

THE SUDHANA - MANOHARĀ TALE IN THAI

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The story of Prince Sudhana and the bird maiden Manoharā - in Thai Suthon and Manōrā - is an ancient tale which was already prominent in the Sanskrit literature of northern Hīnayāna Buddhism in the early centuries of the Christian era. Its early history has been carefully traced by Jaini (1966) with particular reference to its presence in reliefs on the early ninth century temple of Borobudur in central Java. The Pāli versions of the tale are part of a collection of *jātakas* (birth tales) traditionally thought to be the work of monks in Chiangmai in northern Thailand from the fifteenth century onwards. The title of this Pāli collection is *Paññāsa-jātaka* (fifty birth tales) and it is known in three recensions: from Burma, Laos/Chiangmai, and Cambodia/central Thailand respectively.¹ All these birth tales are extra-canonical, that is, additional to the 543 birth tales included in the Buddhist canon, and more than half of the stories in each of the three recensions are unique to that particular collection. Only fifteen stories are common to all three versions (Finot 1917:44-9).

One Pāli story from the *Paññāsa-jātaka* that has been critically examined and edited, the *Samuddaghosa-jātaka* (the birth tale of Samuddaghosa), suggests in the form of its language that it was composed in South-East Asia rather than borrowed intact from a Pāli original from India or elsewhere (Terral 1957), while the Burmese collection is known as *Zīn-me Pana-thá* (the Chiangmai fifty) which supports the idea of its origin in northern Thailand.

In Thailand, certain popular stories with a Buddhist setting, from the *Paññāsa-jātaka* and elsewhere, were translated into Thai verse, presumably from a Pāli language source, and were written down on the characteristic long Thai folding books of paper made from the bark of the *khqi* bush (*Streblus asper*). Such tales were read aloud to the laity on the sabbath day, and form a genre at once didactic and entertaining, known in Thai as *klqn suat*. It is composed in a variety of verse forms, the usual mixture known as *kāp* (Skt. *kāvya*), comprising common Thai verse forms called *yānī*, *chabang* and *surāṅgkhanāṅg*.² Perhaps the most popular of all such stories in Thai was the story of Suthon and Manōrā, and two versions of it in the *klqn suat* idiom are compared here. The Thai adaptors of the story are all anonymous, but their work is often charming and nearly always endowed with the Thai flair for the concrete, the realistic, and the human. In the process of transmuting the tale into the language and cultural terms of the Thai, the tales were inevitably recast and expanded

to many times their original length.

The first of the two Thai versions of the Suthon *jātaka* tale in *klon suat* verse is known in numerous copies preserved mainly in the National Library in Bangkok [abbreviated below as NL]. A copy in the Royal Asiatic Society in London was described, and a section of it analysed, by Professor Simmonds (1967), and another copy in private hands is the only one so far published in Thai (Du'an Bunnāk 1956).³ The second version is called here the Songkhla text [abbreviated below as S] for the reason that the only known copy of it is preserved in Songkhla, in southern Thailand, in the museum collection in Machimāwāt temple, also known as Wat Klāng. It was edited and published in Songkhla by Suthiwong Phongphaibūn (1970). The Songkhla text was composed by a southern Thai poet with a good command of Sanskrit and Pāli loanwords. It is full of colloquial southern Thai expressions as well as rather high-flown Indic vocabulary. The text preserved in Songkhla is dated to the equivalent of November 23, 1868, though it is likely to be a copy of an earlier text. Its length is approximately 51,000 words written in three volumes of folding books. The author provides an informative colophon in which he tells us that he has

in devotion composed [it] according to the Pāli as they wrote it in ancient times. There is [here] no story of Nāng Kānom, daughter of the wicked brahmin, no birdling of the lord of the birds, [these] are not to be found in the old text. I wrote the *chan* verses according to the Pāli, the story as of old, of Manōrā. (Suthiwong 1970:297-8)

The reference to omitted incidents will be amplified later. In the course of the story's transformation into a southern Thai folk tale, numerous accretions were made to the original, but our author has not included them. And although he calls his verse '*chan*', this is not the classical Thai *chan* where syllable length is specified in imitation of Sanskrit verse, but a mixture of verse forms in which the three common forms called *yānī*, *chabang*, and *surāngkhanāng* are supplemented by eight other forms possibly of the poet's own invention, or at least highly uncommon.⁴

In addition to these two versions of the tale, there are other Thai Manōrā manuscripts in southern idiom in a rather 'folklorized' tradition quite distinct from the two literary versions. Their language is highly colloquial with much rustic and rough dialogue, representing the Thai poet at his most direct and unrestrained. Although they may be said to possess little that is elevated or noble, they often rise to heights of effective natural sentiment unmatched in the more conventional Thai literary styles and they merit further examination. From central Thailand on the other hand, a highly formalized verse rendition of the tale was composed at the end of the nineteenth century by Phrayā

Itsarānuphāp (1927) in classical Thai *chan*. This verse form attempts to imitate Sanskrit prosody and the resulting effect is, of necessity, somewhat stilted, although its high-flown and learned qualities endow it with a certain prestige in Thai literary terms. The effect of casting the Suthon story in this form is to break the story up into scenes upon which the author has written lyrical impressions or evocations, while the narrative element, which is so marked a feature in all of the more natural Thai settings of the tale, is almost wholly suppressed.

The plot of the Suthon story in all its versions, both Indian and South East Asian, consists in basic plan of the union, the separation, and the reunion, of the hero and heroine. Suthon is heir to the kingdom of Uttarapāñcāla, while Manōrā resides in the inaccessible kingdom of the *kinnaras*, the half-bird, half-human beings who inhabit the lower slopes of the cosmic mountain Kraiḷāt (Skt. *Kraiḷāśa*). The first sub-plot brings the couple together by events that enable a forest hunter to capture Manōrā with the aid of magic noose belonging to a *nāga* king. In the Pāli/Thai versions, the land which is next to Suthon's kingdom is in famine, and its king offers a reward to a brahmin capable of casting a spell on the *nāga* king residing in a lake lying between the two kingdoms. This spell would reverse the ill fortune of the kingdom. The *nāga* is aided by a hunter from Suthon's land; the hunter halts the brahmin's evil spell and, as a reward, is later able to borrow the *nāga*'s magic noose to trap the *kinnara* princess Manōrā. He then leads her to Prince Suthon and the couple marry.

The second sub-plot causes the separation of the couple. A jealous court brahmin in Suthon's land tells the king that Suthon must be sent to subdue a rebellious vassal. Then the brahmin falsely interprets a dream of the king and calls for the sacrifice of Manōrā, but she cannily asks for her wings and tail on the pretext of performing a last dance before the queen, and flies away to her father's kingdom in Kraiḷāśa. Suthon returns victorious but, in grief at the loss of his beloved, he undertakes a perilous journey to her land beyond the magic Himavanta forest in order to regain her. He has to perform miraculous feats to win her back, but the couple are at last reunited, and eventually they return to Suthon's land where he accedes to the throne.

The number of characters in the Pāli version of the tale is fifteen, compared with sixteen and seventeen in the National Library and Songkhla texts respectively. All of the fifteen Pāli characters occur in the two Thai versions and they can be conveniently grouped in the following manner:

Sudhana group: Sudhana and his parents, King Ādiccavamsa and Queen Candadevi;

Manoharā group: Manoharā and her parents and six sisters.

First sub-plot group: Jambucitta, the *nāga* king; the king of Mahāpañcāla; the evil sorcerer brahmin; Puṇḍarika the hunter; and Kassapa the hermit.

Second sub-plot group: the purohita and the brahmin promised promotion by Sudhana.

The fifteenth character, the god Indra, appears *ex machina* at appropriate points in the plot.

The sixteenth character in both Thai versions is the vassal king in revolt in the second sub-plot, named Phrayā Čhan in the Songkhla text, and also Čhanthaphānu (P. Candabhānu), while his name is Nantharāt (P. Nandarāja) in NL. This latter name may arise from a misunderstanding that the king of Mahāpañcāla (named Nandarāja in the Pāli) and the rebellious vassal were one and the same person, as the rebel is not clearly identified in the Pāli. In fact, the king of Mahāpañcāla is not named in either Thai version. The seventeenth character in the Songkhla text is the hunter's wife, named Mēkhabidā, unique to this text, though found in other southern versions. Her presence is an example of the many elements of naturalization in the setting of the story in southern Thailand.

Among these characters a few variations in names and spelling can be noted. The neighbouring king of Mahāpañcāla, King Duma in the Pāli (Manoharā's father), becomes Prathum (Praduma in Pāli spelling) in NL and Thumphōn (P. Dumvara) in the Songkhla version. Manoharā's mother is unnamed except in NL where she is Čhankinnarī. Čhan is a popular name, readily supplied in this tradition where a name is wanted. For example, the extra character of the vassal king in revolt is named Phrayā Čhan in S, as already noted.

There are no differences of primary significance between the three versions. They can all be said to be clearly in the same overall tradition, and the fact that the two Thai versions omit nothing significant from the Pāli, and only occasionally alter or add to it, strongly indicates that they both derive directly from it. Indeed, the poets themselves have each stated clearly that they took the story faithfully from the Pāli text, and there is nothing to suggest that we should doubt this.

The following twelve points stand out as the most prominent differences in the three texts:

1. In the Pāli, the scheme to kill the *nāga* lord is formulated by King Nandarāja on advice from his ministers. Neither

mentions the king's name, though in NL this (Chet Venhara) is given to the enemy vessel. NL sets the number of surviving ministers (a NL list of 22) and one *nāga* is mentioned who is to be killed. In the Pāli, the reward for the *nāga*, dead or alive, is half the kingdom. NL has the same reward, but the king asks for the *nāga* alive. In S, the reward is cloth, jewels, silver and gold, and the *nāga* lord must be killed.

2. The initial events at Kassapa the hermit's hut and pool differ in the various texts. In the Pāli, the hunter arrives, greets and questions the hermit, finds the pool, returns and asks the hermit about it, then watches Manōrā and her sisters bathing in the afternoon of the same day, which happens to be the day of the full moon. Finally, he returns again to the hermit and asks about catching a *kinnara* maid.

In NL the hunter reaches the lake first, then the hermit's, where the hermit explains that it is the *kinnaras'* lake. The hunter stays overnight to spy on the maidens. Thus, the order of events is different and one interview with the hermit is absent.

The same interview is lacking in the Songkhla version where the hunter first reaches the hermitage and asks to spend the night. The following morning he sets out and by chance finds the lake where the *kinnara* maids are already bathing and playing. He hides and watches them, then returns to question the hermit about catching one.

In addition to these minor variations, the two Thai texts add scenes in Krailāsa not found in the Pāli, where Manōrā's mother warns her about the excursions to the lake. The Songkhla text additionally includes the incident prominent in southern Thai folk versions of the tale where Manōrā and her sisters must steal their wings from the sleeping queen before they can set off for the lake.

3. Manōrā and her sisters respond to the crisis of Manōrā's capture by the hunter with surprise but soon with calm acceptance in the Pāli version; with frantic desperation, violent laments, reproaches and appeals in NL; and with a tempered alarm and fear together with appeals, to the hunter in S. The copy of the NL text in London extends the lamentations with extra passages in which bribes are tried upon the hunter to induce him to release Manōrā. The bribery attempts are also found in S. In keeping with the detached viewpoint of the Pāli text towards this incident, Manōrā delivers a moralizing farewell before setting off into the forest with the hunter, in which she points out the universality of misfortune, of union and of separation. This

farewell in NL is an impassioned grief passage where Manōrā recalls the pleasure of a home and family she may never see again. S substitutes for these an additional interview with the hermit in which Manōrā pleads with him to intercede with the hunter on her behalf.

The incident of Manōrā leaving behind some token of herself with a message occurs in each version, but in the Pāli she entrusts pieces of her clothing to the mountain and leaves a noncommittal message for her family in case they should follow her there, indicating only the direction in which the hunter led her away. In NL she ties her jewelry to a tree as a sign for her rescuers, having failed to bribe the hunter with them (in Pāli the hunter asks Manōrā for her jewels at the lake; this does not occur in the Thai texts). Then she leaves messages with forest spirits along the way, begging her family to save her. In S the messages are delivered to the hermit but they are contrary to those in NL. She asks that they do not follow her.

4. King Praduma, the father of Manōrā, has an attitude of compliance to his queen's plan to go in search of Manōrā in the Pāli, but in NL he has to be talked into agreement. In the Songkhla text on the other hand, it is the king's own suggestion that the queen go looking for Manōrā, and he tells her to inveigle the hunter into giving back their daughter.

5. Concerning the question of Manōrā's purity, as she must travel alone in the forest with the hunter for many days, the Pāli text includes a passage explaining that Manōrā's superior state of being made it impossible for the hunter to approach or touch her. For the same reason, it is explained that the hunter's only thought was to offer Manōrā to Prince Suthon, whose merit was equal to hers. The matter is not specifically broached in the NL text but the hunter's attitude to Manōrā is clear from his respectful addresses to her. In S it is treated separately in the section where the prince meets Manōrā for the first time. He is concerned and suspicious of the hunter's proper behaviour during the long forest journey, so he tells the hunter to take four men to the place where Manōrā is waiting. The four men find themselves unable to approach closer to the maiden than four *sōk** because of the heat radiating from her. Thus Suthon is assured of her purity.

6. In the first encounter of Suthon and Manōrā each of the three versions describes Suthon's departure from the city for an excursion. In the Pāli, his mount is an elephant, Samudahatthi (Kamutahatthi in NL; unnamed in S); in the Pāli, when the hunter

* *sōk* is a linear measure based on the distance from elbow to fingertips. (Ed.)

and the maiden come across the royal path, Suthon is struck with love and questions the hunter, then rewards him, and plans are commenced for the marriage of the couple. In NL, Suthon is initially angry. He questions both the hunter and Manōrā, and falls in love with her. Then he withdraws with Manōrā to a pavilion and eventually seduces her in a long amorous passage, wherein she protests at length at his advances and arguments. Suthon's anger is a feature of Thai naturalization of the story. Carried to an extreme degree, as it is in the folktale versions from the south, Suthon punishes the hunter for returning without any game and has to force him to disclose the arrival of Manōrā.⁵

This first encounter receives quite different treatment in S. The hunter and his prize are first seen from a distance, and Suthon sends a scout to look; he returns with the hunter, who explains. Manōrā's purity is then tested, as above. The hunter's wife, Mēkhabidā, is sent to attend and guard Manōrā; Suthon's parents are informed and they come out of the city to see her; she is interviewed and her horoscope is read. Preparations for a wedding begin and the couple are united only after the ceremonies, as in the Pāli.

7. The royal dream which provides occasion for the jealous *purohita's* false interpretation is dreamed by the king in the Pāli and NL, but by the queen in S where Manōrā is called to interpret it before the *purohita* is consulted. Manōrā gives the correct, suspicious interpretation. The dream itself is briefly described in NL where the king dreams that his intestines spread and flow around the earth where the Pāli specifies that they issue forth from his breast and thrice encircle the continent of men (*jambudvīpa*), and then return to his body.

The queen's dream in the Songkhla version is more involved: the enemy king cuts off Suthon's head with a sword, and all his entrails are seized and tied around the city; his blood flows out all the four gates of the city. Then a man takes Suthon's clothing and puts it into a fire: it rises up into the air 'from the queen's hand' (*chāk kōn thēwī*), and Manōrā interprets the decapitation as a mark of the gods' respect for Suthon's powers. The sacrifice of his entrails around the city she explains as a sign that the populace are in an auspicious state within the limits of his authority. Lastly, she explains that the burning of Suthon's clothing and their disappearing into the sky shows his imperviousness to the attacks of the enemy.

In S alone the *purohita's* false interpretation ties the alleged ill omen to Suthon's safe return from the campaign. In the Pāli and NL, the ill omen is said to threaten calamity for the land of Udṅnpanchā* rather than for Suthon.

* Probably P.Uttarapañca, but it is likely to be a corrupted form of Uttarapañcāla (?= Mahāpañcāla). (Ed.)

8. In the Pāli text, Manōrā's flight occurs after officers come to seize her and take her to the sacrifice. She flies away without hovering, turning to leave messages from the air, as in the two Thai texts. Her farewell is given in the palace after she dances before the queen and she takes her leave as if she were about to die in the sacrifice, rather than as in the Thai versions where she has already effected her escape. This casts a quite different complexion on her messages to Suthon and her farewell. The Thai texts also lay stress on the element of guile in Manōrā's obtaining her wings from the queen whose loyalties and duties are in conflict, as she has been assigned by her son to protect Manōrā, and clearly feels a motherly love for Manōrā, while her husband requires that Manōrā be taken for the sacrifice. In NL, the queen desperately appeals to Manōrā, in an attempt to dissuade her, when she realizes that Manōrā is actually going to flee, protesting that she would never let Manōrā die, that Manōrā could trust her and come down from the air. Manōrā's philosophical reply is that fear compels her to flee, that living creatures by nature flee the threat of death. In S, the conflict of loyalties is dealt with in a calmer fashion: Manōrā flies out the window, stops and takes her leave, giving a long and eloquent message for Suthon. The queen's suggestion in response is quite sensible, that Manōrā should first fly to Suthon and take his leave, but Manōrā explains that she would not be able to find her way and she wings off to the hermit's dwelling.

9. The instructions for Suthon entrusted to the hermit by Manōrā regarding the difficult journey through the forests are enumerated in the Pāli version in great detail. There are eighteen separate items in Manōrā's description of the way. Twelve of these are enumerated in NL, with slight variations in order and content. S includes only a very brief resumé of the journey ahead of Suthon, though the journey itself is described at length in this version, incorporating approximately fifteen incidents which correspond in major details to the Pāli journey.

10. Suthon's return from battle and discovery of Manōrā's flight find variant treatment in the three versions. In the Pāli, he reports at once to the king on his campaign, then his mother embraces him and tells the bad news of Manōrā's flight. In his palace, Suthon is reduced to a fainting state by his grief and he bids his mother farewell to follow Manōrā, against her strong protestations. He leaves the city and stops at the hunter's house. In NL, the events are the same but they are elaborated in somewhat greater detail, including Suthon's return through the forests and his anticipation of Manōrā, details of the booty and prisoners he has brought back, long and repetitive grief passages and pleadings on the part of the queen, the repetition of Manōrā's instructions (not in the Pāli) and Suthon's final departure. The variants in the Songkhla text are the following: there is no interview with the king at all, and Suthon misses Manōrā at once, learning from the servants of Manōrā's flight. Then the queen comes to him and they both faint and

require medicines. No instructions are relayed, as in this version Manōrā has left them with the hermit rather than with the queen. Only after Suthon departs does the king appear, and the queen informs him of the events. He sends messengers after Suthon to dissuade him from his quest but the prince sends them back and continues on his way. The hunter accompanies Suthon on a seven-day journey to the hermit's dwelling, where Suthon sends the hunter back after they talk to the hermit together. In the Pāli and NL, Suthon sends him back before interviewing the hermit.

11. All three texts agree that when Suthon arrives at Manōrā's land he finds *kinmara* maidens drawing water from a lake, but the number of maidens is seven in the Pāli, sixteen in S, and 500 in NL.

12. There are variations in S's treatment of Manōrā's discovery of the arrival of Suthon. These are similar to the way this text treats Suthon's return and discovery of Manōrā's flight. First, a detail is added. The purifying water administered to Manōrā to remove the taint of her years of contact with human beings is given to her by an appointed brahmin, while the maidens give it in NL and in the Pāli. Then, finding the ring that identifies the presence of Suthon, Manōrā faints and is carried to the queen whom she begs to inform the king. The queen does so and the king then questions the maids who carried the water about the human stranger. This contrasts with the events in the Pāli and NL where Manōrā first sends presents to Suthon, then informs her mother and then her father. The Pāli includes an interrogation of Manōrā by the king which seemingly ought to have occurred seven years previously when Manōrā first returned from the human world. This interview is absent in NL.

Notable differences also arise in the trials employed to test Suthon: these slightly alter the depiction of the prince's character in the three versions. The pretext for the three trials is not mentioned in the Pāli: the king merely asks Suthon whether he can perform the feats. Suthon replies with casual confidence that he can do anything. In NL, the king explains that he only proposes the feats to satisfy the *devas* (gods) regarding Suthon's merits. In the Pāli, Suthon performs each feat with almost arrogant confidence, although he must invoke Indra's aid in the last test in which he must choose Manōrā from among her sisters. In NL, he makes no specific assertion or boast of his abilities, and he must additionally invoke an oath on the second of the tests when he tries unsuccessfully on the first attempt to lift a stone throne. Only S presents the trials as a difficult challenge to Suthon. The king proposes them, he says, for the sake of knowing the extent of Suthon's skill. The bow test is accomplished easily, but he must shoot through eight layers in all of trees, slabs, metal sheets, etc. with his arrow, where there are seven layers in the other versions. Yet Suthon, when the second test is proposed, feels sorely taxed, and wonders in despair at Manōrā's calm

appearance as she watches. For the lifting test he takes an oath and Indra appears, whereupon Suthon is able to lift the massive rock, here specified as eighteen *sāk* in size. Indra assists in the choice of Manōrā from her seven sisters of identical appearance, as in the other versions, but in S he attends the reunion of Manōrā and Suthon as well, and presides at the ceremonies, thus playing a more prominent role in this version. An additional detail in S is the preparation of a special room for the choice. NL describes only the adornment of the seven sisters. Southern folk versions also mention a room for the choosing of Manōrā from her sisters.

The ensemble of the two Thai poems and their presumed Pāli source comprise a puzzle of literary cross-currents, particularly when taken together with the Lao, Cambodian and Mon versions of the story.⁶ The tendency in the vernacular versions to expand and naturalize the story in consonance with the poet's own imagination and cultural context is clear. The extent of embellishment can be seen as increasing in order from the National Library text to the Songkhla text, while embellishment is even more pronounced in the Lao, Cambodian, and Mon versions. Although the National Library text is a faithful retelling of the Pāli tale, elements of naturalization can be identified in the extra dream in which the queen anticipates Suthon's birth: in the scene where Manōrā is warned by her mother of danger at the lake where she is destined to be captured by the hunter; in the scene of Manōrā's farewell before her flight from Suthon's land; in the entertainment and didactic wet-nurse passages (Ginsburg 1971:88-9); in the reunion scene between Manōrā and Suthon and their extended courtship love passage (*ibid.*, 74-7). And yet the variations in this text are so limited in scope that we are not led to suspect influence from any active oral tradition. In comparison, the Songkhla text shows more evidence of naturalizing detail and embellishment, and here a knowledge of folk versions from southern Thailand, oral and written, enables us to identify their apparent influence upon the Songkhla poem. Such additions are the hunter's wife, Mēkhabidā: the rebel vassal named Phrayā Chan, the theft of wings and tails by the seven *kinnara* princesses to fly to the lake where Manōrā will be captured; a date for setting Manōrā's horoscope; the lively description of the hunter's appearance; and Suthon's cursing Manōrā's servants in his grief at her loss. Here also, comparable to the NL text, are entertainment passages, a didactic passage on choosing a wife, and a love passage (*ibid.*, 84-110).

In the Lao poem, various major variants and additions can be noted for the first time, such as the absence of the subplot involving a second kingdom in famine, and of the *nāga* lord. In general, the Lao poem employs considerable freedom in treating the details of the narrative, although conforming in most major features. There are three dreams additional to the one found in the Pāli story. The dream is apparently a pleasing feature which

all the South East Asian versions expand in some measure. Furthermore, the god Indra makes repeated interventions in the course of the Lao narrative, especially in the much extended forest journey section of the poem where he thrice assists the questing prince. This forest section is further embellished by encounters, which are extraneous to the Pāli or Thai, between Suthon and ghosts who give accounts of their sins and sufferings, a feature which would seem to relate to locally popular Buddhist stories such as the Phra Mālai tale.⁷ One device of the plot is clearly omitted from the Lao poem by what can only be an oversight, since it is referred to in the text without any context. Suthon obtains from the hermit an account of what lies before him in the forest, as described by Manōrā when she visited the hermit on her journey home. This is specified in the Pāli-Thai versions, and in the Lao poem the hermit also conveys to the prince her account of the forest quest, but in the Lao she fails to deliver to the hermit any account of the forest. She only leaves her ring and cloth, and mentions some of the forest dangers in a generalized way. The 'cloth' must, in fact, be the magic cloth which, as we know from the Thai versions, is meant to assist the prince when he encounters dangers in the forest, but the listener to the Lao poem must be previously familiar with the story to follow this reference. A number of other important points of the narrative are glossed over in this fashion so that the story seems to be of less interest to the poet. Perhaps he is merely giving formal setting to a well-known story, giving it 'literary' attributes. The inherent drama of the narrative gets overlooked and the potential excitement offered by Manōrā's capture, her first meeting with Suthon, her flight, the prince's trials, and so on, which are so vividly appreciated in the two Thai poems, are virtually ignored in this Lao version.

A similar tendency can be noted in the Cambodian poem, but here appear even more surprising omissions and additions. Of these the most remarkable is the absence of the choice of Manōrā from among seven maidens. Instead, following the performance of feats by the prince, the question of whether to reunite him with Manōrā is proposed to Indra, and the entire court travels to Indra's heaven to seek his judgment. Indra's role is much expanded in this version. Another major omission is, as in the Lao poem, the sub-plot concerning the kingdom in famine and the special role of the *nāga* lord. An addition is Nāng Kānom, Suthon's first wife, and daughter of the *purohita* whose jealousy is in fact aroused by Manōrā's ascendancy over his daughter. This is the same Nāng Kānom mentioned in southern Thai versions of the tale, whom the Songkhla poet tells us he has excluded from his poem because she is not to be found in the Pāli text. He also mentions the exclusion of the birdling(s) of the lord(s) of the birds, and in fact the Cambodian poem contains an incident where birdlings of a monstrous bird interview Suthon before he is carried to Krailāt. There is clearly a link here between two geographical distant narrative traditions, the Cambodian and

the southern Thai. The Cambodian poem does not share the Lao poem's tendency to trivialize or gloss over the dramatic elements of the story.

These regional variations in a literary tradition merit much further study, revealing as they do a great deal about local South East Asian literary traditions and culture.

NOTES

1. The Burmese version was published in Burmese translation in 1911; the Lao recension was described by Finot (1917), and the Cambodian version was published in 1953 in Phnom Penh, with a Cambodian translation appearing there in 1961.
2. These verse forms require a rhyme scheme including internal rhyme (from the end of one line to the middle of another line) and external rhyme (from the end of one line to the end of another line) and specific numbers of feet per line. For an introduction to Thai prosody see Schweisguth (1951: 18-25).
3. Only one of the copies of this version is complete, in six volumes of the Thai folding book in the National Library, Bangkok, and it is this complete copy that is taken here to represent this manuscript tradition. The incomplete copies present differences in spelling, word choice, and phrasing from one another and from the one complete copy which is taken here as their fair representative. The National Library text is approximately 45,000 words in length. Its orthography and spelling suggest an early or mid nineteenth century date, and, in fact, the scribe has dated the completion of his work in a colophon to three o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday on the date corresponding to October 1, 1856.
4. For the details of these variant metres see Ginsburg (1971: 163-9).
5. Information from oral sources.
6. These versions are summarized in Ginsburg (1971:173-200).
7. Phra Mēlai is a monk who obtains miraculous powers by dint of powerful meditation, travels to heaven and to hell, and returns to preach about these places to his countrymen.

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