

Nature and Function of Some Therapeutic Techniques in Thailand*

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Studying therapeutical techniques cross-culturally, we immediately face a dichotomy. Cosmopolitan, also called modern or Western, medicine is contrasted with folk medicine because the latter is considered to be based on beliefs difficult to verify with scientific methods. We observe the same dilemma when religious texts are studied as an issue separate from religious practices. "Incongruent" religious practices will then be grouped together under the label "folk" religion.

These observations have a bearing on the present study not only because folk religious and therapeutical practices appear to be related, but because questions about the general validity of labels containing the words "elite" or "folk" arise when, for example, the elite who manage the "normative religion" and dispense "modern therapy" not only participate but also initiate and propagate "folk religious and therapeutical practices." This applies especially in the present case where, aside from "modern public health care," "non-modern therapeutical techniques" still seem to fulfill some needs of Thai whether they are sophisticated urbanites or part of the rural population.

Before entering the discussion about nature and function of one specific therapeutical technique, the historical development of religion

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The data are based on fieldwork conducted in Thailand in 1960, 1971-72, and 1975.

and medicine in Thailand shall be briefly summarized.

There are no Thai records about their beliefs and customs during the three thousand years they lived in Southern China. Chinese chronicles and legends in Yunnan report of Thai kings abdicating in favor of their sons to become Buddhist monks (Carthew 1952: 1-28). This indicates a pervasion of Buddhist beliefs, but the records also mention animist practices based on beliefs in spirits. Lambert speaks, for example, of the worship of a "power-giving supreme energy in the form of a piece of cut stone" (1952: 39).

Thai records begin with the thirteenth century when the Thai moved south and the kingdom of Sukhothai gained supremacy in the territory now occupied by the Thai nation. Theravāda Buddhism became state religion but, on the same stone edict, King Rama Kamheng proclaims that a powerful mountain spirit should be propitiated, so that the Thai nation might not perish (Coedès 1924). In the conquered territories, Thai king began, furthermore, to employ court Brahmin who had previously served the Khmer kings. There must have been also court physicians and it can be assumed that medical care was available for those who could pay a trained physician. Reports about medical training before the nineteenth century are, however, scarce.

Practitioners would, in general, train their sons and relatives or eager young men would apprentice themselves to a master and, in serving him, learn his trade until they became his successors or until they had established a reputation of their own. Medical knowledge was, therefore, "handed down through individual training of pupils by skilled practitioners" (Zimmer 1948: 75). Medical training was also offered in monasteries.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in Thailand in the sixteenth century. Jesuits then founded the first hospital in the capital Ayuhdya in 1676. They were followed by the Dutch and the French in the seventeenth century. American missionaries came in 1818 and first taught Chinese in Sampeng. Not wishing to neglect the Thai, they began also to offer them medical help and treatment. A Thai would take an American missionary to be a physician and would consequently call him "*mo*."¹

The first vaccination for smallpox was administered by American missionaries in 1837 (Executive Committee 1930). In 1889, the first Faculty of Medicine was established in Thailand, as part of Chulalong-

1. Some Thai still call American missionaries "*mo*."

korn University, with its seat at Siriraj Hospital in Thonburi. The course of studies was extended to four years in 1902, to five years in 1911, and to six years in 1915. There are, however, still not enough trained physicians available to serve distant areas. A partial solution to this problem was found in dispatching mobile units to these areas.

There was and there is in the villages, therefore, demand, for example, for monks who have some knowledge of the healing arts which includes incantations and the exorcizing of evil spirits (Rajadhon 1961: 67) In the centuries without public health care, the majority of the population consulted also folk practitioners from almost every walk of life who drew their authority from their reputation of successful cures or the possession of a sacred textbook.

Numerous textbooks on diseases enabled, indeed, the literate to look up a cure for themselves or for those who asked for such service. Copies of these textbooks² have been collected and are now kept in the National Library in Bangkok. In Wat Jetubon, Bangkok, we find also, together with other information, therapeutical texts engraved in stone. This "university in stone" (Nivat 1933: 143-170) was used for the instruction of monks and was available to all who visited this monastery. The texts were considered to be "scientific" but the knowledge, when we apply the above-mentioned labels, was based on "folk beliefs".

Most of these books refer to Indian medical texts. The *Rogānidān* (Treatise on Diseases), for example, is said to contain the teachings of Komarabhacca³ who lived at the time of the historical Buddha. Komarabhacca ("son of a courtesan") was adopted by King Bimbisara but fell into disgrace. He then went to Taxila and began to study medicine. After seven years of study, his teacher sent him out to collect all those plants which could be used for curing. Komarabhacca came back with the answer that all plants could serve as medicine, if used at the right time and in the right proportion, whereupon his teacher declared that he had completed his apprenticeship (Beyer 1907: 1-22).

Another legend (in the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the *Rāmāyāna*) tells us that Iśvara created a monkey physician, Jambuban,

2. Among them we find a Treatise on Medicine written under King Phra Narayana in the seventeenth century A.D.

3. Doctors used to bring him sacrifices at the expense of their patients. He is supposed to have the qualities of the Aśvins (the Divine Twins, e.g., *Rg Veda* i. 116-118) who travelled in three-wheeled cars. To a holy man who was beheaded for revealing on them forbidden science, they presented a horse's head and stuck it on his neck in place of his own head. They enabled the lame to walk and the blind to see, and restored an aged man to youth (Hallett 1890: 272-76).

for the monkey prince Bali.

Medical textbooks, memorized at first and transmitted orally, must have existed in India at a very early age.⁴ Most of them have been ascribed to Komarabhacca and their contents was considered to be almost as sacred as the Vedas. Translations of these textbooks have been kept in Thai monasteries and have become the substance of medical thinking in Thailand since the first contacts with Indian traders and Brahmin, i.e., the latest when Thai moved into the present territory of the Thai nation in the thirteenth century.

At the time, when the still extant versions of Indian medical texts were composed, Indian thought had reached already a high level of abstraction and the study of the concrete was considered to be a secondary issue. As all other things in the visible world, the human body was, for example, supposed to consist of five elements (*bhūta*), seven body substances (*dhātu*) and three, latter four humors (*doṣa*).⁵ It was

4. The *R̥g Veda* already contains a hymn to the herbs (x, 97) and in the *Atharva-Veda* (viii, 7) we find a charm bestowing longevity. The divinities to whom it is addressed are herbs. Pharmacopeiae are ascribed to Bhiṣaj Ātharvana, the prototype of a doctor-magician, later to be called *vaidya* (learned man). The tutelary divinity of classical Indian medicine was the non-Aryan Dhanvantari who incarnated as Divodāsa, mythical king of Benares (*Suśruta* i, 1; v, 1, 66). Out of compassionate love for all beings, Punarvasu Ātreya (descendant of Atri) also taught the Wisdom of Long Life to six disciples: Agniveśa, Bhela, Jāturkarpa, Parāśara, Hārīta, and Ksārapāni. The treatises of the first two are both extant. They served as base for the later *Suśruta* and *Caraka Saṃhitā* codified in the first centuries of the Christian era. See Zimmer (1948: 10, 18, 26, 36–48) and the eight systems of *Āyurvedic* (*āyu*, life; bestowing long life) practices: (1) general principles of medicine, *sūtra-sthāna*; (2) pathology, *nidāna-sthāna*; (3) diagnostics, *vimāna-sthāna*; (4) physiology and anatomy, *śarīra-sthāna*; (5) prognosis, *indīrya-sthāna*; (6) therapeutics *cikitsā-sthāna*; (7) pharmaceuticals, *kalpa-sthāna*; (8) means of assuring success in treatment, *siddhi-sthāna*.

The Master of Healing in late Buddhism was the Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru.

5. The three humors are, *kapha*, phlegm; pitta, bile; *vāyu*, wind.—We are reminded here of the ideas of Plato and Aristoteles, Hippocrates and Galen who also elaborated on the theory of the four elements. Chinese medicine developed later the principle of the five elements, wood, fire, earth, metal, water; the Yin and Yang and the Five Evolutive Phases, *wu-hsing*. Medicine in China originated with plant lore, demonic beliefs, divination, incantations, and faith healing. Early canons of medicine are the *Pen T'sao* (Herbal) of the Divine Husbandman Shen Nung (2838–2698 B.C.) and the *Nei Ching* of the Yellow Emperor Huang Ti (2698–2598 B.C.), codified in the first centuries of the Christian era. Taoism introduced alchemy, charms, deep breathing, and magic while Buddhism brought elements of Indian medicine and auto-suggestion. The Hippocrates of Chinese medicine, Chang Chung-Ching wrote in 168 A.D. an essay on typhoid. For details, see Wong 1932.—Medical textbooks in Thailand, containing many references to Indian texts, hardly mention any Chinese medical text. Chinese influence

believed that when the mixture and proportions of the elements got out of order, illness would occur. Excess of wind would be the cause of rheumatism, epilepsy, apoplexy, headache, flatulency, colic, and inflammations. Excess of earth, by means of invisible mists, would cause cholera and plagues. Too much fire, generated through nourishment, would cause boils, malaria, typhoid, measles, or small-pox and too much water would cause dropsy, implicating that fire was not sufficiently present to let the water evaporate.

When we compare the *Rogānidān* with a book written by the Thai court physician, Phya Bamroe Rājabadya,⁶ we find agreement on the Indian theory of the four elements;

- twenty parts of the body represent the earth element: hair, nails, teeth, skin, muscles, nerves or veins,⁷ bones, marrow, spleen, heart, liver, tissues, diaphragm, bowels, stomach, etc.;
- twelve parts represent the water element: bile, saliva, serum, transpiration, fat, tears, mucus, urine, etc.;
- six parts represent the air element: breathing in the six parts of the body (which puts the blood into motion and causes the movement of the bile, the bowels, and the transpiration); and
- four parts represent the fire element: temperature and a sort of *vis vitalis*.⁸

The heart was considered to be a thinking organ. As dissection and surgery were not practiced in a Buddhist country, anatomical concepts were based on beliefs. The body, for example, consisted of three hundred bones and the muscle were an undifferentiated mass of flesh.

Prescriptions differed with the day on which the illness arose and the day the patient was born. Medicine would belong to one or a mixture of the following four classes:

1. indigenous herbs
2. Chinese herbs (barks, leaves, etc.)
3. animal substances (bones, teeth, urine, eyes of birds or cattle or cats, bile of snakes, sea shells, fish skins, snake skins, etc.)
4. mineral (stones, saltpetre, borax, lead, antimony, sulphate of copper, table salt, sulphate of magnesia, rarely mercury),

in Thailand is found only in the usage of certain herbs.

6. Used by Achan Piem at Wat Rachaburana (Lieb), Bangkok.

7. The Thai words for nerve and blood vessel are the same.

8. Br̥haspati was the Lord of Magic Spells but also the Lord (*pati*) of the innermost soul force (*bṛh*, *brahman*). Zimmer found that "the idea of a life-substance, itself endowed with a soul is one of the remarkable conceptions which presumably go back to pre-Aryan antiquity" (1948: 160).

also gums and resins. Medicines were mixed to oppose the element which was in excess or to supply what had been found to be deficient. The concoctions contained sometimes up to one hundred seventy-four ingredients and were taken by the pot (two to three quarts). Broken limbs were wrapped in cotton wool dipped in coconut oil. Cupping was applied, also plasters, herbal poultices, massage, shampooing and tattooing, exorcism and the propitiation of the supernatural.

In previous centuries, Thai doctors would travel through the country with their medicine box on foot or in their little skiffs and accompanied by one servant or assistant. The medicine box, wrapped in a piece of figured muslin or some silken or wollen fabric, would contain the necessary herbs, pills, and powders. A doctor would remain with his patient day and night while he was suffering from a serious disease. Doctors were paid by the result and entitled to customary fees, called *Kwan-Kow Kaya*. The *Kwan-Kow* was used to propitiate the legendary teacher of Indian medicine, Komarabhacca, and the *Kaya* were considered to be the legitimate costs. Doctors would also act as priests to exorcise evil spirits (e.g., molding little clay images to be left, together with offerings at the wayside or to be set afloat on a water course). The trade was far from being lucrative and only a few doctors would acquire a teak-built house and could support two or three wives together with their growing family (Hallett 1890: 272-76).

The Siam Red Cross Society speaks of ten kinds of ancient healers:

1. apprenticed healers who follow dogmatic traditions of the past and very often are highly respected, experienced, and useful men;
2. healers who possess one or more specific recipes of repute, handed down from generation of generation or from preceptors to pupils;
3. the boil and wound healers, the former using ointments, belonging to a class which begins to disappear with the introduction of modern methods for minor surgery; the latter were originally the dressers of foreign surgeons, before the advent of modern antiseptics, who would confine their work to a crude form of surgical practice;
4. practitioners of massage, a highly skilled class who do considerably more good than harm;
5. the unqualified midwives⁹ who decidedly do much more harm than good;
6. the male nurses who were previous members of hospital or other organized

9. In some cases a woman who has been a successful mother will, past her middle age, find the cares of her household falling on other shoulders. She will then try to help neighbors and friends regularly in their time of labor. Such midwives have no training, no knowledge of anatomy or cleanliness. They used to let the mother-to-be sit against a red waterjar, holding up her fingers and counting the contractions. Such a scene is engraved at the Bayon, Angkor Wat (Executive Committee 1930: 288).

medical staffs and are useful as long as they confine themselves to their proper capacity;

7. the healers by exorcism who employ water or magic spells and are somewhat analogous to Christian Scientists, or those who practice auto-suggestion;
8. the vendors of drugs, including those who sell simple as well as modern remedies or patent medicines;
9. the healers' apprentices and entourage who naturally "dabble in the craft of the household"; and
10. the healers by mere wit or conjecture.

The rest the Siamese Red Cross calls imposters who just manage to escape the criminal courts, adding that to "the Siamese people modern medicine had never been popular. They always had a fear of being 'cut up' or something done to them against their will while in hospitals" (Executive Committee 1930: 236-37, 288, and 314).

Almost every Thai, as mentioned before, believes to know something of the art of healing, though he will seek certain practitioners for their specialties. There are:

- the *mo luang* (royal physician who has to pass six grades in his education) and
- the *mo ratsadon* or *mo tjaloe* (folk practitioner)
 - *mo du* (looking doctor, i.e., fortune teller, palmist, astrologer)
 - *mo khwan* (soul doctor)
 - *mo lum phi fa* (medium of the ski spirit)
 - *mo nuet* (one who practices the art of shampooing for curative purposes)
 - *mo phi* (spirit doctor)
 - *mo phi pob* (exorciser of malevolent spirits)
 - *mo ram* (medium of ski spirit)
 - *mo song* (diviner)
 - *mo suad khwan* (doctor who knows the *khwan* [soul] chants)
 - *mo tham* (exorciser of malevolent spirits)
 - *mo wicha* (controller of magical power)
 - *mo ya* (herbal doctor), etc.

They are concerned with restoring the physical *and* the psychic imbalance of an individual.

We will now concentrate on the psychotherapeutic technique of a *tham khwan*, i.e. "the making of the *khwan*." During this ceremony three spheres—the individual-psychological, the social, and the cultural-religious—are intimately connected so that the curative efforts have religious aspects. Kirsch (1967: 273) has pointed out that

The *khwan* concept does 'objectify' certain psychological features, most specifically the 'psychological balance' or equilibrium of the individual, but it also 'spiritualizes' those characteristics as well.

Religion has thus important integrative functions for groups and for individual personalities. Concerned with the explanation and expression of the ultimate values of a society, it is furthermore concerned

with the threats to these central values, or to social or individual existence; it has important defense functions in providing ways of managing tensions and anxieties. Thus, religion both maintains the ultimate values of a society and manages tensions in the personalities of individual members of a society (Lessa 1958: 1).¹⁰

The *khwan* has been defined by Thai informants as the "essence of life," a principle vital and essential for all sentient beings. Though the concept of a permanent individual soul cannot be found in Theravāda Buddhism, no contradiction is felt by the participants in a *tham khwan* ceremony. Unsubstantial and indestructible by nature the *khwan* is supposed to reside in a physical body at will. It can leave the body during sleep and illness, and permanently at the time of death (Anuman 1962). Without a *khwan* a person would not be complete. As a child grows, its *khwan* will also become stronger and more attached to its body.

There are thirty-two *khwans*¹¹ who reside in the different parts of a body. Each may be propitiated singly when a certain body part is

10. See Ericson, cited in Mandelbaum (1966: 1187). He finds that ritual, as part of a religion, "can be a means whereby a person feels that his separateness has been transcended and his individuality yet confirmed." Also Roheim, "defense systems against anxiety are the stuff that culture is made of" (1943: 106).

11. None of the Thai informants could list more than six parts of the body where a *khwan* may reside but all the parts they mentioned belonged to the list of thirty-two contained in the *Khuddakapāṭha* (a prayer book for daily use in the Pāli Canon): *kesā* (hair of the head), *lomā* (hair of the body), *nakkā* (nails), *dantā* (teeth), *taco* (skin), *maṃsaṃ* (flesh/muscles), *nahāru* (sinews), *atthi* (bones), *atthimiñjāṃ* (marrow), *yakkam* (kidneys), *hadayaṃ* (heart), *yakanaṃ* (liver), *kilomakaṃ* (membranes), *pihakaṃ* (spleen), *paṃphāsaṃ* (lungs), *antaṃ* (intestines), *antagunaṃ* (entrails), *udariyaṃ* (stomach), *karisaṃ* (feces), *pittaṃ* (bile) *semhaṃ* (digestive juice, phlegm), *pubbaṃ* (pus), *lohitaṃ* (blood), *seda* (sweat), *meda* (fat), *assu* (tears), *vasā* (lymph), *khela* (saliva), *siñghānika* (snot, mucus), *lasikā* (synovial fluid of the joints), *muttaṃ* (urine), and *matthaka* or *matthaluṅgaṃ* (head or brains).

The concept of thirty-two parts of the body appears already in early Hinduism. Discussing absentee burials in India, Crooke (1972: 193) mentions that a coconut represented the head, thirty-two pomegranate seeds the teeth, two shells the ears, arsenic the breath, yellow pigment the bile, sea foam the phlegm, honey the blood, bristles of the wild hog the hair, wet barley flour the flesh, etc. Most of these representations of body parts match the above list of the *Khuddakapāṭhā*. It is therefore, possible that later traditions used the number thirty-two not only for the teeth but also for those parts which were considered representative for the body of an individual.

afflicted by illness. During the *tham khwan*, however, the *khwan* is generally treated as one entity.

Although "soul fastening ceremonies" are known throughout South-east Asia and also in different parts of the world, the *khwan* appears to be an indigenous concept. When the Thai ethnologist Anuman Rajadhon (1962:120-121) discovered similarities between the Thai word *khwan* and the Chinese word 魂 *hun*.¹² The difference between Thai and Chinese concepts is, however, that the Thai *khwan* lacks an expressed polarity. It remains one immaterial entity which decides at will when and for how long it wants to reside in a material body. This independence is threatening to the well-being of an individual and constitutes the major motivation to conduct a *khwan* ceremony.

The calling of the *khwan* (*riag khwan*) takes place during sickness, after an accident or after an shocking experience. *Tham khwan*, also *choen khwan*, or *su khwan* in northern and northeastern Thailand, means "to make, to reinsure, to invite, to strengthen the *khwan*."

Aside from illness and mental stress, a *tham khwan* is also performed

1. when the first hair of a one-month old baby is cut,¹³

12. *Hun*, written with the characters for "cloud" and "demon," rises after birth and forms itself with the inhaled air, similar to the *khwan* who gradually becomes attached to a body. The *hun* has, however, triple characteristics—intelligence, the inhaled and the exhaled breath. This reminds of the "embryonic breathing," a Taoist technique of mystical physiology. Though there is a birth re-enacted in the *tham khwan nag*, the performance hardly resembles the Taoist technique—Another Chinese concept, the *p'o* 魄, written with the characters for "white" and "demon," is produced with the sperm and comes into existence during conception. The *p'o* combines all vital spirits—seven for men and nine for women. After death the *p'o* stays close to the corpse and dissolves with it.—The word *shen* 神 stands for a major category among the powerful and fearful spiritual beings which have to be worshipped in order to secure human well being. Closely related to the idea of the human soul, the *shen* is conceived as having two components, the *hun* or positive component and the *p'o* or negative component.

The *hun*, like the *khwan*, persists with the desire to reincarnate. In contrast to the *khwan*, the *hun* and the *p'o* are, however, material. The first is considered to be hot, the latter cold and the union of the two, comparable to that of *yin* and *yang*, is indispensable. *Shen* (*yang*) and *kuei* (*yin*) are the ultimate spiritual influences, positive and negative, respectively, which underlie the two components of the soul.

13. Because a mother is considered to be polluted during the birth act, she has to purify herself by lying close to a fire for seven up to twenty-eight days. This "roasting" of the mother is offered as an explanation when Thai are asked why the first hair is called "fire hair."—Rajadhon (1952: 179) spoke of the

2. when, coming of age, the top-knot is cut,¹⁴
3. at the eve of an ordination (*tham khwang nag*),
4. during a wedding ceremony,
5. when a person returns home after a long absence and as a welcome or farewell for visitors, and, especially in the northeast, for almost every life crisis, i.e., when a person undergoes a change in status or residence,
6. after a cremation (for the living).

Most of these ceremonies can be seen as rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960) but *tham khwan*, in general, appear necessary when, in the words of modern psychology, a weakening of the ego-axis is felt. Though there are also *tham khwan* for the house post when a new house is built, for

tham khwan as the "traditional ceremony of receiving the child into the family." A child becomes a he or she only after this ceremony.

14. The top-knot is considered to be the residence of the *khwan*. For this reason the head of a person should never be touched (Rajadhon 1962: 128). Believing the *khwan* can leave by the fontanelle, baldness is explained with frequent excursions of the *khwan* (Rajadhon 1962: 24).

In earlier times the skull of a dead person was broken "to release the soul." A coconut broken at the time of cremation, simulates now the old custom.

In India,

... Ascetics... who have become absorbed in the world soul during life, and therefore need no Srāddha or funeral rites, are believed to possess the power of concentrating the soul at the crown of their heads, and they can die at will, the soul passing straight to felicity through the Brahmā-randhram. To assist the exit of the soul, the successor in office of the holy man strikes a coconut or conch-shell on his skull, and in opening thus made places the Sālagrāma or sacred ammonite, an act known as Kapāla-Kriya, 'the skull rite' (Crooke 1972: 184).

See also the tonsure ceremonies mentioned in the *Ordinances of Manu*.

In Thailand, the top-knot cutting of a prince is called *sokanta* and the king himself, representing Siva, would receive the tonsure on a replica of Mt. Kailāsa. The less elaborate ceremony for nobles and commoners was called *Kāra Koncuk* (Wales 1931: 127). To be performed when a child is nine, eleven, or thirteen years old, the custom is, however, hardly upheld anymore.—See also Gerini (1895).

15. The *Mahāvagga* I. 3, reports that, while the Buddha was pondering on his enlightenment, a sudden downpour occurred. A *Nāga* (mythical serpent) then coiled his body around the Buddha and spread his head to protect him against the elements. (Depictions of this scene are worshipped particularly by those born on a Saturday.)—The *Mahāvagga* I. 63 mentions, furthermore, that a *Nāga* wanted to become a monk and turned himself into a man. While asleep, he inadvertently assumed his natural form and frightened his fellow monks. The Buddha, therefore, decreed that each man has to vow before his ordination that he, in fact, is a human being (this rule is still observed). To remember this *Nāga*, all candidates who have their heads shaven before ordination and who are already wearing white robes, are called *nag*.—The word *nāga* can also be translated with "elephant." It is then an epithet for the Buddha's strength and endurance.

drums, for the state elephant, for water buffaloes, and for the rice,¹⁶ we will, in this paper, concentrate on the *khwan* for human beings.

The ceremony consists of

1. the invocation of (a) the Triple Gems¹⁷
(b) various gods¹⁸
(c) the individual *khwan*,
2. the waving of the lights (*wien thiang*),
3. the feasting of the *khwan*, and
4. the tying of the wrists (*phūk khwan*).

The *tham khwan* will be conducted by:

1. the most respected relative or,
mainly in rural areas, a village elder,
2. one or two *mo khwan* (soul doctors, paid according to reputation),
3. a Brahmin (offering the most expensive service), or
4. (though rarely) a Buddhist monk.

The author participated in three ceremonies:

1. the *tham khwan* for a one-month-old baby, performed by the father, who was the boatman of the British navel attaché in Bangkok, but also a Brahmin and a spirit medium (Bangkok, January 4, 1972);
2. the *phūk khwan* for the freshmen at Chiang Mai University, performed by the rector of this university with the assistance of some faculty and some senior students (Chiang Mai, July 15, 1972); and

16. Textor (1960: 422) lists ten cyclic rites alone for the propitiating the *khwan* of the rice.

17. I.e., the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (His Teachings), and the *Sangha* (the community of monks and novices).

18. Hindu deities have been integrated into the Buddhist cosmology and serve as guardians of the Buddha and his teachings (see Rhys Davids, vol. III, part II, Ch. 21, 1910, for the myth of the conversion of *Sakka* (Indra) to Buddhism, see also Tambiah 1970: 255). For Hindu cosmogony, see *Laws of Manu* I, 5-16; for the Buddhist cosmology, see the *Traiphum* (Treatise of the Three Worlds; Coedès 1957), based on *suttas* and the *Abhidhamma*, composed twice by Thai kings, first in 1335 A.D. by King Lu Thai and, at the end of the eighteenth century, by King Taksin.

Kirsch (1967: 269) names some of the gods who may be invited to descend on the *bai si* (auspicious tray) during a *tham khwan*: Phra In (Indra), Phra Phom (Brahma), Phra Jamanat (Yama), Phra Athit (The Sun, Lord of the Sky, Surya), Phra Chan (The Moon). Viṣṇu and Siva are not mentioned but the chief of the tutelary gods of the Vedas, Indra (see *R̥g Veda* ii, 12; over one fourth of all Vedic hymns are dedicated to Indra). He appears in many Buddhist legends as protector and advisor of the Buddha. A favorite theme in Thai monastery paintings is Indra teaching the Buddha the "Middle Way" in playing a lute with three strings, one too tightly, one too loosely strung but the third one producing the right tone.

3. the *tham khwan nag* for a twenty-five-year old chemistry teacher, performed by two *mo khwan* from Bangkok (Chiang Mai, July 21, 1972).

Participant observations attest that *khwan* ceremonies are still performed with Brahmin paraphernalia in a Buddhist setting. Where the demand for these ceremonies declined, this has been compensated by efforts to revitalize the custom. Such efforts are motivated by the fear of losing the safeguards traditional society has to offer in anxiety-producing situations. Where *tham khwan* ceremonies have become an affair of the upper classes, they fulfill, nevertheless, aside from their social implications, psychologically curative needs.

Khwan ceremonies are not seasonal. Their performance is prompted by specific events in an individual's life and is initiated by someone close to the candidate. The "making" or "strengthening of the *khwan*" operates, therefore, on several levels simultaneously:

1. it restores a psychological balance of the individual,
2. the presence of those close to the candidate offer the reassurance of society in culturally available terms,
3. supernatural forces are invited and propitiated and their promise is made binding,
4. in the microcosmic reenactment of a higher reality, all artifacts are charged with symbolic meaning and serve to reinforce the efficacy of the ceremony.

In other words, harmony is restored and assured

- between the individual and his psyche,
- between the individual and his society,
- between the individual and the supernatural, and
- between the individual and the universe.

Thus the *tham khwan* touches the individual/psychological, the social, and the religious sphere where religion represents the ultimate values of a society and has important integrative functions.

The *khwan*, as has been pointed out above, is an indigenous animist concept. To its ceremonies Brahmin¹⁹ paraphernalia have been added: i.e., the waving of the lights (Indian *arati*),²⁰ the use of a *bai si*²¹ for

19. When in the thirteenth century the Thai moved south from the Yellow River, they met in the newly conquered territories Khmer court Brahmin. Later on, Tamil Brahmin came from South India to fulfill the growing demand for brahmanical services. Brahmin are still indispensable for the *abhiṣeka* of Thai kings and for other state ceremonies, e.g., the First Ploughing.

20. From the Sanskrit root *ārādh-*, *ārādhana* means an action by which one tries to propitiate someone to gain a favor or by which one wants to honor and worship someone (i.e., during *pūjā*).

offerings, and the tying of the wrists.²² When we further observe that the Buddha and His Teachings are invoked at the beginning and the end of the ceremony, we get the impression that syncretism²³ occurred over time. Though the physical appearance of the artifacts points to different origins, their symbolic content, however, is related and their psychological functions are basically the same. Tensions and anxieties are managed according to the needs of an individual member of a society. Such customs justify and sanction, they reinforce and reunite, and they sanctify and transcend present conditions.

Buddhism, a reaction to orthodox-ritualistic Brahmanism, arose, nevertheless, out of the Indian tradition of ascetics. Since pre-Aryan times, sages have practiced meditation and have manipulated supernatural powers. Some of them reinterpreted sacred scriptures and developed elaborate philosophical systems. The animism, appearing already on Indus Valley seals, stayed ingrained in the religious practices. If left out in a doctrine, it still was practiced with conviction.

In the basic teachings of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths²⁴ to

The waving of candles is first mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I. 2.2:13, later also in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

21. Thai, "auspicious tray," its many tiers representing the sacred mountain or the world tree with the different realms for different kinds of supernatural beings (see Traibhūmi). It will always be crowned with an egg (the *Hiraṇyagarbha*, "Golden Embryo," first appeared in the *R̥g Veda* X, 121, 129-4-5. It became the prototype for the Cosmic Egg in later Hindu myths; see also Hellborn 1963).

22. Vasudeva tied Kṛṣṇa's wrists after the boy had killed the female demon Putanā, see *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Book V, Chapter V. See also, *rakṣabandhanas* (protective bracelets), sisters would give their brothers in August during the hot Indian summer. Brahmin may also go from house to house, offering to tie cotton threads around the wrists of the members of the household. The custom certainly diffused wherever Brahmin went, but Porée-Maspero (1951: 161) records that during the unhealthy mid-summer season, Chinese would also tie five-colored threads around their wrists to warrant long life. The Lolo would use red threads, the Khmu black for children and white threads for adults.

23. This word has been traced back to the inhabitants of Crete who, in earlier times, rallied around a common cause and "syncretized" to withstand external foes. The term "syncretism" is presently used when allegedly conflicting (mainly religious) beliefs reconcile to form an integrative pattern.

24. Pāli, *Catvāry ariyasatyāni*:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*)—Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, death is suffering, to be separated from the pleasant is suffering, not to be separated from the unpleasant is suffering, not to receive what one craves is suffering, e.g., the five aggregates of attachment (*khandhas*) are suffering.

2. The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering (*samudaya*, arising)—Craving (for sensual pleasures, *kāmatanḥā*; for existence, *bhavatanḥā*; and for annihilation, *vibhavatanḥā*) leads to rebirth.

eliminate exactly the four successive problems a Hindu doctor was taught to solve in treating a patient:

1. Are all complaints based on real suffering?
2. With what kind of suffering is the patient afflicted and what is its origin?
3. Can the disease be cured or not?²⁵
4. What kind of treatment is available for this ailment?

The Buddha never denied the existence of spirits and supernatural powers. Too great an involvement with such powers was considered to impede the spiritual advancement of the individual and would not lead to *nibbāna*. For those suffering, he suggested, however, the chanting of certain *suttas*²⁶ for protective and curative purposes, the first *pareitta* ceremony being performed by Moggellāna to tap the “power inherent in Buddhist texts” and to invoke Buddhist deities (Spiro 1967: 252). It was implied that such *pareitta* ceremonies still belong to the realm of the “relative truth” (*samutti satya*).

In search for the “ultimate truth” (*paramārtha satya*), the *Pāli* Canon takes into account the diversity of human nature and names the different levels of the relative truth. The dramatic shift from external to internal controls occurs with stream entry when the *sotāpanna* (stream enterer) destroys the first three of the fetters:

1. the view of the existence of a self,
2. sceptical doubt in the Triple Gem, and
3. reliance on rites and rituals and attachment to various practices without the right understanding.

Tolerance toward psychotherapeutic techniques can, therefore, been found already in the canonical texts of the Theravādin, a school of the earlier, more austere forms of Buddhism. The shift from the belief in and the reliance on external controls to the development of internal

3. The Noble Truth of Annihilation (*nirodha*) of Suffering—Annihilation means no more craving, breaking loose, and being delivered.

4. The Noble Truth of the Path (*magga*) leading to the Annihilation of Suffering. This is the Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭaṅgika-magga*). See also Zimmer (1948: 33–34).

25. In case of an incurable disease a Hindu doctor was taught to withdraw.

26. See *Chullavagga* V: 6. *Paritta suttas* are also mentioned in the *Questions of King Milinda*. Spiro (1970: 144–47) lists, among others, the *Pubbaṅha Sutta* against epidemics, the *Vaṭṭaka Paritta* against fire, the *Bhojjhanga Sutta* against illness, the *Ātānātiya Paritta* against evil spirits, the *Angulimāla Paritta* for an easy childbirth. See also, Tambiah (1972) and Wales (1931).

27. Especially the *Abhidhamma* and its commentaries, e.g., the *Vishuddhi-magga* by Buddhaghosa.

control mechanism obviously requires fortitude and perseverance. Monks and ascetics could achieve such high a goal although there are reports that, because of the high quality of their *kamma*,²⁸ laymen and -women had also the potential to become enlightened.²⁹

In Buddhism, however, each individual is free to decide how much effort he wants to invest for his well-being. Many will be satisfied with improving their present existence and being reborn with a higher status or in one of the heavens. There they would meet also Indian gods³⁰ who, transformed into guardians of the Buddha's teachings, had become subject to the Law of Causation, i.e., rebirth, themselves. Thus the pragmatic philosophy of the Buddhist texts served a wide range of life situations. Hadn't the Buddha proposed gradual teaching and *upāyas* (skillfull mean)? Early Buddhism bridged, therefore, the gap between "elite" and "folk religions," or, better to say, between religious texts and religious practices. Everybody was supposed "to be a lamp to himself" and "to work on his own salvation with diligence."³¹

The elaborate spiritual hierarchies of Buddhist cosmology, based on earlier beliefs, meet with highly defined hierarchies in the secular realm.³² Both the secular and the spiritual hierarchies become visible in the *tham khwan*. The seating arrangement and the way how participants address each other take care of the secular hierarchies. The *bai si* (auspicious tray) represents the hierarchies of the universe and indicates with each tier a different level of reality.³³ Created in a safe space, i.e., surrounded by a *siñcana* cord³⁴ and purified by the waving

28. *Kamma* (Pāli), *karma* (Sanskrit, from the root *kr-*, to do); what has been done; act or deed (including thoughts and words) and their consequences (fruit, *phala*).

29. See Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, Chapter VI, one enters the *darśanamarga* (Way of Insight) with the removal of the *klesas* (defilements).

30. See footnote 18 on p. 11.

31. The last words of the Buddha, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*.

32. Like many other Asian languages, the Thai vocabulary provides terms to indicate sex, age, education, secular position, degree of royal blood, and spiritual accomplishments of the participants in an encounter.

33. The *bai si* is, indeed, a microscopic replica of the macrocosmos and the *axis mundi* (the Cosmic Tree, see Eliade 1973: 113).

34. From Sanskrit *sic-*, to sprinkle (lustral water for protection or to exorcise). A *siñcana* cord is made of several strands of loosely spun cotton and is used to confer blessings from a Buddha statue and reciting monks to the gifts and their donors. It is also held in a circle in other ceremonies to protect the space inside.

According to a Buddhist legend, a *bodhisattva* who was going on a journey with four companions, was given a *siñcana* cord by a *Pacceka Buddha* (one who is enlightened out of his own efforts but is not able to communicate his insights).

of the lights (*wien thiang*), the *tham khwan* ensures continuity and the *bûn* (merit) acquired coerces the supernatural into a contract which becomes "binding" with the tying of the cotton threads around the wrists (*phūk khwan*).³⁵

The monk-to-be for whom a *tham khwan* is performed may outgrow the ritual sphere. He will, however, not refuse to chant (*suad mon*)³⁶ for curative reasons. "Catering to the needs of the people does not do any harm." This answer was given the author by a highly educated and spiritually advanced monk in Bangkok when he complied with the request to exorcise an evil spirit. This spirit had allegedly taken residence in a Buddha statue and was supposed to cause aggravating circumstances for its owner.

The *tham khwan* performed at such occasions, certainly offers a remedy for the arising anxieties before psychic disturbances can reach a clinical level. It is an ancient remedy which penetrated later developing therapeutical religious beliefs. This statement checks with Jung saying,

For thousands of years the mind of man has worried about the sick soul, perhaps even earlier than it did about the sick body. The propitiation of gods, the perils of the soul and its salvation, these are not yesterday's prob-

When a female monster changed herself into a beautiful girl, the *bodhisattva* warned his companions to be on guard, but all of them were led astray and eaten by the monster. The *bodhisattva*, however, fled to Takṣila and wound the *siñcana* cord around the rāja's residence. After the monster had run around the palace for seven days without having been able to cross the cord, its protective power had passed the test.

For "Spiritual Thread," see also Eliade (1960).

35. The symbolic tying of the wrists has multiple functions:

- i. to keep the *khwan* inside the body of the candidate and the strengthen the "life force" of the individual;
- ii. to protect the candidate against evil forces from the outside;
- iii. to seal a contract between the individual and the supernatural (with the archaic meaning of sacrament, "solemn oath, token pledge") and
- iv. to assure the candidate of the care and the good will of those close to to him in a socially sanctioned rite.

The tying of the wrists of the freshmen at Chiang Mai University was explained in an undated publication of the local Christian Students Association as follows:

- i. aside from reducing their anxieties, the new students are reassured that their *khwan* would not escape when entering a new, i.e., the scholarly world (see Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1960);
- ii. the students also promise to study and the university promises to provide adequate education.

36. "Chanting mantras," i.e., parts of Buddhist *suttas*; see *Suad Manta Chabab Luang* and Prabat (1970).

lems. Religions are psychotherapeutic systems in the truest sense of the word (1964: 172).

In former times, as Jung put it, man called the gods unfavorable but man now prefers to call it neurosis and seeks the cause in lack of vitamins, in endocrine disturbances, overwork, or sex.

... Among the so-called neurotics of our day there are a good many who in other ages would not have been neurotic. ...

These victims of the psychic dichotomy of our time are merely optional neurotics; their apparent morbidity drops away the moment the gulf between the ego and the unconscious is closed (1963: 143-144).

To conclude, although there are missing links in the documentation on the *khwan* and its ceremonies, in Brahmin and Buddhist literature we find allusions to customs resembling those around the concept of the *khwan*. The syncretism found in *khwan* ceremonies should, therefore, not be explained with an amalgamation of different beliefs but with a reunion of universal elements which developed different degrees of refinement in other cultures.

It has been shown that the elite fostered and even initiated folk religious practices and that the dichotomy between elite and folk religion is not felt during the performance of a *tham khwan* where all elements have, first of all, one therapeutic function.

Eastern religions do not refuse to fulfill the various psychological needs of their people. Thus the *khwan* was not only tolerated in Thailand, where Theravāda Buddhism is state religion for at least seven hundred years, the inclusion of normative religious texts and the efforts of the elite to revitalize the ceremonies have also reinforced the concept, so that during a *tham khwan*, which is performed for very pragmatic reasons, the experiential world is transcended and the pragmatic functions would not be complete without their transcendental aspects.

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