

THE CAREER OF *KHUN CHANG KHUN PHAEN*

Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit

Abstract

This article traces the development of the long Thai narrative poem, *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. The poem began life in a troubadour tradition of recitation. The best evidence suggests the tale originated around 1600, and the early development of the text probably took place in the Narai era. In response to popular demand, an original story, possibly once recited in a single session, was developed into some twenty episodes, and three 'sequels' were later added. Between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the 'ownership' of the poem passed from the folk tradition to the court. As a result, the poem shows a mixture of folk and court styles, sometimes separate, and sometimes layered upon one another. Starting around 1850 and ending in 1918, the ever-developing text was converted into the static form of a standard printed book. In this last stage of its career, the plot, characterization, and meanings of the work were substantially changed.

Khun Chang Khun Phaen (*KCKP*) is a long narrative poem about love and death. Within the canon of pre-modern Thai literature, it is distinctive because it originated locally rather than being adapted from a foreign source, and because its main characters are relatively ordinary people rather than kings and gods. The standard modern version was edited by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab and published in 1917–18.¹ That book has tended to be treated exactly like a poem, play, or novel in the western tradition – namely, a fixed text. But in fact the poem has a career, a history, a past. This article peers into that past.

KCKP began in a tradition of troubadours who recited tales for local audiences and passed on the text by word of mouth. Such tales grow with the telling. *KCKP* probably started life as a story that could be recited for an audience within the space of a single night. By the early twentieth century, it had grown to over sixty episodes of that length. Many works in Thai and other Asian traditions

¹ This has been constantly reprinted, and is available in one-, two-, and three-volume versions. All references here are to the Khurusapha edition, twentieth printing, 2003, in the form: *PD*, volume: page.

have careers in the same way. They have been rewritten, expanded, reinterpreted across different eras. The career of *KCKP* is complex because it began in a folk tradition of oral performance, but was later adopted by the court and transformed into reading material. Tracing the career of *KCKP* is not easy. It is not known when it first emerged. The manuscript trail goes back no earlier than the Bangkok Third or Fourth Reign. There are very few external sources for writing its history. However, there is a lot of information buried in the text itself. The career is etched in the work's own wrinkles.

This article uses the standard text edited by Prince Damrong but also two earlier printed versions (by Samuel Smith in 1872 and the Wat Ko press in 1890), some published fragments, and some of the large stock of manuscript texts in the National Archives.

The first section below examines how the work was born and grew. We argue it is best understood as an Original Story² and three sequels. The second section traces when each segment of the poem was developed. The third traces the contrast between the 'folk' and 'court' portions of the text. The fourth follows the process of revision through the nineteenth century, and the fifth examines the conversion from oral tradition through written manuscripts into printed publication. The conclusion summarizes some of the main changes to the nature and meaning of the poem in the course of this career.

An Original Story and three sequels

In Siam there was an old tradition of reciting folk tales (*nithan*) for entertainment. Most probably, *KCKP* began in this tradition. In the first chapter, the narrator tells us, 'This story comes down from ancient times, and there is a text in Suphan.' The event which makes the story of *KCKP* so dramatic and different is the ending in which a woman (Wanthong) is executed, ostensibly for failing to choose between two men (Chang and Phaen).³ This event, possibly based on an historical incident, must have been the focus of the Original Story. The build-up to this dramatic ending is a love triangle set in the provincial town of Suphanburi.

Growing with the telling

How did the tale grow to its final length? The process can be glimpsed in three versions of a famous part of the poem in which Phaen abducts Wanthong from Chang's house. There are enough verbal clues to suggest that the three manuscripts

² We capitalize this term throughout to indicate that we are using it as a term of art.

³ For simplicity, we use a single name for each main character, dropping their titles (Khun, Nang) and ignoring changes of name over the poem.

form a sequence – the second was developed from the first, and the third from the second. These manuscripts date from late in the poem’s history (probably early nineteenth century) and after it has passed from oral to written transmission, but probably illustrate the way the poem developed throughout its career.

The first and second manuscripts are fragments, and have become known as *Samnuan kao* (old version).⁴ The first may be in the form transcribed from troubadours in the early nineteenth century.⁵ It begins as Phaen rides through the forest. He arrives at Chang’s house and climbs in. He notices an unusual room and enters, finding a lady, Kaeo Kiriya, who explains she is the daughter of Phraya Sukhothai, mortgaged as a slave to Chang for a loan. Phaen gives Kaeo Kiriya money to ransom herself from slavery, propositions her directly, and they make love. He leaves her, walks through the central hall of the house, noting its exotic decorations, and finds a tapestry curtain outside Wanthon’s room. He admires her handiwork, then cuts the string. At this point the fragment ends. The style is simple story-telling, relating a sequence of events with little embroidery of setting, character, or dialogue.

The second fragment, which may date from the First Reign,⁶ tells the same story, but has expanded to over three times the length.⁷ A few scenes have been added: Phaen performs a ceremony before entering the house to gain the cooperation of the local spirits; Chang’s guardian spirits come out to challenge Phaen. Other scenes have been lengthened: on entering the house, Phaen notices Chang’s pot-plants and ornamental fish; he also describes the cluttered but elegant contents of Kaeo Kiriya’s room; she puts up more resistance to his proposition at first, and afterwards delays his departure; the tapestry is described at greater length. In sum, the texture of the story has become much denser. The dialogue is much longer and more elaborate. The house and its contents are portrayed in greater detail. The encounter with the spirits emphasizes Phaen’s special talents. Kaeo Kiriya becomes more of a character than a passive plot element. Comparing the two manuscripts, it can be seen how one line in the first fragment has grown to a sub-scene in the second. But the basic story has not changed.

⁴They were first published in 1925, and reprinted in Atsiri, Chotchuang, and Khru Sepha Niranan 1990, and Chotchuang and Khru Sepha 1998.

⁵Court poets favored verse with a regular meter – either the same number of syllables per line, or very little variation. Troubadours concentrated on the sound, and paid little attention to regularity. In this fragment, the syllables per *wak* (half line) vary between six and eleven. Also the language is relatively simple.

⁶Khun Wichitmatra argued that this second fragment was written by Chaophraya Phrakhlang (Hon) on grounds of similarities with the verse in Hon’s *Kaki* and *Rachathirat* (Kanchanakphan and Nai Tamra 2002: 166–9). Hon died in 1805.

⁷For telling the same portion of the story. The second fragment also continues further with the plot.

The third manuscript was composed in King Rama II's literary salon, and part of it is ascribed to the king as author. It appears in chapter 17 of the Damrong edition. Large sections of this third version tell the same story as the second, line for line, but have been completely rewritten in a self-consciously more elegant style. Some parts have been expanded for poetic effect. Whereas the second version enumerated the plants and fish on Chang's terrace, the salon version converts this into one of the most famous passages of nineteenth-century Thai poetry. Moreover, this is not just for show. The sensuous description of flowers in bloom and fish sliding against one another builds anticipation of the sexual excitement which is approaching.

In this example, the text expanded by successive authors adding and embellishing scenes. Another method of expansion was by repetition or recycling. In the oral tradition, two or more parallel versions of a single incident could be developed by different troubadours or schools of troubadours. The story which appears in chapter 14 of the Damrong edition probably began life as an alternative version of this same abduction incident. It opens in exactly the same way with Phaen missing Wanthon, riding to Chang's house, and climbing in. It then diverges into a different, comic tale of Phaen tormenting Chang and other members of his household. In the middle, there is a similar scene of cutting down a tapestry. Towards the end, there is an exchange between Phaen and Wanthon which is very similar to a scene that immediately precedes the abduction in chapter 17. At this point, in the space of a single two-line verse, and without any logic, Phaen leaves Chang's house and returns home. Most probably, troubadours had developed two versions of this abduction scene – one romantic (Kaeo Kiriya), the other comic. The Kaeo Kiriya version came to be preferred, but the other version had its own charm. Performers were reluctant to throw it away, so the ending was cut off, and the chapter moved back earlier in the story.⁸

Original Story

These two examples suggest how the tale grew in the telling. The outline story remained the same. Incidents expanded with added detail, dialogue, and

⁸There is further internal evidence of this recycling. In this chapter 14, Phaen is introduced with mini-invocations, praising his supernatural powers. Such invocations appear elsewhere in the poem only after Phaen equips himself with a sword, horse, and powerful spirit in chapter 16. This story has been moved earlier in the tale, but these invocation have not been removed. We suspect the Kaeo Kiriya tale was a late addition. The introduction of her in chapter 14, her reappearance in chapter 21, and her later appearances, are rather clumsily pasted into the story.

The two skirmishes between Chang and Phaen in the forest in chapters 19 and 20 are probably another example of recycling. The structure of both passages is the same: Chang follows after Phaen and finds him in the forest; Phaen uses stunning mantras, animates grass dummy troops, and wins the skirmish; Chang flees; Phaen returns to Wanthon; they bathe in a stream; the defeated army falls to recriminations.

First Sequel

In response to popular demand, the producers of *KCKP* not only filled out the Original Story as outlined above, but also reacted to popular demand in the same way as producers of other forms of popular entertainment from manga to *Star Wars* – they created sequels.

According to Prince Damrong, by the late Ayutthaya period, the recitation of episodes from *KCKP* had become the most popular form of local entertainment in the lower Chaophraya basin.⁹ This entertainment had become known as *sepha KCKP* or just *sepha*. The word *sepha* appears to name a genre but its meaning is obscure. There are some songs with the same name, but there is no association between them and the rhythm of narration used for *KCKP*.¹⁰ The word might derive from the Sanskrit *sewa* meaning a service (to the gods) but the derivation is speculative.¹¹ Kukrit Pramoj believed the tales were created in jail and the word *sepha* somehow defined that, but his argument is unclear.¹² In short, the derivation and meaning of the term *sepha* is not known for certain. In practice, at the end of the Ayutthaya era, *sepha* was a collective term for the episodes of the *KCKP* story. A measure of its extraordinary popularity is that no other story seems to have developed in the same way. Subsequently, some other stories were rendered in the same form on royal command, but failed to gain popularity and have since been almost totally lost.¹³

The First Sequel replicates several key elements of the main story, with Phaen's son replacing his father in the central role. Like his father, young Wai is tipped into poverty and virtual orphanhood by his father's imprisonment. Just as Phaen and his mother had to leave home and flee to Kanchanaburi in the Original Story, Wai has to flee from his stepfather Chang to the same destination. Like his father, too, he raises himself by becoming educated in the military arts, volunteer-

⁹ Damrong, *Tamnan* I: 2-3. Prince Damrong wrote two prefaces to *KCKP*. The first appeared in the three volumes of the first edition, and is included in most subsequent reprints. References here are to the Khurusapha edition. The second appeared as the introduction to the second edition of *KCKP* in 1925, and was reprinted by Rong Muang Press in Bangkok in 1925 as *Tamnan sepha*. In notes these are called *Tamnan* I and *Tamnan* II. Translations can be found at <http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~ppasuk/kckp/damrong.htm>.

¹⁰ Damrong, *Tamnan* I: 1.

¹¹ Damrong, *Tamnan* II: 2-3.

¹² Kukrit Pramoj (2000: 10-12) argued that jail figures prominently in the story, and that one of the teachers mentioned in an Honoring Teachers (*wai khru*) invocation which Prince Damrong cited in his preface to *KCKP* is Phan Raksa Ratri, the title of a jail warden. In Old Laws no. 25 of the Three Seals Law, the word *sepha* appears seven times as part of the titles of officers involved with imprisonment, but this is the only known reference and the meaning is unclear (*Kotmai tra sam duang*, hereinafter *KTSD*, V: 46, 50, 51).

¹³ They were: the Si Thanonchai tale; a portion of the royal chronicles; and the Abu Hasan tale from the Arabian nights.

ing to serve the king, winning a famous victory, being ennobled as reward, and acquiring two wives whose jealousy will cause him problems.

As with the example of the abduction above, possibly all or part of this sequel began life as an alternative version of the original Phaen story. Subsequently, rather than being abandoned, this version was adapted into a sequel with Phaen's son in the title role. Rather than being placed after the Original Story, this sequel was *inserted into* the Original Story immediately prior to the climax.¹⁴ (see Fig. 1) To prepare the way for this insertion, Phaen is consigned to jail for around fifteen years, giving time for his son to grow up. To get back to the conclusion of the Original Story, Wai abducts his mother Wanthon from Chang's house, just as Phaen had abducted her as lover in the Original Story, thus provoking the delayed denouement of a trial and Wanthon's execution.

As in other genres, sequels have to be both the same (familiar) and different (novel). To add some difference to this First Sequel, some extra stories have been imported from elsewhere. The military campaign to the north, which occupies over half the length of the sequel, seems to be based on a true incident that happened in 1564 and is reported in both the Ayutthaya and Lanxang chronicles (on which more below). One incident in this campaign – a rescue from the Chiang Mai jail – seems to be modeled on a similar rescue which took place in a campaign in Burma in 1662.¹⁵

Second and Third Sequels

The Second Sequel has another repetition of the Phaen story, this time with Phaen's second son Chumphon as the focus. He also leaves home (by wandering off), becomes educated (at a *wat* in Sukhothai), and returns to win royal favor for his valor. Two other stories have been blended into the narrative: a jealous quarrel between Wai's two wives which succeeds in splitting the whole family into warring camps; and an imported tale about a giant crocodile terrorizing people along the Chaophraya River. While the First Sequel is brilliantly dovetailed into the original,

¹⁴ We suspect that the compilers knew that the death of Wanthon was the proper ending of the work, and hence inserted the sequel before that.

¹⁵ In *KCKP*, Phra Thainam and 500 soldiers are imprisoned but not killed in Chiang Mai. In the chronicles, Phraya Siharat Decho and 500 soldiers are imprisoned but not killed in Ava. In *KCKP*, Khun Phaen arrives and uses supernatural powers to enter the jail and release all the prisoners from their chains. In the chronicles, a relief force under Phraya Surin Phakdi arrives and begins to attack the stockade. 'Meanwhile, Phraya Siha Ratcha Decho, bound in fetters, thereupon examined the clouds and shadows in the sky, saw a propitious omen, and recited a holy Buddhist mantra spell and magically managed to make all his fetters fall off from his body.' In *KCKP*, the freed prisoners kill the guards and steal weapons, horses and elephants. In the chronicles, the freed prisoners kill the guards and 'the Burmese prisoners, elephants, horses and weapons they had captured being numerous, had them sent under escort to [the king of Ayutthaya], and reported all of the details of their royal service for his benefit.' See Cushman 2000 (hereinafter *RCA*): 281.

the crafting of this Second Sequel is much less accomplished. The time-sequence does not work. Things happen without logic. Elements have been inserted by cut-and-paste (a character from the Third Sequel makes a brief appearance, though yet unborn). This sequel is located after the ending of the Original Story.

The Third Sequel extends the family conflict which began in the Second Sequel down through two generations.¹⁶ Phaen and most other main characters from the Original Story are removed from the story by an epidemic. The descendants of Wai's two quarreling wives fight a long-running battle, mostly over possession of Chiang Mai. Descendants of other branches of the lineage are incorporated as allies. A few other surviving characters make guest appearances. Some of the famous scenes are repeated, including the abduction and the giant crocodile. To sustain interest, there are more exotic locations and more special effects. One of Phaen's grandsons fights in a dynastic dispute in China, returns with a Chinese wife, and later is reborn as a Burmese prince. The battles become more fantastic. A giant whirlpool makes an appearance. Prince Damrong judged that this sequel had merit neither as plot nor poetry, and excluded it from his printed edition.

When did *KCKP* develop?

Debates on dating

The fifth and sixth stanzas of the first chapter run:

This is the story of Khun Phaen, Khun Chang, and the fair Nang Wanthon. In the year 147, the parents of these three people of that era were subjects of the realm of His Majesty King Phanwasa. The tale will be told according to the legend, so that you listeners may understand.¹⁷

There have been several ingenious attempts to decode the date '147'. Prince Damrong argued that the figure was a copyist's error for CS 847, equivalent to CE 1485/6, in order to accord with a theory described below.¹⁸ Choomsai Suwannachomphu suggested the date means CS 1147 (CE 1785/6), the year Bangkok was officially founded, but the first digit was truncated to fit the meter. Choomsai argued that the celebration of Bangkok's foundation made such an impact that the date was inserted into *KCKP* when the various episodes were first assembled in the Second Reign.¹⁹

¹⁶These chapters have been printed in two collections: *Sepha* n.d., and *Sepha* 1966.

¹⁷PD, I: 1.

¹⁸Damrong, *Tamnan* I: 8–9.

¹⁹Choomsai 2002.

Phiset Jiajanphong argued that 147 appears in the *Singhonawat* (Singhanavati) chronicle from Lanna as the year in which the Buddha died, the old era of dating was closed, and the Buddhist era began (this old era was subsequently named the Anchana Sakkara). This knowledge may have passed from Lanna to Ayutthaya as several Ayutthaya legends and literary works have some Lanna origin. ‘147’ was thus a known date with sacred significance, and was inserted into *KCKP* to denote nothing more exact than ‘once upon a time’.²⁰

Prince Damrong argued that the story of *KCKP* originated from events which took place around 1500 and were recorded in the *Testimony of the Inhabitants of the Old Capital*.²¹ The *Testimony* story runs as follows: Lanchang offered a royal daughter to the Ayutthaya king as part of a political alliance; to disrupt this alliance, the King of Chiang Mai had the princess seized in mid-journey; the Ayutthaya king sent Khun Phaen at the head of an army which defeated Chiang Mai and brought the princess to Ayutthaya. By virtue of the sequential position of this story in the *Testimony*, Damrong identified the Ayutthaya king as Ramathibodi II (r. 1491–1529), and argued that the date of Phaen’s birth given as 147 is a copyist’s error for CS 847 (equivalent to CE 1485/6), which would mean the Chiang Mai campaign took place around CE 1500.

However, this origin is very doubtful. In his preface to *KCKP*, Damrong calls the *Testimony* ‘a form of royal chronicle’ with the implication that its contents are reliable. Yet in his preface to the *Testimony* (pp. 7–8), Prince Damrong judged that the history was compiled from ‘several people remembering bits and pieces’ without the assistance of written texts. The *Testimony* is a synthesis of information taken down from prisoners hauled away to Ava after 1767. The time interval between the recording in 1767 and the supposed date of the event around 1500 is the same as between now and the fall of Ayutthaya. The early part of the *Testimony*’s historical account is full of unlikely stories. It credits U Thong with a reign of forty-five years, compared to sixteen in the chronicles, and ends the account of his reign with U Thong importing Brahmins from Varanasi, and restoring the buildings at the Buddha’s Footprint on Suwannabanphot Hill – both stories more credible in much later reigns (the footprint on Suwannabanphot hill was discovered in the 1610s). It then skips over U Thong’s successors to a ‘King Phanwasa’, in whose reign there are only two items, the story of Phaen and the Lanxang princess, and a diplomatic mission of friendship to Ava which again is more likely at a much later date.²² After Phanwasa, the *Testimony* tells the story of Sudachan and Chinnarat, and

²⁰ Phiset 2002, summarized in Sujit 2002: 51–4.

²¹ Damrong, *Tamnan I*: 2–9.

²² *Khamhaikan* 2001: the Phaen story is on 57–63, 66–7, and the embassy on 63–66. The embassy seems like an attempt at reconciliation following the conflicts of the late sixteenth century. There is no trace of such an embassy in the chronicles.

from this point onwards there is some correspondence between the *Testimony* and the chronicles. In short, the early part of the *Testimony* has nothing that corresponds with other sources, but several stories which are more credible at later dates. There is thus no real grounds for timing the Khun Phaen story to c. CE 1500 on the basis of the *Testimony*, though the story may originate from a later era. Damrong found that the gazetteer²³ portion of the *Testimony* was very muddled, perhaps because ‘the original *bailan* sheets were mixed up’, and he resequenced this portion of the *Testimony* in his edition, but not the historical part.

In addition, the Phaen story is very strange in the context of the *Testimony*. The rest of the *Testimony* is about kings and their exploits, yet this episode is a long story about a common soldier. This strangeness hints that the *Testimony* has borrowed this story from elsewhere.

Besides, this Chiang Mai campaign episode is *not* the core of the *KCKP* story (i.e., the love triangle and Wanthong’s death). This Chiang Mai episode appears in one of the sequels which were probably late additions to *KCKP*. Moreover, the Chiang Mai campaign in *KCKP* seems based on an incident which occurred in 1564 and is recorded in some detail in the chronicles of Ayutthaya and Lanxang, though the roles of the participating states have been shuffled. This story runs as follows.

In 1560, in the face of Burmese aggression, Ayutthaya and Lanxang concluded a treaty of friendship, recorded on an inscription later found at Dansai (Loei province). As part of the agreement, the two sides ‘discussed arrangements for a lady to be presented (in marriage) in token of friendship in accordance with ancient custom’.²⁴ According to the Luang Prasoe chronicle, in 1564 the king of Lanxang asked for the hand of Princess Thepkasat of Ayutthaya as part of an alliance. Initially another princess was sent on grounds that Thepkasat was sick, but Lanxang insisted this was rectified. An escort was dispatched from Lanxang to Ayutthaya to collect her, in exactly the same way as Ayutthaya sends an escort to collect the Lanxang princess in *KCKP*. Wishing to disrupt the Ayutthaya–Lanxang alliance, the ruler of Phitsanulok, then allied with Ava, seized the princess en route, in the same way that Chiang Mai seizes the Lanxang princess in *KCKP*. In revenge Lanxang attacked Phitsanulok, in the same way that Ayutthaya attacks Chiang Mai in *KCKP*.²⁵

In short, the true story of an abducted princess seems to have been adapted as the plot of a segment of *KCKP*. Possibly, the story then found its way into the *Testimony*. Maybe this came about because the *KCKP* version simply seemed real to those who heard it. Perhaps the scribes and editors of the *Testimony* in Ava misunderstood what they were being told.

²³The *Testimony* has two parts: a history; and a gazetteer of information about the city, monarchy, government, ceremonial, and so on.

²⁴Prasert and Griswold 1992: 801.

²⁵RCA: 49–51; the same story appears in the Lanxang chronicles, see Stuart-Fox 1998: 80–1.

Original Story: internal evidence on dating

There is one other incident in *KCKP* which might be dated. In the opening chapter, when Phaen is born (and given the natal name Phlai Kaeo), his grandfather advises:

His birth-time is three by the shadow on Tuesday in the fifth month of the year of the tiger. The Chinese capital has sent glittering crystal to present to the King of Ayutthaya for placement on the pinnacle of the great *chedi* built since the time of Hongsa and called Wat Chaophraya Thai in the past. Give him the name Phlai Kaeo, the brilliant'.²⁶

When King Naresuan defeated the Burmese prince in an elephant duel around 1593, Abbot Phanarat of Wat Chaophraya Thai pleaded with the king to spare nobles condemned to execution for failures on the battlefield.²⁷ Damrong reasoned that Phanarat also advised Naresuan to make merit by building a victory *chedi* called Chaiyamongkhon, resulting in the *wat* becoming known as Wat Yai Chaiyamongkhon.²⁸ Wachari Tomyanan surmises that the crystal would have been placed on this *chedi* at the time of its completion, and speculates that this indicates when the composition of *KCKP* began.²⁹ The first tiger year after Naresuan's victory was 1602/3.

There is no mention of such a gift in the Chinese records, but these records rarely mention gifts to peripheral territories. Yet the gift could well have been given because of China and Siam's shared enmity with Burma. Whenever Burma was ruled by an aggressive ruler, China feared attacks on Yunnan. This fear was strong in the late sixteenth century. In February 1593, the Chinese court received an offer from Siam to attack Japan. This extraordinary proposal makes no sense unless it was an expression of Siamese support for China in the hope of some reciprocal assistance against their common Burmese enemy. In late 1592, Siamese envoys went to Beijing, though there is no record of the issues discussed. In 1604,

²⁶ PD, I: 7.

²⁷ RCA: 132–3.

²⁸ Damrong imagined that Phanarat advised Naresuan to follow the example of King Dutthagamani who in Lanka in 205 BC commemorated victory in a similar elephant duel by building one victory *chedi* at the battle site, and another in his capital; and that as a result Naresuan built a commemorative *chedi* at the battle site of Nong Sarai (Don Chedi) and the Chaiyamongkhon (Damrong 2008: 125). Montri Limpaphayom has argued that Don Chedi was not the site of the battle, and that the commemorative *chedi* is actually Wat Phu Khao Thong. Piset Jiajanphong and Sisak Wallipodom doubt there were any commemorative *chedi* built at all. This debate was collected in Sujit 1994. There does not seem to be any other evidence on the origin of the Chaiyamongkhon.

²⁹ Wachari 1990: 13–18.

Beijing sent agents to ‘Siam and Bo-ni³⁰ to arrange the combining of forces’ against Ava, and promised rewards if Ava were destroyed. Another missive went to the commander of Guang-dong/Guang-xi ‘to notify the countries of Siam, Bo-ni and Champa to join forces in a pincer attack’ against Ava. Other records from this time show Beijing bestowing gifts on officers and allies that helped to constrain Ava’s expansion.³¹ Although there is no direct evidence of a Chinese gift made in recognition of Naresuan’s help in deterring Burmese aggression, such a gift is quite feasible within the political context.

The name of ‘Khun Phaen’ appears only twice in the chronicles, and once in another epic, and all three derive from this same era. In the listing of official titles in the Three Seals Law, the title closest to ‘Khun Phaen Saensathan’ (the full version in *KCKP*) is Khun Phlaeng Sathan, *palat* of the left in the royal guard (*tamruat phuban*).³² An officer of this name appears in the Ayutthaya chronicles commanding a brigade during King Naresuan’s siege of Toungoo in the late 1590s. His co-commanders included several nobles of higher rank, including Phraya Thainam, suggesting Khun Phlaeng was a prominent soldier.³³ In 1604, when King Naresuan and his brother and successor Ekathotsarot leave Ayutthaya to march against Ava, they pass Pa Mok and come to Ekarat where ‘Khun Phaen Sathan was ordered to cut the wood and curse the [enemy’s] name according to the forms of the holy royal ritual for victory in war’.³⁴ In the epic poem *Lilit taleng phai* (Defeat of the Mon), which also recounts events of the 1590s, a messenger sent from Kanchanaburi to inform Ayutthaya of a Burmese incursion is named Khun Phaen.³⁵

There is one other slight but suggestive hint on timing. At every appearance of the king in *KCKP* there is an invocation. These passages portray the king surrounded by the best of everything as proof of his supreme merit. At the end of the first chapter of *KCKP*, the king makes his first appearance and fittingly the invocation is the longest and most elaborate in the poem. In the passage describing the king being bathed, anointed in scents, clothed in fine raiment, and equipped with splendid regalia, it states, ‘He was bathed in water flowing in a stream from a shower-head’.³⁶ To appear in this context, a shower-head must have been new

³⁰ Geoff Wade (see next note) thinks Bo-ni may be Brunei. Possibly that is true in some Chinese records, but we wonder whether in these instances, Bo-ni refers to Phitsanulok.

³¹ Geoff Wade, translator, *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: an open access resource*, Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press, National University of Singapore, <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/2907>, accessed June 10, 2008. The above account uses records 2907, 3130, 3013.

³² *KTSD* I: 226.

³³ *RCA*: 177.

³⁴ *RCA*: 193.

³⁵ *Lilit taleng phai*: 46.

³⁶ *PD*, I: 11.

and very special – something available only to the king. The word used is *surai*, which clearly derives from the Persian, *surahi*. This suggests the invocation was composed in the middle or late seventeenth century, most probably in the Narai reign (1656–88), when the court adopted architecture, dress, regalia, vocabulary and much else through trade and diplomatic contacts with Persia.

Another incident from the Narai era may have bearing on *KCKP*. In 1660, a border town pledged allegiance to Ayutthaya but then changed its mind, in fear of the power of its old overlord. Ayutthaya sent an army. Some clever monks came out to negotiate, pledging secret allegiance to Ayutthaya, and promising to cooperate against the old overlord.³⁷

This account echoes the Chiang Thong campaign in chapters 8 and 9 of the Original Story of *KCKP*. Chiang Thong pledges allegiance to Ayutthaya, changes its mind after a visit by a Chiang Mai army, is attacked by Phaen at the head of an Ayutthayan force, and sends out three clever monks to negotiate. Though the two stories are different in detail, it is possible that this incident was inspiration for troubadours to develop the Chiang Thong story. This is another hint that the *KCKP* tale developed in the seventeenth century.³⁸

In sum, the reference to Naresuan's victory chedi at the birth of the principal male character is the best (but still very fragile) indication of when the core story may have been born. The name of Khun Phaen figures as a soldier in other sources around this same time. The prominence given to the *surai* nozzle in the first royal invocation hints that tale was being elaborated by the Narai era. The possibility that the military campaign in the early part of the story may have been based on a 1660 incident further suggests this timing.

First Sequel: early beginning

The First Sequel was initially developed in the folk tradition. As noted above, all or much of it may have begun as alternative versions of the original Phaen story. In the Smith/Wat Ko text, the First Sequel passage on the Chiang Mai campaign is told in folk mode from the viewpoint of the ordinary foot-soldier.

³⁷ RCA: 250–60.

³⁸ There is another hint in the chronicles, but it makes matters more complicated. Shortly following the above incident, around 1664, King Narai attacked Chiang Mai in revenge and won a great victory. The description of the siege and fall of Chiang Mai in the chronicles is very like the siege of Chiang Mai in the First Sequel, especially in the Smith/Wat Ko text. However, it is almost certain that the siege and victory in the chronicles did not take place. The incident does not appear in the Chiang Mai chronicle (which does record the earlier incident) or the Burmese records. In the Ayutthaya chronicles, it is written up with great drama, but the ending makes no sense: the Chiang Mai ruler is defeated but not made a tributary, and Chiang Mai does not figure in Ayutthaya's external relations for decades afterwards (RCA: 291–300, especially 299). So was this another story that began in popular tradition, including *KCKP*, and later found its way into the chronicles?

As soon as the army leaves Ayutthaya, the soldiers live off the land. They seize pigs from merchants, crops from fields, anything eatable from villages and markets. Villagers along the route flee into the forest on the army's approach, taking their valuables and their daughters. Local officials rush to feed and entertain the soldiers lavishly because the alternative is to be plundered. Before reaching Chiang Mai, there is a battle to take a border outpost. The Thai are protected by their invulnerability, but the Lao opponents suffer terrible carnage. The field is left strewn with blood, guts, lopped heads, and severed limbs. At Chiang Mai, even before the victory is decisive, the Ayutthayan army begins looting. They ransack houses, threaten old ladies to reveal their valuables, seize furniture and crockery, appropriate wives, round up families of people to serve as slaves, and herd away livestock of every kind. After victory is final, there is a drunken feast. In a lovely touch, the dancers laid on for entertainment have to abandon the stage after so many drunken soldiers come up to join them. A messenger is sent to Bangkok to report the victory. He commandeers a boat, seizes liquor from a Chinese vendor, and passes the journey in a drunken stupor, pausing only to loot fish and sugarcane. The army returns to Ayutthaya like a city on the move, herding war-prisoners and livestock. At the overnight stops, the Thai soldiers celebrate among the captured women, teaching them to speak Thai, making them dance naked, and dragging them into their mosquito nets.

Possibly this is the most realistic depiction of pre-modern warfare in the region, portraying the adventure, the risk, the horror, and the gain. At one point the narrator breaks in and editorializes: 'Be forgiving but this is customary for an army. They create chaos like you see in a mask-play. Even though they think they're good, it's as crude as a robber getting a wife by capture and rape'.³⁹ This text must have begun in the folk tradition. Prince Damrong slated it as 'clearly a vulgar (*chaloaisak*) version in a style unsuitable for performance in the court'.⁴⁰ The whole passage was replaced in his edition.

Much of the further development of the First Sequel was in the hands of the court. While the Chiang Mai campaign in the Smith/Wat Ko version is clearly in the folk mode, the passages which come before and after this segment betray court authorship. When did the involvement of court authors with *KCKP* begin?⁴¹

³⁹ WK: 1029.

⁴⁰ Damrong, *Tamnan II*: 61.

⁴¹ In a diary of court activities found in section 146 of the Palatine Law, 'sepha' appears as one of the entertainments of the king. However, it is not certain that this refers to *KCKP*, or to the musical style of the same name, or something else entirely. Though this law is ostensibly dated to 1358/9, many of such dates are inaccurate, and the laws were probably updated to reflect contemporary practice during their frequent recopying. 'It is most likely that the Palatine Laws, of all the supposed old laws, is a construction of Rama I legislators, even if older material was incorporated' (Vickery 1984: 46).

In 1784/5 a group of local officials whose experience dated back to the Borommakot reign (1733–58) was convened in Bangkok to record the customs and practices of royal visits to the Buddha's footprint in Saraburi. An annual visit to this site had become a major royal event since the seventeenth century. This group recorded that, 'When the king goes up to worship, Khun Intharaphitak and Khun Phromphitak of the *khlang* ministry take a Phra Narai cloth, a Wanthong tapestry (*man wanthon*), and a gold model junk for the king to present'.⁴² It seems that, as a result of the famous passage in the abduction episode noted above, a 'Wanthong tapestry' had become a conventional phrase describing an article which the king used in one of the major events on the royal ritual calendar in late Ayutthaya.⁴³ This reference suggests the court had adopted *KCKP* some time before the mid eighteenth century. If indeed, as suggested above, the story of Phaen leading an army to Chiang Mai found its way from *KCKP* into the *Testimony*, then probably court writers had begun to play a role in the development of the story in this era.

There is also one internal hint that the court writers helped to develop the First Sequel in late Ayutthaya. The text mentions the Banyong Rathanat throne hall, one of only two major buildings of the Ayutthaya palace mentioned directly by name in the poem. This hall was built in 1688 and used most intensively between the 1710s and 1730s when the older throne halls were dilapidated and undergoing repair.⁴⁴ The insertion of such names and other 'real' touches of court life are a hallmark of the court authors. Most likely these references to the Banyong Rathanat hall were inserted into *KCKP* when the building was at the height of its use in the early eighteenth century.

First Sequel: final form

While the First Sequel may have begun to develop in the late Ayutthaya era and partly in the folk tradition, it seems to have taken full shape in the hands of the court during the Early Bangkok period.

When Prince Damrong assembled the names of all the known *sepha* performers from the early Bangkok period, the only one who had probably begun his troubadour career in the Ayutthaya era and survived through to early Bangkok was a gatekeeper, a lowly commoner. But in the next generation of performers who emerged during the First Reign, most were from the ranks of officialdom, and

⁴² 'Khamhaikan khun khlon': 57.

⁴³ According to legend, after Wanthong's death, Khun Chang presented one of her embroideries to King Songtham (r. 1610/1–1628) who in turn presented it at Phra Phutthabat, hence founding the tradition (Chotchuang and Khru Sepha 1998: 83). Note that this timing again suggest the *KCKP* story originated in the early seventeenth century.

⁴⁴ Fine Arts Department 1968: 6.

Damrong could trace their patrons in the court.⁴⁵ This shift of generations seems to mark the passage of *KCKP* from 'folk' to 'court' ownership.

The main evidence to date the development of the First Sequel to early Bangkok lies in the politics. The villain of this story is the ruler of Chiang Mai who is defeated and humiliated, while by contrast, Lanxang is a friendly ally of Ayutthaya. These politics are appropriate to early Bangkok, not before, not after.

After the Narai reign, Ayutthaya had almost no dealings with Chiang Mai or Lanxang for almost a century. Chiang Mai was under Burma, and Lanxang was falling apart. Ayutthaya's external relations were focused on Cambodia and the Mon country, not the territories to the north. This situation changed with King Taksin's northern expedition of 1775, and his alliances with Kawila of Lanna and Siribunyasan of Lanxang. Over the next fifty years, Bangkok established its influence in the north. The Lao states were the more willing allies, while the *jao jet ton* dynasty of Lanna had obvious aspirations for more independence, and had regularly to be whipped back into line. The politics of this era seem to be reflected in the politics of the Chiang Mai campaign in the First Sequel. Perhaps this part of *KCKP* was developed to impress the sons of the Lanna and Lanxang rulers who came to Bangkok for education in the early Bangkok era.

One other striking fact about the First Sequel is the relative ignorance about Lanna and Lanxang. *KCKP* is famous for the accuracy of its geography, but not in its accounts of Lanna and Lanxang. All the *wat* named in Chiang Mai and Lamphun are wrong. When the King of Chiang Mai returns home, he starts out ascending the Nan River but then suddenly arrives at Rahaeng on the Ping. When leaving Vientiane for Ayutthaya, the Lanxang princess mounts an elephant and sets off – the authors did not know the Mekong river was in the way.

Also, there are many mistakes over culture. Both Lanna and Lanxang are referred to as 'Lao' territories, and the authors do not seem to realize the cultural differences between them. In several places, Lanna people play the *khaen* though this is a Lanxang and not a Lanna instrument. In the Smith/Wat Ko edition, Chiang Mai characters use many Lao phrases which are Lanxang Lao, not Lanna *kham mueang*.

Some but not all of these mistakes were subsequently rectified. In the revision that probably took place in the Fourth Reign (see below), the journeys to Vientiane are sprinkled with place-names which figured in the 1827–29 war with Anu of Vientiane; the Lanxang princess is ferried across the Mekong in a grand flotilla; the Chiang Mai king's northward journey follows the Ping all the way; and the Lanxang Lao phrases have been deleted. The mistakes found in the early version of the First Sequel suggest that it took full shape before travel and trade revived after the disruptions caused by the warring in the late eighteenth century.

⁴⁵ Damrong, *Tamnan I*: 13–16.

We suspect that the court portions of the First Sequel began to develop in the early-mid eighteenth century, but came of age in the early Bangkok era. There is one hint in the text. The reception of a Lanxang envoy at Ayutthaya in the early part of the First Sequel is very similar to the reception of a Tavoy embassy at Bangkok in 1791, as reported in the First Reign chronicle.⁴⁶ Of course, the procedure could have been standard, but the echoes between the two accounts are very strong. The First Sequel must have been finished by 1821–4, as those are the years when Sunthon Phu composed chapter 24, ‘The Birth of Phlai Ngam,’ which is the introduction and set-up for the First Sequel. It was certainly done by 1827 when the wars against Vientiane changed the political background, and when the Bangkok court learnt the geography of the Khorat plateau.

Second and Third Sequels

The Second Sequel probably dates to early Bangkok. One key episode involves an (illusionary) revolt by ‘New Mon’. There were two large immigrations of Mon into Siam in 1775 and 1814–15. These new arrivals spoke a version of Mon which was more influenced by Burmese than the version used by older Mon inhabitants of Siam. The terms ‘New Mon’ and ‘Old Mon’ were used to distinguish the two groups.⁴⁷ In addition, the portrayal of Wai’s household in the Second Sequel has a very bourgeois feel which differs greatly from earlier parts of the poem and matches well to the culture of early Bangkok.⁴⁸

The Third Sequel also probably dates to the Bangkok era, and much of it may have developed quite late in the nineteenth century.

From folk to court

KCKP is a complex text because it developed in two different traditions in two phases of its career – the first in a folk tradition of troubadour recitation, and the second in a court tradition of drama performance and reading. The text has two distinct ‘modes,’ which differ greatly in theme, setting, style, and the approach to didacticism and nature. The final version of the sequels is in almost pure court mode. Only a small amount of the text remains in pure folk mode, but the Original Story was developed in the folk tradition and retains a base layer in the folk mode, evident in the themes, characters, and setting, though a second court layer has been

⁴⁶ See *PD*, chapter 25, and Flood and Flood 1978: 176–82

⁴⁷ Halliday 1913: 1–15; Kanchanakphan and Nai Tamra 2002: 690, from the Second Reign chronicle.

⁴⁸ See Nidhi 2006. Saichon Satyanurak has argued convincingly that the economic and cultural changes which Nidhi describes had begun in late Ayutthaya, but they were certainly more intense in early Bangkok.

overlaid. In this section we outline the very different characteristics of the folk and court modes of *KCKP*.

Theme

The theme of the Original Story is the love triangle, and especially Wanthon's dilemma over the two men. The plot can be summarized as follows:

Phaen and Chang compete for the hand of the beautiful Wanthon. Poor but talented Phaen woos and marries her but is then sent off to war. Rich but ugly Chang seizes Wanthon through money and trickery. Phaen arms himself, abducts Wanthon from Chang's house, and kills two nobles, thus becoming an outlaw. The couple flee to a frugal but idyllic sojourn in the forests. When Wanthon becomes pregnant, they give themselves up. The king condemns her to death for failing to choose between two men and thus provoking disorder.

This is the plot of a romantic tragedy. The themes are love and death. By contrast, the plot of the First Sequel in isolation is as follows:

Phlai Ngam volunteers to serve the king, thereby rescuing his father from jail. The two lead an army to Chiang Mai and win a great victory. On return, the king rewards Phlai Ngam with an important position in royal service and two wives.

This is the typical plot of a courtly heroic tale. The themes are war and success. The reiteration of the same story with another of Phaen's sons in the Second Sequel is similar. The First and Third Sequels are almost entirely taken up with political rivalries and military campaigns. In the Original Story, the political events which result in Phaen being sent on campaign in the north are sketched in 25 lines,⁴⁹ but the parallel passage in the First Sequel is around 1,400 lines. In the Original Story, the actual fighting occupies less than 200 lines, but the parallel campaign in the First Sequel is around five times that length. The Third Sequel is essentially one long battle story of 10,000 lines with only a few minor interludes away from the fray. These battle sequences have more in common with heroic court writing (*Yuan phai, Nirat tha dindaeng*) than with the Original Story of *KCKP*.

⁴⁹ In the Smith/Wat Ko edition it is around 25 lines, but had doubled to 50 lines by the PD edition.

Setting

The setting for the Original Story is the provincial towns of Suphanburi, Kanchanaburi, and Phichit, and the wild periphery of the forests. Characters make excursions to the royal capital of Ayutthaya, but these are short in duration, and generally bound up with fearful events (especially legal process and punishment). The minor characters of the Original Story are drawn from local society – neighbors, relatives, domestic servants, local officials, monks, hunters, boatmen, and tribal villagers. The plot is wound around the notable events of everyday life – births, weddings, cremations, temple festivals, major crimes, house-building, travel, sickness. The authors seem to delight in describing these events in loving detail.

By contrast, the First Sequel takes place either in the capital city of Ayutthaya or on military campaign. Visits to Suphanburi or Kanchanaburi are brief. All the minor characters are officials, soldiers, and members of the court. The plot is wound around political affairs, military campaigns, and lawsuits. The authors seem to delight in showing off their technical knowledge of court protocol, government practice, legal proceedings, military affairs, and diplomatic relations.

Style

The Original Story has a style suited for troubadour performance. Most of the chapters underwent revision during the nineteenth century (see below) so this style is often obscured. The exception is chapter 1 and most of chapter 2. As Prince Damrong noted, this section may be in the form that was transcribed from troubadours in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ It is the only segment in which the narrator explicitly addresses his ‘listeners’. The language of this segment is relatively simple and homely, and the meter is highly irregular.⁵¹

By contrast, the sequels are in the style of court composition. By the early nineteenth century, court literati had decreed that verse with a regular number of syllables per half-line, and strict rules for internal and external rhyming, was prized as the *khlon suphap*, genteel verse. The variant with eight syllables was most prized, with the seven-syllable variant running a close second. In the First Sequel, some bravura passages are written in one of these forms. Most of the text of the sequels favors a mixture of seven or eight syllable half-lines, and fairly strict rhyming.

In the Original Story, the storytelling is very fast-paced. There is a rapid-fire mixture of romance, tragedy, bawdy comedy, violence, sex, and supernaturalism typical of many varieties of popular entertainment. Much of the text consists of dialogue, particularly the argumentative dialogue found in other Thai folk performance genres such as *prop kai* and *phleng choi*.

⁵⁰ Damrong, *Tamnan I*: 17.

⁵¹ This can be seen in the Smith/Wat Ko version of these chapters, prior to editing for the Damrong edition.

The narrative of the sequels is more even-paced and the story-telling is more linear. The sequels retain some interludes of rude-mechanical humor, but these are a much smaller element than in the Original Story.

Nature

Nature plays a very large role in the story. The towns are islands in a sea of forest, and the characters plunge into the trees as soon as they begin a journey. The attitude to nature differs between the Original Story and the sequels. In the Original Story, the forest is a place of great beauty and great power. It can serve as a refuge and as the source of exotic and powerful objects, but it is also a place of great danger. These characteristics are introduced in the untouched first segment. Wanthon's father dies from a fever contracted while traveling through the forest to trade, and Chang's father is killed by a gang of robbers who live in the forest. When Phaen and his mother have to flee their home, the forest offers them refuge but also threatens them with its dangers. They sleep in a tree to avoid wild animals, and are pestered by insects.

These same characteristics are developed throughout the Original Story. When Phaen becomes an outlaw, he flees into the forest as a refuge. He also travels through the periphery of forest and mountain in search of objects of power. Phaen and Wanthon have a romantic sojourn in the forest, enjoying its beauty but also suffering its hardships. Whether benign or threatening, nature is real.

In the sequels, nature serves as a prop for showy exercises in versification, and is often treated in a highly unrealistic way. From the eighteenth century, passages in which poets drew metaphors and allusions from nature, especially in the course of a journey, became one of the stock exercises of Thai poetry. Other poetical exercises used features of the natural world for bravura displays of rhyming, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. The sequels of *KCKP* are studded with such passages in which the sound of the words is far more important than any reality described.⁵² Clusters of trees appear together because they rhyme, alliterate, or sound nice together, not because they might exist in the same ecosystem. Birds are perched on certain trees because of affinities between their Thai names. Crakes are always sitting on cinnamon trees because the two Thai words are the same (*anchan*). One passage reproduces the sound of crows cawing by stringing together names of trees with a 'ka' sound, even though a coastal-mangrove plant and a deep-forest tree would never be found side-by-side. Another strings together the names of 56 trees while obeying the rules and convention of rhyme, meter, and alliteration but ignoring totally the laws of nature.

⁵² There are some exceptions. Sunthon Phu (in chapter 24) combined naturalism with dramatic versifying. In chapter 28, the descriptions of Si Fai lake in Phichit and of a mountain crossing are highly realistic.

Didacticism

The Original Story was developed in the interplay between troubadours and their audiences over a long period of time. The players incorporated tales, true or imaginary, whose meanings resonated with the audience. They fine-tuned the episodes, characters, and language to satisfy the tastes of the audience. By this process, the work became a depository of values, ways to understand the world, and lessons for living in it. The poem remained popular because it could be ‘read’ to extract these meanings and lessons from generation to generation. The Original Story can be seen as highly didactic, but this didacticism is embedded in the plot, not made explicit in the wording.

By contrast, the sequels contain several passages of explicit instruction. Manuals of correct behavior became a popular genre in nineteenth-century Bangkok. Sunthon Phu wrote two famous examples. Probably their popularity reflected the emergence of a new middling social stratum that wanted to learn genteel behavior in the hope of upwards mobility. The sequels contain several passages of didactic advice which are similar to the content of these manuals. When Phaen (now aged around 50) is about to set out on the Chiang Mai campaign, his mother gives him a lecture on military technique, straight out of the manual on the Arts of War.⁵³ When the Chiang Mai royal family is about to be swept down to Ayutthaya, the queen lectures her daughter on the art of being a royal wife. In the Second Sequel, Wanthong returns as a ghost in order to instruct her son on military technique. Phaen also receives from his mother a long and highly formal lecture on the ten principles for succeeding in royal service.⁵⁴

Literary allusions

The sequels and other segments rewritten in the court are sprinkled with allusions to other literary works. The largest number of these refer to *Ramakian*, *Inao*, and *Anirut* – the three ‘inner’ works which were reserved for performance at court, and which were all composed in versions by King Rama I. Other references are to ‘outer’ dramas, which had no similar restriction, but still were mainly performed in the court circle. Most of the outer dramas (*lakhon nok*) mentioned in *KCKP* are stories made popular in versions attributed to King Rama II or his salon – *Sangthong*, *Khawi*, *Kaki*, *Suwannahong*, *Chaiyachet*, *Manohra*. There are also some references to the geography of Chomphuthawip in the Three Worlds cosmology, a key text of the Siamese royal tradition, consciously revived in the early Bangkok court.

⁵³ In *PD*, chapter 27.

⁵⁴ In *PD*, chapter 15.

Sum: original and sequels, folk and court

The career of *KCKP* is complex. The Original Story was composed by troubadours for local performance. Although large parts were subsequently rewritten by court authors, a distinctive ‘folk mode’ can still be seen in the few unrevised passages, and as a substratum of the rest. By contrast, the three sequels are composed in a very different ‘court mode,’ suitable for performance at court and for reading.

It is easy to imagine the passages in the folk mode being performed for local audiences, eliciting empathy for the characters, familiarity with the setting, tears, laughter, and great acclaim, but it is impossible to imagine the same about the passages in the court mode. Conversely, it is possible to imagine passages in the court mode being appreciated by a court audience precisely because of their formal elegance, their range of allusions, and their political and didactic concerns, but it is impossible to imagine them entertaining a local audience.

The literary critic Chetana Nagavajara confessed that he once slated the climactic episode of *KCKP* on grounds that it was ‘deprived of unity and of good taste, because the incidents that follow one after the other totally lack any sense of logic, with tragic components mingling with grotesque elements, at times even bordering on inappropriate vulgarities.’ Only later did he appreciate that these very characteristics were what made it suitable for popular performance: ‘The more the episode is chaotic and marked by disparate and incoherent elements, the better the artist can demonstrate the supremacy of his art by varying the modes of expression to accommodate the changing emotions’.⁵⁵ Chetana’s changing evaluation nicely captures the difference between performance and reading, between folk and court modes.

Revision of *KCKP* in the nineteenth century

With its transition from folk tradition to the court, *KCKP* entered a new phase of its career. In the hands of the court, the consumption of *KCKP* changed in two ways. First, court producers embroidered recitation with elements borrowed from the stage dramas which were popular at the time; more than a single reciter might be used, and a musical ensemble was introduced to play interludes. Second, the text was consumed by reading, or by listening to a reader. In addition, over the nineteenth century, there were two projects of revision.

Second Reign salon

Members of King Rama II’s literary salon collaborated on a revision of the second half of the Original Story (chapters 17–23). Although there is no

⁵⁵ Chetana 2003: 241–2.

documentary proof on authorship, two chapters are conventionally attributed to King Rama II, another two to the future King Rama III, and one to Sunthon Phu.⁵⁶ Khun Wichitmatra suspected that King Rama II's cousin, Chaophraya Mahasakdi Phonlasep, another member of the salon who also adapted passages of *KCKP* into dramas, was responsible for revising three other chapters.⁵⁷ Members of the salon also tinkered with other chapters from the Original Story, though in a much less comprehensive way.⁵⁸

As noted above in the description of the three versions of the abduction episode, this revision appears not to have altered the main thrust of the plot, probably because it was so well known that it was sacrosanct. The court authors elaborated new scenes, extra dialogue, and fuller description. They added *nirat*-like passages of showy poetry, speeches of didactic advice, and literary allusions. They also raised the level of the language, and conformed the meter to the prized forms of the day. Most of the famous passages of *KCKP*'s poetry, learnt by Thai schoolchildren to this today, appeared in this revision.

As a result of this revision, much of the Original Story (apart from chapter 1 and much of chapter 2) is a mixture of folk and court modes. The story, setting, characters, narrative style, and boisterousness betray the folk origins, while the poetry has been upgraded, and the narrative sprinkled with markers of court style.

Khru Jaeng

A second project of revision probably took place in the Fourth Reign. Khru Jaeng, a *sepha* performer who later became an author, took a leading part.⁵⁹ Khru Jaeng introduced some new episodes that had already developed in the troubadour

⁵⁶The attribution to King Rama II is due to Prince Damrong who wrote in the preface to *KCKP* as follows: 'I once asked Prince Bamrap Borabak, "I have heard it said that this sepha was composed by King Rama II. Is that true?" He replied, "Yes, he composed it, but not openly, and several other people helped.'" (*Tamnan I*: 18). In his revised version of this preface, eight years later, he added: 'The statement that "several other people helped" in the composition probably means that when King Rama II encouraged composition of sepha, the poets of high status who were close to the king probably used the king's compositions as a model for composing other passages, and they also did not disclose the authorship because they wanted to use strong words in the same way.' (*Tamnan II*: 44) The attribution of certain chapters to King Rama III was pure speculation on Damrong's part, but has now become fact.

⁵⁷Kanchanakphan and Nai Tamra 2002: 267–81.

⁵⁸Prince Damrong detected King Rama II's hand in parts of chapters 4 and 13, and King Rama III's hand in parts of chapters 11 and 12. The video on *KCKP* in the Suphanburi Museum attributes chapter 3 to Sunthon Phu and chapter 7 to King Rama III.

⁵⁹Almost nothing is known about Khru Jaeng except that he lived close to Wat Rakhang.

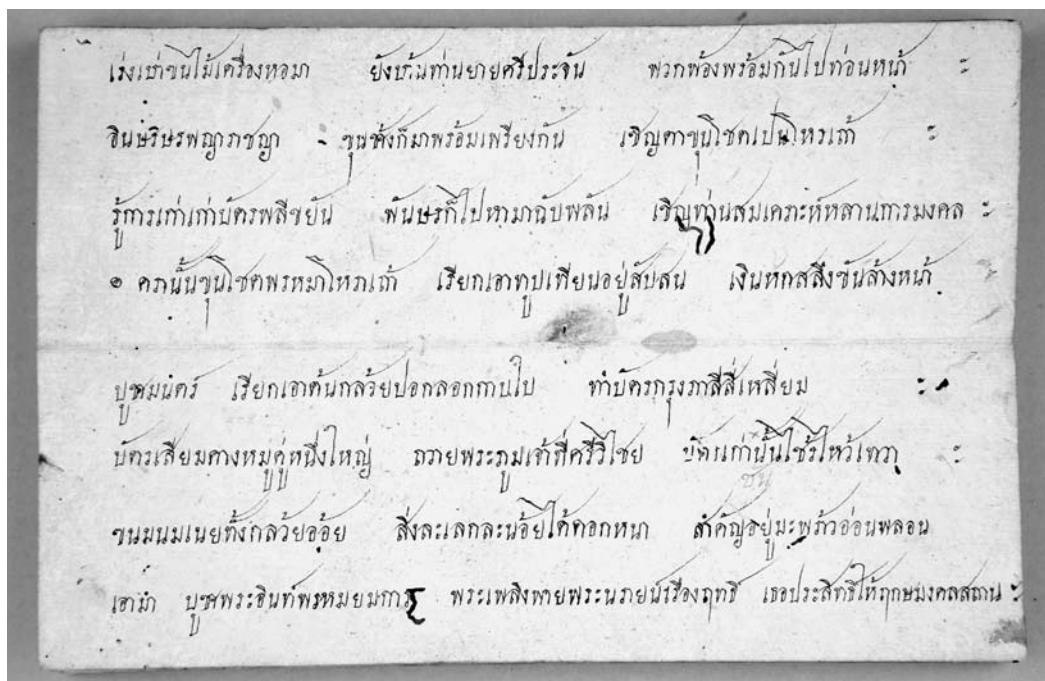


Fig. 2 *Samut thai* mss; passage on a house-building ceremony not found in the Damrong edition.

tradition.⁶⁰ But his major contribution seems to have been made on a court commission, as it amounted to a clean-up of the ‘vulgar’ Chiang Mai campaign in the First Sequel.

In this revision, the foot-soldier’s view of the campaign was totally discarded. The disorderliness of the march was replaced by a short passage about opium taking. The bloody battle over an outpost was excised. The drunken victory feast became a sedate affair. In place of the wholesale looting, people and property are seized on behalf of the king, entered on manifests, and subsequently returned after the Chiang Mai ruler is pardoned.

The revision is also kinder to the Chiang Mai ruler, reflecting the changed politics of the mid-nineteenth century. He becomes a grander, more royal character, with a more sumptuous palace. He is still defeated and humiliated, but regains his dignity through a sequence of lamenting speeches, and a scene of triumphal return in procession to his Chiang Mai capital.

With the excision of the foot-soldier’s view, and the addition of more material on the Chiang Mai ruler and on Ayutthaya officials, the First Sequel became almost completely a story by and for the court.

⁶⁰In chapter 17, Khru Jaeng introduced the story of Khun Phaen marrying Buakhli and then killing her to make a protective spirit (*kuman thong*) from the unborn child. Prince Damrong noted this story was already popular among troubadours, but had not earlier appeared in written versions of the text. See *Tamnan*, I, 33.

From oral tradition to printed book

Over the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, *KCKP* made the transition from oral recitation to printed book. This was a transition from a milieu which promoted constant variation to a medium that by nature is static. This ‘deceleration’ of the text did not happen immediately but developed gradually over a century or so.

Manuscripts and collections

According to Prince Damrong, in early Bangkok individual episodes of *KCKP* were transcribed from troubadours into manuscript form, but there was no full collection of these manuscripts. He believes that the first collection was assembled in the palace during the Fourth Reign.⁶¹ The episodes were copied in sequence into a set of *samut thai* volumes. The lines were written continuously (not in the familiar form with two hemistiches per line) with a symbol to indicate a paragraph break (see Fig 2). The text continued from one volume to another, and the break between volumes was arbitrary. There was no division into chapters and no titling of chapters or episodes. Short synopses were often written on the cover of each volume. This collection included the Original Story, the first two sequels, and the opening episodes of the third.⁶² Some copies of this collection seem to have been made for senior members of the court, as Chuang Bunnag was in possession of one. These manuscripts met a demand from readers for a familiar unchanging text. Prince Damrong retailed a story concerning Chuang Bunnag (Chaophraya Sisuriyawong) and his personal reader:

Phra Saenthongfa (Pong) told me that Somdet Chaophraya Borom-maha Sisuriyawong would listen only to this chapter. Phra Saenthongfa was later asked what happened if he recited to the very end where *Khun Phaen* descends from *Khun Chang*'s house. He replied, 'Well, I have to go back to where *Khun Phaen* enters the house again'.⁶³

⁶¹ In his first version of his preface to *KCKP* in 1917–18, Prince Damrong reckoned this collection dated to the Third Reign (*Tamnan* I: 23). In his revised preface of 1925, he explicitly revised this opinion, but gave no reasons why (*Tamnan* II: 59).

⁶² This is the coverage of the Smith and Wat Ko editions, which were based on Chuang Bunnag's text, which in turn was copied from the palace text. The story ends with the execution of Phlai Yong and Soi Fa, which is the end of the third chapter of *Sepha* n.d., and of chapter 51 in *Sepha* 1966. In truth, this could be called the end of the Second Sequel since the focus of this sequel is Soi Fa.

⁶³ Damrong, *Tamnan* I: 35.



Fig. 3 Cover page from the Smith edition, 1872.

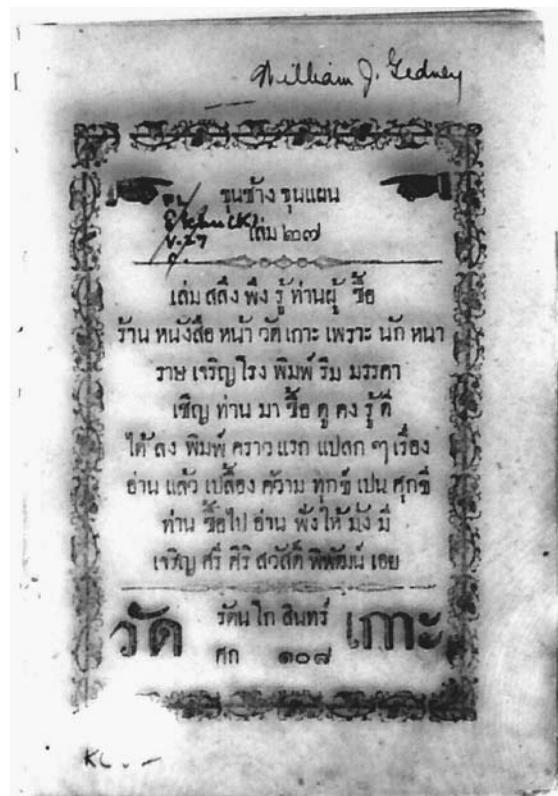


Fig. 4 Cover page from the Wat Ko edition, 1890.

Printing

The missionary-printer Samuel Smith published the first book of *KCKP* in 1872.⁶⁴ Smith borrowed Chuang Bunnag's text, which in turn was a copy of the palace manuscripts.⁶⁵ He divided the text into chapters which followed the (arbitrary) division into *samut thai* volumes found in the manuscripts. He also retained the continuous lines and synopses, and added no chapter titles. He sold the work in installments. Each volume contained the text of four *samut thai*, and was priced at one baht. According to Prince Damrong, the edition was popular, and was quickly copied by other printing houses. The press at Wat Ko⁶⁶ printed such an edition in 1890, selling it in smaller volumes containing only one *samut thai* and priced at one *salueng*.⁶⁷

After Prince Damrong resigned from government service in 1915 and devoted himself to literary works, one of his first projects was editing *KCKP*. He used the original palace text from the Fourth Reign, and three other copies of this text found in the palace library for checking passages that were unreadable. He replaced the long passage on the Chiang Mai campaign with the version revised by Khru Jaeng (discussed above), and also adopted three shorter passages by Khru Jaeng.⁶⁸ He decided to end his edition after the Second Sequel.

⁶⁴ Thanks to Achan Choomsai Suwannachomphu for providing a partial copy (about half) of the Smith text. We have not been able to locate a full copy.

⁶⁵ In his first version of the preface, Damrong wrote that Chuang's text was 'thought to be' the text that Smith used (*Tamnan* I: 27), but in the revised preface he states this as a fact (*Tamnan* II: 68). Smith made one innovation – putting spaces between the words. This was replicated in the Wat Ko publication.

⁶⁶ Wat Ko is the familiar name for Wat Samphanthawong in Sampheng. The area opposite the wat gate was one of the first markets for books in Bangkok. Ratcharoen Printers (also more commonly known as Wat Ko Printers) was founded in 1889 when Nai Sin, who had earlier become an agent for selling Smith's publication through his glassware shop, installed a manual printing press in a shophouse on Wanit 1 Road opposite the wat. The press became famous for its cheap editions of classics and popular works (Matichon 2006: 24–8). There is a complete copy of the Wat Ko text in the William Gedney collection at Michigan University Library. There are a few installments in the Prince Damrong Library on Lan Luang Road, but they have no cover pages and no identification in the catalogue.

⁶⁷ The Smith and Wat Ko texts are not exactly the same, but have clearly come from a common original. The wording is almost exactly the same, except for some typical copyist's errors and omissions. The division between *samut thai* volumes differs between the two sets, and the spelling is often widely different. This suggests that an original manuscript (perhaps the palace text) was copied into two different sets by copyists with different handwriting size, different views on spelling, and different susceptibility to error. These two sets were then the basis of the Smith and Wat Ko publications respectively.

⁶⁸ These passages are: forging the Skystorm sword; Buakhli and the Goldchild; and crocodile Khwat. For Skystorm and Khwat, Khru Jaeng's versions were revisions of older versions of the story, while the Buakhli story was an unwritten version popular among troubadours.

Prince Damrong's edition of 1917–18 is a book, rather than a replication of the *samut thai* text. He divided the narrative into chapters on the basis of the story, and invented chapter headings. He set the text in lines, with two hemistiches per line, as in drama texts with a line-throw between paragraphs. Most of all, he created a canonical version, a definitive text. His edition has been constantly reprinted without any modification, not even correction of the (very few) obvious errors. It is sacrosanct. There has been no attempt to produce an alternative selection from the many texts available. Only a handful of fragments from alternative texts have been published.⁶⁹ All of the many subsequent commentaries, précis versions, and prose renderings are based on this text. Most of the dramas, films, novels, cartoons, and television series based on *KCKP* have stayed within its confines.⁷⁰ Only a handful of films and novels have strayed beyond, using imagination rather than alternative sources. Academic research has focused on the Damrong version. The pre-Damrong printed versions (Smith, Wat Ko, Khru Jaeng) have disappeared from view and are difficult to find.

From folk to book: some major changes

We have no direct evidence of *KCKP* as it existed in the folk tradition of troubadour recitation. Although recitation of *KCKP* is still performed, the script has been greatly influenced by the printed version. In 1950, E. H. S. Simmonds recorded recitation of an episode of *KCKP* in Ang Thong. He found that the story deviated from the printed version with a folkish slant (less politics, more humor, simpler language) but was mainly based on the Damrong edition.⁷¹

We can get some idea of the folk version by imaginatively stripping away the layers of revision, and by examining versions of the story which developed in other media. In this section, we trace five ways in which the *KCKP* changed in this late phase of its career.

Morality and characterization

Sukanya Pathrachai argues that the folk version had a simple black-and-white morality – rich vs. poor, and good vs. bad: the evil, rich, oafish Chang competes for Wanthon using money, political connections, and underhand methods; the good, brilliant Phaen is hamstrung by poverty and honesty. Sukanya shows that this simple dualism was retained in the version of *KCKP* performed as *likae*.⁷²

⁶⁹The *Samnuan kao* fragments were published in 1925. One of Khru Jaeng's chapters was published as Fine Arts Department 1925. Sujit 2002 contains two passages from Khru Jaeng version of the Buakhli episode.

⁷⁰Narongsak 2002 and 2005.

⁷¹Simmonds 1963.

⁷²Sukanya 1991: 29–37.

Over the nineteenth century revisions, this simple duality was obscured in the *sepha*. First, the rich–poor contrast was not erased but muted. Between the early manuscripts and the Damrong publication, the clothes worn by Phaen’s family become more sumptuous, the foods they prepare and eat become more elaborate, and the possessions around them become more varied. Possibly the court writers and editors simply inserted the kind of food, cloth, and articles with which they were more familiar.⁷³ Certainly the effect is to elevate the family socially. At the same time, several direct references to Phaen’s poverty were deleted, while a line describing Phaen’s lineage as *phu di*, gentlefolk, was inserted. The addition of the sequels saw Phaen elevated from commoner to minor noble and then governor of Kanchanaburi.

Conversely, several passages which emphasized Chang’s wealth disappeared over the revisions. These include a line in the opening chapter stating that Chang’s family ‘are rich people,’ another with Chang describing himself as rich in the scene of the Mahachat chanting, Wanthon’s mother describing Chang as having ‘cartloads of money,’ and trying to persuade Wanthon into marriage with the words, ‘Chang will give you so much money, you won’t be able to sew sacks fast enough to hold it all’.⁷⁴

The contrast is also reduced by making Chang somewhat less of a buffoon, a figure of fun and contempt. For instance, in the old version of the opening chapter, Chang’s mother is so appalled by his appearance at birth that she kicks him off the bed. He is described as ‘short and stubby like the pigs at Wat Kaeo.’ His mother berates him, ‘You’re so weirdly different from any of the kinfolk with that oily head like a fishing cat.’ Other children ask in horror, ‘What’s that over there, mummy? It’s got a face and body like a big tom cat, a humpback, a hairy chin, gaping mouth, hair all over its body and shoulders, white eyes, long feet, hands and navel, and rows of odd things round its neck.’ Even the king is appalled when young Chang is presented at court, ‘A shiny head with no hair on the pate, black, and fat as a *taphon* drum. What a disaster! His forehead bulges out in an odd-looking way’.⁷⁵ All of these passages had disappeared by the time of the Damrong publication.

In a very old version, Chang’s marriage to Wanthon is played as high farce, spoofing Chang’s extravagance and his lack of taste. The young girls chosen to carry the dowry, usually selected for their beauty, are hilariously ugly. By the Damrong version they had metamorphosed into ‘fair, attractive teenage girls from respectable families of good status, and all dressed to the nines’.⁷⁶

⁷³ For example, compare WK: 67 to the start of PD: chapter 3.

⁷⁴ WK: 10, 90, 344, 425.

⁷⁵ WK: 5, 9–10, 21.

⁷⁶ The old version, from Thailand National Archives mss 131, is in Choomsai 1991: 59 and 165; compare PD, I: 216.

Most strikingly, the revisions undermine the simple good–bad division by smearing Phaen with blood. In the Smith/Wat Ko version, Phaen kills only on the battlefield. By the Damrong publication, he murders a wife, slaughters two innocent peasants in cold blood, and tries to kill his own son. In the Fourth Reign revision, Khru Jaeng introduced the Buakhli story in which Phaen marries a woman and then kills her in order to create a spirit from the fetus of his own child. Khru Jaeng also has Phaen kill two Lao peasants so he can adopt their forms as disguise. And in the contorted plotting of the Second Sequel, Phaen tries to kill his first-born son, and is foiled only by poor tactics.

In general in these revisions, Phaen becomes a more violent character. For example, in the old fragment of the abduction scene, Phaen only cuts Wanthonh's three tapestries down to the ground. In the Second Reign salon revision, he angrily slashes them to shreds with his sword. In an old version of the jealous quarrel which parts Phaen and Wanthonh, Phaen is relatively calm and conciliatory. In the version found in the Damrong publication, he is much more violent, both verbally and physically, and precipitates the split by drawing his sword on Wanthonh. Sukanya argues that this change, making Phaen more responsible for his own downfall, reflected the demand of a new court audience, consuming *KCKP* by reading, for a more nuanced plotline and morality.⁷⁷ But there also seems to be a definite project to reduce Phaen's stature as a heroic character.

Leading female characters

Over the revisions, the role and character of the key female figures changed markedly. In the Original Story, Wanthonh is very much the central figure. Her death provides the tragic ending. Many of the best bits of dialogue come from her mouth.⁷⁸ And it is her we weep over at the end. The addition of the three sequels changes the balance. Wanthonh hardly appears in the First Sequel, and has died before the other two. No other female character inherits her prominence. Simala, who is her parallel in the First Sequel, is much less developed. In all three sequels, the women have become prizes which men acquire through seduction or as reward for military success. The women also squabble with one another over the men. None of them are key to the plot. None has a dilemma like Wanthonh.

The revisions also modified the character of Wanthonh, making her conform more closely to a court ideal of female submissiveness.

In a folk version of the first meeting between Phaen and Wanthonh, she takes the lead, flirting even though he is in a novice's robe, then blocking his responses

⁷⁷ Sukanya 1991: 29–37.

⁷⁸ Compare the speeches over the three bo seedlings; Thong Prasi mumbles something prosaic; Phaen copies his mother; Wanthonh soars (*PD*, I: 58–9).

with a reminder that he is forbidden from talking to a woman on alms round. In the Damrong version, she is much less forward in this scene.⁷⁹

This transformation is clearly seen in the rewritings of the abduction scene during the Second Reign. In the second fragment, Phaen and Wanthon fall into a fierce argument, trading mutual recriminations over which one caused them to split. Phaen's desire for Wanthon overcomes him and he starts to plead. She gains the upper hand and mocks him for taking a second wife. In desperation, Phaen uses a love mantra to subdue her. She agrees to leave and goes to pack, but when she sees Chang she begins to change her mind. Phaen has to use a mantra four times. When they finally leave, Phaen tries to browbeat Wanthon by saying he will tell Chang that she chased after him out of uncontrollable lust. She laughs in his face, 'Is this the soldier that destroyed the Lao army speaking these sharp words? Anyone would think it laughable.' Phaen then points out a bald-looking stork and pretends it is Chang following them. She parries in kind by pointing to another bird and pretending it is Phaen's second wife. 'Is that Laothong following us? Somewhere I hear she went into the palace. You can't have her any more, that's why you come after me. Oh, are you getting annoyed?' Wanthon not only gives at least as good as she gets, but Phaen rather enjoys it and the banter leads directly into lovemaking.

In the revision by the Second Reign salon, the storyline has the same events, but the characterization is totally changed. In the argument, Wanthon is more peevish than dominant, and Phaen more violent. He first verbally threatens to kill her, then draws his sword on her, and finally threatens that she is either leaving willingly or in two pieces. When Phaen taunts her with the fantasy of her lust, she has no response other than a peevish protest. When he spins the joke about Chang and the stork, she only asks meekly to go back home. In short, in the revised version, Phaen reduces Wanthon to submission by physical and verbal violence, and Wanthon is portrayed as almost helpless.⁸⁰

Similar modification in the female role occurred in the later revisions. In the Smith/Wat Ko (pre-revision) version of the First Sequel, Phaen's son Wai has an affair with Simala, daughter of the governor of Phichit. When they first meet, with their fathers present, Wai gazes at Simala and we are treated to his mental review of her breasts, rear, waist, arms, fingers, and dress. Such reviews are a standard element of such scenes. What follows is more surprising. We switch to Simala and listen to her review of Wai:

⁷⁹ 'Santiwan' (Somdet phra Ariyawongsathotayan, Pun Punnsirimahathen, later Supreme Patriarch) recounted the scene in an article on Wat Palelai first printed in 1970. His account of the passages in *KCKP* associated with Wat Palelai follows the Damrong version closely except in this scene. Probably his variant came from a local version, though he does not explain that (see Santiwan, 1971: 29–31).

⁸⁰ See Chotchuang and Khru Sepha 1998: 134–40, 149–51; compare to *PD*, II: 45–52 and 60–1.

‘He has a bright face and cheeks like nutmeg. His lips look as if painted with rouge. His black teeth gleam prettily. When he smiles, you can see a glimpse.

His hair is cute as a lotus pod. A rounded neck in proportion like a molding. Eyebrows curved like a bow. The black pupils of his eyes gleam like jet.

‘A strong chest and curvy waist. Everything looks perfect. If he came to lie with me for one night, I’d gobble him up’.⁸¹

In the version which emerged from Khru Jaeng’s revision and was included in Damrong’s edition, Wai’s mental review of Simala has tripled in length and multiplied in intensity, while Simala’s review of Wai has been deleted. Simala is so overcome by properly demure shyness that she rushes away to hide.⁸²

This passage also shows how love scenes were revised. The two instances with Wai and Simala in the Smith/Wat Ko version are possibly the only such scenes which survive from the folk version with no court revision. In both these scenes, Simala is a very willing partner. In the first, she puts up only token resistance to Wai’s advances by protesting ‘Hey, let all the servants go to sleep first.’ In the second (after his return from war), she ribs him a little about ‘eating sticky rice’ while in Chiang Mai. By contrast, in all scenes of a couple’s initial lovemaking in the Damrong publication, there is a touch of rape. Even if the woman is aroused, she puts up verbal and physical resistance, and the man responds by blowing mantra and using physical force. In Khru Jaeng’s revision, the first encounter between Wai and Simala was rewritten to conform to this standard pattern.⁸³

The Second Sequel introduces another difference into the portrayal of women. One of the three sub-plots of the sequel revolves around jealousy between Wai’s two wives. This theme recycles the jealous quarrel between Wanthon and Laothong in the Original Story, but with an important difference. The quarrel between Wanthon and Laothong is momentary. Subsequently it is forgotten and they live in harmony. Both are ‘good’ women. By contrast, Wai’s two wives, Simala and Soi Fa are clearly cast as ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ Soi Fa resorts to using love philters, which was a serious offence under Ayutthaya law. The jealousy is far from momentary and is not reconciled but causes Phaen’s lineage to split into two camps that war continuously for the next two generations.

⁸¹ WK: 928; compare to *PD*, III: 40.

⁸² From hiding, she does manage some appreciation, but very watered down: ‘This man is no waste of time! He’s the most handsome, most brilliant. His face and body look like they’re painted with gold. Handsome to perfection.’ (*PD*, III: 40).

⁸³ WK: 936, 1062–3; compare to *PD*, III: 49–52.

In the Original Story, Chang is the personification of ‘bad’ in contrast to the ‘good’ of Phaen. But Chang has only a small role in the First Sequel and then disappears completely while Soi Fa becomes the personification of evil which drives the plot. This role is passed from male to female.

In sum, the transformation in the role of women in the nineteenth-century revisions of *KCKP* is sweeping. Though we have very little evidence of the portrayal of women in *KCKP* in the folk tradition, the early fragment on the abduction of Wanthon and the glimpse of Simala in the above excerpt suggest that the women were verbally forceful and sexually assured. In the revisions and extensions of the story, the women are reduced to courtly submissiveness, subject to near-rape, pushed to the sidelines, converted into prizes of war, and recast as the agents of evil. Most strikingly, Wanthon disappears from the title of the work where she most obviously belongs.

This transformation may reflect a change in the audience. The audience for folk performance was probably more than half female (because many men were absent on corvée, military service, in the monkhood, etc.). The *KCKP* Original Story may have acquired its immense popularity because the main theme (Wanthon’s dilemma and death) appealed to this female majority in the audience, and because the troubadours continually developed the story in response to this audience’s tastes. By contrast, in the court, the majority of the audience (or the most important part of the audience) was male. In effect the sequels are warrior romances in which heroes defeat enemies and acquire rank, fame, and women – a very typical court genre with strong male bias.

Folksiness

Like much popular entertainment, the folk version of *KCKP* was full of sexiness, comedy, and knockabout farce. Rapid transition among moods was probably one of the tricks of troubadour performance. Some examples still remain. For example, the tragic moment of Wanthon’s death sentence is immediately followed by a farcical scene of Chang falling into dogs’ shit.

But throughout the nineteenth-century revisions, such farcical scenes along with comic one-liners and risqué jokes were steadily deleted. This can be seen in the revisions of the Second Reign which removed several passages present in the earlier version of the abduction scene. In flight from Suphanburi, Phaen rewards a Mon boatman with a valuable ring, and the boatman responds, ‘I’ll sell it to redeem a slave I can hug in bed. I’m in love with I-Khlai at the end of the village, and I-Phon with the dangling breasts, the wife of Phan Son.’ In the abduction from Chang’s house, as Phaen threads his way through the prone bodies of servants put to sleep by his mantra, one woman ‘started to dream, fumbled in her skirt, and murmured, “I’ve found a monitor lizard’s hole.”’ Phaen peers into the bedroom of Chang’s

brother and finds him ‘sleeping the wrong way round on the bed using his wife’s bottom as a pillow’.⁸⁴ All these passages (and many others of a similar nature) were deleted. While each deletion on its own is of little significance, collectively they reduce the earthiness and realism.

This sanitization continued in later revisions. As already noted, Khru Jaeng’s revision of the Chiang Mai campaign removed scenes of carousing, womanizing, drug-taking, looting, and raping, mostly written for comic effect. In his editing, Prince Damrong consciously moved *KCKP* yet further away from ‘popular entertainment’ and towards literature, principally by reducing the role of sex, violence, and comedy. In his second version of the preface, Prince Damrong explained,

But there were also several problems that had to be resolved. The first was the old view that women should not read *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* because it is an obscene book.... The obscene wording is found only in passages from the vulgar (*chaloeisak*) versions which probably came to be inserted when the whole thing was assembled.... Hence if those common chapters were to be excised and replaced by other versions that are not obscene, it would result in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* becoming readable by both men and women without the former prejudice.⁸⁵

Damrong described four categories of changes he made while editing: deleting passages considered obscene; deleting ‘jokes that were improvised during recitation but are not funny on the printed page’; amending clumsy or erroneous link passages probably inserted by earlier editors; and amending obscure wording.⁸⁶ Damrong’s team toned down the ‘wondrous scenes’ describing lovemaking through metaphor, deleted the advice by mothers on how brides should feed their husbands for maximum performance, pruned the farcical scenes of lower cloths slipping off, droopy breasts dangling, and old men groping, and excised many risqué one-liners.

Buddhism

The two largest deletions made by Prince Damrong on grounds that the jokes were not funny both concern Buddhism. The first comes in the second chapter at the cremation of the fathers of Chang and Wanthon and concerns a funeral entertainment known variously as the Twelve-Language Chant (*suat sipsong phasa*), monk clowning (*jam uat phra*), or lay chanting (*suat kharuhat*). These performances

⁸⁴ Chotchuang and Khru Sepha 1998: 149, 119, 133, 118.

⁸⁵ Damrong, *Tamnan* II: 72.

⁸⁶ Damrong, *Tamnan* I: 30–1.

were laid on to entertain guests who kept the corpse company overnight on days before a cremation. They were once widespread and popular. The performers were originally monks but their participation was sternly banned by the Sangha Law of 1782.⁸⁷ Laymen took over, and although even this was technically banned, there were still specialist troupes in the 1930s, one headed by a future police general.⁸⁸ In the version in *KCKP*, the performers appear to be monks. They are high on liquor and ganja. They adopt roles as Thai, Mon, Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao, Khmer, Indian, and Farang. The content is highly scatological, and the audience loves it.

The second passage occurs where Chang ordains in order to make merit after Wanthong's cremation. This incident is retained in the Damrong version, but reduced to a short joke about Chang struggling with the initiation formula. The earlier version is much more elaborate. The abbot can find only a huge machete to shave what little hair Chang has on his bald pate. Chang gets tangled in his first attempt to don the robe. He gives a sermon which spoofs not only the ignorance of many monks but the absurdity of the plots of outer dramas (*lakhon nok*), and which reduces Chang's own mother to commenting, 'I have no faith. I'd rather feed dogs than make merit'.⁸⁹

Prince Damrong may indeed have judged that these two passages were 'not funny on the printed page,' but it is probably also significant that in his governmental career Prince Damrong helped to initiate the project to cleanse, standardize, and regulate the Buddhist order as a pillar of the emergent nation.

Kingship

At four points in the Original Story, the text confronts the question whether Phaen's abilities are powerful enough to defy the supreme authority of the king. In the Smith/Wat Ko version, the issue is resolved in favor of Phaen in all four cases. By the time of the Damrong edition, all four were changed.

The king stands at the apex of the *sakdina* order. His authority is based on his supreme merit accumulated in past generations. Phaen is born a commoner but becomes a man of power by studying the military arts, including supernatural abilities. The monks who teach the military arts are convinced their pupils can defy the monarch. In the first of these four instances, the teacher of Phaen's father, Khun Krai, asks Phaen in bewilderment how Krai let himself be executed by the king: 'I'm still disappointed that he died without putting up a fight. He must have lost his knowledge. Why didn't he come to see me? If anyone dared come after me, there'd be no match.' Phaen explains that his father had drunk the oath of

⁸⁷ Sangha Laws clause 10 (*KTSD*, IV: 226–7).

⁸⁸ Yai 2001; Choomsai 1991: 58–9, 197–8; Skilling 2002.

⁸⁹ *WK*: 1230.

allegiance and would not go back on his word, and hence renounced his mastery and allowed himself to be killed.⁹⁰ The vocabulary used (*tat sai* and *soem*) are technical terms within *saiyasat*. Khun Krai had the power to resist his execution, but chose not to use it.

After release from jail, Phaen visits the abbot of Wat Palelai, his old teacher, who is bewildered why Phaen languished in jail for a dozen years ‘What was up? Didn’t you have faith in your knowledge? Or was it fun sleeping in the jail? Why didn’t you escape to find me? If they came after you, I’d put on a yantra cloth and fight back. Why did you sit doing nothing, not following what I taught you?’⁹¹ Phaen replies ‘I was not lacking in power,’ but again explains he had given an oath that he would not escape and refused to break his word.

When Phaen and Wanthon are outlaws in the forest, and Wanthon becomes pregnant, Phaen decides to give himself up. He reasons, ‘If I give myself up, rather than being captured deep in the forest, the punishment should be light and I can create obstruction with the power of my knowledge’.⁹² When brought before the king, ‘Khun Phaen intoned a mantra he had decided on in advance, and blew it with faith in its lore. The king’s mood relaxed, and he turned his face towards them.’ The king promptly absolves Phaen of the serious charge of murdering two higher officials.⁹³

When Phaen’s son Phra Wai goes to seek pardon for his mother, he prepares himself with a full complement of lore:

He composed his mind, turned his face to the east, chanted the Great Beguiler mantra to charm and inspire love, put a Pokhwam with a powerful face in his mouth, pronounced a sacred Kasak verse displaying mastery and a verse of Lord Narai transformed into a floating omen, and recited prayers to his powerful teachers for the king’s anger to recede. He waited until he felt his breath through his left nostril, and then crawled into the jeweled audience hall.⁹⁴

The king ‘felt very sorry inside for Muen Wai on account of the power of the mantra’, and promptly issues a pardon (though it turns out to be too late).

⁹⁰ WK: 175.

⁹¹ WK: 898.

⁹² WK: 672.

⁹³ In the parallel scene in the First Sequel, the effect is the same: ‘When the king, pinnacle of the resplendent city, saw the three arrive, his mood improved and he took pity on them as he would children in the womb. / Because of the force of the powerful mantra, the king’s attitude became warmer and more sympathetic.’ (III, 228, 19)

⁹⁴ WK: 1201.

In two of these examples, Phaen's powers work on the king; in the other two, Phaen rationalizes why he declined to exercise his powers. Between the Wat Ko text and Prince Damrong's version, all four of these incidents were deleted or modified to become less explicit. In the first example about Khun Krai, just a single half-line with the technical phrase for renouncing *saiyasat* power was removed. In the second, about Khun Phaen's time in jail, the whole scene was cut. In the third, on Phaen's surrender, the line in which Phaen claims ability to 'create obstruction with the power of my knowledge' was deleted. In the fourth, Wai's request for a pardon, the panoply of lore is much reduced, and the explanation that the king was moved 'on account of the mantra' have been removed.⁹⁵

The Smith/Wat Ko version came from a palace text of the Fourth Reign. Apparently at that time, Phaen's defiance of royal power was not found objectionable. But by the era of royal absolutism, this equanimity seems to have disappeared.⁹⁶

Conclusion

The career of *KCKP* probably began around 1600 in a folk tradition of troubadour performance and grew with the telling over many decades. The story was later adopted by the court and adapted to court tastes.

The appearance of Phaen and the Chiang Mai campaign in *The Testimony of the Inhabitants of the Old Capital*, and the conclusion that *KCKP* is based on a true story from around 1500, should be treated with some skepticism. On the internal evidence of the poem, the most likely origin of the story is around 1600, possibly from a true story of the execution of a young woman. The best evidence for when the poem began to accumulate in the oral tradition is the mid to late seventeenth century.

KCKP seems to have developed in four parts. The Original Story probably began from the execution which serves as the climax, and was gradually lengthened by popular demand into a tale with many episodes. The development took place mainly in the folk tradition of oral performance, though large parts were revised by the court in the nineteenth century. This Original Story forms chapters 1–23, 35–36 of the Damrong edition.

⁹⁵ The significance of these changes is considered in more detail in Baker and Pasuk, 'The revolt of Khun Phaen' (forthcoming).

⁹⁶ Writing in the 1980s, Kukrit (2000: 213) was so appalled by Phaen's attempt to use a mantra on the king in the third of the above incidents that he claimed this effrontery was the cause of Phaen's subsequent misfortune.

A First Sequel began to develop in the folk tradition in late Ayutthaya, probably based on an alternative version of the Phaen tale adapted with Phaen's son in the leading role. This sequel was inserted inside the Original Story (chapters 24 to 34) with some craft, and revised by court authors during the nineteenth century to remove virtually all traces of its folk origins. Two other sequels, also in the court style and probably composed in the nineteenth century, were added at the end.

As a result of this history, *KCKP* has two distinct modes. The folk mode has the setting, characters, and concerns of the provincial town, and style suitable for oral performance as popular entertainment. The court mode has the setting, characters, and concerns of the capital and court, and style suitable for court performance and literary appreciation. These modes are both separate in parts of the tale, but also layered on one another in others.

Although the original folk version of *KCKP* has not survived, enough traces remain to reconstruct its main characteristics.⁹⁷ The king is portrayed, in Prince Bidyalankara's phrase, as 'a queer and thoughtless autocrat',⁹⁸ a figure of terrible power. Officials are flaccid, cowardly, and corrupt. The rich (as represented by Chang) are crass buffoons. The hero is born a commoner, tipped into poverty by the king, and repeatedly disadvantaged by Chang with his money and court connections, but raises himself up by his own brilliance and learning, and uses his

⁹⁷ The western work which most resembles *KCKP* is the legend of Robin Hood. A big difference, however, is that the history of the Robin Hood legend is relatively well documented, and has been extensively studied in recent years. There is no clear identification of an original man named Robin Hood. In the earliest sources, mostly lawcourt records from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the name is used as an epithet for criminals and outlaws. By the fifteenth century, ballads appeared all over England in which Robin Hood is a rebel against the church and the nobility. He robs and he refuses to serve the king. He often appears as a trickster who defies authority. He lives in the forest and wears a green costume that recalls a wild, anti-civilizational spirit-figure in Anglo-Saxon legends. From the late fifteenth century, playlets about Robin Hood were performed at local festivals, especially the May festival, often with Robin Hood as the May King, a lord of misrule. In this era Robin Hood was 'the hero who stands for an alternative and natural force of lordship, one who has the will and the power not only to elude but also to resist and if necessary destroy the agents of the world of legalism, of finance, and of regulation' (Knight 1944: 81). The authorities began to suppress these performances in the late sixteenth century, and imposed a total ban in 1592. In the seventeenth century, there was a deliberate attempt to bring this rebellious tradition under control. Dramas appeared in which Robin Hood was given a noble background, and his exploits began to lose their rebellious character. He became an earl fallen on hard times. He no longer fought against the church and the power structure, but against individual corrupt officials. He no longer defied the king, but appealed to the king to help suppress a corrupt enemy and restore his rightful position. By the eighteenth century Robin Hood had also become a nationalistic figure, representing values of charity, bravery, and moral uprightness which were supposed to form the national character. By the twentieth century, this tamed version had evolved into a tale largely for children. See especially Knight 1994.

⁹⁸ Bidyalankarana 1941: 13.

mastery of lore to protect himself and others. Ultimately his powers are superior even to those of the king. The heroine, both beautiful and strong-willed, is battered by the machinations of Chang, the inequalities of gender, and the terrible power of the king. When the themes of political and sexual rivalry interlock, the heroine becomes a sacrificial victim, ending the story in a shocking tragedy.

After the story was gradually adopted by the court, possibly beginning in the eighteenth century, it underwent successive stages of revision, culminating in the standard printed edition of 1917–8. In these revisions, authors made the work more comfortable and familiar for the court audience by thinning down the folkish elements, and adding elements of genteel culture. They also collectively changed the meanings of the work over time. They blurred the contrasts between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, good and evil. They undermined the simple heroism of Phaen by making him violent and blood-thirsty. They converted the heroine into a more submissive, helpless figure. They disrupted the plot by distancing the denouement from its build-up, hence obscuring the political meanings.

The political landscape of the folk version is very similar to that found in works of folk tradition anywhere – a local hero pitted against the highest authority. The underlying theme of struggle against wealth and authority was probably a significant factor in *KCKP*'s enormous popularity in late Ayutthaya. By the twentieth century, this political aspect had been almost totally obscured by successive revisions. Indeed, in his ‘new reading’ of *KCKP* written in the 1970s, the royalist litterateur-politician Kukrit Pramoj could imagine Phaen as a shining example of loyalty to the established order:

The loyalty of the characters in *KCKP* can be used as a model for officials and people in general. It is an ultimate form of loyalty without question. Even severe royal punishment does not make the loyalty of any of the characters diminish. They continue to remain loyal. Moreover, several of the characters have command of lore and supernatural powers, including keeping protective spirits. But when they must face royal punishment, their skills – whether from mantra or various amulets or spirits – totally lose their force, and provide no protection against the royal will.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Kukrit 2000: 21.

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