrative passages is closely bound up with the verse structure. They mark the end of *wak*, *kham* and *bot* and sometimes a point three or four syllables before the end of the second

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33. The terms refer to the poetic style rather than to the method of recitation.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

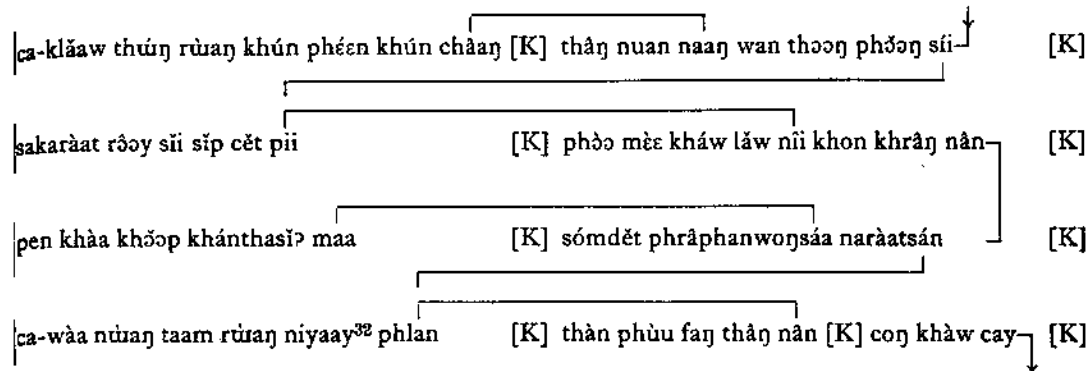
²⁸ Nai Pleuang na Nakorn, *Prawat Wannakhadi Thai*, Bangkok, 1953, p. 466. The date given is B.E. 1901 corresponding to A.D. 1358, but caution in the use of this text is necessary because of extensive revision carried out in the 1st reign (1782-1809).

²⁹ Damrong, *op. cit.*, introduction pp. 33-4.

³⁰ The writer was informed by the late Nai Niao Duriyabandhu that the wood employed is normally *mai chingchan*, *Dalbergia bariensis*. Dhanit Yupho gives an illustrated description of several types of *kráp* in *Thai Musical Instruments* (English translation by David Morton), Bangkok, 1960, pp. 10-11. *Krap*, in the form *cráp*, are mentioned as an accompaniment to the voice in singing or chanting by de la Loubère, *Du Royaume de Siam*, Paris, 1691, tome 1, p. 265.

half-line where the *wak* link rhyme frequently falls. Less frequently a break marked by the *kráp* occurs at an equivalent point in the first half-line. The beginning and end of cantos are marked by longer passages on the *kráp*. For parts such as invocations or where special emphasis is required the *kráp* have the function of an accompaniment.

The following example of *sepha* recitation of a narrative passage from *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* illustrates the normal method.³¹



Points at which the *kráp* are employed are marked [K]. Structural rhyme (*samphat nŋk*) is indicated by linking lines. In other recordings by the same artist the use of *kráp* intermediately after the *wak* link rhyme in the second half-line is more frequent than in the above example.

The text of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* itself provides an interesting description of *sepha* recitation.³³ This takes place at the top-knot cutting ceremony for the thirteen-year-old Phlai Ngam, son of Khun Phaen. At that time he was living with his grandmother Thŋng Prasi in Kančhanaburi.

"After the abbot had returned to the monastery, the strains of the *phinphat* orchestra arose.³⁴ The family and friends of Thŋng Prasi had sought out the best reciters of *sepha*. Ta Mi was a master of the battle scenes. How his throat swelled with sound as he recited. He charmed the

³¹ Transcribed from SOAS, Dept. S.E.A., and the Islands. Record No. CSI, 1, Litt. 1. Recorded in Bangkok, 1951. The performer was the late Nai Niao Duriyabandhu, a leading *sepha* artist from the Silpakorn. Text: Damrong, ch. 1, lines 9-12. Note on transcription, p. 292, n. 39.

³² The reference to the text as *niyaay* is of interest. See above p. 289.

³³ Damrong, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 220, lines 7-14.

³⁴ /phinphāt/bīna-bādyā < vīnāvādyā Skt. "playing on the lute". Stringed instruments are not used in this orchestra so the use of a derivative from *vīnā* is difficult to understand. An alternative term /piiphāt/ is frequently employed, especially in the country. /pii/ is the Thai clarinet which is used with the percussion orchestra. The writer is informed by his colleague Dr. J. R. Marr that in South India the term *mukavīnāi* < *mukha* + *vīnā* Skt. has been employed for a wind instrument, "the Indian clarinet". Madras Tamil Lexicon, VI, p. 3229, col. 1. This instrument is mentioned in Kurrālatapurāṇam, Taruma 54, an 18th? century text. In Hindi the term *bīn* is applied to a folk-instrument of the pipe type.

ears of the old people. They declared he knew it all. Ta Rong Si knew well the comic parts alone. He rattled and rattled the *kráp*, grimacing the while and rolling his eyes.

"The style of Nai Thang was loud and ringing. He chanted the quarrelling passages with angry voice. Nai Phet drew out the echoing *oei cha* so long, so long.³⁵ Nai Ma and Phraya Non were apt at clowning. They sang the vulgar episodes to the enjoyment of the people, who noisily acclaimed their expertise. Old Thong Yu knew the language of the Lao. He gave the Lao parts, the scenes of forest travel and passages with musical accompaniment."

This passage emphasizes several aspects of *sepha* recitation. First, the use of varying qualities of voice to point up emotive differences. Secondly, the fact that reciters tended to have their own specialisms. Thirdly, the use of *kráp* and of the percussion orchestra.

The author of the *sepha* recitation passage is reputed to have been Sunthôn Phu (1786-1855) a court poet of great renown who produced either directly or at dictation a number of episodes of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.³⁶ Prince Damrong has shown that at least some of the reciters mentioned were well-known contemporaries of Sunthôn Phu, active in the 11th reign.³⁷ The introduction of such personages suggests that the description represents a synthesis of the poet's experience of *sepha* recitation rather than an exact illustration of a country scene. But Sunthôn Phu was a great traveller and was well acquainted with provincial practice. It may be assumed that the picture is a reasonably accurate one in this respect.

It appears that reference is made to more than one style of recitation: the *sepha* style proper involving the use of *kráp* which may have resembled the court style in use down to the present day, and what seems to be a provincial style or styles employing nonsense syllables as pausal or chorus features as is common in many kinds of country singing. These styles are relevant when the technique of recitation of the Amphoe Wiset text (C) is considered.

A transcription of the two cantos of Text C is given below. A musical transcription of the first four lines of each canto is provided.³⁸ The transcription of the texts is in terms of the system in use at SOAS.³⁹ Two degrees

of vowel length only are recognized, short and long. Actual vowel lengths can be judged from the musical transcription. Tones are normalized in terms of the Central Thai system which was that of the speech of the reciter.

Canto 1

line 1
khaa nān n--- cūj chōm vvy---
---la cāw phlay kic - w--- | māe lū - ān yōc nā---
āk māw vvy--- pān- khōn phān vvy--- tī line 2
thāp chí-āj māy vvy--- dāy pān
dēm--- mā rāc sā thān nā--- tōp n thān--- vvy---
--- āj an phian vvy line 3 ca khāw--- fū thūn iā ---
vvy--- kīp māe bān --- māe sūk ēm
mān vvy--- pūi--- pām vvy--- kā sēm sām vvy s māe line 4
lōj rāc thī ān yā vvy--- dāy phōm
kām--- khūa phān nān s--- vvy--- nāj nāy vvy---
--- kām yā mā vvy

³⁵ *oei cha*: syllables used as pausal or chorus adornment in country singing.

³⁶ Prince Bidyalankarana: "The Pastime of Rhyme-making and Singing in Rural Siam". *Journal of the Siam Society*. XX/2. 1926. pp. 101-27. ref. to p. 104.

³⁷ Damrong, *op. cit.*, introduction p. 22.

³⁸ The writer is indebted to his wife, Patricia Simmonds, for making the musical transcription. He wishes also to express his thanks to Mrs. Ousa Weys and Mr. Sulak Sivarak for much helpful discussion of the texts and translations.

³⁹ This system was devised by Miss E. J. A. Henderson and slightly modified by the present writer. It is a reading transcription based on phonetic principles like that of Mary R. Haas which it resembles in many particulars. The chief differences from the Haas system are the employment of *ux* and *ʏ* for the back unrounded vowels, the use of *y* for *j* and the employment of tone marks according to the following scheme: mid: unmarked; low: *˘*; high: *ˆ*; falling: *ˋ*; rising: *ˊ*.

- line 5. cun̄ laaw thōn̄ n̄ōn̄ k̄o-n̄ān̄ [vvy] yũ khīān̄ kh̄āān̄ [v̄v̄]
 thân sốn̄ nān̄ [vvy] phīī līān̄ [vvy] thāān̄ s̄āy khw̄āa [vvy]
6. ph̄ūak̄ f̄īī phāay b̄āy b̄āk̄ [n-vvy] kach̄āk̄ maa |
 lêw̄ maa ȳōn̄ yaaw [vvy] cháaw ch̄āa [vvy] san̄n̄ lam [vvy]
7. thú̄n̄ weelāa tawan b̄āy [vvy] yũt̄ f̄īī phāay kin̄ kh̄āaw |
 t̄ēē phōō ʔim̄ maa [vvy] lêw̄ l̄aw [vvy] cuan̄ caa kh̄am̄ [vvy]
8. ʔaw̄ parīʔ̄ phīut̄ s̄ān̄ [vvy] san̄n̄ lam [v̄v̄]
 lêw̄ maa l̄ay cam̄ [vvy] ʔaw̄ l̄āap [vvy] s̄āam̄ l̄em̄ maa [vvy]

Canto 2

line 1
 ph̄rā can̄ thōn̄ na--- sōn̄ p̄h̄ōt̄ n̄ na----- dūā m̄ōt̄

m̄ōk̄----- lêw̄ maa h̄oȳ wī w̄ēk̄ s̄ōn̄ ā sāw̄īāḡ -----

kh̄āp̄ wēē h̄īā----- line 2
 ph̄rā can̄ thōn̄ c̄tān̄ c̄ēḡ----- v̄v̄y-----

k̄rā c̄āp̄ t̄ā | maa th̄ōn̄----- n̄ā----- laaw̄ th̄ōn̄----- lā

ʔōōḡ n̄ nuan̄ nē v̄v̄y----- a----- line 3
 lom̄ ph̄rāphāy ch̄ay

ph̄āt̄ n̄ v̄v̄y----- m̄ērā- yam̄ d̄ūk̄ n̄----- s̄ām̄ n̄h̄īk̄ th̄ōn̄ a-ŋ̄ā ph̄im̄ n̄ōy

v̄v̄y----- lā h̄oȳ hu- án | line 4
 p̄ān̄ chā n̄ī ā c̄āw̄

ph̄im̄ ph̄ī----- v̄v̄y m̄ī kh̄oȳ kh̄uan̄ ch̄w̄ lam̄ nuan̄ c̄āp̄ n̄

kh̄ay----- k̄ō m̄ay----- n̄ū----- v̄v̄y |

- line 5. yũ klaȳ taā s̄āaraph̄āt̄ [vvy] yān̄ kh̄āt̄ fw̄áān̄ |
 m̄īī yũān̄ ȳān̄ [a] kh̄áw̄ w̄āā w̄á̄y [a] k̄ōō yān̄ m̄īī yũū |
6. th̄āā n̄ōon̄ sũūn̄ kh̄àw̄ h̄à̄y khw̄àm̄ [vvy] cham̄l̄uān̄ dūū |
 m̄īī h̄ēt̄ ȳōom̄ ca-rũū | yũū phāaȳ naȳ |
7. m̄īī m̄īā ʔaam̄ thú̄n̄ kh̄áw̄ m̄ī kw̄áak̄ kwā w̄á̄y ka-m̄ēē yaaȳ |
 ʔōō m̄ēē s̄áaȳ sũt̄ th̄ī r̄á̄k̄ [na] caā t̄ōn̄ klaȳ taā |
8. ca-maā yũū khon̄ diaw̄ pl̄iaw̄ ʔōk̄ | s̄ēen̄ naȳ ʔāān̄ w̄āān̄ |
 ph̄r̄ōʔ̄ ʔāaȳ kh̄ūn̄ ch̄āān̄ ʔanaam̄īt̄ | maā ʔītsaȳáā |
9. phōō ph̄á̄k̄ nũn̄ raw̄ k̄ōō r̄ēēn̄ [vvy] f̄īī phāaȳ maā |
 phōō r̄ūn̄ c̄ēēn̄ suriyaā | thú̄n̄ suphan̄ phlan̄ [vvy]
10. c̄ōōt̄ ruwā rian̄ khīān̄ prath̄á̄p̄ [ma] k̄á̄p̄ n̄āā th̄āā [a]
 h̄ēn̄ s̄áaȳ thōn̄ n̄ōn̄ lōn̄ maā | yũū k̄á̄p̄ th̄ī n̄ān̄
11. m̄ũ̄ā d̄īī caȳ kh̄ūm̄ paȳ b̄ōk̄ [v̄v̄] k̄á̄p̄ c̄āw̄ ph̄im̄ phlan̄ |
 b̄ōk̄ w̄āā ph̄īāaȳ k̄ēw̄ n̄ān̄ kh̄áw̄ k̄l̄á̄p̄ maā [vvy]
12. chúaȳ ph̄āā r̄á̄k̄ n̄ōȳ b̄áā [aa] ph̄v̄ȳ n̄āat̄ān̄ |
 ruwā th̄ī n̄ōon̄ c̄ōōt̄ fw̄áān̄ [na] taphaan̄ ȳá̄ȳ |
13. kram̄ōom̄ k̄ēw̄ maā lêw̄ [vvy] h̄à̄ȳ d̄īī caȳ |
 th̄āā m̄īī p̄īk̄ bin̄ d̄à̄ȳ | ca-r̄ōon̄ raā v̄v̄y

pause, relatively short or very short, is marked | and |.

The provincial cantos are performed in different styles. Both are accompanied by *ching*. That of canto 2 bears some resemblance to palace *sepha*. The two-line verses (*bot*) are marked by the syllable *v̄v̄y* where the *krap*, occasionally accompanied by *v̄v̄y* is used in *sepha*.⁴⁰ The full lines (*kham*) are clearly marked by pause in silence in ten of the thirteen lines, at a conservative estimate. In each second half-line (*wak*) a break occurs in ten cases, usually before the final three syllables. There is also a break in the first half-line in twelve cases. This is marked by *v̄v̄y* in eight instances, by other "continuant" syllables in two, and by pause in silence in one. The first half-line of the canto has two short breaks. It has been noted already that a break marked by the *krap* may occur in the first half-line in palace *sepha*, though this feature does not appear in the example given above (p. 291).

A feature of interest in canto 2 is the close relationship, syllable for syllable, between recitative note and speech tone. This can be seen from the

⁴⁰ *Bot* divisions of this type do not occur, of course, in the sections, ll. 6-7 and 11-12 of canto 2 where the verse-structure is irregular, see above p. 286.

musical transcription. The falling tone is represented by a falling cadence except in two cases [*caw*] where the note is B. These are non-prominent initiating syllables in a phrase. The rising tone gives a rising cadence with a single exception, that of a short non-prominent syllable, initial in a disyllabic word (*[sám]* in *[sámmúkk]*). The register tones, low, mid and high, are not realized on three separate notes but the notes concerned can be grouped in an ascending series. Low tone is represented by the span of a major fourth, from B below middle C to E above. Mid tone occurs within the span of a major fifth from D to A above middle C.⁴¹ The realization of high tone covers an octave span but on prominent syllables this span is a major fifth, from E to B above middle C. Each tone therefore has its own area of realization. There is no repetitive or overall melody to suggest that the passage should be classed as song. The requirements of speech-tone are dominant and the technique is that of vocalized recitation.

George List has commented on the high level of co-ordination of the pitch elements of speech and song in certain types of recitation chant and folk-song in central Thailand.⁴² The examples he uses are recitations of the alphabet, the multiplication table, a lullaby and a stanza in *khlong* metre. Each shows a very high degree of co-ordination, with a greater tendency for register tones to be associated with a single separate note. These tones do exhibit, however, signs of adjustment to environment, a feature which is rather more marked in canto 2 here.

Palace *sepha*, in the examples recorded by the present writer, is clearly a type of vocalized recitation. There is no repetitive melody to be observed. Co-ordination with speech tone exists, but the curious variations in voice quality which are characteristic of *sepha* complicate the problem of notation.

Some important differences are to be seen in the style of canto 1. In ten out of eleven examples falling tones exhibit a falling cadence, but a rising cadence occurs on only three out of seven rising tones. The register tones vary over a wide and generally similar pitch range in contrast to their behaviour in canto 2. A repetitive tune is discernible though the first bar, initial half-line, is not repeated.

In canto 1 "verses" are marked by *γγγ* and half and full line breaks are present, marked either by *γγγ* or by pause in silence. Thus far the structure of breaks is similar in palace *sepha* and in cantos 1 and 2. In canto 1, however, the longest break is made at that intermediate point in each half of the poetic line which has been referred to above. This feature is much more clearly defined here than in canto 2 or in palace *sepha*. It is significant that the break occurs immediately after the first element of an additional rhyming pair has occurred or may occur. In the eight lines of canto 1 a

⁴¹ There is one case of a contour: EDB.

⁴² George List: "Speech Melody and Song Melody in Central Thailand", *Ethnomusicology*, V, 1, January 1961, pp. 16-31.

rhyme falling at this point is taken up in the remainder of the half-line in seven instances. This technique places emphasis, therefore, on additional rhyme (*samphat nai*) which, in written *klon*, is a less important feature than structural rhyme (*samphat ngk*). Nai Pleuang na Nakorn calls attention to the fact that most half-lines have additional rhyme in the established text of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* and that though, on the page, the role of these rhyme-bearing syllables appears to be secondary, the recitation technique (*khap*) brings them into prominence.⁴³

A further indication of the functional importance of the additional rhyme is given in a short text recorded by the writer in Bangkok in 1951. It was performed by an elderly woman in the so-called "beggar" style.⁴⁴ The text consists of only four lines but the pausal structure is such that it takes almost four minutes to perform. The time is a multiple of eight which is also the case in cantos 1 and 2. The content is obviously derived from the established text and so is not of special interest in itself, but the long pauses, marked by *γγγ*, fall after first elements of additional rhyme in most cases and there is additional rhyme in both first and second halves of each line except where the pattern and the unsophisticated reciter have been disturbed by the presence of Sanskritic polysyllables as a result of using the established text, probably by hearsay, as a model.

line 1. a. khrân thúṅ [γγγ] chân sáam [γγγ] duu ṅaam phriṅ⁴⁵ [γγγ]
LB

b. fii muuṅ phim [γγγ] thii càw tham [γγγ] phii cam dáy [γγγ]
LB

line 2. a. yuuṅn phít [γγγ] mään nōṅ [γγγ] tōṅ tít cay [γγγ]
LB

b. chaláat nâk [γγγ] pâk wáy [γγγ] rúanṅ khaawii [γγγ]
LB

In this example the long breaks occurring between the additional rhymes within each half of the line are marked. Structural rhyme, though present, is not marked here. Thus canto 1 and the "beggar" text place emphasis upon rhyme within half-lines, though marking, also by the syllable *γγγ*, the main caesura and the end of the line where the first elements of structural rhyme pairs occur in written *klon*. This emphasis

⁴³ Nai Pleuang na Nakorn, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

⁴⁴ Transcribed from SOAS, Dept. S.E.A., and the Islands. Record No. CSI. 1, Litt. 3. Text: Damrong, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 66.

⁴⁵ For phrim.

points to the importance of the aspect of oral performance suggesting that texts of this type were once composed extempore. It is very likely a vestige of the bard, for in oral composition it is natural that the first element in a rhyming pair should be marked by pause. The bard may then give thought to the passage containing the second half of the rhyme. This is precisely the convention existing in these Thai texts. Obviously the rhymes fall most closely together when they are within the same half-line and it is here, in two of the styles, that the longest breaks occur. In the canto 2 style and in *sepha* proper this particular feature becomes progressively more vestigial though the general principle of pause after actual or potential first element of rhyme is maintained.

The short sections into which the text is divided by the full use of breaks suggests the trace of a simpler country type of Thai metre, the running set of syllable groups linked end to middle by rhyme. This is the form used in the extempore chanting of verses in New Year and other ceremonial in Thailand and it has established itself in literature as *rai*. This form with the addition of an end-line rhyme, moving it, as it were, halfway towards *klon* metre, is commonly used for extempore harvest and boat-festival songs.⁴⁶

There is another aspect to canto 1. Of the four types discussed here, it alone exhibits what appears to be a pre-existing song melody. List deals also with this subject and, as he says, the Thai do not compose new melodies but draw on a repertory of traditional tunes.⁴⁷ Such tunes are used in conjunction with various literary texts in appropriate circumstances. He points out that this method of composition offers some parallels with traditional techniques of composition used in China. This is perhaps another example of the disparate influences that have had their effect on Thai culture. Elements of Chinese musical technique can happily blend with a Thai text which is subject to secondary Indian influence in imagery and diction, relating an indigenous story in Thai metre, the elements of which are none the less labelled in part with terms of Indian origin.

The example of classical song quoted by List is very short and does not, unfortunately, include the text. It appears to be a long first half-line of a text in *klon paet* or possibly a full line in the shorter dramatic style. The technique of construction is generally comparable with that of canto 1.

Conclusion

It seems that Sunthon Phu's description of *sepha* and similar entertainments performed at the tonsurate of Phlai Ngam refers to a number of recitative techniques. *Sepha* proper with *krap* was one. The mention of the pausal syllables *oey cha* and of song tunes normally accompanied by music

suggests that other techniques were used as well. It may not be too far-fetched to imagine that, of the examples discussed here, canto 2 represents a recitative used in the country for narrative texts and that certain passages of a special nature, for example chapter introductions, were sung to traditional tunes in the manner of canto 1, with or without musical accompaniment.

The texts show both natural variations on a common body of material and the direct influence of written literature. That these elements appear side by side is probably a reflection, not only of the recent effect of published texts upon the traditional provincial reciter, but also of older tendencies towards unity in Thai literary culture. If there is a long-existing continuum between court and country in these matters the explanation may lie in the underlying influence of religion, particularly of Brahmanistic practices, in what looks at first sight, when the printed text is read, to be simply secular entertainment.

⁴⁶ Prince Bidyalankarana, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴⁷ List, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.