

THE COSMOLOGY OF POWER IN LANNA*

* This paper was originally presented in a shortened version at the 82 nd.annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, Illinois, 17 November 1983.

I would like to thank Prof. S.J. Tambiah of Harvard University for his comment on the first draft of this paper.

The Buddhist tradition is pre-eminently a world-renouncing one. Yet Buddhism has always had a great deal to say about worldly matters, how people should live their lives, how kings should rule their kingdoms. The particulars of these messages have varied from place to place and from time to time, but underlying this variation there has been remarkable consistency. Themes found in the Buddhist Canon and early commentaries have been played out over the centuries with many variations but the themes have nonetheless remained the same. In the Tai Yuan tradition, which we shall examine here, religious literature, ritual, and political ideology all show clear continuities with their classical Indian and Sinhalese Buddhist antecedents.

The Tai Yuan people are the traditionally dominant ethnic group of the old Lännā kingdom which flourished in what is now northern Thailand before being absorbed by Siam in the 19th century. The term "Yuan" is essentially a literary one used to distinguish them from other Tai groups such as the Tai Long (Shan) and the Thai (Siamese). The Yuan call themselves *khon mueang*, which means something like "countrymen," and it is in the term *mueang* (which is found in all Tai languages) that we can see the basic outlines of the political, social, and economic organization.

Mueang can be glossed as "settlement," "principality," or even "country," but one can perhaps best define it as "'centered' or 'center-oriented space...[standing] for a capital, town, or settlement with the surrounding territory over which it exercised jurisdiction." (Tambiah 1977 : 74) So, a principality is a *mueang* because it consists of a dominant princely capital and satellite domains, but a large village can be a *mueang* because it represents a human center to cultivated space and dominates lesser villages in the district. Here is the key to both the

ecology and sociopolitical organization of Lanna. *Mueang* in a geographical sense are territorial units occupying a riverine valley basin. Wet-rice cultivation is carried on in these valleys, which are bounded by high, wild, forested mountains. In a political sense the *mueang* is in the first instance a principality made up of smaller *mueangs* which in turn are made up of yet smaller *mueangs*. So, one can speak of Mueang Lanna, the so-called kingdom having Chiang Mai as its center. One can also speak of Mueang Lampang, one of the very nearly autonomous principalities. Or one can speak of Mueang Yao, a large village in Mueang Lampang which in its day had some importance as a center of firearms manufacture. The point is that a big *mueang* is made up of little *mueangs* which reproduce it on a smaller scale, not only ecologically and socially but ritually as well. This is the type of polity that Tambiah refers to as galactic. At the lower levels the *mueangs* are natural ecological units, that is valleys where wet-rice cultivation is practiced (Turton : 252). At a higher level the *mueang* is an overarching political unit held together by ties of kinship between princes, tribute, and ritual.¹

Space is socially constituted in terms of the *mueang*. The Yuan social construction of space inflects with the Yuan conception of nature. In the center there is the princely capital which is like the center of a *mandala*. This is symbolized by the presence there of the main Buddhist temple of the principality with its palladium (usually a magically potent Buddha image, such as the Emerald Buddha), the animist city pillar (*lak mueang*), and the king's palace (*kum luang* or *hō kham*, literally "great palace" or "golden pavilion"). In the lesser towns and villages (*bān*) there are smaller temples, spirit shrines, and residences of princes and noblemen. All around these are the irrigated rice fields (*nā*) which produce the basic wealth of the *mueang* and in a sense defined civilized space, for the rice fields represent nature under control, harnessed for human purposes. That is, socialized nature. At the boundaries of civilization we find the mountains with their dark forests, wild animals, and strange folk who speak incomprehensible tongues. The wild forest (*pā thuean*) is nature beyond human control², violent and full of threatening forces, but at the same time full of vital energy which can be put to human use if only it can be domesticated. This is one of the central problematics of the classical Pali literature and reproduced in Yuan ritual and literature (both Pali and vernacular): How to socialize nature? This then raises the question: what is the relationship of the untamed forest and its untamed spirits to the Buddha and his disciples in the civilized world?³

The Yuan conception of kingship draws heavily from Buddhist ideas, particularly the notion of the "righteous king." "Righteous king" is a somewhat pale rendering of the Pali *dhammarāja*, for the original term implies not just a king who behaves righteously (a *dhammiko dhammarājā*), but a king who upholds the *dhamma* or Law. This implies both that he supports the Buddhist religion and that he maintains the unchanging norms of the social-cosmic order. He is the pre-eminent Buddhist layman and the patron of the Buddhist Order but his office is founded on the nature of things as defined by the Buddhist cosmology. The king is a spiritually superior being who has achieved his status on the basis of merit (*puñña*) earned in his past lives and his legitimacy rests on his performance of stereotyped meritorious deeds in this life. His function is not so much to legislate as to rule according to fixed principles and the well-being of society rests on the righteousness he brings to his task. (See Lingat.)

There is a certain unity between ideas about nature and ideas about society in the Buddhist tradition. Focussing on one Tai Yuan rite and the texts associated with it we shall see how ideas originating in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* (Buddhist Canon) and Sinhalese *Mahāvamsa* (Great Chronicle) are played out in the Lanna context. We shall examine ideas about nature and the nature of humanity and kingship in the Yuan legal text *Samuttarāja* and related ideas in the Yuan historical tradition which has its roots in the Sinhalese *vamsas*. The key ideas are those of the righteous king and the unity of the moral and natural orders in a single moral cosmos.

The ritual which concerns us here is the annual buffalo sacrifice to the spirits Pu Sae and Ya Sae (Grandfather and Grandmother Sae), which takes place at the foot of Doi Kham near Chiang Mai in the Yuan ninth lunar month (haem 14 kham, duean 9 = Thai duean 7) (late May to early June). This is the end of the dry season when the rain starts to fall and the villagers prepare for the rice-planting season ahead. This formerly royally-sponsored rite is still performed on a somewhat more modest scale by the local villagers. Pu Sae and Ya sae are autochthonous spirits. Kraisi has identified them as Lawa aboriginal spirits (Kraisri 1967). The myths and rites concerning them say a great deal about the Yuan conception of nature and political order.

SACRIFICE TO YA SAE⁴

The annual sacrifice to Ya Sae was, as stated above, formerly a royally-sponsored rite. The expense of the sacrifice was borne by the prince of Chiang Mai and the prince or his representative would attend the ritual. Nowadays

the sacrifice is performed by the villagers of Mae Hia Sub-district (Mueang District, Chiang Mai) who collect the money among themselves under the direction of the sub-district headman (*kamnan*).

The day before the ritual is spent preparing the non-meat offerings such as trays of flowers and betel. This is done by women, mainly old, in Pa Ci village. The men of the village go to the sacrificial grove (*dong*) in the forest nearby to clear the overgrown grass and set up temporary shrines to various spirits who receive part of the offering, in addition to the permanent shrine of the Lord of the Grove (*khun dong*). (Nowadays the men have the help of the Faculty of Agriculture of Chiang Mai University, which has a research station nearby and sends in a tractor to clear the site for the sacrifice. The Faculty, too, has an interest in keeping on good terms with the spirits). The women say that the men simply “don’t know” how to prepare the offerings. (P̄cāi dā khua tī bān b̄p cāng).

Early the next morning, on the day of the sacrifice, a young male buffalo is led to the sacrificial grove by the men and unceremoniously slaughtered. It is skinned and butchered. The skin is laid out over the meat and some of the meat is used to prepare traditional festive dishes, such as *lāp*. Meat offerings are given to all of the spirits, except for one, who for reasons which will become clear later, receives only vegetarian food.

Once everything has been set up the ritual begins. A spirit-priest (*tang khao*, literally, “preparer of rice”) who must be a former monk (*nān*) or novice (*n̄p̄i*) kneels before each temporary shrine and recites an invocation from a text. The invocations ask the spirit to partake of and enjoy the offering and to assure health and rainfall for the villagers in return. Each invocation includes the line “Let not the rice of the Lawa [Lua hill-tribe] die in their swiddens, let not the rice of the Thai wither and die in their fields.” (L̄u’nyia’hai b̄p hūē t̄ai, k̄a, Tai nyia’n̄a b̄q hūē t̄ai hiao h̄āng.) (Kraisri: 78)

Meanwhile a group of eight men, who must also be former monks or novices carry (*hām*) a large chest containing a furled painting of the Buddha on cloth (the *pha bot*) into the grove. (These men have nowadays been replaced by a pick-up truck, much to the distress of local traditionalists.) The banner was originally kept at Wat Pha Sing, a major temple in Chiang Mai city. The original banner disappeared during the Second World War, however, and a facsimile made sometime earlier and kept at Wat Pa Ci is used instead. (Kraisri: 78) The chest is placed under a large tree, from which the banner will later be hung. A group of five monks comes, one from each village of the sub-district (*tambon*) and sits nearby the tree.

After the invocation to the spirits is completed a group of mediums, most of them women, prepare themselves to be possessed by the spirits. Each medium is the "horse" (*mā khī*) of a particular spirit, and which spirit will actually come seems to vary from year to year, with the exception that the medium of Pu Sae is always there. The spirits soon take possession of their mediums and the mediums then dress in their special clothing, which closely resembles the clothing traditionally worn by Burmese men (that is a *longyi* and headcloth).⁵ The possessed mediums then swagger about, eating raw buffalo flesh and drinking whiskey. At one of the performances that I observed (1982) one of the spirits, perhaps taking a cue from a then-popular television show based on Thai mythology, climbed a tree in the woods and sat there for a while howling and capering like a monkey. The same year the spirit of Pu Sae refused to become involved in the sacrifice, but simply sat sulking to protest what he said was the improper and untraditional way the rite was being performed.

While the spirits are eating their meat and drinking, men at the large tree where the banner has been placed are busy raising the banner while the monks chant verses from the Buddhist Canon and boys beat drums and cymbals. Once the banner is raised and set swinging to give the impression that the Buddha is there in person the spirits abandon their cavorting and run over to the banner where they dance before it, shrieking and jumping. With that the ceremony ends.

There are, as we can see, two parts to this rite. The first is the propitiation of the spirits by offerings of food, whiskey, and so forth. The second is the submission of the spirits to the Buddha, who is represented by this image painted on the banner, to the Buddhist Order (*sangha*), which is represented by the chapter of monks, and to the Buddha's teaching (*dhamma*, which also means universal Law), which is represented by the texts chanted by the monks; in short, the submission of the spirits to the Buddhist religion. The processional structure of the rite, the order in which things happen, recreates the order of the events described in the myth we shall presently examine. At this point, however, this much is clear: the spirits are in the first instance wild, as is emphasized by their eating raw meat⁶ and tree-climbing, and only later do they become submitted to the Buddha. This submission, which represents the submission and domestication of the forest to human use, is incomplete, however, for the spirits do not pay homage to the Buddha in the usual way of bowing and offering flowers, incense, and candles. Instead, they dance, jump, and cry out like beasts. Although the spirits (and nature) have been

domesticated they still maintain their vital force and implicitly the potential for becoming uncontrolled and destructive, and therefore they must be propitiated.

THE MYTH OF PU SAE, YA SAE, AND VASUDEVA-RṢI

The myth of Pu Sae, Ya Sae, their son Vāsudeva-rṣi, and his adoptive daughter Cāmadvē is the foundation myth of Lanna. It is not precisely a single unified story, but rather a series of stories in many versions. In these stories the single most important institution in Lanna, Buddhism, is founded, most important places are named, and the first cities are established. Pu Sae and Ya Sae become not only the guardians of Lanna, but the parents of many of the major spirits in the area as well. It is this series of myths, in short, that tells the story of how the wild forests of the Ping and Wang River valleys were turned into the glorious civilized states that were to become Lanna.⁷ The short version of the myth that follows draws on various sources, including oral tradition, the *Bāmsāvatārayonak*, the *Mūlasāsana*, the *Jinakālamālipakaraṇa*, the *T'āmnān Braḥ Dhātu Tqy Gām*, and an article by Kraisi Nimmanaheminda.^{8, 9}

In the last year of his life, the Buddha, knowing that he would soon enter Parinibbāna and pass away from the earth forever, decided to go on a tour of the world to distribute bodily relics (*dhātu*) of himself for future generations to worship. He sets off in the company of his disciples and god Indra, flying through the air. Eventually he alights in the area where Chiang Mai is later to be founded. Some versions of the myth have him predicting the future founding of the city of Haripunjaya.

Having alighted and walked to Doi Kham (Gold Mountain) the Buddha sees and is seen by three demons (*yakkhas*). These are Pu Sae, Ya Sae, and their as yet unnamed son. The Buddha, being omniscient, knows that they are cannibals and that their intention is to eat him and his party. But being compassionate he prevents them from committing this terrible sin. Some versions of the myth have him using his spiritual power to soften their hearts, others have him subduing them by a terrifying display of power. In any event, they change their minds, and the Buddha insists that they change their dietary habits as well, since the area is fated to become a civilized Buddhist kingdom and it would not be proper to have wild demons running about eating the citizens. Pu Sae and Ya Sae acknowledge that the Buddha is right, but still find it a bitter pill to swallow and ask if they couldn't perhaps have just one person each *per annum*. The Buddha refuses and eventually a compromise is worked out

whereby they are each permitted to eat one buffalo each year, to be offered them by the prince of the local *mueang*. Their son, however, is so taken with the Buddha's teaching that he becomes a vegetarian and asks to be ordained as a novice (*sāmaṇera*) and is accepted by the Buddha. Later he asks to laicize and be ordained as a religious hermit (*ṛṣi*) instead and the Buddha agrees, giving him the name Vāsudeva-ṛṣi or Sudeva-ṛṣi. Sudeva is the spirit who receives the vegetarian offering in the ritual. We should note that some sort of aboriginal population must already be in the area according to the myth, since the local prince is to be required to make the annual offering to Pu Sae and Ya Sae. Other texts (*Tāmnān Lambān hLuan*) have an aboriginal Lua prince come to worship the Buddha.

The Buddha leaves a few hairs of his head as a relic to be worshipped, appoints Ya Sae to be the guardian of the relic, and then leaves. The relic is put away in a cave on Doi Kham. Pu Sae goes to live on Doi Sutep, the large mountain nearby overlooking Chiang Mai. Vasudeva-ṛṣi goes to meditate in the forests on Doi Sutep, the mountain to which he gives his name (Sudeva=Sudeba=Yuan Sutep). Pu Sae and Ya Sae eventually die, becoming spirits (*phi*), Vasudeva inheriting the duty of looking after the relic on Doi Kham.

Many years pass by (roughly 1000, if one takes the chronology of the myths seriously) and one day Vasudeva discovers three pairs of male and female infants lying in the footprints of animals, one pair in an elephant's footprint, one pair in a rhinoceros's, and one pair in a gaur's footprints. He brings them up and the children marry, each brother marrying his sister. Later a doe, grazing at a spot where Vasudeva had urinated, ingests some of his urine containing semen and conceives.¹⁰ She gives birth to human twins, a boy and a girl. They, too, grow up and marry. Vasudeva creates a city for them and sets them up to rule over the others and their descendants. In the next generation, however, trouble arises, for the sons of the doe-children Kunarisi and Miguppatti rule unjustly and the gods in anger destroy their cities by flood after warning the righteous to flee for their lives.

Vasudeva, thinking of the Buddha's prediction, decides that a city must be established in the area, but that it must be ruled by a suitably meritorious person. He applies for assistance to Sukkadanta, a fellow *ṛṣi* at the Mon city of Lawo, who responds by sending Camadevi, the king's daughter, along with a retinue of ministers, merchants, craftsmen and monks to inhabit the city that Vasudeva is to establish for them.

Vasudeva creates Haripunjaya at a suitable spot and installs Camadevi as queen there. The people from Lawo and former residents of the destroyed city take

up residence in various quarters of Haripunjaya. Camadevi gives birth to twin sons, Mahantayasa and Anantayasa, fathered by her former husband at Lawo.

It later happens that the Lua king Viranga, seeing the beauty of Camadevi desires to have her as his wife. She finds the notion most unpalatable, but rather than unpolitically reject his proposal Camadevi asks Viranga to undertake a contest to prove his ardor. She asks that he throw his spear from the top of Doi Sutep to the city of Haripunjaya, a distance of over fifteen miles. Viranga is delighted, for spear-throwing is his specialty, and he gladly takes the challenge.¹¹ Viranga is allowed two tries and on his first try his spear falls just short of the city walls. Camadevi is quite alarmed by this and rather than submit to marrying the savage prince she decides to defeat him by subterfuge. So, she prepares a cap made from her undergarments and has it sent to Viranga saying it is a token of her esteem and a good-luck charm. Viranga takes this as a sign of Camadevi's love and happily puts the cap on before making his second throw. The cap, however, has its intended effect and by the placing of Camadevi's female pollution on Viranga's head his strength is sapped. His spear falls at the foot of Doi Sutep.

Viranga realizes that he has been defeated by treachery and so sets out with an army to sack Haripunjaya and take Camadevi by force. She raises an army and sends her now grown-up sons out on an elephant to engage Viranga in single combat. They do and defeat him. Viranga retreats and later dies brokenhearted on Doi Sutep where he becomes a spirit.

Camadevi, who has inherited the care of the relic from Vasudeva, has her sons build a stupa on Doi Kham and has the relic enshrined there.

The sacrifice to Ya Sae recreates, more or less, the first part of the myth, the Buddha's visit to Doi Kham. The myth makes it clear that the subjugation of the spirits is a prerequisite to the establishment of civilization and the Buddhist religion. In order for the *mueang* valley states to be established and the Buddhist religion glorified the spirits must be brought under control, their energies exploited, and the savage tribes banished to the hills. Thus Ya Sae becomes the guardian of the Buddha's hair-relic, Sudeva a *ryi* and founder of Haripunjaya, and Viranga defeated. We already know that Pu Sae, Ya Sae, and Sudeva receive a share of the offering, and so does Viranga, who also has a shrine and is beseeched to enjoy the offering and give his protection. In a sense, the ritual encompasses the entire process from the coming of the Buddha up to the founding of Haripunjaya and the final expulsion of the Lua to the hills.¹²

The significance of the myth and rite will become clearer if we compare them to their Sinhalese counterparts. The myth clearly owes a great deal to the Sinhalese *vamsa* (chronicle) tradition, particularly to the *Dīpavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* (MV). In the first chapter of both these chronicles we have the Buddha perceiving that the island of Lanka is to become the home of his religion, but that it is occupied by evil *yakkhas*. He flies through the air and by a terrifying display of power forces the *yakkhas* to submit. He then draws Giridīpa, another island, close to Lankādīpa and having given it over to the Yakkhas sends it back to its original place in the ocean.¹³ In a later episode Vijaya, the king who founds the Buddhist Sinhalese race in Lanka, has a son and a daughter by a *yakkhiṇī* (female *yakkha*). Vijaya expels his demonic wife and children from human society and they flee to the forest where the children become the ancestry of the Vāddas, the wild forest people of the Lankan highlands. (MV: 60)

The *yakkhas* and the Vāddas of Sri Lanka are in a position structurally similar to the position of the *phī* or Lua (or Lāwa) of Lanna. We have just seen how the MV handles the taming of the *yakkhas* and the origin of the Vāddas. Obeyesekere reports a very interesting rite, “the Procession of the Vāddas” (Vāda Perahāra) at Mahiyangana in Sri Lanka. In this rite a group of Vāddas armed with sticks representing spears stages a mock attack on the shrine (*devale*) of Saman, one of the protector deities of Buddhism, the stupa where the Buddha’s relic is enshrined, and the monks’ residence in the *vihara* (Buddhist temple). They end up submitting to the superior moral force of Buddhism and worshipping the Buddha’s relic, the monks, and the god Saman. (Obeyesekere: 19-20) The parallel with the sacrifice to Ya Sae is clearly not perfect, but the message of both is the same: nature must submit to culture, which is definitively represented by the Buddha and Buddhist institutions.

Who are the Lua? Where do they come from? Tai Yuan literature provides us with an answer to these questions. In the Yuan vernacular legal text *Samuttarāja* (SR) we are given two law-codes and two origin myths. The first law code applies to the Tai and is prefaced by a myth, taken almost directly from the canonical *Aggañña-suttanta* (in Rhys-Davids) (with some interesting twists added), that explains the origin of the human race. The second law code is specifically for the Lua and is prefaced by a myth explaining the origin of the Lua. Both origin myths rest on a degenerative theory of evolution. In the first myth the human race in general, and the Tai in particular, are explained to have originated by the gradual degeneration of divine beings who became increasingly coarse and selfish until they found the need

for a ruler to regulate them. Thus the first king, Sammutirāja¹⁴ (Mahāsammata in the AS, the name means “the Great Elect”) is chosen from among the people and human society as we know it established. The king is a lawgiver and his law code follows the mythological introduction. It mostly concerns the regulation of wet-rice agriculture. At the end of the law code we find the statement “this is the law for the Tai,” (an ni khong Tai lāē) (SR: 25) followed by a myth explaining the origin of the Lua.

According to the myth the King Sammutiraja sent a group of families to herd goats on Luwa mountain (Luvapabbata). Those families found that they could not grow their lowland rice and other crops on the mountain and feared that they would be faced with starvation. The goats were worried and went to seek the advice of two monkey kings (*phanyā wōk*).

The monkey kings told the goats, “Look here, this is the mountain, down there is the valley. You can’t grow valley plants in the mountains or mountain plants in the valley.”

The monkeys then came up with a scheme to save the humans. The monkeys together with the goats would go to the valley and eat all the seed they could fit in their bellies and carry back all the seed they could hold. In the mountain they would then defecate and thereby excrete these seeds. Then they would eat the seed they had carried and repeat the process. They did this, and by this process the valley plants were transformed into mountain plants that could grow in the mountains. In particular, wet-rice (*khao nā*) was transformed into dry-rice (*khao hai*). Thus the humans were saved and they took up a happy livelihood in the mountains, eventually forgetting human speech and adopting the speech of monkeys. They came to develop their own customs consistent with their environment and the lowlanders came to call them Luwa and then Lua after their dwelling-place. The domesticated goats eventually degenerated into wild animals.

Once the Lua community is established the need for a lord to rule over them becomes apparent and Sammutiraja dispatches a man to be their leader and create a law-code for them.

This myth goes one better than the MV in putting the forest people somewhere between nature and culture and by integrating their evolution into the general evolution of the human race. In both cases, however, the origin of the forest people follows from royal action. In the MV the king is the genitor of the Vāddas. In the SR the Lua evolve from the goat-herders sent out by the king. In both cases the

degenerated race becomes a peripheral community, subject to the monarch but with special laws and customs of its own. Neither the Lua nor the Vāddas are Buddhist, but both recognize the spiritual hegemony of the Buddha. The Lua believe that they were formerly a valley-dwelling Buddhist people who were pushed into the hills by the Tai (is this a reference to the story of Camadevi?) where they lost their civilization and Buddhist religion. (Kunstadter 1963 : 172) So, the point is clear: wet rice, monarchy, valleys, civilization, and Buddhism all go together. The social and natural orders are integrated in that it is impossible to maintain valley Buddhist civilization in the hills just as it is impossible to grow valley crops in the hills.

In the SR animals function as mediators somewhat like the *yakkhini* in the MV.¹⁵ The *yakkhini* mothers a semi-human hybrid race. The animals physically mediate between wet-rice and dry-rice and even go so far as to teach the humans their language. The animals' action is particularly interesting in the light of the Tai agricultural law of the SR, wherein it is forbidden to defecate or urinate in a wet-rice field. This is considered an offense against the domesticated field-spirit and a purificatory ritual must be held if this offense takes place.¹⁶ Animals are also mediators in the first myth we examined, the story of Vasudeva and his doechildren. Here the doe, very much like the *yakkhini*, mothers a semi-human race which is incapable of sustaining civilization. In the MV the half humans are expelled from civilization because "men fear supernatural beings." (MV : 60) In the story of Vasudeva the doe-children ultimately prove incapable of ruling justly, that is, in a civilized fashion, and the gods are forced to annihilate their city. Only a righteous Buddhist monarch such as Camadevi can create and sustain civilization.

The wrath of the gods in the story of the doe-children follows from a long Buddhist tradition of seeing the *devas* as the agents of the Dhamma. According to the canonical *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, if kings are unrighteous it will lead to all of society becoming unrighteous, "this being so, moon and sun go wrong in their courses...seasons and years are out of joint, the winds blow wrong, out of season. Thus the devas are annoyed. This being so, the sky-deva bestows not sufficient rain," (Woodward : 84) which leads to crop-failure and weakened, malnourished people. On the other hand, if kings are righteous, the opposite follows. While kings are the moral overseers of society, the gods are the moral overseers of kings. It is the duty of kings to be righteous, their righteousness being shown most clearly through acts of Buddhist piety.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In the rite and myths we have examined here we have seen how the Yuan tradition, set in a broader Buddhist tradition, has answered the questions raised earlier: How to socialize nature? What is the relationship of the untamed forest and its untamed spirits to the Buddha and his disciples in the civilized world? (pg. 3, above) These questions are posed in the canonical texts of the Theravada Buddhist tradition and carried forward into the Sinhalese and through that the Yuan traditions. For us as observers this has raised on the one hand the question of the relationship of Buddhism and so-called animism, or spirit religion. On the other hand we have been led to consider the relationship of political structures to the religious beliefs involved in these questions. In answering the first of these two questions we have steered clear of the Scylla of looking for two distinct systems ("two religions") and Charybdis of seeing one amalgamated system ("syncretism"). The point has been to explore the complex relations between the two and not to peg down Yuan religion in one category or another. We have found that Buddhism and the spirits of Lanna are in a relationship in some ways hierarchical, as shown by the spirits' submission to the Buddha in the sacrifice to Ya Sae, and in some ways antagonistic, as shown by the incomplete nature of their submission which still must be annually renewed, and the enduring danger the forest represents to the world of the fields and villages. The natural world is a source of energy which left to itself is dangerous and destructive but which domesticated can be put to human use.

The political organization of Lanna in its ritual aspects is an answer to the problem of domesticating the forest and harnessing the forces of nature. The basic political unit of the Tai, the *mueang*, is both an ecological-political unit and a kind of ritually and cosmologically defined space. It is essentially Buddhist space, that is, civilized space which is indissolubly bound to a certain kind of agriculture (wet-rice), a certain kind of political organization, and the presence of the Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*). The king is more than just the functionary who administers this Buddhist principality, but in his very person is the key force that brings it forth into existence and allows it to be reproduced. We have seen how in the *Anguttara-nikaya* and the story of Vasudevarsi the king is a mediator between society and nature (as controlled by the gods). In the MV and SR stories of the origins of the Vāddas and the Lua the king is a mediator between civilized and uncivilized humanity. This mythology explains the inconvenient existence of uncivilized human beings in the forest (where humans do not belong), but also serves to incorporate these groups into a unitary picture of mankind and polity as peripheral groups.¹⁸ In the sacrifice

to Ya Sae we have seen how the king, as sponsor of the ritual, must take responsibility for seeing that the spirits are propitiated and through Buddhism under control. The king sides with Buddhism both as its agent and its patron.¹⁹ The towns and irrigated fields of the *mueang* are the places where the king rules and his splendor shines. The forests, full of wild animals, spirits, and uncivilized humans are the boundaries of civilization and the places where the king's power is weak.²⁰ Only a righteous Buddhist monarch can create and sustain a civilized society.

NOTES

1. It is worth noting that a *mueang* in this large sense also tends to be an ethnic unit. The *khon mueang* share a language and customs which distinguish them from their Tai neighbors such as the Tai Lue and the Lao.
2. The term *thuean*, "wild," is used by extension to refer to various illegal and unregulated activities, as in the phrase *lao thuean*, "moonshine whiskey."
3. In general the forests are inhabited by dangerous and hostile spirits such as are found in trees and streams. The domestication of these spirits and their conversion to benign protective spirits is part and parcel of the domestication of nature. Just as the destructive and dangerous energies of nature can be tamed and harnessed for human use, so the dangerous spirits of the forest can be propitiated and asked to become domestic spirits. Thus in my village in Lampang Province a squatter living on the edge of the village created a small spirit shrine to ask the protection of the spirit of the place whose trees he had cut down. This process is very common and accompanies any intrusion of human settlement or exploitation into forested areas.
4. There are, in fact, two separate sacrifices held on succeeding days. the first is now held on Doi Suthep on *haem 13 kham* and is for Pu Sae, the second, described here, Ya Sae. Both spirits, however, partake of both sacrifices. The second, moreover, is still performed in a more traditional manner.
5. This is doubtlessly related to the fact that Lanna was conquered by the Burmese in the mid-16th century and ruled as part of the Burmese empire on and off until the late 18th century. Since the spirits are "princely" figures, often having the name of some identifiable historical figure, it is natural that they should adopt the dress of the group that ruled the area for so long. In my village the "Ancestral Lords" (*phi puña caonai*) were said to be "Lords of Ava." It is interesting to note that the spirit mediums (*nat kadaw*, "spirit wives") in Burma, as in Lanna, are typically women.

6. Clichéd as it may seem, raw : cooked = nature : culture for the Yuan. The eating of raw meat is truly astonishing to the Yuan, and the chance to see the mediums do this amazing thing draws a large crowd of curiosity-seekers to the ritual. Moreover, eating raw but spiced meat, such as *sa*, *lap*, and *lu*, is a very male activity that often goes hand-in-hand with drinking alcohol, another very male activity. The relationship and oppositions between male and female, nature and culture are complex and cannot be reduced to simple formulae, but one can say in brief that there is a male cult of machismo among the Yuan which emphasizes such activities as drinking, eating raw meat (*kin dip*) and the use of violence. This is structurally opposed to “civilized” male behavior of abstention from alcohol, eating only cooked meat, and religious devotion. The monk in the paradigm of such civilized behavior.
7. Camadevi was in fact a Mon queen and Haripuñjaya, her kingdom, a Mon kingdom. The Yuan acquired their Buddhism from the Mon, however, and see a direct link between their Lanna kingdom and the old Mon kingdom of Haripuñjaya, which was conquered by the Yuan king Mangrai in the 13th century.
8. Kraisri does not indicate the sources for the myths he recounts in his extremely valuable article, but they presumably include both the written and oral traditions.
9. A full analysis of this material would of course take full account of all the details and variations of the various versions of the myth. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, I have chosen to focus on the major points common to the various versions, pointing out differences where they occur.
10. A similar myth concerns the origin of the supernatural being Upagutta (in Pali, “Protector”) who inhabits streams and protects the Buddhist religion and important Buddhist ceremonies. According to the myth as related to me by an aged monk in my village the Buddha once ejaculated into the Ganges to show a disciple how one must eject all impurities from the body. (Semen in *nam asuci*, “impure fluid.”) A female *naga* (serpentine water deity) was impregnated by this semen and later gave birth to Upagutta who was ordained as a novice in his father’s religion when he reached the proper age. Yuan temples have shrines to Upagutta containing a novice’s requisites near their congregation halls (*vihara*). On the occasion of major temple festivals Upagutta is ritually invited from a

nearby stream and placed, in the form of a white rock from the stream, in the shrine to guard over the event and keep away the forces of Mara, the Buddhist Evil One.

11. The name *Viraṅga* means “Mighty-Limbed” in Pali, although the various Yuan forms, such as *Bibanga* (*Pipangkha*) and *Milakkha* have no such meaning.
12. It is noteworthy that only those involved in the events surrounding the founding of *Haripuñjaya* are represented at the sacrifice, but that *Camadevi* herself is not. Although I have come across the spirit of *Camadevi*’s husband (in an entirely different context), *Camadevi* herself is never considered to be a spirit to the best of my knowledge. Why this should be so is not entirely clear. Perhaps it is related to the fact that the other characters all represent to some degree the forces of the forest and nature and therefore must be propitiated while *Camadevi* is the preeminently successful founder figure who is in a sense represented in the ongoing existence of the institutions of the Buddhist religion and the *mueang* polities.
13. Geiger, the translator of the MV, believes that *Giridīpa*, which means “Mountain Island,” does not refer to a separate island but to the mountain highlands of Lanka. He prefers to think of *dīpa* as meaning something like “district” (MV : 4n4). This would certainly be consistent with the rest of the MV where the *yakkhas* do show up again later. It would also be consistent with my point that the mountains and mountain tribes (in Sri Lanka the *Vāddas*) represent “wild” nature as opposed to “civilized” space in the cultivated valleys in Buddhist cosmology.
14. The text identifies itself in the original as “*Samutti*” or “*Samuttiraja*” (*kāmbī ān cī vā samutti*, p. 1) but it has been published as *Samuttaraja*, for some reason. The proper Pali form is *sammuti* (or *sammata*, as in *Mahasammata*) and since both the correct and the incorrect forms appear in the text I have chosen to use the correct form throughout, except when referring to the title.
15. There is an Isan myth in which gods disguised as animals act as mediators in the opposite direction, bringing irrigated rice from the forest to the peasants. See *Tambiah 1970 : 351ff.*
16. The Yuan do not share the general Indian abhorrence of unclean bodily substances. This is a very specific ritual prohibition. The text reads: *Phi phū dai khī sái nā dān gō đĩ, yíav gō đĩ, hĩ mǎn hā khautòk, đòkmài, nǎm khauh in sòmboq, hlàu hai, kai gū, khò sammā khārava sia* (SR : 13).

17. Interestingly, the same supernatural mechanism works on the village level, too. There is a hierarchy of deities, from the great *devas* and *phis* that protect the entire kingdom, down to local spirits, which parallels the hierarchy of princes and officials in the kingdom. A condition of general immorality at the local level can cause the angered spirits to withhold rain, and so local rites aimed at propitiating the spirits and *devas* and making merit for them are often held.
18. Such groups have historically had a certain amount of economic importance to the Lanna princes as suppliers of rare and valuable forest products which could only be traded under royal monopolies.
19. The role of the monarch as patron of the Buddhist order is extremely important and deserves far fuller examination than is possible here.
20. The *mueang* itself is internally stratified into more and less civilized places, which can be thought of as series of concentric circles centered on the royal capital. The further out one goes the more the degree of civilization and extent of royal influence wanes, till one reaches the forest where both are nearly extinguished.

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