

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE THAI
SANSKRIT AND CHINESE SWAN MAIDEN

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by

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Introduction

The Siamese people living on the Chao Phraya Plain in central Thailand, the people forming the majority of the inhabitants of Northern and North-Eastern Thailand as well as neighbouring Laos who are known, ethnologically speaking, as the Lao people, and furthermore also the Thai people living in the Sipsong Panna area of Yunnan Province of China, together all belong to the Thai race. As well as having in common the culture of the Thairrace, they have also received the culture of India, and are even now devout followers of the Theravada Buddhism. Also, amongst the Thai people of these areas, the 547 Jataka tales contained in the Pali Tipitaka sutra have become well known as tales used in sermons at Buddhist temples.

Apart from the 547 Jataka tales of the Pali Scriptures, there have also been handed down amongst the Thai people Pannasa Jatak tales, known in Thai as the Panyasa Chadok or 50 Jatak tales⁽¹⁾. These 50 Jataka tales are said to have been written down in Pali by a monk in Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand around the 15th-17th centuries A.D.⁽²⁾ The Panyasa Chadok differs from the Jataka tales of the Pali Buddhist Scriptures in that it has provided a great deal of subject matter for the Thai literature of later generations. Its tales have become poems and plays, and there are also those which are believed to be indigenous to the Thai people and have been handed down from generation to generation. Of the tales in the Panyasa Chadok, the tale of Prince Suthon or that of Prince Suthon and Princess Manora have come to be the best known and most loved by the Thai people. However, these are not tales such as those taken by the people of Thailand as being indigenous

to the Thai race, but rather have a strong link with Indian tales, and furthermore bear a close resemblance to the tale of the Swan Maiden of China and Japan.

The Thai race live in the central part of the Indo-China peninsula, that is to say, in Thailand, Laos, the Shan States in Burma, and also in the northern areas of Vietnam. As is indicated in the name "Indo-China peninsula", it lies between India and China and is in a position to be easily influenced by both India and China. Here I would like to investigate to what degree the Thai people's 'Tale of Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' concurs with Indian tales, and in which points they differ, and also examine what sort of relationship pertains between the Thai tale and the Chinese Tale of Swan Maiden. Furthermore I shall also take up the characteristics of the Thai people's 'Tale of Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' from the point of view of cultural history more than from that of literature.

1. The Thai people's 'Tale of Prince Suthon and Princess Manora'

It is said that the oldest version of 'Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' handed down in Thailand is that found in the Pali language Pannasa Jataka. Today, this has been translated into Modern Thai in Thailand and is called by its name as pronounced in Thai, Panyasa Chadok (ปัญญาสชาดก). The second tale in this collection, "Suthon Chadok", is the tale of 'Prince Suthon and Princess Manora'. For the most part, tales written in plain Modern Thai and collected together in collections of narratives of all sorts are quotations or adaptations from the Panyasa Chadok. The Manora Nibat Wat Matchimawat edition (มโนห์รานิบาตฉบับวัดมณีมาวาส สงขลา) of Southern Thailand are versions of 'Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' written in the dialects of the respective areas, but it is completely unclear as to when they were written. The Laotian Story of Thao Sithon (มหานิทาต์สิทิม) is also the same tale versified in the Lao language, but here too its date of origin is unknown. From the contents however one

can see that both these tales are of the same lineage as "Suthon Chādok" of the Panyāsa Chādok. The 'Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' as handed down amongst the Thai people of the Sipsong Panna area of Yunnan Province in China is available in Zhao Shutun (王松 他撰「召樹屯(傣族民間敘事長詩)」, 雲南人民出版社, 1979.), translated by Wang Sun and others and in Bai Hua's The Peacock (白樺, 「孔雀」, 中國青年出版社, 1979.), both of which are translations into the Chinese language. 'Zhao Shutun' refers to 'Prince Suthon' and 'Peacock' to 'Princess Manora'. From such things as the contents of the tales, the names of the characters and place names, these tales too can be seen to be of the same lineage as "Suthon Chādok" of the Panyāsa Chādok.

	Prince Suthon	Princess Manōrā	North Panchān
Panyāsa Chādok	Phra Suthon	Nāng Manōrā	Uttara Panchān
Manōrā Nibāt	Sī Suthon	Nāng Manōrā	Udōn panchān
Sīthon Manōrā	Sīthon	Nāng Manōrā	Penchān
Thāo Sīthon	Thāo Sīthon	Nāng Manōrā	Penchān
Zhao Shutun	Zhao Shutun	Nan Muluna	Banjia
Peacock	Zhao Shutun	Nan Ruona	Panjia

It can be surmised that the tale as written in Pāli was copied and passed on by Buddhist monks, translated into the dialects of the various regions, and conveyed even more widely among the people until the present day. Here I would like to introduce the outline of "Suthon Chādock" from the Thai Panyāsa Chādok as a typical example of the tale of 'Prince Suthon and Princess Manora' as passed down amongst the Thai people.

In a land called North Panchan there ruled a king by the name of Āthitwong, and his queen was called Chanthathēwī.

An incarnation of a Bodhisattva lodged within the womb of the queen, a prince was born and was given the name of Prince Suthon.

In this land called North Panchān there was a pond which waters were as crystal clear as a jewel, and in this pond there dwelt a dragon king by the name of Chomphūchit. Thanks to this dragon king, North Panchān had become a land where crops would bear fruit in abundance. To the south lay the land of Panchān, and there foodstuffs were insufficient

and the inhabitants were poor. The king of this land, Nantharat, was jealous of the fertile country neighbouring him and thought to kill the dragon king, and so he called together the Brahman monks and said, "If you capture the dragon king alive, or kill him and bring him here, I shall turn over half the country to you." One Brahman monk requested a drug with which to kill the dragon king, went into the forest, stood nearby the pond and was about to recite a curse. The dragon king changed his appearance in to that of another Brahman monk and surreptitiously watched the scene from the vicinity of the pond. Then along came the hunter Buntharik passing by, and he happened to meet with the dragon king who had transformed himself into a Brahman monk. The dragon king asked Buntharik from which country he came. Buntharik replied that he came from North Panchan, and then the dragon king asked if he knew the reason for the wealth of foodsuffs and the ease of living in North Panchan. Buntharik replied that it was thanks to the dragon king that it was so. Thereupon the dragon king asked him what he would do if this dragon king was being hounded by danger, and Buntharik replied that he would cut off the head of the person attempting to do the harm. Then the dragon king declared, "In fact I am that dragon king", and that as the Brahman monks of the neighbouring country were trying to kill him, he requested that the monk be captured. Therupon the hunter captured the Brahman monk trying to murder the dragon king and killed him outright.

The dragon king took the hunter down to the land of the dragons at the bottom of the pond, where he entertained him lavishly in tanks for seven days, then giving him a present of precious jewels, escorted him back to the surface. Upon parting the dragon king said, "If you should want to see me again, please say so to the dragon gatekeeper. He will bring you to me." The hunter returned safely to his home. One day, as Buntharik went into the forest to do some hunting, he found a recluse's hermitage. He paid his respects to the hermit, and when he went on further, found a beautiful garden in which there was a square pond filled with clear water upon which bloomed lotus blossoms. According to the hermit, a group of Kinnari were wont to come to this pond to bathe. On the day of the full moon, the seven Kinnari Princesses of the king of Kailat Mountain,