

# A Note on Letters from Jit Phoumisak to William J. Gedney, 1953–1958

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**ABSTRACT**—William J. Gedney, the leading scholar of Thai linguistics in the United States in the last half of the 20th century, and Jit Phoumisak, at the time an undergraduate at Chulalongkorn University, established an unexpected and productive working relationship in the early 1950s in Bangkok. That relationship was forcibly ended at the start of 1954 when Jit was accused as a leftist and suspended from his studies at Chulalongkorn University, and when Gedney was required to return to the United States due to the loss of his visa. Their friendship and concern for each other did not end. They met one or two times over the ensuing years prior to Jit's death, and, it turns out, they exchanged letters, six of which were among Gedney's effects at his death in 1999. These made their way into the University of Michigan Library's Special Collections in 2009, but they have escaped notice by scholars until recently. This brief note introduces the letters and puts them into the context of the lives of the two men at the time of their writing.

Six personal letters written by Jit Phoumisak to William J. Gedney between 1953 and 1958 have been found in the Gedney Collection at the University of Michigan Libraries. The letters came into the collection separately from the bulk of its items, most of which were acquired by Gedney in Thailand after 1947 and donated to the university as long ago as 1975. The letters were included among personal documents after his death in 1999 and not singled out for attention. Their historical importance was not immediately recognized, and they were not donated to the university until 2009. They turned up in early 2021 in an internet search while this writer was working with other of Gedney's postdoctoral students, searching for overlooked items from his lifetime of scholarly work.<sup>1</sup>

William J. Gedney (1915–1999) was a worldwide leading scholar and teacher of historical-comparative Tai linguistics. He grew up in southwestern Washington in a family of teachers of modest means. He graduated from Whitman College in 1934, having majored in English. He wrote for the college newspaper and was awarded honors for his senior thesis. After graduation, he taught high school and began studying

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<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan Catalog entry: <https://search.lib.umich.edu/catalog/record/990073823270106381?query=chit+phumisak%2C+letters&library=All+libraries>. The letters can be obtained by outside researchers who follow the library's guidelines for access. <https://www.lib.umich.edu/locations-and-hours/special-collections-research-center/access-our-materials>. The letters are included here in an online appendix: [https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pub\\_jss/article/download/256328/172566/938714](https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pub_jss/article/download/256328/172566/938714)

linguistics at University of Chicago summer linguistics institutes. He was drafted into the military in the Second World War and assigned to a U.S. Army language unit in New York city where he began working on the Thai language with a group of linguists tasked with improving U.S. defense and diplomatic capabilities. He enrolled in the graduate program in linguistics at nearby Yale University, where he completed a PhD in Sanskrit studies in 1947. Yale subsequently tasked him with collecting Thai publications for their fledgling Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) program and funded him for two years.

Jit Phoumisak<sup>2</sup> (1930–1966) was a scholar, writer, and political activist in the 1950s and 1960s in Thailand. He wrote scholarly and polemical works on Thai history, etymology, and philology, as well as many poems and songs. Jit's father was a Thai government civil servant; his mother was sometimes at home, sometimes involved in intermediate level retail businesses. Jit's father served in the Thai government's civil service contingent in Cambodia during the Thai occupation of its western provinces from 1941 to 1946, and Jit's early secondary education happened there. One does not find much in the way of specifics about that schooling, but he emerged from it with a reasonable command of English, Thai, French and Khmer, a moderately empirical mindset, a passion for literature and poetry, and an exposure to anti-colonial nationalism from a Khmer point of view.<sup>3</sup> In October 1958 he was arrested along with other writers, journalists, and activists by the new military government. Following his release from prison, without trial or judgement, in late December 1964, he followed his former fellow political prisoners to secluded camps in Sakon Nakhon province, where he was shot dead on 5 May 1966. His academic and literary works were discovered and published during the student movement of the 1970s. His songs, in particular, were sung by college students and well-known musicians as a rallying cry of the opposition at that time and more recently during the youth uprising of 2020–2021. His status today is akin to that of a folk hero, an icon of freedom, intellectual integrity, scholarship, talent, and resistance.

Gedney and Jit met in 1951. Gedney had been in Thailand for about three years, having newly completed his 600-page dissertation that same year—"Indic Loan Words in Spoken Thai." His personal intellectual goal was to expand his expertise in the written language and its Sanskrit roots. He immersed himself in Bangkok's world of Thai literature and language studies, cultivating relationships with Phaya Anuman Rajadhon, faculty members at Chulalongkorn University, and Bangkok writers and literary figures. He traveled frequently to Cambodia and learned to speak and read the language, refining his discoveries about Indic loans in modern and ancient Thai. His Yale funding ran out after a year or two, and rather than return to the U.S., he opted to stay in Bangkok and supported himself through translation work, much of which came to him through the U.S. embassy and the then nascent U.S. intelligence and military advisory services.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> There are two spellings in English for both the first name and the surname. Jit/Chit for the first name; Phumisak/Phoumisak for the surname. In these letters one finds only Phoumisak for the surname, with Jit the most frequent rendering of the first name. I use Jit Phoumisak throughout. WorldCat uses Čhit Phūmisak.

<sup>3</sup> Craig J. Reynolds, "Jit Poumisak in Thai History"; Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*.

<sup>4</sup> John Hartmann, "A Jit-Gedney Dossier of Facts"; Reynolds, "Jit Poumisak in Thai History"; Thanon

Jit was in his early twenties at the time. He had recently graduated from Bangkok's premier prep school, Triam Udom, and was starting his first semester at Chulalongkorn University in the Faculty of Arts in June of 1951.

By the time he appeared on the Chula campus, he stood out from most of his classmates because of his outspokenness. While still a Mathayom student, he and a few like-minded peers had founded and published their own works in a short-lived literary magazine (Thassana วรรณสนะ)<sup>5</sup>. In June of 1950, around the time he met Gedney, he had published an essay in the magazine that was an implicit critique of his Thai literature professor about a single word in the classical Thai poem *Lilit Phra Lo* (ลิลิตพระลอ).<sup>6</sup> He drew on his fluency in Khmer and personal knowledge of Cambodian life from his middle school days in Battambang to disambiguate a term that was misread by previous Thai scholars, a Khmer loan, *pha-ok* 'fermented fish', known as *plā rā* (ปลาร้า) in Thai.<sup>7</sup> A few faculty staff saw him as someone with promise, and two,<sup>8</sup> who already had a relationship with Gedney, had the idea of pairing them up. As Gedney later told it to students and friends, Jit needed a place to live and some financial support; his and Gedney's language and literature interests were very similar; and the two Chula teachers felt that Jit would be able to answer many of the Thai language questions that still came up from Gedney, relieving them of that burden. It is reasonable to think that they also hoped an association with Gedney would be good for Jit's demeanor as a scholar. It mostly seems to have worked. Gedney was able to find a place for Jit, and the translation business grew. They both advanced as scholars and became close friends and coworkers, living with Gedney's common-law wife over the next three or so years.

Most of the translation work was of news service reports and government documents. However, the best known today of the projects they undertook together was a translation of the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx, a commission for the U.S. Embassy and/or the CIA. Craig Reynolds reports that the project originated with the then U.S. ambassador, William Donovan, who is said to have thought that the Thai establishment were still somewhat naive about Marxism. Gedney agreed to the project on the condition that he be allowed to employ a native speaker as an assistant, and thus, ironically, the U.S. Embassy and the CIA contributed both intellectually and financially to Jit's development as an historical materialist.<sup>9</sup> There has also been persistent speculation about Gedney's political opinions at the time. What role did he have in Jit's intellectual evolution? Was he a Marxist? The Thai police apparently thought so, and Reynolds reports that as late

Nangsū, "Khui kap sāttrāchān Winlām Čhē Ketnī": Āchān farang khōng Čhit Phūmisak".

<sup>5</sup> Internet sources also name Jit as a managing editor and a participant in the financing for this periodical.

<sup>6</sup> Čhit Phūmisak, "Khwām pen mā khōng plā phōk [plā pha'ok] nai lilit Phralō", pp 40-43. For the date of Jit's original article see *Thanon Nangsū*, same volume, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Bickner, "Reflections on a literary dispute between Jit Phumisak and Phra Worawetphisit", in *Papers from the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, edited by Marlys Macken, 87-96, Tempe, AZ: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> ม.ร.ว.สุมนชาติ สวัสดิ์กุล (Sumonchāt Sawatdikul), สมจิต ศึกษมัต (Somchit Surksamat), from *Thanon Nangsū*, "Khui kap sāttrāchān Winlām Čhē Ketnī", p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Reynolds, "Jit Poumisak in Thai History"; *Thanon Nangsū*, "Khui kap sāttrāchān Winlām Čhē Ketnī".

as 1980, when Reynolds interviewed the man who had been a lead investigator at the time, he was still sure of it.

Later in life when talking about this time and his reputed Marxism, Gedney was always quick and definite in his denials. Yes, as a young man in the depression era thirties, he was sympathetic to the plight of the working man, but, no, never a communist. No one who knew him doubted that. It turns out, however, that in saying this he omitted mention of facts about his work as an undergraduate that might have led to more nuanced questions. This, too, has just been recently discovered, turned up in the same bibliographic searches that found the letters, small items from his student record. He appears to have done concentrated study on Marxism and on communism in the American fiction of that era. He was confident enough of his command of the subtleties of dialectical materialism to display it in a book review that appeared in his student newspaper, and his senior work on communism in American fiction earned him honors in English in 1934.<sup>10</sup> In his discussion of the little that can be definitively said about the origins of Jit's communism, Reynolds reports that he was familiar with and enjoyed citing the fiction of the American author Howard Fast. Knowing now of Gedney's undergraduate interests, one has to wonder if that influenced Jit to any degree. Gedney reported that their conversations about politics mostly came about on an item-by-item basis from the news of the day, dinner table conversation. He recalled that they did not much otherwise talk about politics, not from a theoretical perspective.<sup>11</sup> One expects now, however, in light of this new information, that Gedney's undergraduate command of Marxist concepts, albeit twenty years in the past, must have come up as they talked, certainly as they worked on the translation of the *Manifesto*.

After having been chosen as the lead editor of the 1953 Chulalongkorn Day memorial volume for the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Jit included several radical articles on Thai society and politics written by himself and others. A number of the articles and Jit's proposed cover art were censored by the University as either lacking respect or for being overly leftist, and publication of the yearbook was suspended. At a meeting in a university auditorium about the issue, but at which he had not been invited to speak, Jit attempted to explain and defend his editorial decisions. He was knocked from the stage by other students and injured—the infamous *yon bok* (โยนบก) incident. The national police became involved. The university immediately suspended Jit from study, eventually extending that for a full year.

By this time, Gedney and Jit had become collaborators on the translation work and mutual supporters as each pursued individual literary and research interests. Gedney had become something of a mentor to Jit, and immediately after *yon bok* he attempted to come to Jit's defense with the Chula faculty and with Bangkok newspapers. This was distinctly unsuccessful and eventuated in his losing his visa and the right to stay in Thailand.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Whitman College *Pioneer*, 26 October 1934, p. 3; 31 May 1935, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Thanon Nangsū, “Khui kap sāttrāchān Winlām Čhē Ketnī”.

<sup>12</sup> Mitrūamrop, “Chīwāprawat bāng tōn khōng Čhit Phūmisak”; Reynolds, “Jit Poumisak in Thai History”, pp. 30-3; also Hartman, “A Jit-Gedney Dossier of Facts”.



Both men's personal and family arrangements were seriously upset by the fallout to the events of October, 1953. Jit lost his residence and his employment as an associate in Gedney's translation business. His sister, newly graduated as a pharmacist, who had been working outside of Bangkok, was enlisted to come to his financial aid.<sup>13</sup> His education was threatened, as he feared that the suspension might eventually force him to give up on a Chula degree and start over at another university. There was also the problem of being an official leftist and suspected communist. For his part, Gedney was not at all prepared to leave Thailand. He was not officially married; his wife had no passport or visa; she had four children, two of whom were occasionally living with them, two of whom were with her ex-husband, and none of them would be able to accompany their mother to the United States. Gedney had no job there, no residence.<sup>14</sup>

Both were able men, and both worked out solutions that satisfied necessity and allowed them to continue with their lives. Gedney found a teaching position in New York State in 1954 that led, in 1960, to work at University of Michigan training new U.S. Peace Corps volunteers for Thailand, which then became the permanent position from which he retired in 1980. Jit shows in these letters how he marshaled his personal and family resources to both contest and survive the situation with the University. The letters offer a first-person account of his experiences negotiating with the University, his interactions with the police, and his efforts to find employment and a place to live. It will take a historian's eye to see if they significantly add to or change what is known about that.

The letters also throw some light on the relationship that existed between the two men, through the content of what is said, through Jit's use of pronouns, and his handling of material that might elicit deference. Given their education and age difference and the facts of Thai culture, one might expect that Jit's choice of pronouns and politeness indicators would show him as student, Gedney as professor. Instead, Jit's pronoun choices (*phom*/ผม, *raw*/เรา, *khun*/คุณ) show that he chose to relate to Gedney as an equal. His prose and the way he tells stories in the letters similarly show no special deference. He is respectful, but also quite assertive, not shy about instructing and contradicting Gedney or otherwise expressing himself.

The first letter was written from Nong Khai in May 1953. It is the only letter of the six written before *yon bok* and Gedney's departure from Thailand, when neither of them was dealing with Jit's suspension from Chula or the Thai government's refusal to extend Gedney's visa. Jit is traveling, looking to purchase palm leaf manuscripts. He has had a communication from Gedney, and he clarifies for him that he is using his own money and has his own purposes in buying these items (see excerpt). The trip is going well; he has found a manuscript that particularly pleases him — *Sang Sinxay* (สังข์ศิลป์ชัย).<sup>15</sup> He

<sup>13</sup> Some of his contemporaries disagree about the need for this. They thought that Jit could have been more frugal, living like other students in dormitories and eating at student restaurants, that his ego was involved in his concern for having more income and a house. Thamsook Numnonda, personal communication.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, "Jit Poumisak in Thai History", Hartmann, "A Jit-Gedney Dossier of Facts"; Rakchat Phatharaphak, personal communication.

<sup>15</sup> An epic poem from Laos. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sang\\_Sinxay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sang_Sinxay) and the references included there, and in Thai: [th.wikipedia.org/wiki/สังข์ศิลป์ชัย](https://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/สังข์ศิลป์ชัย)

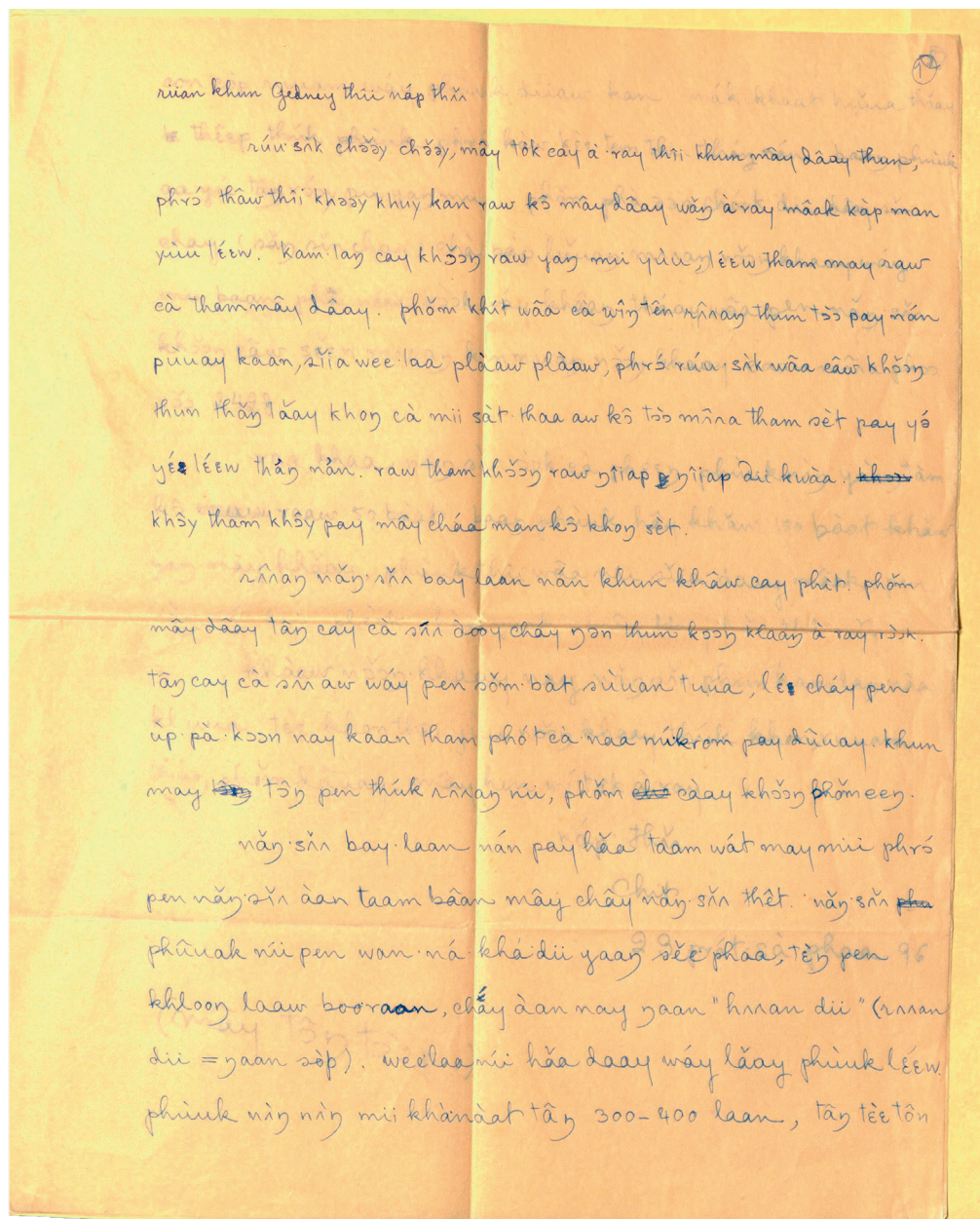


Figure 1. Excerpt from Letter 1, Nong Khai, May 1953.

"I feel pretty calm, not upset about your not getting the grant [that you applied for] because, as we have said to each other in the past, we don't hope for a lot from that sort of thing. We still have our energy and our sense of purpose, so why would we not be able to get done what we intend? I think that putting a lot of energy into chasing future grant money is just going to make us ill, a pure waste of time, because my sense is that all the grant funders are only going to have confidence in us when we have already wrapped up a lot of work. We'll be better off to quietly concentrate on the work, finish it a little at a time, and in not too long it will be done.

About the palm leaf manuscripts, you misunderstand me. I'm not interested in using any sort of grant money to buy them. I want to buy them for my personal collection and to use them also in creating a dictionary. You don't have to worry about this; I'm spending my own money.

One does not find palm leaf manuscripts at temples because they are books that were read at home, not used for sermons. Works of this sort are in the See Phaa (see phaa) style, written as old style long form verse. They were read at funerals. I have found quite a few of them, each with 300-400 leaves from start to finish bound together in a single volume ..." (Author's translation)

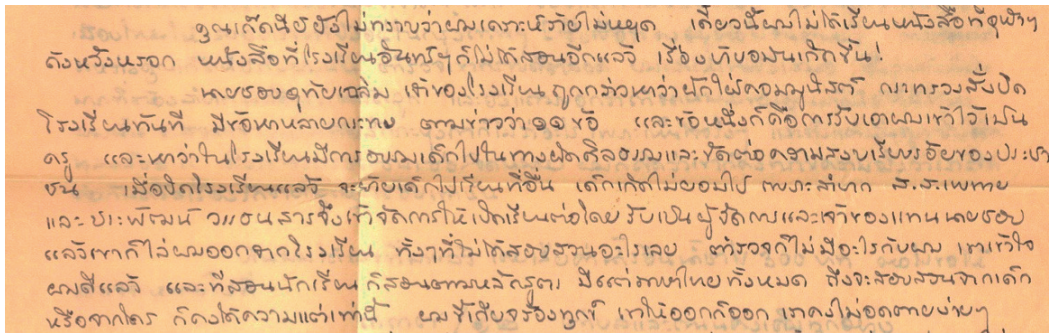


Figure 2. Excerpt from Letter 4, Bangkok, July 1954.

"I have not yet begun to tell you about how bad my situation is. I am not in school at Chulalongkorn as I had hoped to be. And I am no longer teaching at Indara Suksaa (โรงเรียนอินทราสุกษา) school. The situation has gone completely crazy.

Mr. Chōp Uthaichalerm (ชอบ อุทัยเฉลิม), the owner of the school, was accused of harboring a communist and the Ministry ordered the immediate closing of the school. They included several chamber pots worth of accusations. According to the news there were eleven issues, and one of those was that he had brought me on as a teacher, that the school had provided instruction that was at variance with community moral standards and in opposition to the peace and order of the citizenry. They declared the closing of the school and were getting ready to have students transfer to other schools, but the students said it was a hardship on them, and they refused to go. Parliamentary representatives Phē-thai [เทพาย, probably เทพาย ไชตินุชิต] and Praphat Wannasān (ประพัฒน์ วรธนสาร) then came on in place of Chōp as managers and owners to run the school. And they chased me out without any sort of inquiry. The police have no problem with me; they understand me very well. And the things I was teaching were straight out of the standard curriculum. It was just standard school Thai language course work. If they had asked the students, that's surely what they would have said. I don't have the energy to cry out about being wronged. If they want me out, I'm out. I won't starve so easily." (Author's translation)

instructs Gedney on the nature of the manuscripts and how they were used in ordinary life. He also comments on Gedney having received news of being turned down on a grant for which he had recently applied. Jit speaks as a colleague; he uses the pronoun 'we' (เรา) and says essentially that *we* should not expect to be appreciated until *we* have completed a great deal more work, and *we* will be best off just concentrating on the work. It is very possible he is repeating back to Gedney things that Gedney had said to him, but he is clearly casting himself as a partner with Gedney in their work.

The next three letters are likely to carry the most interest for historians and biographers of Jit. They were written in March, June, and July of 1954.<sup>16</sup> They deal with Jit's still ongoing negotiations with Chulalongkorn University about the terms of his suspension, his required meetings and conversations with the police, his efforts to find sustainable employment and a place to live, the possibility of transferring to another university, and his efforts to stay in contact with the children of Gedney's wife and deliver money received from the U.S. to them. They include the names of Santibaan (Special Branch) officers working on his case and individuals at Chulalongkorn University who presided over his matter and to whom he appealed for help. They list several of the jobs he had in those months, the names of his employers with comments about them, the circumstances of his losing employment, newly developing job prospects, the reluctance of old friends to meet with him or rent property to him, his concern about the small salaries he was able to command, the adjustments his mother and sister were making to be able to support him in his new circumstances.

<sup>16</sup> The July 1954 letter shows the date 1947, written in Jit's hand. The BE year at the time was 2497. It seems an unlikely error for someone as careful as Jit, but no other explanation suggests itself.



The three letters show that between March and June of 1954, he still had some hope Chula would reinstate him for the coming school year and that the Santibaan were telling him he had their support for that. One sees his hopes rise and fall and his eventual disappointment. One sees also his emotional involvement with Chula, the value that he put on having a Chula Arts degree even as he explored the possibility of a transfer to the Social Science Faculty at Thammasat University. He worried he would lose his first two years at Chula and be forced to start over; he speaks of that as a financial blow he should seek to avoid, even if it means switching majors and schools.

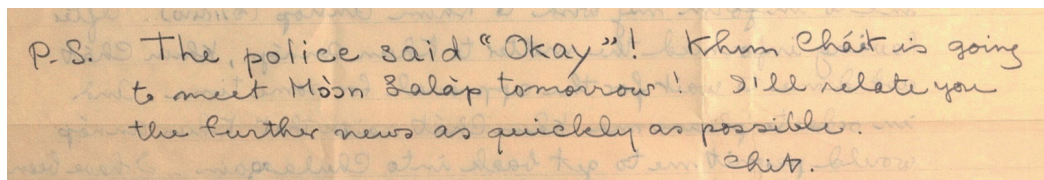


Figure 3. Excerpt from Letter 3, Bangkok, June 1954.

The letters say very little about what was happening with Gedney. It is clear that he was writing to Jit, too. Jit's comments suggest that his letters dealt with Jit and with matters concerning the children of Gedney's wife, who had stayed on in Thailand. In these letters written in the first seven months of the separation, Jit is concerned to assure Gedney that the money he is sending is getting to the children, and that he is full hearted in his willingness to act as go-between. Jit also goes out of his way to say kind things to Gedney's wife and to express his affection and respect for her. Readers may have seen their relationship characterized as contentious,<sup>17</sup> but here he is kind. He was at the source of the events that had forced her and Gedney to leave the country, and he likely held himself partially responsible for her separation from her children. He knew that pained her, and he could see that it was hard for the children. He seems to have genuinely wanted to comfort her.

One also sees in these letters Jit's sense of humor. He makes jokes about his smoking and the cheapness of the cigarettes he buys, his poverty. He mocks his abilities as a teacher of English and French and finds comfort in his relative superiority to other faculty members. He teases Choy, Gedney's wife, with references to moments they had together before she left Bangkok. One also sees him mock and complain of having to pay "tea money" in various circumstances.

The first of the letters is written in English with a postscript and a short note to Khun Choy in Thai. The second is written in standard Thai script. As a student at Chulalongkorn University, Jit was known for his precise, beautiful handwriting,<sup>18</sup> and one sees that in these letters. His writing is clearly legible with a consistently flat line from one margin to the other, small enough to fit several hundred words on a page.

The other letters are written in a script that utilizes the International Phonetic Alphabet, complete with tone markers on every syllable (see the excerpt from the 1953

<sup>17</sup> Phirom Phūmisak, *Khit thung ... mae*.

<sup>18</sup> Thamsook Numnonda, personal communication.

letter above.). It may be that this was done in part to tax the Santibaaan censors who had to read them, but it was also the continuation of a practice between the two of them.<sup>19</sup> Gedney's US students take it for granted that Gedney, as a "speech before writing" linguist from the postwar language teaching era, brought his phonetics to Jit, and that Jit acquired them from him. However, Gedney noted in interviews later in life that he did very little direct instruction of Jit, and Chula Arts students of that era and later are emphatic about the use of this script likely coming about because of the required phonetics classes at Chula that were routine at the time and for several years after.<sup>20</sup> From their point of view, the phonetics represent something from Chula that Jit brought to the relationship. Jit's mastery of the medium can also be seen as a demonstration of his competence and competitiveness. It was a boon for Gedney, too, as it allowed him to avoid the awkwardness of having to use his less fluent written Thai in their daily correspondence.

Jit's 1956 letter appears to have been written in response to one received from Gedney that resumed the correspondence after a break. It includes comments on two small issues that were likely presented in the letter to which he was responding—a book to which they had contributed<sup>21</sup> and a question about the pronunciation of certain tones. Jit has had news from Phaya Anuman that Gedney is a candidate for a Fulbright appointment in Sri Lanka, and he is effusively enthusiastic about that, thinking it will be an opportunity for them to see each other. He has received some money from Gedney for Choy's son, and he assures him that it will be delivered. He has been working as an English language tour guide in Bangkok, writing brochures and leading tours. His English has improved; he may be the best guide in the city. It is a very upbeat letter. He even imagines that his return to Chulalongkorn University in June, which he announces, will lead to a diploma in just one year and, unspoken by Jit, graduation with his entering class.

The final letter written in 1958 says nothing about the intervening time or Jit's life. The letter is all about the children of Gedney's wife and their circumstances in Bangkok. Gedney did indeed receive the Fulbright for Sri Lanka, but not until that year. This letter may have been sent to him in Sri Lanka. It sounds an alarm, that the children are in danger of being swallowed by Bangkok's 'merican (American) culture, that the money Gedney and Choy send is not getting to the children. He never mentions himself in the letter, and he closes with a direct admonition that Gedney needs to find a way to right things for the children. Sometime not too long after that—we don't know when—Gedney and Choy went to Bangkok from Sri Lanka and managed to take all the children with them to Kandy and then, when the Fulbright ended, back to the United States.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> William J. Gedney, personal communication.

<sup>20</sup> Thamsook Numnonda, Sunee Grima, personal communication.

<sup>21</sup> Included with the Jit-Gedney letters in the University of Michigan collection is a letter from Florence Barber to Jit dated 9 May 1956 with a copy to Gedney. This must be Gedney's copy. It references a book, *Riddles of Many Lands* by Carl Withers and Sula Benet, to which Jit and Gedney had contributed a set of translated riddles. Jit alludes to the matter in his letter, but it is not clear that he ever received the letter from the publisher.

<sup>22</sup> Rakchat Phatharaphak, personal communication.



Chula disappointed Jit at least one more time. He did not graduate with his class, and when he did finally graduate in June of 1958, he skipped the ceremony at which graduates received their diplomas from the king.<sup>23</sup> He is reported to have been very involved with writing and with discussing politics in study sessions with friends. He had by that time also completed and published through Thammasat University the work for which he is still best known, *The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* โฉมหน้าของศักดินาไทย ในปัจจุบัน (*Chōm Nā khōng Sakdinā Thai nai Paṭchuban*).<sup>24</sup>

Thai politics were changing around him as he wrote the 1958 letter. He and Gedney did not get to see each other when Gedney picked up Choy's children. Jit was arrested six weeks or so after the letter was sent, to be kept in prison without charge for the next six years.

It is a tribute to the meticulous care of the University of Michigan Southeast Asia and special collection librarians that these letters turned up on an internet search of bibliographic materials for Gedney. It is a tribute to his executors that the letters found their way to the university, and a tribute to Gedney himself that they survived fifty years in his file cabinet in an unblemished state. They were a lucky find. It will be up to others to say what they may contribute to better understanding Jit in a historical context, but they stand on their own with respect to filling in an understanding of Jit's humanity. They show him in moments of both hope and despair; they show his resilience and determination in negotiating with the police and Chulalongkorn University and in looking for work; they show his sense of humor; they show his concern for a friend, his wife, and her children.

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<sup>23</sup> Thamsook Numnonda; Reynolds, personal communication.

<sup>24</sup> Mitrūamrop, "Chīwāprawat bāng tōn khōng Chit Phūmisak".

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