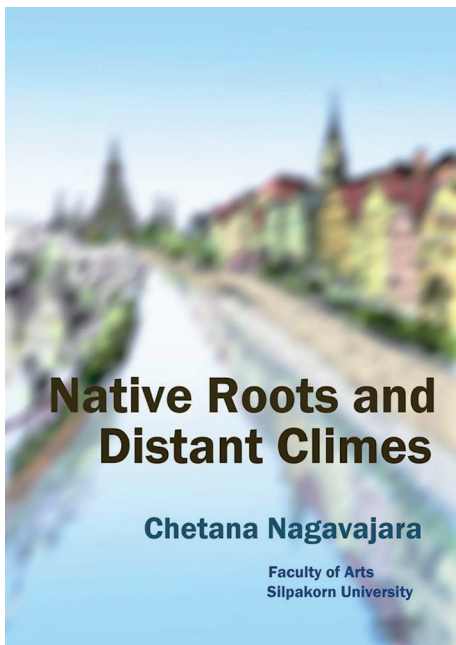


failed marriages in Germany, Sweden, or the UK. In fact, I think this paradox is what attracts me most to Patcharin's book. Reading *Love, Money and Obligation* helped me to understand the lives of my students at Payap University, a few of whom have *farang* step-fathers. Without exception students talking privately to me honor their step-fathers, deeply appreciating their kindness and the opportunities extended them through their mother's marriage. Some of these opportunities were financial and helped them pay school fees and travel. But most importantly they appreciate the love and affection of a father. This is quite different than the Western stereotypical step-parent, who is resented by their step-children.

The gist of Patcharin's story is that Thailand has somehow created room for a transnational family form in a remote rural village like Na Dokmai. Indeed such relationships may perhaps start as a transaction in a bar. But, as Patcharin points out, the story goes beyond a financial transaction, or "fee for service." The longings of the human heart are much more complicated. And it is nice that a rural village like Na Dokmai reminds us of this.

Tony Waters

Native Roots and Distant Climes: Collected Essays and Reviews in English and German (2014-2020) by Chetana Nagavajara. Nakhon Pathom: Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, 2020. ISBN: 978-616-572-756-3. 350 Baht.



Chetana Nagavajara, Professor emeritus of Silpakorn University, Bangkok/Nakhon Pathom, is an eminent comparatist, who has articulated intercultural hermeneutics using introspection coupled with capacity for objective assessment, supplemented by philosophical reflections of current affairs and trends through reflexive anthropology.

This review is focused on five of the six essays about "Native Roots" that portray aspects of Thailand's culture and history to reaffirm the open-mindedness of these hedonistic people inhabiting the "Land of Smiles" who do not look upon "others" as "aliens", but in the Buddhist way of perceiving them as "being of this world" (Pali: *satta-loka*).

In the essay entitled "The Others as Our Betters: Case Studies from Thailand" the point is stressed that Buddhism rejects racial distinction. The Thai have learned to benefit from the cultural heritage of "others" such as through the coexistence of Buddhist and

Brahman ceremonial practices at state functions. At the behest of King Rama III (reigned 1824-1851), the “Verses Describing Peoples Speaking 32 Languages” were composed.

Thai classical musicians love performing the composition known as “Songs in Twelve Vernaculars” that imitate the styles of twelve nations. Highlighted are the Mon as an ethnic group that sought refuge in Thailand and are distinguished by high civilization, both in material and spiritual terms, who were welcoming Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka triggering the rise of *Theravada* Buddhism. The greatest debt owed to the Mon lies in the creation of the new order of *Dhammayuttika Nikaya*.

Prince Mongkut’s model was Mon monks in Thailand who were held in high esteem. From them were taken over not only their exemplary code of conduct, but also their monastic robe. After ascending the throne as King Rama IV in 1851, the *Dhammayuttika Nikaya* was strengthened. Its disciplinary seriousness and its scholarly pursuit paved the way for the new movement of “forest monks” that has made Thailand the center of devout Buddhism appreciated by scholars and practitioners. Crucial is the readiness of the host country to recognize the “others” as their “betters”, in the spiritual domain as well.

Also, it is recognized that the integration of Chinese immigrants into Thai society has been more successful than elsewhere. The success must be attributed to the Sino-Thai themselves, who identified quickly with the adoptive land. Patriotism is not the prerogative of the native-born; patriotism towards the adoptive country is much in evidence, too.

In his essay entitled “Restoration as Re-creation: The Performative Role of the Word in the Context of Thai Culture” (pp. 55-94) Chetana Nagavajara addresses the significance of oral tradition in preserving the cultural heritage of the Thai. This essay is based on the rationale that the world of orality thrives on “improvisation”. Thai folk entertainments – such as a verse repartee called *Lamtad* or a folk theatre called *Likay* – are the bedrock of improvisation. Much of Thailand’s great “literature” is improvised, never recorded, is appreciated and assimilated by the living public. The alliterative prose poetry, known in Thai as *rai*, is masterly. Rhythmic vitality naturally facilitates memorization.

The restoration of the Ayutthayan literary heritage drew on local traditions as well as foreign inspirations. The Thai allowed themselves to be enlightened by Indic, Chinese, Khmer and European intellectual and cultural wealth. Restoration and recreation went hand in hand, as evident from the preservation of such works as *Maha Chat Kamluang*, *Thawathosamat* and *Yuan Phai*, all of which date from the 15th century.

Thailand’s brand of “renaissance” thus did not take the form of a rediscovery of ancient civilizations as in the West, but was an act of forging continuity with its immediate past. King Rama III had matters committed to stone and let “the word” carry the message, turning this treasure house of knowledge and wisdom over to the “public domain”.

The all too familiar Buddhist precept of *hiri ottappa*, meaning “shame of doing evil”, transferred to the political arena at the national level, given the latest mass political demonstrations, can throw light on the performative role of the word. Spoken theatre has definitely advanced with rallies reconstituting the political speech as a

conveyance of public spirit and moral integrity. The “central stage” became an “open university”. Issues related to government policies and actions were discussed rationally, supported by concrete evidence and theoretical acuity. The value of those offerings by the “open university” far outgrew the purpose of the anti-government protest. In short, the performative role of the word can become effective only if it is buttressed by moral rectitude and commitment to the common good.

The essay entitled “Performance as Criticism – Criticism as Performance” (pp. 95-139) presents reflections based on the author’s life-long engagement as a critic especially of musical and theatrical performances in Thailand and abroad.

The research team of the Thailand Research Fund with Chetana Nagavajara serving as project leader discovered that musical contests, especially among “*Piphat*” ensembles, could be considered a phenomenon that encourages “*music to criticize music*”. The dialogue between two ensembles can be appreciated in terms of reciprocal *criticism*: artists criticizing artists; artists creating works of art to criticize works of art; art criticizing art. The musicians are in themselves critics – they must be able to be *critical of themselves*. To be able to admit defeat in public requires a high degree of what is known in Buddhism as “*mudita*”, pleasure at the well-being or success of others.

In analyzing a Thai literary and dramatic gem dating from the mid-19th century, the verse drama *Phra Malethethai* by the female poet Khun Suwan, which defies normal theorizing on the subject of parody, the author’s research resulted in evidence that the poetress had been trying to prove that the richness in sound of the Thai language can be exploited to create a verse dance drama, whose meaning is at the level of being *suggestive* rather than overt. Khun Suwan exhibited an immense erudition having composed, as well, a verse tale entitled *One Hundred Versions of Unaruth* by weaving other literary works into her own narrative.

Writing the essay entitled “Mourning Becomes the Thai People: October 13th and an Artistic Renaissance” (pp. 161-174) was triggered by the passing of the highly revered monarch, H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, in 2016. In and through it Chetana Nagavajara recalls that the exhibition “Portrait of the King: The Art of Iconography”, organized by the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre in 2009, bore witness to the tension between the traditional realistic portraiture and the contemporary attempts at creative deviations, which contain an immense potential that can propel the contemporary Thai art circle to the level of a “hermeneutic society”, a society that knows how to interpret, in other words, a thinking society.

October 13th has, indeed, rekindled that dormant poetic fervor. The social media abound in poetic contributions. Memories of the fatherly kindness of the late King find expression in verse form. A poetic renaissance is afoot, mourning the departed monarch by way of poetry is a spontaneous act of creativity.

The essay entitled “Research and Cross-cultural Enrichment” (pp. 175-223) draws on the long, continuous and rich experience of Chetana Nagavajara in doing research on German language, literature and culture, mainly from a comparative perspective, even after retirement.

German grammar contains elements that strike foreigners as something special. One example is the usage of the first subjunctive form in indirect speech. Here is an

antidote against lies, deception, propaganda and PR tricks. Using the example of the German sentence: “*Sie sagten, XYZ sei ein großer politischer Führer*“ (They said XYZ was a great political leader), it is evident that it contains an inherent potential for its own criticism. An assertion is reported, and in indirect speech. The first subjective form compels one to examine the credibility of the statement.

Regrettably Thai literature proved to be ineffective as an instrument of drastic political change, for imbued with the spirit of Buddhist philosophy, those young rebels became conciliatory and soon practiced the “*dhana parami* “ in forgiving their enemy.

The author’s analysis of the instrumental composition of the Thai classical orchestra, with emphasis on the unique role played by the second xylophone (*ranad thum*), reflects Thai mentality, whereby leadership is exercised by those *apparently* assuming secondary or even subservient positions.

In his German essays, grouped in English under the heading of “From Tübingen to Berlin: Essays” (pp. 369-461), Chetana Nagavajara relates his contributions to scholarly events in Germany.

The author maintains that profound intellectual as well as scholarly exchange is a dialogic culture. He has posited research *as culture*, given his own experience confirming that human-centered modes of operation remain the best way to further cultural enrichment.

In the 83rd year of his life, Chetana Nagavajara kind of took stock of his published works, as of May 2020.

Karl Weber