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Making new space in the Thai literary canon

Thak Chaloemtiarana

The Thai literary canon identifies three novels published around 1929 as the first authentic Thai novels. This pronouncement elides the importance of novels published before that date. Because literary scholars focus their teaching, writing and research on novels defined by the canon, lesser-known works have been overlooked or ignored. The current Thai canon obfuscates literary transmission, in particular, the significance of pre-1929 compositions. In this essay, three novels – Mae Wan's Khwam phayabat *(1902), Khru Liam's* Khwam mai phayabat *(1915) and* Nang neramid *(1916) – are selected to show that these early compositions represent important genres of novels that should be considered for the canon, even though they are seen as less than 'authentic' Thai. This paper examines the three novels through the lens of critical, translation and postcolonial theories. It is a study of vernacularisation, authenticity, hybridity, mimesis, and bi-culturalism.*

Preamble and caveat

As someone not trained in literary studies and teaching in America, I am contesting the Thai literary canon from the margins — disciplinarily and geographically. This paper examines three early Thai novels that have not been included in the Thai literary canon. In my assessment, these three novels represent important examples of the Thai novel that helped the Thai public deal with the west during the turn of the twentieth century.

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My own interest in politics and the novel began in the mid-1970s when I used Kulab Saipradit's *Lae pai khang na* [Looking to the Future] (1955) in a class at Thammasat University. The novel describes the political awakening of a boy from Isan, Thailand's poorest region, privileged to study at an elite school in Bangkok. There, he meets students from all classes and ethnicity, and a favourite teacher who would later become involved in the overthrow of absolute monarchy. The novel focuses on the years immediately following the 1932 coup, showing how the good intentions of the leaders turn sour when the new democratic regime itself becomes authoritarian and repressive. The novel was to be in three parts, corresponding to human life cycles: formative years, mature years, and declining years. However, Kulab was unable to finish the last volume after his self-imposed political exile in China following the Sarit Thanarat coup in 1957.

I used *Lae pai khang na* to help contextualise the cultural and social milieu surrounding the 1932 coup that ended absolute monarchy in Siam. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, heated debates occurred frequently on campus between faculty members who resisted the proliferation of what were seen as trashy leftist novels read by the students, and other lecturers who were willing to discuss what the students were already reading. The schism took on political and disciplinary dimensions when the Thai language faculty argued that they were the true protectors of not just 'good' Thai literature, but also the nation, religion and the monarchy. Those who did not agree with them were labelled left-leaning *rua hang yao* [long tail boats] lecturers out to destroy Thai culture and the Thai nation by encouraging students to read seditious novels and books that celebrated socialism, communism, and social justice.[1]

The (re)discovery of Thai novels as good sources for social criticism was the work of radical students and some young Thai literary scholars who were looking for ways to critique the inequities of Thai society. Student activists and other young literary critics republished many novels that were banned during the previous dictatorial regimes. In addition to *Lae pai khang na*, students were reading, for example, Seni Saowaphong's *Pisat* [The Demon], the many works of Asani Pholachan, and Jit Phumisak's *Chomna sakdina Thai* [The Real face of Thai feudalism].[2]

1 On 19 Feb. 1975, faculty members in the Thai Language Department at Thammasat University organised a panel discussion, '*Wannakam hai arrai dae sangkhom* [What does literature give to society?]', as a counterattack against radical students who were accused of trying to destroy Thai literature by reading trashy leftist novels instead of classical Thai literature. The students rejected traditional Thai literature as an instrument of the ruling and oppressive *sakdina* [feudal] classes. Tomayantri, a conservative writer and one of the panellists, attempted to explain *sakdina* in a positive light but was booed by the students. I was one of a handful of lecturers who had assigned students to read recently resurrected 'leftist' literature. For example, my open-book examination question asked freshmen in the Thai Civilization Foundation course to consider the connection between ideology and history when reviewing the works of Prince Damrong, Luang Wichit and Jit Phumisak. Students were asked which history they preferred and why. Students across campus organised study groups to discuss the exam, much to the dismay of some conservative faculty members who accused me and the students of promoting leftist politics on campus. *Rua hang yao* refers to the modern, sleek, fast and flashy boats equipped with powerful Japanese car engines connected by a long drive shaft to the propeller (thus 'long tail boat'). I assume that these boats motoring up and down the Chaophraya River along the Thammasat campus and the progressive faculty members on campus are seen as dangerous to the preservation of order and tradition.

The tension between those in favour of the novel and those against teaching the novel started in the 1960s. Refer to David Smyth, 'Towards the canonizing of the Thai novel', in *The Canon in Southeast Asian literatures*, ed. David Smyth (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 174–5.

2 The standard text on the social and political role of the Thai novel is Trisin Bunkhachon, *Nawaniyai*

Many years later, beginning in 2000, I began teaching a graduate seminar on the Thai novel at Cornell University. These seminars analysed selected Thai novels in light of Hayden White's theory of tropes, the New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt, and translation theory, especially post-colonial translation theory.[3] In one seminar, we read in the vernacular several of Kulab Saipradit's novels such as *Luk phuchai* [The real man] (1928), *Khang lang phab* [Behind the painting] (1937) and *Lae pai khang na* (1955) to try to understand why his novels are considered by many to be politically radical and socially relevant. In another seminar, we read and compared Mae Wan's (pen name of Phraya Surintharacha) *Khwam phayabat* [The Vendetta] (1902) with Corelli's *Vendetta*, and Nai Samran's (pen name of Luang Wilatpariwat, who is popularly known as Khru Liam) *Khwam mai phayabat* [The Non-vendetta] (1915). What I discovered is that although Kulab's *Luk phuchai* (1928) was one of the three canonical novels designated as the first authentic Thai novels, Phraya Surintharacha's *Khwam phayabat* and Luang Wilatpariwat's *Khwam mai phayabat* that predated them were not. I became intrigued by two fundamental questions: 'How is the canon constructed?' and 'What limitations does a canon impose upon the study of literary transmission and the significance of other literary works ignored by the canon?'

Introduction

David Smyth's preface in *The Canon in Southeast Asian literatures* is instructive in answering my questions. Smyth's preface identifies two important features of the canon:

> Traditionally the literary canon is seen as a chronological arrangement of famous authors and major works which 'have stood the test of time' because of their intrinsic merits and which are linked over the centuries by a presumed cultural unity . . . the term 'canon' is most widely understood to refer to an institutionally recognised list of exemplary works, such as the body of works constituting the national literature of a country, it is also used to denote a system of rules for creating such works.[4]

First, a canonical work must stand the test of time and reflect an 'authentic' cultural characteristic, at least of the predominant culture. Secondly, the canon identifies works that have become timeless and 'institutionally recognised' as national literature. This implies that canons are constructed by institutions, in this case, by academic literary scholars who research, teach, and most importantly, write and publish about why a particular work is more important than others. This process, in turn, ensures that the selected works will stand the test of time because other scholars

kab sangkhom Thai [The Novel and Thai society] (Bangkok: Samnakphim Sangsan, 1980). Also see Hiramatsu Hideki, 'Thai literary trends: From Seni Saowaphong to Chart Kobjitti', *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 8 (Mar. 2007). Among the young progressive literary scholars are Chonthira Kladyu and Suvanna Kriengkraipetch. A comprehensive list of the books that were reprinted during this critical period can be found in Prajak Kongkirati, *Lae laeo khwam khluanwai koh prakot* [And then a movement appeared] (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 2005), pp. 438–42.

3 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Boston: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing new historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jeremy Munday, *Translations studies: Theories and applications* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

4 Smyth, *The Canon*, p. vii.

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will also write and teach them in academic institutions. This observation answers my second question; that is, even though it is assumed that the canon changes as scholars' opinions change, once a canon is institutionalised, it is difficult to dislodge.

This paper is a small attempt to question the established canon, especially the designation of the first 'authentic' Thai novel, and ultimately to try to make new space to accommodate several that have not been considered. It is not my purpose to discuss in detail the complexities of canonical construction. I am only responding to the ontological nature of the canon which I believe puts an undue emphasis on the 'big three', namely, Kulab Saipradit's *Luk phuchai* [The Real man], Mom Luang Buppha Kunchorn's *Sattru khong cha lon* [Her enemy], and Mom Chao Akatdamkoeng's *Lakhon haeng chiwit* [Circus of life], all published around 1929. This overemphasis, I would argue, elides the importance of novels published before that date, and at the same time funnels scholarly energy towards only those novels identified in the canon itself. If the year 1929 demarcates the birth of authentic Thai novels, then anything written before that is less important, or worse, is considered inauthentic.

A recent institutional reinforcement of this canon is the publication of a special volume of the influential *Warasan phasa lae nangsu* [The Journal of Language and Books], volume 35 (2004) dedicated to the 100th birthday anniversary of four exemplary authors. That issue celebrates the '*Rung arun nawaniyai Thai*' [Dawn of the Thai novel] suggesting that the Thai novel began with the works of four authors. In that issue, the novels of Mom Chao Akatdamkoeng, Kulab Saipradit and Mom Luang Buppha Kunchorn are once again selected, analysed, and critiqued. The focus on the three novels ignores, devalues, precludes and omits the importance of pre-1929 novels. In addition, the celebration of the three novels denies the importance of the transmission of earlier literary traditions upon which the canon is based.[5]

The reinforcement and reiteration of this canon in *Warasan phasa lae nangsu* reflects the work of two influential scholars writing in the mid-1970s. Suphanni Warathon published her 1973 Chulalongkorn University M.A. thesis as *Prawat kanpraphan nawaniyai Thai* [The History of the Thai novel] in 1976. A year earlier, Wibha Senanan had published her 1974 University of London Ph.D. dissertation as *The Genesis of the novel in Thailand*. Wibha's book became the standard text in English and was only revised and published in Thai in 1997. Both books gave a convincing account of how the rise of print capitalism in Thailand helped spawn literary magazines, journals, newspapers and books that introduced European-style prose

5 I am not alone in this assertion. Phichet Saengthong's article on Mom Chao Akatdamkoeng also questions the effects of designating *Lakhon haeng chiwit* as the first Thai novel. He argues that the current canon does not sufficiently cover literary transmission, and the influence of Thai literary traditions on Akatdamkoeng's novels. Phichet believes that Akatdamkoeng's novel became an exemplary novel because it fits the leftist inclinations of literary critics of the 1970s who wanted to use the novel to critique class society in Siam. He suggests that there is a relationship between the canon and the ideological preferences of its constructors. I agree with Phichet that the division between low-brow *nangsu aan len* [books that are read for fun], and high-brow *wanakam sathorn sangkhom* [literature that reflects social conditions] is artificial and not very helpful. The social and cultural impact of trashy low-brow novels on the reading masses may be as important, if not more so, than the effects of esoteric literary works on a handful of literary scholars and their students. Refer to Phichet Saengthong, '*Phatthanakan nawaniyai Thai: Korani Momchao Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat* [The Development of the Thai novel: The Case of Mom Chao Akatdamkoeng Raphiphat]', *Warasan phasa lae nangsu*, 38 (2547): 53–86.

fiction to the expanding literate and increasingly urban public. Suphanni and Wibha also concurred that the three novels published around 1929 by Kulab Saipradit, Mom Chao Akatdamkoeng and Mom Luang Buppha Kunchorn warranted special recognition as the first 'authentic' Thai novels. These two texts became the definitive study of the birth and evolution of the Thai novel. More recently, Mattani Rutnin (1988), Marcel Barang (1994) and David Smyth (2000) continued to reinforce Suphanni's and Wibha's pronouncements.[6]

Those literary scholars point out that the three 'authentic' Thai novels depict Thai society realistically through main characters who are Thai, and with central themes that are serious and substantive.[7] As illustration, Wibha asserts that Kulab Saipradit is 'more serious in his imaginative writing than most of his contemporaries whose work normally evolved around the theme of melodramatic love, mystery, or detection'.[8] More importantly, these literary scholars insist that the three novels had developed a distinct Thai identity. It is not clear to me what constitutes 'distinct' in these cases, or why some novels are more imaginative than others. My own reading suggests that all three of the novels are indeed melodramatic love stories, not radically different from earlier novels which were pejoratively labelled *nangsu aan len* [books read for fun], or *buntherng khadi khlueb* [enamelled entertainment]. Authenticity, and what is considered to be Thai, is such an elusive and contingent concept that seems to be important only to regimes that define the Thai nation state. I am more impressed by the fact that the three texts are modern novels written in the vernacular Thai language, and I feel that a debate about authenticity is unwarranted and distracting.

The canon is inevitably constructed by literary scholars, conditioned by their own subjectivity/ideology influenced by the intellectual climate of their generation. The period in which the canonical novels were published coincided with the impending crisis of the old regime, the rapidly expanding middle class and bureaucracy, exciting social change, the vast improvement in education, and the emergence of writing as a vocation. The end of the 1920s set the stage for the modern Siam of the middle class, a period that the scholars of the 1970s were more familiar with. In addition, by the end of the conflict in Vietnam in 1975, young people were becoming nationalistic and more socially aware. They advocated economic nationalism and in turn searched for 'authentic' Thai products including national literature that critiqued the injustices in Thai society.

The renewed focus on the place of literature, especially the novel, from both the conservative and radical camps, resulted in a struggle to define authentic, relevant and good literature. Nationalistic Thai literary critics concluded that the very early Thai novels were just too derivative, too indistinct from the European novels upon which they were based and therefore, too unauthentic. On the other hand, the young radical literary scholars were also busy excavating and promoting literature with social and political messages in their own attempt to insert these radical voices into the canon itself. In this strange mix, the fate of the very early novels was sealed. They were summarily ignored.

6 Mattani Rutnin, *Modern Thai literature* (Bangkok: Thammasat University Press, 1988); Marcel Barang, *The 20 best novels in Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Modern Classics, 1994); David Smyth, *The Canon in Southeast Asian literatures.*

7 Suphanni Warathorn, *Prawat kanpraphan nawaniyai khong Thai* [The History of the Thai novel] (Bangkok: Khrongkan Tamra, 1976), pp. 233–4.

8 Wibha Senanan, *The Genesis of the novel in Thailand* (Bangkok: Thaiwatthana Panich, 1975), p. 83.

Reconstituting a genealogy of the Thai novel to include pre-1929 novels: Excavating and rehabilitating the very early novels

Although the novel has been a genre of literature in Europe since the publication of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1615, it was only introduced into Siam at the end of the nineteenth century. Students, both commoners and princes, returning from their studies in Europe began to experiment with writing western-style prose fiction that incorporated realistic plots, believable characters, English grammatical structures, punctuation and dialogue.[9]

By the end of the nineteenth century, short stories began to be published regularly. Many of these were translations of English compositions.[10] By the early twentieth century, many students who returned from Europe found publishing outlets in the emerging magazine market. Although we know about the names of these magazines and some of the very early compositions from the accounts in Suphanni's book, it is not possible to assess fully the totality of novels that were written during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. Even the titles cited in Suphanni's book could not be easily found in the national or university libraries. It is more than likely that these are still languishing on private collectors' bookcases, or feeding termites in boxes stored away in closets.

Few examples of the novels of the first period remain in circulation. Printing runs were low and circulation was limited to the elite intellectual class. Suphanni says that most of these early novels were based on western examples. In fact, the very first full-length novel published in the Thai language is Phraya Surintharacha's *Khwam phayabat* that appeared in 1902. It was a translation of Marie Corelli, *Vendetta! or the story of one forgotten* (1886).[11]

9 One of the earliest and most controversial examples of this is Prince Phichitprichakorn's '*Sanuk nuek* [Fun-filled thoughts]'. '*Sanuk nuek*' was supposed to be a serialised set of stories that would eventually become a novel. The first instalment was published in *Wicharayananwiset* journal in 1886. The plot seemed innocent enough. It is about young monks at Wat Bowoniwet discussing what to do after leaving the monkhood. Although the monks and the event were fictitious, Wat Bowoniwet was a real place, the home of the Supreme Patriarch who was King Chulalongkorn's uncle. The abbot was agitated that the temple was depicted in a bad light (the monks were discussing women, among other things), and he demanded that the author rescind what he had written. King Chulalongkorn scolded his brother for upsetting their aging uncle. He subsequently wrote an apologetic letter to his uncle explaining that Prince Phichit was just experimenting with a new form of writing — the *nowel farang*. He explained that this form of literature is common throughout the world, implying that Siam should also produce these works as signs of modernity. This incident proved to be a minor setback that delayed the appearance of the modern novel in Siam until 1901. An excellent critique and a reprint of '*Sanuk nuek*' can be found in Wibha Senanan Khongkanan, *Kamnerd nawaniyai Thai* [The Birth of the Thai novel] (Bangkok: Samnakphim Dok Ya, 1997), a revised edition of her English text.

10 An excellent selection of some of these early translations and original essays can be found in *Roykaew naew mai khong Thai B.E. 2417–2453* [The New Thai prose writing, 1874–1910], ed. Nawatri Ying Sumali Wirawong (Bangkok: Samnakphim Sayam, 2004). The short stories were published in *Darunowat*, *Wicharayanwiset*, *Wicharayan*, *Lak Witthaya*, *Thalok Witthaya*, *Thawi Panya*, *Kula Sattri*, *Samran Witthaya* and *Nithranukhro*. This edited volume is an amazing anthology of 40 Thai short stories written mostly during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Sumali provides a concise tabulated analysis of each short story, documenting names of authors, publishers, length in pages, main characters, plot summaries, writing styles, originality (Thai or translation), and other useful observations. This anthology should be required reading for students interested in Thai modernity, literary transmission, the evolution of modern Thai language, post-colonial theory and intellectual history.

11 Marie Corelli, *Vendetta! Or the story of one forgotten* (1886), published by Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints, www.kessinger.net (last accessed on 1 Sept. 2008). No original copies of *Khwam phayabat*

Suphanni also identifies two Thai proto-novels — *Nithan thong in* and *Darawan*. *Nithan thong in* was a detective story inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series. Self-contained episodes were written by Prince Vajiravudh under the pseudonym Nai Kaew Nai Khwan in 1904; 15 episodes were published. *Darawan* was the work of Kromamuen Narathip Praphanphong using the pseudonym Prasertaksorn. That novel appears to be a proper Thai romance set in Malaya. Aside from Suphanni's excellent analysis and Rachel Harrison's recent interest, these two early novels have not attracted much interest from other literary scholars. It is puzzling to me why these novels are not included in the canon.

Even more puzzling is the exclusion of *Khwam Phayabat*, which has been acknowledged as the first novel to appear in the Thai language. Even though *Khwam Phayabat* is a translation, it introduced the Thai public and aspiring authors to the novel form. Neither Suphanni nor Wibha analysed this novel in their influential texts, nor has the novel been mentioned in recent publications that identify/institutionalise important works of literature. Ignoring the importance of this translated novel is, in my opinion, a grave oversight.[12]

I will devote the rest of this article to examining three non-canonical early novels, each representing the genre of the vernacularised (translated) novel, the original Thai novel, and the hybrid/imitation/bi-cultural novel that helped prepare Siam for modernity and political and cultural autonomy. The three novels were written by two authors — Phraya Surintharacha and Luang Wilat Pariwat. Phraya Surintharacha, using the pseudonym Mae Wan, published *Khwam phayabat* in 1902. Luang Wilatpariwat or Khru Liam used the pen name Nai Samran to compose *Khwam mai phayabat* in 1915. He also wrote *Nang neramid* [Created nymphs] soon after *Khwam mai phayabat*, in 1916.[13] Contemporary Thai literary scholars have dismissed

can be found at the National Library, the only copy still circulating is its reprint for the cremation of Phraya Surintharacha's wife in 1967. Cornell University's Echols Collection has this copy. Marcel Barang's condescending remark, 'Marie who?', suggesting that the Thai reader only appreciated mediocre literary works misses several important points (Barang, *The 20 best novels of Thailand: A Thai modern classics anthology*, Bangkok: TMC, 1994, p. 60). Corelli's novels outsold male literary rivals such as Arthur Conan Doyle. Corelli was also one of the most popular fiction writers of her time. During the late Victorian age, Corelli was the darling of the middle class. When she died in 1924, numerous articles were written about her in the press. The *London Mercury* declared that in her hey-day, she 'was read by the entire middle-class, who bought in all many hundreds of thousands of her works at six shillings a volume'. Her novels were seen as both low-brow and high-brow simultaneously. Refer to Annette R. Federico, *Idol of suburbia: Marie Corelli and late Victorian literary culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 169.

12 Suphanni also lists 18 titles published between 1911 and 1919, but it is unclear whether these novels are original compositions or translated novels and whether they are still available to researchers. Undoubtedly, this period is indeed a lively period for novels that deserves serious attention. Another popular author whose works have been translated into Thai is H. Rider Haggard. The most famous among his translated novels is *She* (1886), first translated by Luang Wilatpariwat using the pseudonym *Nok Nori* some time in the early 1900s or early 1910s under the title *Sao song phan pi* [Two thousand year old beauty]. This translation has been reprinted several times, most recently in 1990. The term '*sao song phan pi*' is now a common description of women who refuse to age. Few however, remember how the term originated.

13 Phraya Surintharacha and Luang Wilatpariwat were among the first of seven commoners to receive scholarships from King Chulalongkorn to study in England in 1895. They accompanied Prince Chakkrabongse to pursue further studies in England. Mae Wan, pseudo, *Khwam phayabat*, 2nd edition, published in *Cremation volume of Khunying Nueng Surintharacha*, Wat Thepsirintharawat, 8 June 1967.

these novels as inauthentic Thai because they are *nangsu plae* (translated book), *nangsu prae* (transformed book), or *nagsu plaeng* (metamorphosised book), which are distinctions without difference.

Vernacularisation as appropriation

Thai culture over the centuries has benefited from translations of literary works from other cultures.[14] The *Ramakian*, for example, is a Thai rewriting of the Ramayana that has been accepted as an exemplar of classical Thai literature. I would not be surprised if many Thai do not realise that the epic is in fact an important scripture in Hinduism. In my own case, it was not until I was an educated adult that I realised that *Nithan Isop* and *Inao* were not Thai.

Translation from a foreign language into Thai involves predominantly sense for sense and not word for word. The accuracy that is demanded of academic translation is not the concern of most of the early translations. Translators have exercised a wide range of agency in adding to, subtracting from, or changing the stories they translate.[15] For example, the Ramayana has been re-written, re-interpreted and re-formatted, so that as the *Ramakian*, it has taken on a new life to celebrate the royals and not the gods as in the original Hindu text. In fact, each Southeast Asian version of the Ramayana reflects its own local history and cultural specificity.[16]

Postcolonial scholars like Tejaswini Niranjana and Gayatri Spivak focus on the power relations involved in translation.[17] Niranjana is concerned with how translations 'inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of colonial rule'.[18] This is because domination is carried out by the state apparatus. Spivak, on the other hand, highlights how colonial translation is a way to reconstruct or to rewrite the image of the colonised as an inferior culture. Through the process of interpellation, a term coined by the French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, the colonised internalise this inferiority and thereby perpetuate the myth of inequality. Vince Rafael, in his book *Contracting colonialism*, however, takes a different tack. He documents how the Tagalog use 'mistranslation' as a strategy to resist Spanish hegemony.[19] Rafael's work differs from Niranjana's, even though both are interested in the subjectivity of the colonised, in that Rafael theorises that retranslation or mistranslation

Nai Samran, pseudo, *Khwam mai phayabat* (Bangkok: Double Nine Press, 2001). Nai Samran, pseudo, *Nang neramid* (Bangkok: 1916).

14 For a discussion of translation as culture and translation as appropriation, refer to *Translation, history and culture*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevre (New York: Pinter, 1990). Assimilating foreign text into a target culture and linguistic can also be seen as a domesticating process. While generally a negative concept, when used by the subaltern, it can be empowering.

15 The translator's ideology generally wins over all other considerations, be they linguistic or poetic. Andre Lefevre, *Translation, rewriting, and the manipulation of the literary frame* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 39.

16 For a study of plot variations, refer to Nicanor G. Tiongson, 'The Rule of Rama from the Bay of Bengal to the Pacific Ocean', *SPAFA Journal*, 10, 2 (May–Aug. 2000): 5–25.

17 Gayatri Spivak, 'The Politics of translation', in *The Translation studies reader*, ed. L. Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 397–416.

18 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting translation: History, post-structuralism, and the colonial context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 33.

19 Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

existed widely during the colonial period. The agency of the colonised to mistranslate may have puzzled the Spanish priests, but it was logical to the Tagalog.

The study of early Thai translations of western literature can gain from Rafael's conceptual framework. Even though Siam was never directly colonised, the imposition of extraterritoriality by the 1855 Bowring Treaty compromised its sovereignty. Thus scholars have conceptualised Siam as a semi-colonial state to try to make it fit into the conceptual framework of colonised Southeast Asia. Although the debate about how to situate Siam in postcolonial studies is still unsettled, I would argue that even as a semi-colonial state or a crypto-colonial state (a term coined by Michael Herzfeld), the Thai had control over cultural production that served their own needs and not those of the hegemonic colonial powers. In this instance, I would also argue that translation was a way to cushion the impact of western domination.

The policy of urging translations was first announced by King Chulalongkorn in 1886 as a way to improve education and knowledge about the west.[20] The discourse of resistance was expressed as the necessity to keep abreast of the best achievement of *khwam than samai* [the latest achievement of human civilisation] regardless of where it originated. Asian humanistic culture was to be replaced by western culture that emphasised rationality, science, and industry. Beginning with King Mongkut, Siam's leaders wanted to acquire the west's superior scientific and industrial achievements together with the cultural forms that supported those achievements. But the Thai would only select what was best and most appropriate for them through translation or adaptation.

Translation, interpretation and rewriting are processes that appropriate what is transformed as one's own. Thai translators do not always see themselves as technicians of language, but as artists, authors and composers. It is not unusual to see authors list themselves as such and not as mere translators. In fact, the first Thai author/translators exercised freewheeling agency by including their own stories and ideas that exceeded what was actually in the novels themselves.

Another way to theorise translation is to consider it as the vernacularisation or localisation of knowledge — turning something foreign into Thai. The historian David Wyatt has made a strong argument that the emergence of what he calls the 'vernacular kingdoms', which invented their own writing in the late thirteenth century, facilitated and precipitated the vernacularisation of idioms of art, literature, and music. This is why one can distinguish, for example, Buddha images that are Indian, Thai, Burmese, or Khmer. The vernacularisation process in literature when applied to the novel, therefore, makes translated novels 'Thai'. His colleague O.W. Wolters equates

20 Suphanni, *Prawat kanpraphan*, p. 32. The sign of a shift from Chinese economic and cultural hegemony to an English/European hegemony is the suspension of tribute missions to China by King Mongkut in 1852 when Siam began negotiations with the British about trade and legal authority that led up to the Bowring Treaty of 1855. Refer to B.J. Terwiel, *Thailand's political history* (Bangkok: Rivers Books, 2005), p. 145. Historians have concluded that the 1893 incident where French gunboat diplomacy forced Siam to relinquish claims to territory on the west bank of the Mekong solidified Siam's policy to emulate western civilisation as a strategy to resist colonial conquest. Refer to Patrick Jory, 'Problems in contemporary Thai nationalist historiography', *Kyoto Review*, Mar. 2003. It should be noted that soon after that crisis King Chulalongkorn sent two sons, Prince Vajiravudh and Prince Aphakorn, to study military and naval science in England. Others were soon to follow.

appropriation to localisation, whereby what is foreign becomes fractured, restated, and drained of its original significance before being reconstituted with a new subjectivity.[21]

Translation is also a way to educate readers about other cultures. Many leading Thai intellectuals such as Phraya Anuman Ratchathon and Prince Wachirayan had *farang* patrons to help them with English and to understand Europe.[22] But for the rest of the middle class, translated stories provided easy access to help them know the west and other cultures. Moreover, many translated works wrote into their compositions the equality or even the superiority of Thai culture over western culture and practices. For the Siamese, translation was an appropriation of western knowledge that helped to boost the Siamese sense of self-assurance, cosmopolitanism and understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of modernity that would prepare them to deal with the encroaching west. Even though it was clear that the west was superior in many aspects, there was no need for the Siamese to feel totally inferior. To emulate the west did not necessarily mean to submit to the west. 'Knowing the west' through translation could be an effective strategy to help prepare the Siamese to resist western hegemony.

The outlets for these translations were the numerous magazines that began publishing in the early 1900s. The names of these early magazines provide a clue to how western knowledge was to be appropriated. *Lak Witthaya* (1900–02) means 'to steal knowledge', in other words, 'to plagiarise'. The first novel in the Thai language, *Khwam phayabat*, was serialised in 1901 in this magazine. *Thalok Witthaya* (1900–05), meaning 'to expose knowledge', may have been the single-handed work of Luang Wilatpariwat/Khru Liam, who edited and wrote most of the articles using numerous pen names. His translation of *She* [*Sao song phan pi*] appeared in this magazine.[23] *Thawee Panya* (1904–07), or 'to

21 Refer to O.W. Wolters, *History, culture, and region in Southeast Asian perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999), pp. 55–7, 173–14, 182–8. David Wyatt's assertions were presented on numerous occasions in guest lectures in my course, *Asian Studies 208: Introduction to Southeast Asia*. Appropriation, or to make something one's own, may explain why some of the early translators see themselves as authors and composers of new transformed literary works and therefore did not feel compelled to acknowledge the original manuscript or author. Plagiarism through translation is not seen as the bankruptcy of indigenous genius. Instead of being a prohibited behaviour, stealing knowledge through plagiarism is condoned and taken as clever or *keng*. Outwitting a better opponent is always *keng* in Thai culture. The practice of not crediting the work of previous scholars also occurs in re-translations. Later translations of Rider Hargard's *She* by Chaiwat, pseudo, *Sao song phan pi* (n. p.: 1943), found in the Chulalongkorn University Library, and Sodsai, pseudo, *Amata thewi* (Bangkok: Praphansarn Press, 2004), never even mentioned that the first translation was made by Khru Liam. Note that Chaiwat also plagiarised Khru Liam's title.

22 Phraya Anuman Rachathon translated Rider Haggard's *Virgin of the sun* in 1916 with the help of his English supervisor. Before that, in 1913, he also published a novel *Amnat haeng khwam phayayam* [The Power of perseverance] but refused to give the name of the original author or book title. The vernacularisation of western literature through translation became an honourable pasttime for the educated class, both those who studied abroad and those who learned English at local schools such as Suan Kulab, Thepsirin and Assumption. These early writers translated and wrote original prose fiction as a duty, as well as to seek fame. They did this while working at their regular government jobs. Writing did not become a serious profession until the founding of the Suphab Burut group by Kulab Saipradit in the late 1920s.

23 S. Phlai Noi asserts that Khru Liam was not involved in the original phase of *Thalok Witthaya* which was operated for a few years beginning in 1900 by Wan Thalokwitthaya. He says that Khru Liam revived the magazine in 1912. If this is true, then *Sao song phan pi* may have been published later than conventional thinking. But it is also possible that *Sao song phan pi* was serialised in the original magazine. Refer to S. Phlai Noi, '*Khru Liam phu khian nawaniyai Thai khon raek* [Khru Liam who is the first to write a

double knowledge', published Rama 6's *Nithan thong in. Phadung Witthaya* (1912–15) meaning 'to nourish knowledge' was a magazine published by the Sino-Thai paper *Chino-Sayam Warasap*.

The first decade and a half of the twentieth century marked a time when the literate and urbanising public became interested in learning more about the west. European emporiums were opened to sell western goods. The educated class even began to subscribe to English papers and magazines. Hollywood films began to appear. Perhaps more importantly, King Chulalongkorn made two trips to Europe in 1897 and 1907. The king's trip was widely publicised and the art work, dining sets and other exotic European goods he brought back caused excitement among his subjects.[24] The educated Siamese fascination with foreign cultures seemed insatiable. The novel helped meet these needs.[25]

More than a translation: *Khwam phayabat*

When Mae Wan's *Khwam phayabat* was published as a single volume in 1902, it caused quite a stir among the Siamese educated class. Although English had been taught in Siam since the Fourth reign, it was not that widespread. The publication of *Khwam phayabat* in the vernacular meant that the literate and urban Thais were able to gain direct access to an English novel. Stealing knowledge – that is, plagiarism – indeed exposed western knowledge to the Thai readers.

Khwam phayabat was the first full-length novel about 'exotic' Italy easily accessible to the Thai audience. It provided an important window for the Thai to get a glimpse of European life. This thirst for knowledge about the west was reflected in the publication boom of subsequent translations of works by Corelli, Rider Haggard, Alexander Dumas and Arthur Conan Doyle.[26] In fact, many translations were published but the original authors or manuscripts were difficult to ascertain because the Thai translators left out this important information.[27]

Thai novel]', in *Khwam mai phayabat* (Bangkok: Dok Ya, 2002), pp. 82–3. Khru Liam wrote under many pseudonyms such as Nai Samran [Mr Happy], Kaew Kung [Shrimp Tomalley], Rang Jiap [Absolutely Farang], Khun thong [Minah Bird], Pakka Kaew [Glass Pen], Klue Kaew [Crystal Salt], Malaeng Mum [Spider], Maew Europe [European Cat], Suriwongsongfa [Light in the Sky], Sithanonchai [famous court figure from Ayuthaya period], Nai Talok Khon Thi Song [The Second Comedian], Hong Thong [Golden Swan], Nok Krathung [Krathung Bird], Editor [Editor], Gaw Gaw [First Thai alphabet], Nok Noi [Little Bird] and Nok Nori [Nori Bird]. Refer to Suphanni, *Prawat kanpraphan*, p. 65.

24 Refer to Maurizio Peleggi's fascinating study of material consumption and the Thai court in *Lord of things: The Fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

25 Translated works appealed to the Thai reader because they presented a more realistic picture of life that contrasted with the traditional Thai *Jak jak wong wong* stories. Suphanni, *Prawat ka praphan*, pp. 35–6. The *Jak jak wong wong* stories were variations of a common theme. The leading men usually had names ending with *jak* or *wong*, e.g. *Jakkaew, Laksanawong, Phra Worawong*, or names that suggested noble roots, e.g. *Sangthong, Phra Maniphichai*. The plot was generally about a romance, where a handsome prince sent to study martial arts or magic meets and conquers hardships and enemies using his martial and magical powers. He would meet the perfect woman and win her hand. The two marry and live happily ever after.

26 Suphanni lists 27 European authors, ibid., pp. 81–2.

27 For example, *Amnat haeng khwam rak* [The Power of love], supposedly written by Marie Corelli was published in Siew Hut Seng's *Chino Sayam warasap* in 1911. I have been unable to figure out which of Corelli's novels this is because I have not seen the Thai translation. Other examples of Corelli translations

In a sense, the Thai version of *Vendetta* is the translation of a novel written in English by an English author about Italy and Italian values. The author, whose real name is Mary 'Minnie' MacKay, claimed a fictitious relationship to an aristocratic Italian musician (hence the name Marie Corelli) to 'translate' Italian culture and language into English. Following suit, Phraya Surintharacha also assumed the fictitious 'feminine' name of Mae Wan to translate the English translation of Italian culture and morals. Therefore, *Khwam phayabat* is a translation that is twice removed from Italy, exposing the Thai readership to Italian culture translated through the lens of an English novelist.

Mae Wan frequently inserted his own voice into the translation to explain these differences to his Thai reader. For example, the European custom of kissing a lady's hand was explained as a form of greeting. But Mae Wan also told the reader that the English do not practise this. In fact, many of the early translated novels, such as Phraya Anuman's *Soraida*, included explanatory notes about these strange European customs.

Mae Wan's translation thus directed the gaze of the Siamese outwards to see European hegemonic culture in a different light. Europeans were shown to be different, quaint and peculiar. They seemed to have strengths and weaknesses universal to mankind. Their humanisation made them less different from the Thai.

Thai cultural practices were also written into the novel to show superiority. For example, the novel begins with the main character, Count Fabio Romani, telling the reader that he was writing from the grave; that is, he is dead and buried. In fact, he was not yet dead when his friend Guido, who lusted after Romani's wife, had him buried. Count Romani was able to escape from his coffin to plot revenge on his wife and former friend. Even though the original novel discusses cremation as a good way to dispose of a corpse, Mae Wan embellished the discussion by explaining to the Thai reader that 'dead' means that the person has already been sent to the *wat* [Buddhist temple] and the corpse has already been already cremated.

But more importantly, he asked, 'Why haven't people all over the world followed our Thai custom?' This question appears on page three of the novel, keying the Thai reader to the possibility that Thai culture is equal to other world cultures. Not only is this tactic a way to draw in the Thai reader by invoking something familiar, it provides resistance to other cultures by placing the Thai on a par, or in this case above, other world civilisations right at the outset of the novel.

Of course, for the story to work, Count Romani had to be buried alive and later to escape from his coffin and crypt (translated as *hong suey* — a Chinese grave long familiar to the Thai reader). Romani was able to escape from his family crypt and change his appearance and his name to Count Oliva. He returns to kill Guido in a

are *Thelma* (1887) and *Absinth* (a translation of *Wormwood*, 1890); both novels were translated and published in 1912 by Mom Chao Suksisamorn and Mom Chao Phansikasem. *Absinth* was so popular that it was translated twice after that, in 1915 by Chaowalit Setthabutr, and in 1928 by Malai Chuphinit. *Treasures of heavens* (1906) was translated in 1916 by Luang Naiwichan.

As an aside, plots from *nithan* [fables], *jatakas* [Buddhist parables] and epics have been considered as part of the public domain that can be used to form new stories. For example, King Bhumibol's widely read *The Story of Mahajanaka* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing Co., 1996) is an adaptation and translation – in English and in Thai – of a story from the Tripitika to illustrate how good elements (a productive mango tree) are destroyed, leaving behind unproductive social elements (barren mango tree), and how perseverance wins over evil.

pistol duel and remarries his unfaithful wife, Nina. The story ends when he lures Nina to the family crypt to reveal his true identity. Tragically, Nina is killed when one of the stones in the crypt becomes dislodged and crushes her. The violent deaths of the adulterer and her lover are depicted as justified revenge in Italian culture. But Mae Wan also inserts a Thai sentiment into the equation. In explaining Nina's death, Mae Wan explains her demise not just in terms of a vendetta, but in terms of Buddhist karmic retribution. That is, her death was not caused by her husband, it was the consequence of her own transgressions, her own bad karma.

A close comparison between the original and the translated version also reveals the liberal use of the translator's licence to include and to exclude. For example, Mae Wan ignored and excised most of Corelli's railing against the state of European morality and ethics. But Mae Wan rewrote the ending of the novel to place Siam front and centre on the world stage. After the death of Guido and Nina, Count Romani disappears from Italy. In the original story, he sets sail for the jungles of South America. But in the Thai version, he books a passage on a ship to Singapore then changes to another ship which takes him to Krung Thep Mahanakhorn Amorn Rattanakosin, the official name of Bangkok. Mae Wan cleverly inserted the word 'this' to describe Krung Thep as a hint that Count Romani, acting as narrator, was recounting his story from his home in exile somewhere in Siam. This final (re)writing de-centralises and provincialises Europe by making Siam a worthy place for a rich Italian prince and perhaps others like him to take refuge and asylum. Bangkok becomes a modern cosmopolitan city where a European can become lost among the many who reside there. It places Bangkok on par with the other great cities of the world.

The First original Thai novel: *Khwam mai phayabat*

Although Suphanni, Wibha, and other literary scholars agree that Khru Liam's *Khwam mai phayabat* is considered the first novel to be composed by a Thai, too little was known about it in the mid-1970s to allow for its consideration as part of the canon. In fact, few had been able to read it until it was rediscovered in 1997 and republished in 2001 and 2002. Thus analyses of this novel that appeared in most influential texts extrapolated from its title that it must have been a parody of Mae Wan's *Khwam phayabat*. In fact, until it reappeared, literary scholars believed that Khru Liam composed his novel soon after the publication of *Khwam phayabat*. We now know that it was written 13 years after, in 1915. And perhaps because it was believed to have been written to rival Corelli's work, it was therefore seen as derivative and unworthy of the canon. As a derivation of a European novel, it was, *ipso facto*, less than authentic Thai.

The impetus for *Khwam mai phayabat* was the republication of *Khwam phayabat* in 1913 together with the promulgation of the Literary Act of 1914.[28] The 1914 Act was an attempt by Rama VI to nationalise the novel by making it more Thai. The Act deplored the state of Thai literature, in which authors used improper language influenced by foreign grammar and punctuation; compositions were imitations and

28 Wibha, *Genesis*, pp. 72–3. Also see Nitaya Masavisut, 'Kindling literary flame', in *Thai literary traditions*, ed. Manas Chitakasem (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1995), pp. 8–9. The Act was also to encourage the writing of 'good' literature that will be judged and awarded prizes. Thanaphol Limapichat, a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) is currently writing a dissertation that traces the evolution of 'good' literature in his study of Thai intellectual history.

translations of non-literary European novels; and acknowledgements of the original author and title were absent.

In response to the 1914 Literary Act that also urged writers to produce good Thai books, and the republication of *Khwam phayabat*, the publisher of Rong Phim Thai saw a business and a nationalistic opportunity that could be met with the publication of an authentic Thai novel. He hired Khru Liam to write a novel that was anything but *farang*. Although he preferred a Thai novel, it is interesting to note that he was unconcerned if it was Indian. He specified that the title of the new novel had to be *Khwam mai phayabat*.[29]

If we are to use the reasons cited by literary scholars for why *Lakhon haeng chiwit*, *Luk phuchai* and *Sattru khong chao lon* are considered the first authentic Thai novels, then *Khwam mai phayabat* should also be one. How could it not be so when the author was Thai, the language was Thai, the setting was entirely in Siam, all of the main characters were Thai, the issues covered in the novel were critical ones for that period, and the moral fabric of the plot was based on Thai Buddhist teachings? In fact, Khru Liam proclaimed in his preface:

> This story is a made up story composed by a Thai. It is a genuine Thai story, not an abridged story, not a translation, and not adapted from some other story. It is the inaugural copy of a genre called *pralom lok khwam riang* [composition to seduce the world] which is a real Thai novel. If you read it you would like it. I pity the Thai reader. So now you can read a real Thai *pralom lok khwam riang*.[30]

The only reference to *Khwam phayabat* is in the first few pages of the novel. Chapter 1 is titled 'The Sweet taste of non-vengeance'. It begins with the Buddhist proverb that one should vanquish anger with non-anger and that one should win over ill will with goodwill. The first sentence of the novel claims that the *farang* relishes the saying 'revenge is sweet', but that the sentiment is in fact misguided and counterproductive. *Khwam mai phayabat* or *The Non-vendetta* sets out to prove the opposite. It is the

29 *Khwam mai phayabat*, postscript, pp. 718–31. The editor gave Khru Liam some pencils and paper together with a copy of *Khwam phayabat*. Suchart Sawatsi admitted that he had written about the novel without ever having read it. He based his conclusion that it was a parody of Corelli on erroneous assertions of other literary scholars. Suchat at first believed that Khru Liam serialised *Khwam mai phayabat* in *Thalok witthaya*. We now know that Khru Liam finished writing the 717-page novel in 22 days, a feat that impressed his friend Mae Wan.

30 *Khwam Mai Phayabat*, preface. Khru Liam claimed that this novel was the first *pralomlok khwam riang* [composition to seduce the world] or an authentic Thai novel. The category *pralom lok*, according to the *Ratchabanditsathan Thai Dictionary* (1954 edition), refers to literary works that focus on romance and sex. Such novels, known as *ruang pralom lok*, are to please the world or worldly passions. This classification is also used in Cambodian literature. Literary scholars conjectured that the term *nawaniyai* was a term concocted by Kulab Saipradit's *Suphab Burut* group. During the 1880s, works written for pure entertainment were also called *nangsu aan len* or *ruang aan len* [books to read for fun, or fun stories]. By the 1920s, while *ruang aan len* became identified with fictions and realism, *pralomlok* was used to describe romances. S. Phlainoi asserted that Song Thepasit wrote articles in 1926 and 1927 to describe their differences. Refer to S. Phlainoi, *Khwamrak chiwit lae ngan Song Thephasit tonbaep khong 'San Thewarak'* [Love, life and works of Song Thepasit: The Model of 'San Thewarak'] (Bangkok: Dok Ya Press, n.d). I thank Thanaphol for this information and reference (private email, 7 Dec. 2007). Also see Phonwipha Watthanaratchanakura, '*Song Thephasit: Nakpraphan ruang san chan khru nai krasae wannakam Thai samai mai* [Song Thephasit: A master short story writer in the current of modern Thai literature]', *Silapa Wattanatham*, 28 (1 Nov. 2006): 154–5.

story of how a Thai man overcame his anger and the need for revenge by adhering to the superior Buddhist concept of forgiveness. Unlike Fabio who killed his adulterous wife and her lover, Nai Jian forgave both.

Although the novel is a romance with a happy ending, it has a Thai twist. The hero is Nai Jian, a sentimental young man who has returned from a short study period in England. He has a rough time keeping a job and finding a wife. But with the help of his mother, Jian finds the beautiful Mae Prung, who lives with her retired parents in a *ban suan* [home among the orchards] in *khlong bang sai gai* [chicken intestines district canal] outside of Bangkok. The Thai reader can easily identify where this is because *bang sai gai* is (still) a district in Thonburi. Only the Thai would call a place the 'chicken intestines' district! To escape her rural surroundings, Mae Prung seduces the hapless Jian. They marry and live at first with Prung's parents. Soon, Prung pesters her husband to move to Bangkok.

In Bangkok, the beautiful Prung is transformed from a country belle into a glamorous city debutante who is paraded around in automobiles on the newly constructed city boulevards. She has turned into a vain and spoiled 'modern' woman, possessed by men for 'show' and for sexual pleasure. Prung eventually falls prey to the allure of the bright lights and the promiscuity of the rich urbanites. She leaves her dull husband for Khun Phak, a sophisticated and rich but uncouth villain. But because Jian is such a moral person he rescues Praphai, Khun Phak's teenage daughter who had been sold by her father to a dirty old man. Jian is rewarded with the gratitude of Praphai, a girl half his age. They become lovers.

A few years later, Mae Prung, no longer beautiful and suffering poor health from an abortion, is discarded by her lover. She returns to ask Jian for forgiveness. Prung repents by becoming a Buddhist nun with Jian's sponsorship. But through the good-heartedness of Jian's young lover, Mae Prung is nursed back to health. Jian's forgiveness is also transformative, for it restores Prung to her former beauty. With the urging of Praphai, Jian takes Mae Prung back as his wife again. Because he was not vengeful, he is rewarded with two beautiful wives, riches and status. The novel ends when both women become pregnant.[31]

Although it is not difficult to make a case that the novel has literary merit, this novel is the first to raise an alarm about the negative moral effects of modernity and urbanisation. As social commentary, *Khwam mai phayabat* is more important than the three canonical novels published in 1929. *Khwam mai phayabat* criticises the decline of morality in modern Bangkok society of 1915. The consumption of western technology, expensive food and alcohol, leisure sites, and public sensuality undermined traditional Thai values. Young Thai women, regardless of their upbringing, easily fell prey to the allure of a loose and promiscuous lifestyle of the modern westernised woman. At the same time, the novel also identifies exemplary Thai men and Thai women who adhere to good Buddhist teachings, and who still value the integrity of the family.

The controversy over whether to marry a westerner or a westernised woman is a theme that was made famous by King Vajiravudh's novelette *Huajai chai num*

31 An excellent discussion of the logic of Thai polygamy is Craig J. Reynolds, 'A Thai-Buddhist defence of polygamy', in *Seditious histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian pasts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), pp. 185–213.

[A Young man's heart], written in 1921. This theme became the centrepiece of *Lakhon haeng chiwit* (1929) and more explicitly in *Sattru khong chao lon* (1929). However, Khru Liam's Mae Prung represents a more threatening example of what modernity can wreak on the unsuspecting Thai woman than those in *Lakhon* or *Sattru*. Unlike the women in those two novels, Mae Prung is neither a *farang* nor a Thai woman who has been spoilt by studying in America. Mae Prung is merely an average, everyday Thai woman who is easily corrupted by a modernity imported from the west. If concern for critical and universal human conditions is a criterion for inclusion into the canon, *Khwam mai phayabat* easily meets that test.

Hybidity, mimesis, and bi-culturalism: *Nang neramid*

Khru Liam's *Nang neramid* [Created nymphs], written shortly after the publication of *Khwam mai phayabat* in 1916 should also receive consideration for the canon. I became aware of the existence of *Nang neramid* while doing research on Khru Liam. Suphanni confirmed the existence of *Khwam mai phayabat* by citing an advertisement found in another novel, *Nang neramid*, written by Nai Samran, the same pseudonym used by Khru Liam when he wrote *Khwam mai phayabat*. Suphanni mistakenly believed that *Nang neramid* was another translated novel.[32]

Several things became obvious to me after reading the novel. First, it seemed to be a translation but was not. Second, the description in the opening scene looked familiar. Third, the novel imitated an English adventure story. Fourth, it contained similar salacious, lewd, and humorous scenes also found in *Khwam mai phayabat*. Lastly, the ending seemed too bizarre for a *farang* story, but not for a Thai one. I had to conclude that *Nang neramid* was an original Thai novel composed by Khru Liam emulating or pretending to be a *farang* novelist. The provocative postscript tells all. Khru Liam writes:

> After my *Khwan mai phayabat* did not sell as expected, I realised that I had no power to change the public belief that a Thai could not write well (as the *farang*) because they lacked the ability to compose an engaging story. Therefore, I have written this *farang* novel about divine nymphs. (In fact) I have also penned other *farang* novels, more

32 I was eager to find a copy of *Nang neramid*. My quest was rewarded three years ago while on leave in Bangkok. Ajarn Sombat Phlainoi had just written an introduction in the republication of *Khwam mai phayabat* in 2002 and I had a hunch that he might have *Nang neramid* in his book collection. Suphot Chaengrew, editor of *Silapa Watthanatham* magazine, helped contact Ajarn Sombat, who admitted that he had a copy of the novel. He agreed to let Suphot take digital photos for me. Because the hand-held digital photos were so uneven, some of the pages were too out of focus to read. Suphot eventually received permission to Xerox the entire novel. Unfortunately, I was unable to examine the original or to find its publisher.

Suphanni asserts incorrectly that *Khwam mai phayabat* appeared soon after *Khwam phayabat*. Suphanni also believes that *Nang neramid* was a translated novel published around 1915 during the reign of Rama 5 (*sic*). I suspect that Suphanni was unable to read *Nang neramid* because if she had she would have known that *Nang neramid* was not a translation. Refer to Suphanni, *Prawat kanpraphan*, pp. 56–7, especially footnote 1, page 57. Khru Liam's contemporaries who wrote in his 1966 cremation volume admitted to having read *Khwam mai phayabat* but no one was able to give much detail. The only evidence of the plot was revealed by Bunchuay Somphong who said that the novel is based on the Buddhist notion of forgiveness which allowed the wronged husband to win back his adulterous wife. Bunchuay Somophong in *Wilatpariwat Anuson*, quoted in Thammakiat Kan-ari, '*Khru Liam perdchak nawaniyai thai ruang raek duay "Khwam Mai Phayabat"* [Khru Liam raises the curtain for the first Thai novel with *Khwam mai phayabat*]', *Silapa Watthanatham*, 5 (May 1984): 111.

> than the stories I had translated. Friends who have been told know that those (novels) are my original compositions. In fact, many know that *Nang neramid* is composed by the author of *Khwam mai phayabat*.[33]

If the statement above is true, then Khru Liam must have authored many novels that were passed off as translations. It also appears that the reading public did not have much faith in the ability of a Thai author to write a good novel, nor was it ready for a Thai novel that focused on the underbelly of Thai society. Readers, it appears, would have preferred *farang* novels about other cultures. In *Nang neramid*, Khru Liam subverts this popular notion by becoming a *farang*-like professional writer, no different from Marie Corelli or H. Rider Haggard, to deliver what his audience wanted — a story of adventure in exotic Egypt. The joke is on the reader who after reading 400 pages of a purported translation is told that he will never find the English original because there is none!

Compared to *Khwam mai phayabat*'s 730 pages, *Nang neramid*'s 399 pages is relatively short. Despite these limitations, Khru Liam was intent upon entertaining his readers by transporting them to a foreign and exotic land promising a story of adventure, intrigue, magic and the occult, fighting, romance, seduction, mummies, and a heavy dose of eroticism. In both novels, however, Khru Liam inserts Buddhist values into the plot to put his Thai readers at ease and to make the stories more accessible.

Although I cannot say for certain whether any other original Thai novel was published immediately after *Khwam mai phayabat* (finished on 4 August 1915), I will assume *Nang neramid* (completed on 29 July 1916) to be the second original Thai novel; that is, a novel composed by a Thai author in the Thai language. The fact that it imitates the *farang* novel should not make it less Thai. Khru Liam was doing what authors before him had done; that is, writing about another culture as if it were his own. To repeat, Khru Liam was emulating his European models, Marie Corelli and Rider Haggard. The former, an Englishwoman, wrote about Italy; the latter, an Englishman, wrote about Arabs and Egyptians in Africa. Why then should not Khru Liam, a Thai, write about the English in Egypt? The only twist here is that Khru Liam was compelled to make his readers think that *Nang neramid* was a translated English novel of adventure and mystery, something that could have been written by Rider Haggard. But after the revelation in the postscript, would his Thai readers accept that Khru Liam was a clever author, or merely a Thai 'passing' as *farang*?

To me, *Nang neramid* is a genuine Thai novel about some English, Egyptian, Arab, and Negro characters in Egypt. Indeed, that the characters of *Nang neramid* are *only* foreign suggests that Khru Liam realised that Thai readers would rather be transported to another world to learn about those Others. Aside from Europe, Thai readers were fascinated by the adventures in backward Africa, by the sensuality of Arabia, and by the daringness of English adventurers. It was much later that Luang Wichit Wathakan would write an African adventure in his novel *Huang rak haew luek* [Sea of love, chasm of death] (1949) where Thai characters would have their own adventures in Africa.[34]

33 *Nang neramid* postscript, pp. 400–1. The postscript was dated 29 July 1916. *Khwam mai phayabat* was completed on 4 Aug. 1915.

34 Refer to Thak Chaloemtiarana, 'Move over Madonna: Luang Wichit's *Huang rak haew luek*', in *Southeast Asia across three generations*, ed. James Siegel and Audrey Kahin (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast

It should be noted here that *Sao song phan pi*, a translation of Rider Haggard's *She*, was also reprinted in 1916, perhaps close to when *Nang neramid* was published. This meant that the Thai public was able to compare the two novels side by side. Of course, the perceptive ones would have noted that *Nang neramid* was a 'Thai novel' about Africa and Egypt, and that *Sao song phan pi* was a Thai translation of an English novel about Africa and Egypt.

Because Khru Liam hastily wrote *Nang neramid* to recoup his lost investment in *Khwam mai phayabat*, he inevitably borrowed ideas from his translation of *She*. Khru Liam's adaptations from *She* are unmistakable. Both novels have English heroes, that of *She* being Ludwig Horace Holly, who studied mathematics at Cambridge; and that of *Nang neramid* being James Billford, who studied classics at Oxford. Both went to North Africa; both dealt with the occult. One met up with a sorceress, the other with a grand wizard. Both stories focus on the immortality of women.[35]

Nang neramid tells the story of the adventure of a young English scholar James Billford on vacation in Egypt. During his explorations of ancient ruins and caves, he and his friends discover well-preserved mummies, mostly of young and beautiful females. It turns out that a Moslem Arab high priest had discovered a way to revive mummies to sexually please men, especially the priests. These mummies are so alluring that if a man touches them, he will be forever lost in lust. The more sex these revived mummy nymphs have with men, the more carnal and the more desirable they become. The Arabs also abduct Billford's fiancé Lydia intending to kill her and to later revive her as a nymph. Eventually, Billford and some friends infiltrate the Arab *ashram* to rescue Lydia. They are backed up by an English expeditionary force that engages the Arabs in a battle.

The ending of *Nang neramid* is especially comical and unserious, something that usually appears in Thai popular fiction. The final battle between the English and Arabs is halted when a volcano erupts, sending out electrical charges that revive all of the female mummies who then wander onto the battlefield. Soon English, Arab, and African combatants become engrossed in a massive sexual orgy with the revived nymphs. The English commander surveys the mess on the battlefield and laments that there is no way anyone can fight *ha praweni*; that is, the heavy onslaught of the sexual intercourse plague or storm. In this case, rampant carnal desire has taken over the lives of the men. After the orgy is over, the nymphs all turn to dust, the soldiers

Asia Program Publications, 2003), pp. 145–63. It should be noted that I use the anachronistic word Negro to describe Africans in an attempt to maintain integrity of the text. The designation was used in *Nang neramid*.

35 Rider Haggard's *She* is about the immortal sorceress Ayesha, or 'She' who has been waiting for her dead lover for over 2,000 years. Ayesha – a white woman who rules over a tribe of Africans – has achieved immortality after immersing herself in a sacred fire. In a fit of rage, she kills her lover, a handsome Egyptian high priest. She soon regrets her action and preserves her lover's dead body for 2,000 years, spending nights beside him. She hopes to be able to revive him one day. In the story, she finds Leo, a protégé of Ludwig Holly. Leo is a splitting image of Ayesha's lover because Leo is a direct descendant of the Egyptian priest. Ayesha tries to convince Leo to step into the fire of eternity with her. But when she enters the fire, she turns into an old woman and dies. Although the novel is a romance, pure and simple, it provided the reader with a wealth of information about Africa — its people, its climate, its culture, its geography, and its plant and animal life. The novel is a vivid portrayal of this alluring and exotic place. It is most certain that the insatiable Thai reading public found the idea of 'knowing' uncivilised Africa and romantic European culture to be intoxicating and different.

become impotent warriors, and the battle dissipates. In the end, Billford and Lydia find each other and after collecting the queen's jewels to sell, the two return to live a lavish life in England.

Rider Haggard and Khru Liam depict women differently. The sorceress in the novel *She* is still full of lust, thoughts and feelings of endless desire. Ayesha is still looking for her long-departed lover and is scheming to get him back even after 2,000 years. Her love is obsessive. She is a jealous lover who has killed the man she loved. Despite her beauty, no man can trust a woman like her. In contrast, Khru Liam's own version of the immortal woman in *Nang neramid* appears to be an imaginative construct of the male sexual fantasy. The Arab high priest creates divine nymphs in *Nang neramid* by reviving beautiful female mummies. Once revived, the divine nymphs have no emotions except those given to them by their lovers.

The revived female mummy nymphs are devoid of *namatham* [subjective truth], and only exist as *rupatham* [objective truth]. All *namatham* is acquired from lovemaking and sex. The revived female bodies are like empty vessels that exist as *rupatham* that only absorb the lust of men as content (*namatham*), which is reflected back at men who are their lovers. But if the nymphs are overused as sexual objects, they will disintegrate into a pile of bones. Khru Liam seems to be playing to the male *kilet* [lustful desire] for pure sex — sex without guilt, and sex without attachments. In fact, the nymph after a period of time will have more lust and eroticism in her than one man can satisfy because she has stored in her *namatham* the lust of several men, or several sessions of lovemaking. These ideas, although expounded by the Englishman Billford, resonate with the Thai audience familiar with Buddhist concepts of form and subjectivity, and the dangers of uncontrollable *kilet*.

Although the magical aspects are present in both *Nang neramid* and in *She*, Khru Liam inserts into *Nang neramid* stories about insatiable sexual appetites and the role of women as objects of desire. But unlike his first novel *Khwam mai phayabat*, where Thai women are victims of male desire, in *Nang neramid*, they are revived Egyptian women. Lustful desires (*kilet*) and the control of these desires are central themes in Buddhist teachings that are familiar to the Thai reader. The fact that in the novel, all the Englishmen, the Arabs and the Africans fall prey to uncontrolled sexual desires implies that they are morally weak.

The novel also highlights the malleable sexual other, the stereotyping of Arab and Negro male sexual appetite and prowess, the binary of male sex drive and female responsiveness, and how sexuality can be conditioned by the objective and the subjective self. Khru Liam also racialises sexual behaviour. Both Arab and Negro men are depicted as driven by sexual desire. The difference is that the Arab priests enjoy the indulgence of sex and understand restraint, but their Negro servants are too lustful to know how to be gentle or when to stop, thereby wasting the nymphs and turning them quickly into dust.

To provide comic relief, a common trope in Thai melodrama, Khru Liam makes fun of Muslim men. In the novel, the Englishmen who secretly joined the Arab cult were worried that they would have to be subjected to *latthi khao sunao* — the Muslim practice of circumcision. Also as an insider's inclusive wink to his Thai readers, Khru Liam describes how after discovering the mummy of the beautiful queen, Billford decides to lop off her head as a souvenir. This grisly act and lack of fear of strange

occurrences in the pyramid are dismissed by Billford who proclaims, 'We are *farang*; we are not afraid of *phi* [ghosts].'

In this novel, as well as his first novel, Khru Liam writes openly about sexuality, which to him was not necessarily pornographic. The orgies in *Khwam mai phayabat* were realistic ones that could have taken place in hotels, in the private rooms of restaurants, and in secret love nests of the rich in Bangkok society. Those orgies were organised by immoral Thai men in an increasingly immoral society corrupted by modernity and urbanisation. In that novel, only Nai Jian, the moral Buddhist man, was rewarded with legitimate sexual relations with his two wives. In *Nang neramid*, however, uncontrollable lust destroyed both the English and Arab forces together with their African allies.

Conclusion

Even this necessarily brief account should demonstrate that the current canon identifying *Lakhon haeng chiw*it, *Luk phu chai* and *Sattru khong chao lon* as the first authentic/real Thai novels obfuscates and elides the importance of other earlier novels. The intrusion of ideological sentiments into the formation of the canon prevents a better appreciation of cultural transmission and reception, especially during the period when the Thai had to cope with heightened pressure from the colonial powers. The labelling of those three novels as authentically Thai suggests that earlier novels were insufficiently authentic, too close to their western models, and therefore, unworthy of consideration. Metaphorically, the 'bath water' from which the three canonical novels sprang forth was unceremoniously thrown out, and with it, some 'babies'. I have discussed the importance of three of these babies. There must be more.

Khwam phayabat is the first proper novel to be experienced uniformly by the literate and increasingly urban Siamese. The novel allowed the Thai to form a common imagination and knowledge about the west. Because the novel was read in the vernacular and not in an imperial language, it could not be seen as the imposition of a colonial value upon the Thai public. The west was filtered through a Thai lens that made western culture accessible, familiar, and less threatening.

But translation is also a process of vernacularisation and localisation that appropriates another culture's knowledge by transforming it into one's own. Thus, Mae Wan's *Khwam phayabat* is more than just a translation of an English novel. It is an original Thai appropriation of the English novel that is representative of a genre of literature that educated the Siamese public about the west. Whether accurate or not, these early translated novels taught the Thai about the alluring yet dangerous Other. The cumulative effect of acquired and appropriated information constituted foundational knowledge about Europe, and other foreign cultures for the Thai.

Prior to the arrival of print capitalism, the Thai foundational knowledge about Indian and Chinese culture came from appropriated translations of two major epics — the Ramayana (*Ramakian*) for India, and the Romance of the Three Kingdoms (*Sam kok*) for China. In both cases, but especially with the Ramayana, the transmission of knowledge is based on limited circulation of texts (even though *Sam kok* was printed in 1865 its circulation was rather limited), oral and dramatic performances, and representations on mural paintings. But with print capitalism that took root in Siam at the end of the nineteenth century and its subsequent flourishing in the early

twentieth century, foundational knowledge about the west and other cultures was rapidly formed by the process of simultaneous reading of a multiplicity of uniform and mass-circulated short stories, newspapers and novels.

The inclusion of *Khwam phayabat* and perhaps other translated novels in school and university curricula will give Thai literature studies new directions for teaching and research that will help clarify when, how, and what Thais knew about the world beyond, and how novels contributed to the Siamese cosmopolitan worldview, its prejudices, its sense of equality, and its confidence with regard to Others. These translated novels should also undergo close study within translation theory, contextual historicism, and postcolonial critical studies.[36]

I have also made the case that *Khwam mai phayabat* is not merely a satire or simply a parody of Corelli's *Vendetta*. It is far more than that. Stephen Greenblatt, the leading proponent of the New Historicism, suggests that literature as culture acts as a constraint to enforce cultural boundaries through praise and blame.[37] As the first original Thai novel that was highly critical of the effects of urbanisation and modernisation, *Khwam mai phayabat* is a very early example of how the novel can help enforce cultural, gender and moral values that have come under attack by modernity.

Aside from the opening page that refers to the belief of westerners that 'revenge is sweet', *Khwam mai phayabat* is indeed a very Thai novel. Its plot is Thai. Its setting is entirely in Siam. Its characters are all Thai and recognisable. Its underlying moral message is also Thai. This novel also suggests historical and anthropological problematics that can be explained by a close reading and a reconstruction of Bangkok middle-class society of the 1910s. I agree with the anthropologist Herbert Phillips, who points out that Thai writers can be 'the most sensitive, reflective, (and) articulate ... members of Thai society ... The writing of literature is integral to the social process, as both historical precipitant and product.' He argues further that literature in the vernacular can be considered a 'noetic expression of a social and cultural milieu', and that it is possible to treat 'literary works as embodiments of culture'. Writing in the vernacular is writing for fellow Thais. Therefore, the communication is intra-cultural and reflects 'the native point of view'.[38]

Nevertheless, *Khwam mai phayabat* is a novel ahead of its time. It failed in the marketplace because it was too drastic a departure from the romances, mystery adventures and detective stories popular at that time. It contained too harsh a criticism of the very people it was supposed to appeal to, that is, the emerging modern urban

36 Parenthetically, the fact that many societies in Asia read translations of similar novels could be a subject of investigation: would different cultural and intellectual traditions lead to different translations and explanations? Would simultaneous literacy of European novels across different Asian cultures and communities conjure up uniform or dissimilar images of the west? How different is each translation intra-culturally and inter-culturally? How does colonial status complicate translation? An excellent study of this line of research is Doris Jedamski's pioneering work 'Popular literature and postcolonial subjectivities: Robinson Crusoe, the Count of Monte Cristo and Sherlock Holmes in colonial Indonesia', in *Clearing a space: Postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, ed. Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 19–48.

37 Stephen Greenblatt, 'Culture', in *Critical terms for literary study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 226.

38 Herbert P. Phillips, *Modern Thai literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp. 3–4. Phillips said that he owed his ideas to Malinowski, which has never been applied to the study of literature.

middle class. Hidden behind the salacious description of sexual orgies was indeed a stunning criticism of Bangkok society. Siam's first original Thai novel was perhaps too modern, too serious, and ultimately too Thai for an audience which did not want to deal with the reality of a morally corrupted Bangkok society.

Nang neramid, on the other hand, was written to satisfy the Thai reading public's thirst to learn about the Others and far-away places. As pure fiction, *Nang neramid* is an important novel because it showcases the professionalism of a Thai author, writing not about the familiar but about the unfamiliar in convincing ways. As the first full-blown novel written by a Thai author in the Thai language about foreign characters in a foreign land, it represents the prototype of local literary genius. Khru Liam should be considered the first professional Thai novelist capable of composing original stories that transcend the limitations of local culture and space. Because most of his life was devoted to writing, translating and publishing books, he has to be considered the first modern professional literary figure in Siam.

Nang neramid is entertaining as well as didactic. The novel allows the reader to be transported into a foreign land, to see life and adventure through Thai eyes, to imagine far-away places, and to imagine the lives and the foibles of Englishmen, Egyptians, Arabs, Ethiopians and Africans. Although he appropriates a western literary form, in *Nang neramid* Khru Liam reverses the usual western gaze that looks at Siam as an exotic and strange place, to allow the Thai to gaze back at the west and other cultures as strange, exotic, immoral and even backward.

Can these three novels be considered authentically Thai? Again, in my opinion, a discussion of authenticity is irrelevant and distracting. These novels are Thai because their authors are Thai and their compositions are in the Thai vernacular. In her essay on otherness in Thai literature, Suvanna Kriengkraipetch remarked that it is difficult to define the Thai 'us', the essential ingredient for Thai authenticity. She concluded that it is much easier to write about others. For example, she points to Rama 1's *Inao*, which identifies the *khaek* [Javanese Muslim] as people who 'did not eat pork'.[39] However, 'eating pork' is not an exclusive Thai characteristic. We know who 'we' are without thinking about it. We also define ourselves by knowing who we are not. The three novels that I have analysed clearly define the Thai 'us' and the foreign 'other'. The vernacular nature of the novels and their Thai authors make them accessible to just 'us' Thais. To reiterate, novels written originally in the Thai vernacular by Thai authors are quintessentially Thai, no different from *gaeng khiew wan gai* [chicken green curry] pizza which I consider to be a Thai dish.

Some may argue that Khru Liam is just an opportunist, a fake *farang*, and no better than a mimic. But unlike colonial subjects writing in the language of the metropole to be shared with those educated in their master's language, Khru Liam's work is in

39 Suvanna Kriengkraipetch, 'Characters in Thai literary works', in Manas Chitakasem, *Thai literary traditions*, p.135. Suvanna concluded that 'the concept of "the otherness" helps to understand and then to define ourselves as belonging to a particular group.' She agreed with a colleague whom she quoted that being Thai was not a set of criteria, but a life-long process. Ibid., pp. 145–6. Another famous assault on Thai identity is Sujit Wongthes, *Jek pon Lao* [Chinese mixed with Laotian] (Bangkok: Silapa Watthanatham, 1987), which suggested that modern Thai identity is a hybrid of Chinese and Laotian cultures. Recently, a friend told me that the Cambodians see the modern Thai as someone who 'looks Chinese, acts like a *farang*, and speaks Thai laced with Khmer'.

the vernacular that is accessible to a large number of literate Thai. It would be difficult to accuse him of mimicking the hegemonic culture of the west. Even though he had studied in England and would occasionally dress as an odd Englishman in Bangkok, he was far from being a colonial subject mimicking his master. In the colonies, subjects with pretensions who mimicked the mannerisms of their masters were seen as 'almost, but not quite'. They were loathed by fellow natives and masters alike.[40]

Thongchai Winichakul interprets Khru Liam's *Nang neramid* postscript as the semi-colonial subaltern's declaration of freedom and autonomy from western hegemony. In that postscript, Khru Liam chides his Thai readers that if they were looking for the original *farang* novel ostensibly written by a good *farang* novelist, they will not find him or her. Instead, they are left with only that novel and Khru Liam who is just as good, if not better than the *farang*. Thongchai and I agree that Siam's semi-colonial status allowed the Thai more freedom to be among the earliest to express post-colonial sentiments and to exercise post-colonial resistance.[41]

In Khru Liam's case, his hybridity, that is, his outward appearance and his ability to mimic a *farang* or a *farang* author could be accepted as 'clever'. The foreign-educated Thai, even those who shamelessly emulate the lifestyle of the *farang* today, are still accepted as a valued and privileged class. Returning *nakrian nok* [students educated abroad] continue to be the stars of Thai society. They are not considered 'hybrids', but 'bi-cultural' — Thais who are comfortable in both Thai and western culture.

Post-colonial theorists who seek the pre-colonial condition tend to treat colonisation negatively and to view translation as an instrument of empire. Others, like Rafael, who celebrate hybridity tend to see translation as a 'highly supple and creative channel of mutual and self-transformation'.[42] In the Thai case, its semi-coloniality allowed for a lesser disruption and a less distinctive demarcation of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial conditions. The Thai elite was able to engage in a domestic project of translation (vernacularisation) that turned translation and imitation into anti-hegemonic instruments of self-affirmation, self-interpellation and resistance against empire.

40 On the subject of mimicry, refer to Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), ch. 4, 'Of mimicry and man: The Ambivalence of colonial discourse'. The pitfalls of mimicry and imitation are not new to the Thai. These concerns were voiced by King Vajiravudh (1910–25) in his short article, '*Latthi ao yang* [Imitation cult]', where he warned the Siamese about how to retain their own Thai culture in the face of encroaching westernisation. He wrote that for the Thai to appear European was comparable to a dog learning to sit. The human owner may think that the dog was cute because it exhibited human qualities, but it was still a dog. Similarly, a Thai who emulated the Englishman may gain the empathy of the English but that only emphasised the superiority of Europeans. King Vajiravudh urged the Thai to appropriate only what was needed to modernise Siam and not to try to become an Englishman. Refer to '*Latthi ao yang*', n.d., in the *Cremation volume of Khanet Rueksaphailin*, Wat Somanatwiharn, 3 Dec. 1975. I am indebted to Craig J. Reynolds for suggesting this reference.

41 Thongchai Winichakul observed that if we were to employ a post-colonial lens to look at *Nang neramid*, then Khru Liam's tactic of engaging the west would be an elaborate dance of deception by a subaltern to declare post-colonial independence from western domination. Remarks made by Thongchai Winichakul, Council of Thai Studies Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1 Dec. 2007. Siam's semi-coloniality was a subject of a conference, 'The Ambiguous allure of the west', held at Cornell University, 5–7 Nov. 2004. Peter Jackson's conference paper, 'Semicoloniality and duality in Siam's relations with the west', raised important questions about the place of Siam and Thai studies in post-colonial studies. The book *The Ambiguous allure of the west*, with articles based on the conference papers, is forthcoming from Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications (2009).

42 Douglas Robinson, *Translation and empire* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997), p. 84.

To conclude, the Thai literary engagement in translation, composition and imitation of western novels during the height of western colonialism in Southeast Asia is a strategy for the semi-colonial subaltern Thai to speak or talk back against western hegemony.[43] The three novels identified in this paper, no less than the three canonical ones, have appropriated the *rupatham* of the western literary form, and by inserting Thai *namatham* their authors have made their novels Thai. Mae Wan's *Khwam phayabat*, and Khru Liam's *Khwam mai phayabat* and *Nang neramid* should be included in the canon of Thai literature as exemplary examples of the translated or vernacularised novel, the overlooked original Thai novel, and the dismissed imitative novel. A full accounting of the early novels predating 1929 will help us better understand the importance of the novel in preparing Siam for modernity and for resistance against the negative effects of western culture. More importantly, unlike elsewhere in Southeast Asia where many indigenous novels are written in the imperial language, the Thai novel is written in the vernacular and consumed locally. The Thai resistance against bad western cultural influence and hegemony is exercised without the full knowledge of the west because vernacular Thai novels are not generally accessible to westerners.[44]

43 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

44 The first Anglicised Filipino novel, Zoilo M. Galang's *A Child of sorrow*, appeared in 1921. By 1966, production of Filipino English novels had exceeded those written in India, Singapore, and Malaya. Refer to Abdul Majid Bin Babi Baksh, *The Filipino novel in English* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1970), p. 3. Anglicised novels were not exclusively consumed by the indigenous, but they were more-or-less open to the world, very much in the tradition of Jose Rizal's *Noli me tangere*, and *El filibusterismo* which were written in Spanish for fellow Filipino intellectuals but were also accessible to the Spanish authorities. It should also be noted that vernacular novels in Tagalog appeared soon after the defeat of Spain by the United States. These novels were written by journalists and typesetters who combined local literary forms with the novel introduced by Rizal. Resil Mojares believes that the defeat of a repressive colonial Spanish regime freed the Tagalog mentally to allow them to write novels in the vernacular. However, those novels found limited circulation because Tagalog was a language limited to speakers around Manila. It is more recently that Filipinos have embraced Tagalog as their national language. Resil B. Mojares, *Origins and rise of the Filipino novel: A Generic study of the novel until 1940* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998), cited in Shirlita A. Espinosa, 'Ethnicity and kinship in Filipino centennial novels', *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 8 (Mar. 2008), no pagination.