

## CHAPTER 7

# SUKHOTHAI: RULE, RELIGION AND ELITE RIVALRY<sup>1</sup>

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Inscription One can't die a death of a thousand cuts. To hack away at it— an ambiguity here, an oddity there — draws no blood. Inconsistency is not enough *in itself* because it cannot exist *by itself*. It presumes consistency — some system or order. Until we know that order, collect all the quirks you like, but you'll not catch a fake. No, you'll only make a mirror to see yourself. Each inconsistency you note will show the consistencies that define you or your era.

What defines our era? Systems. We use them to explain everything from disease to culture, from a single cell to the earth's ecology. So the recurring rules our minds. Social science codifies this consciousness. When it comes to the unique, our era makes us near fools, but on the recurring — whatever 'fits' a system — we are at once geniuses and tyrants. The tyrant insists that life really is prepackaged in neatly sealed, perfectly tuned systems: culture, society, language, even writing or describing. When life fails to fit, he doubts the authenticity of that life, not the adequacy of his system. Hence Inscription One becomes a fake, convicted by its quirks. That is a misuse of systems.

We cannot escape systems and so we must learn to use them well. Sadly, we have no metasystem to settle which *system works where*. So we must try, err and debate. Points go for simplicity, consistency, and fit. The first two can be easily though wrongly had. What's simpler than 'God — or Mongkut— did

it?; does it fit life as the natives live it?

Here Professors Vickery and Piriya fail. They do not try to understand Sukhothai within its own world. Instead, they stay in ours, compiling oddities and ambiguities that testify to little save modern expectations of the past. Still, to be fair, we must address the coherence each scholar claims for his critique. For Vickery (1987) it is the writing. Here the oddities seem to add up, but Diller (1988) gives the definitive reply, even turning Vickery's own evidence against him. For Piriya (1988) it is the errors and clever ambiguities. To him these show that the inscription's author was not a native. Well, anthropology wrestles with what a native knows and doesn't know, says and doesn't say, but if error and ambiguity disqualified our informants as natives, that would do us out of a discipline. Besides, in looking at other cultures and eras, it is not always clear who is mistaken and confused – us or them. To understand why they see what they see, we must enter their world, not stay in ours to judge them by our standards of correctness and clarity.

Let me take one specific case. Piriya (1988:30) observes that Inscription One is vague on describing monasteries, but precise on the ecclesiastical hierarchy. His explanation: this shows the author knew the monkhood well, the monasteries poorly. My explanation: monks mattered, monasteries didn't. The king made the top ecclesiastical appointment and possibly others. To rule well he had to know the Sangha elite, not their monasteries.<sup>2</sup> Anyway, what one knows and what one says always differ. Some knowledge can be too obvious to say, other bits just not worth mention. Either might explain the little said on monasteries. Or what is unsaid may be deliberate. The inscription glorifies Ram Khamhaeng, but apparently he built little and so it says little. After all, why honor others? Indeed, if many buildings and builders were Khmer, why glorify rivals? That fits the inscription's conspicuous exclusion of Khmer ways and words that Coedès (1954 : 295) noted long ago.

But let me go further: were Inscription One to describe monasteries well it would be an anachronism suggesting forgery. It was only later that the Tai<sup>3</sup> religious complex known as

a *wat* came into being (O'Connor 1985). The word itself does not appear in early Sukhothai inscriptions and then later it occurs irregularly. True, Inscription One shows all the necessary elements – monks, monastic lodgings, and shrines – but they are described one by one as distinct pieces, not as *wat*-like sets. It took power and time to join these into a single administrative and conceptual entity, the *wat*. Once done it bound the Sangha to society's hierarchy, effectively domesticating Buddhism. But that did not come quickly or easily. No, 13th century Southeast Asian monks were true mendicants. They were charismatic, relic-wielding forest ascetics. Their freewheeling ways perhaps undid the temple-centered Khmer and surely the Tai polity had yet to bind all monks to temples under clear control. What Piriya expects betrays a modern consciousness and would be a sure sign of forgery.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, if ambiguity is the question, we should consider the prose. Note Inscription One's unassuming style: simple sentences and common Tai words. That did not last. Later inscriptions would delight in borrowings and complexity, but then later court life would dote on imports and society would be formally complex.<sup>5</sup> So we may claim consistency for Inscription One's tone: its informality fits a still simple society as well as its author, a warrior-hero, a man of action from whom we might expect direct speech. Now reflect on what sociolinguistics says about such informality: much is known and taken for granted. To spell everything out violates the assumption that all parties are insiders. Of course such informality creates ambiguity for outsiders – hence Piriya's dilemma. What he wants – essentially a tour guide for strangers – violates the inscription's tone. Its author, in styling himself 'father lord' (I/18, 35, II/9, 28, III/10, 16, 21, IV/1, 9, 11), his subjects 'children' (IV/26-27), presumes his readers are insiders or soon will be. This is not a quirk; as we shall see, it is a policy. Nor is it unique to Ram Khamhaeng. Calling such language condensed speech, Benjamin (1984/5) shows it pervades the region. He contrasts it to elaborated speech which spells everything out and permits control from afar. This is the language of bureaucrats, lawyers and scholars. It is the language Piriya wants and Mongkut would have given.

It fits what the Siamese king and polity became, not what Ram Khamhaeng and early Sukhothai were. In sum, we end up where Diller did: the evidence to show forgery actually argues for authenticity.

Of course this counters only one major charge, leaving petty ones unchallenged. That's intended. A full reply would remake Sukhothai to suit the present. The best answer to critics is a better understanding of Sukhothai. My paper aims at that. I shall focus on elite rivalry in an unsettled society. This requires a new reading of Inscription One. Many treat it as a straightforward description or even the effective constitution of Sukhothai. It is neither. It is just one strong voice in a heated debate. Surely debate suits Ram Kamhaeng's rhetoric. He seeks to convince and cajole, not just report or record. True, a debate has two sides, and yet we know only the author's – his opponents are silent, the issue unspoken. Are we only imagining the other side? No. As we shall see, Ram Khamhaeng's words reveal his opponents. Like any good debater he aims at what he opposes; what he affirms reveals what he must deny. His antagonists are petty lords whose local power impedes the consolidation of royal rule. Let's place them in their setting before we look for them in the inscription.

## **A Setting for Struggle**

What was early Sukhothai like? In an era of radical change we should expect shifting possibilities, not settled kingdoms and cultures. Tai saw their leaders grow from petty chiefs to conquering lords. Their polities evolved. Thai ruling centers arose, denying local autonomy, while great monarchs turned rival lords into courtiers or commoners. Sukhothai came midway. Its ruler, Ram Khamhaeng, stood supreme but he stood alone. His powers were personal, not institutional; his realm was regional yet local power still held sway. Given this setting we may suspect he was trapped between strong factions with local roots and weak institutions of centralizing rule. One explains or at least implies the other, but let us take each in turn.

**Strong Factions:** Let's begin with the region. Rivalry never rests where 'big men' rule. Leaders must grab more just to keep what they have. Yet as rulers came and went, localities seemed to endure, weathering wars and empires (Wolters 1982). So one could conquer a rival lord without ending the rivalry between towns. Challengers awaited only an opening. Now consider the era. It was a time between two empires, after Angkor and before Ayutthaya. In the gap lesser polities blossomed, making an age of rivalry.

Enter the Tai. Their rule is young. Two generations at Sukhothai did not make a royal line, much less a dynasty. True, none can best Ram Khamhaeng but he cannot rule a patchwork where each spot remembers its past and honors its own lords. So petty rivals abound. Surely some are Khmer lords who ruled before the Tai, imperial officials who are now local elites. Others are Mon who came before the Khmer and may still hold much, perhaps most, of the land and people (Diffloth 1984; Gagneux 1978; Wyatt 1984:58-59). finally, there are Tai lords and chiefs. Once their solidarity put the Tai on top (Condominas 1980:268-71), but yesterday's allies are today's rivals. It took many to seize power but now only few can hold it. To make Ram Khamhaeng's line truly royal, some must fall to be nobles or even commoners. Hence the struggle: to consolidate its power Sukhothai must make these many local elites into one elite headed by a single royal line.

In principle the alignment is simple and static: it is Ram Khamhaeng, as king, against all lesser lords in his realm. In practice it is far more complex and shifting: he must make allies, playing one faction against others. Inscription One shows us the first – the king above all – but hides the second for, indeed, a family under one father should have no factions. Of course surely it did, even if they were biding their time, but how are we to hear silenced voices? Any voice had to have backing. At the bottom the backers were ethnic: Mon, Khmer and Tai, among other. For starters let us say each had its own elite. Here the sequence is clear: once the Mon, then the Khmer and finally the Tai ruled. We might expect each new elite to add

an echelon at the top, in part because the polity got bigger but also because it was both easier and customary to let the old live on, encapsulated by the new. Now, if we take this sequence as strata, it would make the Tai at the top and the Mon at the bottom natural allies against the Khmer in the middle.

Of course this is far too neat – marriage and borrowings mixed old and new elites – but given ethnic stereotypes and power blocks we may still suspect Mon, Khmer and Tai factions or styles of rule. Certainly a Tai-Khmer antagonism fits the way Inscription One shuns Khmer influence, whereas a Mon-Tai alliance made political sense when both faced the reigning Khmer. Guesswork though this is, it fits two facts we shall soon explore. One is Ramkhamhaeng's patriarchal appeal to the populace – was it a way to undercut Khmer local lords in the middle? If so, they stood between a Tai king and Mon commoners. The other is Inscription One's fervent Theravada Buddhism – was this affirming Mon ways, restoring the legacy of Dvaravati? If so, this popular religion had endured Khmer rule and its royal cult only to resurface under the Tai, perhaps cementing a Tai-Mon alliance.

Speculating on their alignments is risky but it is safe to assume factions. The region and the era tell us that much. So too does the little we know of the polity's structure. It does not show the strong centralizing institutions of rule that could have countered factions.

**Weak Institutions:** Ram Khamhaeng's Sukhothai was a petty *muang* (city-state) that rose to rule others, but the evidence suggests it was only a collectivity of lesser realms, never an integrated whole. One clue is that it collapsed so quickly after his death (Wyatt 1984:59). Clearly his vassals had not lost their autonomy. Indeed, his inscription says as much. Note how he marks his realm: he merely lists the towns and peoples he rules (IV/18-26), acknowledging these as basic units. So his own words show the seams. In the same way note that he calls his whole realm a *muang* even though many lesser polities he rules are also identified as *muang*. He has no special word to describe his realm as a *muang* above *muang*.

Titles do a bit better. He is a *khun*, apparently making him the leader of other lords, but then as a 'ruler of the muang' (*chaomuang*) and a king (*phraya*) his titles are nothing more than what many of his underlings could have claimed. Thus his titles set Ram Khamhaeng above ordinary men, but they do not make him a king of kings. All of this tells us Sukhothai had yet to consolidate its authority as the preeminent *muang* among many. After all, if all its rulers were ranked clearly and absolutely, it would presume Sukhothai's many *muang* effectively had a single elite. Instead, the absence of overall ranking hints at many elites scattered among many *muang*. Missing too is any administration. Did it just not merit mention?

Overall we can find few counters to factionalism and localism. Rule seems clearly personal, barely institutional. A doomed path, hindsight tells us. Our eyes see a polity ripe for collapse. Yet Ram Khamhaeng lived with what was, not what would be. Even so he did not lack foresight. His failure to institutionalize was not the absence of a policy. We need only see him engulfed in a competition between elites to recognize his strategy.

## Competing Elites

Strong factions and weak institutions set the stage for struggle. Yet when we turn to Inscription One we see only the main actor, Ram Khamhaeng. With no antagonists, how can we claim a struggle? Indeed the inscription seems to say the struggle is over, the battles won. A strong ruler reigns over a happy and prosperous land. Of course he gives his opponents no voice, but we need only look at his policies to see that he is trying to consolidate power at the expense of lesser lords.

**Consolidating Power:** Max Weber (1967:260) says this fatherly king was out "to break the power of the presumably feudal-notables." That is how he reads the injunction to bring disputes directly to the king (I/32-33). In effect Ram Khamhaeng has usurped the patriarchal powers of lesser lords. Why would the king assert this were it not contested? True, one might invoke the "constitution theory," that he is specifying the rights of ordinary citizens vis-a-vis the king, but that hardly fits the

era or the ways of power. Where are the rebellious peasants claiming rights as free men? Where are the nobles demanding a Magna Carta? No, he gives commoners rights only to deny them to rival lords.

Let's continue. Ram Khamhaeng says anyone who clears new land and plants an orchard gets to keep it for himself and his heirs (I/23-24, II/5). He lets people trade freely and does not collect tolls (I/19-22). That sounds benevolent. Yet whose resources has he given away? Not his – or at least not just his. What has he lost in freeing the people from tolls or seizure of land? Any tax would have passed through many sticky hands, feeding local lords first; and who, save local 'big men,' had the effective knowledge and power to extort land?<sup>6</sup> A local elite needed these resources to be able to rule. Almost surely these were traditional prerogatives – why else would the king specify what was not to be? Note he does not renounce tribute—that came directly to him – and he still had the booty of conquest, gifts to win his favor, and possibly profits from Sukhothai's kilns. In short, whatever Ram Khamhaeng lost, petty lords lost more.

Did local elites resist? Surely lesser lords did not just hear their king and shrivel up into commoners. No, they would have taken what they needed to live as they had. Yet Ram Khamhaeng lets commoners know they need not put up with this. Any aggrieved *commoner* can easily petition his king (I/32) who promises to settle justly even cases where “commoners or men of rank differ and disagree” (I/25-26 [Griswold and Prasert 1971a:207]). “So,” one translation reads, “the people praise him” (II/1-2 [Griswold and Prasert 1971a:207]), but here “people” is not everyone, our modern usage; no, it is quite specifically “commoners” (*phrai*) who praise him. So again we see Ram Khamhaeng's benevolence had an edge.

Are these interpretations too cynical? Is not the inscription highly paternal, deeply benevolent? It is – for all who accept his rule. He beckons followers but then those who come must leave someone else. He offers much, but that implicitly challenges what lesser lords give. In short, his policy is generous but shrewd and aggressive. It appears, Weber (1978:1107) observes, when-



ever patriarchal patrimonialism needs “the good will of the masses” to play against “privileged status groups.”<sup>7</sup> Surely Ram Khamhaeng faced just such groups – entrenched local elites whose prerogatives blocked making many polities into one. If his counter was benevolence Weber (1978:1107) alerts us to look for its ideal, a ruler who is “father of the people.” That is exactly what we see. One of Ram Khamhaeng’s titles is “father lord.” So a simple picture emerges: a ruler seeks popular support against rival lords. That does justice to the alignment, not the details. Add ethnicity and it might resemble our earlier sketch: a Tai ruler (top) allies with Tai and Mon commoners (bottom) against Khmer rivals (middle). That adds details but only by guessing. To do better we must compare Sukhothai to other Tai polities. How did they set up their elites?

**Comparing Tai Polities:** Ram Khamhaeng’s attack on rival lords was a step on a path the Siamese and Lao eventually took. In these Hindu-style kingdoms, Maspero (1950:171) argues, a new nobility replaced an original Tai aristocracy. This new elite descended directly from the ruling dynasty’s kings; the old were like the privileged ruling families one sees among Black Tai, White Tai and the Shan of Yunnan.

Let’s look at these upland Tai who seemingly keep the old ways, aristocracy and all. Traditional Tai cosmology legitimates the old aristocracy. Myths tell of a ruling family descended from a creator god; as they multiply sons of sons go off to found their own realms. Such tales echo experience – the uplands is a patchwork of petty realms. In principle there is one elite, a notion intermarriage keeps alive. In practice there are many elites as each realm is essentially self-contained, a power base unto itself.

Apparently Ram Khamhaeng knew this world, though seven centuries ago. He must have known the myth and certainly he assumes its simple split between lords and commoners. Yet myth, not power, joins this world. It has a ruling class but no ruling center. It does not, then, fit the polity he proclaims. Hence his task is clear: He must subordinate this scattered elite, his fellow lords. If there is to be one center, his brothers are now rival rulers. He cannot accept many roughly equal lines,

all loosely joined by myth, marriage and alliance. No, he must make one line solidified simply by power. In short, where myth made all Tai lords siblings and cousins, he must make them his children. Certainly that is exactly the thrust of his inscription's claim.

Of course this picture is far too Tai. Some rivals had other roots. Remember Sukhothai ruled realms once Khmer, still earlier Mon. Earlier local elites did not just vanish when the Tai came, although surely the wise made marriage alliances. Here Ram Khamhaeng plays it both ways. On the one hand he is Tai and proud of it. He claims to be lord of all the Tai (IV/12) and his inscription uses his vernacular, not a tongue of established glory. From this stance his rivals were non-Tai lords and he could invoke Tai brotherhood to subordinate these holdovers from earlier realms. On the other hand he is willing to recognize a lord as a lord, apparently regardless of ethnicity. He welcomes all who come riding elephants (I/28-29) as a lord would. He offers his support, posing no ethnic test. Here he made allies who had no stake in recognizing other Tai lords.

Now that we know his rivals, we can address a flaw in the way we have found them. We have collapsed time to let some upland Tai peoples of this century represent lowland Tai society of the 13th century. This is common but hardly good practice, for surely all Tai have changed over the last seven centuries. Even so, this historical nonsense makes a certain evolutionary sense. After all, the upland Tai live amid petty *muang* as Ram Khamhaeng once did, whereas since his day the lowland Tai have known greater and greater political consolidation. So let's compare these two to see what Ram Khamhaeng faced and where he had to go.

For the uplands consider, say, the Black Tai. Here kin of the ruling Lo-Kam family live amid villages along with semi-hereditary nobles. An established elite blankets the land. Such were the people Ram Khamhaeng had to seduce or subdue, to turn into courtiers or commoners. Now, at the opposite extreme, look at the outcome where the state was strongest, the Central Plains. For the Siamese peasantry, to quote Keyes (1979:219),

“almost all local leaders have been neutralized by the extremely poor articulation of peasant and administrative systems.” Of course this is Bangkok's doing, but Ayutthaya grew by drawing lords into its court and out of the countryside, and even Ram Khamhaeng's policies would have left peasants largely on their own. Finally, between these two extremes, consider areas that escaped strong rule until recently. Thus the Yuan countryside shows traces of petty lords (Davis 1984:38) and the Thai-Lao of Northeastern Thailand still foster strong local leadership (Keyes 1979). Overall then the evolutionary path appears clear, and Ram Khamhaeng stands at a divide.

Other Tai rulers stood at this point, and while we know little about their actual initial moves we see solutions to Ram Khamhaeng's problem. Consider Mengrai, a contemporary of Ram Khamhaeng, who established the Lanna polity to the north-west of Sukhothai. Judging by his laws (Griswold & Prasert 1977; Prasert 1978) he created a single elite by putting everyone under a single decimal ranking. Every ten commoners came under a 'chief of ten' (*nai sip*), five of them came under a 'chief of fifty' (*nai hasip*), and so on. At a thousand the title shifts from chief to lord (*chao*) and continues up to a lord of a hundred thousand (*chao saen*). In principle this would have radically reordered earlier groupings, destroying even the village as a local leader's power base. In practice this may only have retitled local elites, if it got that far, yet the direction of change is clear. Now if this plan is a solution, we may infer Mengrai's problem: petty lords that block his rule. Indeed, his laws seem to admit as much. One passage decries evil lords who do not rule righteously, saying they poison the realm. As Kirsch (1984:262-263) speculates, these may be earlier rulers Mengrai has vanquished or even Tai chiefs who follow pre-Buddhist customs. Note that evil though they are, Mengrai does not decree their death or expulsion. He simply says they should not be allowed to govern (*mai khuan hai pen yai* [Prasert 1978:8]). That would fit a policy of turning rival elites into commoners. To find it stated we need only look to the 14th century Lao conqueror Fa Ngum who in establishing his state lectured that “bad chiefs deserve to be reduced to the status of ordinary people” (Bernal 1959:399).

Let's compare Mengrai and Ram Khamhaeng. Both were conquerors who had to contend with earlier elites. Each was the first Tai lord in his area to establish not just a *muang* but a capital ruling other *muang*, and so both had to contend with the Tai chiefs who were their natural following. All of this boils down to competing elites. Here Ram Khamhaeng's solution appears radical: he leapfrogs lesser lords, stripping them of their resources, and seeks support with commoners. Only a ruler of great might would risk such a coup, but then his inscription proclaims his prowess. By comparison Mengrai seems more modest and pragmatic. He too appeals for commoner support when he lectures lesser lords on righteous rule, although lecturing them acknowledges their place, something Ram Khamhaeng never does. Moreover, while Ram Khamhaeng offers lesser lords only shelter, Mengrai has quite specific posts to dole out (i.e. his decimal organization of society) and accepts that local lords tax the land (*khun phu kin na* [Prasert 1978:6]). Hence he need not just confront rivals, he can coopt them, a strategy that Ayutthaya used well.

Of course this contrast may come from flawed sources. On the one hand Mengrai's laws are surely updated; on the other just because Ram Khamhaeng's inscription does not detail his administration does not mean he had none. Yet to say nothing says something. It says only the center counts. Indeed, just as we hear of the ruler and not his minion, so too does the center, Sukhothai, name the realm. This fits what Tambiah (1976) calls a galactic polity. What, then, is Mengrai's realm? Just as he identifies king and administration, his polity had its own name (Lanna) quite apart from the center's (Chiang Mai). So each polity is consistent in its own way, but why do they differ?

Consider borrowings and locale. While, in spite of himself, Ram Khamhaeng looked south to the Khmer, did Mengrai look north to the Chinese? Where the Khmer were cosmological, the Chinese were territorial. If the former focused on the galactic center, leaving the edges open, the latter defended boundaries, using garrisons to colonize new lands (e.g. Wheatley 1983: ch8). Is it chance then that where the Khmer-influenced Siamese

readily identified the whole realm by its capital (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Bangkok), Tai polities closer to China kept capital and country distinct (e.g. Lü: Chiang Rung vs. Sipsong Phanna; Lao: Luang Prabang vs. Lan Chang)? Along these lines consider the Chinese loan *chiang*. Mengrai and other Tai near China used it to mean a capital (e.g. *Chiang Mai*, *Chiang Rai*) whereas more southerly Tai often used *nakhon*, a Sanskrit borrowing also used by the Khmer. Finally, note Mengrai's decimal organization of society. It may have come from Nan-chao (Wyatt 1984:15), a Tibeto-Burman kingdom, or show the influence of Chinese or Vietnamese administration (Rispaud 1937:118). Either way this looks like a decisive difference from Sukhothai. Certainly Ram Khamhaeng needed some such means to coopt rivals. It is no surprise then that while Sukhothai's successor, Ayutthaya, was galactic, it also had many titles to dole out and clear numerical ranking (i.e. *Sakdina*) like Lanna. If not titles, did Ram Khamhaeng have land to offer? Let's return to Inscription One.

**Land and power:** Much is left unsaid, but he is quite explicit on orchards. They are bountiful and beautiful. His pride shows. Apparently these groves testify to his prowess. After all, fertility flows from the ruler and only a strong king gives people faith to plant for the future. Yet they also show the wisdom of his policy that lets people keep the orchards they plant. Is this new? We must suspect some change for him to claim such credit.<sup>8</sup>

Consider Tai notions of land. Most if not all Tai peoples recognize two types of agricultural land: irrigated paddy fields or *na* and rain-fed hill fields or *rai*. Where *na* last, hill farming depletes the soil, and so old *rai* get abandoned, new ones cleared. Often the ruler owns the *na* and his underlings apportion them, whereas *rai* go to whomever clears and works the land. Now, where do orchards fit? Ramkhamhaeng treats them like hill fields—they become the property of whomever clears and plants the land.<sup>9</sup> Yet in one crucial way orchards are like *na*: They are valuable land that produces for generations. This then denies local lords a resource for rule—control of valuable land. Of course just as this protects a peasant's orchards from his local

lord, so too it protects the latter from the king's exactions. But that is precisely the point: a local lord is no different from a peasant.

Yet before we make Ramkamhaeng a complete radical, notice he never answers a key question: who owns the *na*? Is it parcelled out by local elites as we see among Black Tai and White Tai? Are fields set aside for locals and officials as among the Lü of Sipsong Phanna? Here his silence may show acceptance of a custom he dared not change. He extols the orchards, but why no mention of new paddy fields? Their growth would prove prowess too. Is there no credit due or is it just not his to take? In itself this silence is surprising. In Burma Pagan arose by extending its rice lands (Aung Thwin 1976) and for the Tai Mengrai's laws encouraged new *na* (Griswold and Prasert 1977: 152), just as Nakhon Si Thammarat's ruler told his people to turn the forest into *na* (Wyatt 1975:112-114). Why then did Ram Khamhaeng not openly promote *na* the way he did orchards? Here we may suspect that he did not have full effective control.

Suppose land ownership were a bastion of local power. If so, what would Ram Khamhaeng's strategy be? Were confrontation costly, he would add a new order and leave the old intact. That describes how he recognizes rights to orchards without mentioning *na*. It also fits what Rispaud (1937:17) argues was a historical shift in Tai ranking. Old and new ranked by endowments, but the appanage changed from *na* to households. This fits Inscription One in two ways. First, the household is a fundamental unit (I/22). A child inherits his father's dependents, retainers, movable wealth and orchards (I/21-24), but no mention is made of its *na*. Second, Inscription One records no *na* endowments. When Ram Khamhaeng welcomes needy or dispossessed lords he offers them wealth and retainers, but says nothing of *na* (I/28-30). That suggests retainers, not *na*, were essential to rule. Similarly, he gives a monastery and rebuilds a stupa but he does not endow them with *na* as later became common.<sup>10</sup>

Was Ram Khamhaeng bypassing feudal lords? He seems to dwell on manpower – lords, households and commoners – more

than land. Certainly if local elites ruled through land his inscription does not challenge them directly. Why? In principle the land was his. Buddhism made him "lord of the land" and Tai tradition made him ultimate owner of at least the *na*. This was not just law or custom. It took the king to sacrifice to the spirit of the *muang* to ensure fertility for all. Ram Khamhaeng accepts this right and duty (III/7-10), ritually asserting his claim to the land. Yet here may be the rub. His claim almost had to be ambiguous. Like their neighbors, most Tai recognized two major spirits in a dualism Mus (1975) has called the religion of monsoon Asia. For the Tai one was an autochthonous spirit of the original owners of the land (*phimuang*) while the other was an ancestral spirit of the *muang's* ruling line (*philakmuang*). The two went well together where the ruling line could also claim to be the original owners of the land by virtue of their descent from the creator god. Yet the Tai who went on to rule lowland states encountered a conqueror's problem: others owned the land first, and thus rights to its fertility-controlling spirits. Two solutions appeared. Some kept the old to help the new. So Lao and Yuan state rituals incorporated earlier peoples, recognizing autochthons' rights over autochthonous spirits, a native 'franchise' as it were. In contrast, the Siamese split the two, ignoring earlier peoples but not their spirits. In effect, they cut out 'the middleman' by appealing directly to the spirits. Hence Ram Khamhaeng recognizes an apparently autochthonous spirit but not autochthons' right. So it is the ruling lord (*khun phu dai thu muang* [III/7]) whose worship wins its favor. Stripping earlier peoples of their territorial spirits loosened their claims to the land. That undercut earlier and local lords' spiritual powers in exactly the way Ram Khamhaeng's policies threatened their mundane rights.

All of this suited Ram Khamhaeng nicely. He was a newcomer and a conqueror trying to consolidate his power. It also suited later Siamese rulers of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok whose state rites apparently never acknowledged indigenous claims the way Yuan and Lao polities did. In part it was simply that Siamese seized the spirits as they ultimately did the land. It sounds easy and obvious and yet this religious coup

took great confidence—why risk the spirits' ire? Here courage came from Buddhism. Moral worth legitimated Siamese rule and even spirits had to live by karmic law. To put this another way, the Siamese undercut their rivals not just by denying traditional rights but by affirming Buddhism. As we shall see, in this and other ways, Buddhism helped undercut localism and petty lords.

## **Buddhism and Rival Elites**

Let me take stock. Where Inscription One paints Sukhothai as serene, its rule settled, we are arguing this is at best a moment's calm, a brief triumph in an unfinished struggle between elites. That makes Ram Khamhaeng, the kindly father, a tough politico too. What then of Ram Khamhaeng the pious? Is his Buddhism as calculated as his paternalism? We cannot know. Buddhism served him and Sukhothai well, but much was unforeseeable or just unforeseen, inevitable or simply unintended. To strike a balance, let us begin with Ramkhamhaeng as a conscious and willful actor, and work towards the social tides that swept him along.

It was an era of religious change. Sectarian differences polarized the choices. So Ram Khamhaeng's decision had to be deliberate. Advocating Theravada Buddhist sects was a necessarily political move. Who did he move towards? Many were Mon (Diffloth 1984; Gagneux 1978) and theirs was a Theravada past. That fit his 'popular appeal' strategy. Who did he move against? Surely some rivals were animist Tai chiefs, others Mahayana Khmer lords. Propagating Theravada Buddhism undercut such leaders, but probably few fell. Syncretism was too easy, this religion too tolerant, for faith to determine all.

In the long run consolidation of royal power drew more strength from Buddhism's populism and its levelling tendencies. This was the legacy of Asoka, the great Indian emperor. In the Buddha's day these were mere possibilities; under Asoka they served to centralize, making many petty kingdoms into one realm (Weber 1967:235). Buddhism worked top and bottom: its disdain for caste ritual offered "purposeful opposition to the ruling



strata," while, joined with patrimonial kingship, this popular religion was 'a means of mass domestication' (Weber 1967:240). Like Asoka, Ram Khamhaeng faced rival elites and so we might expect an Asokan strategy. True, an attack on caste ritual found few if any targets, but patrimonial kingship threatened his rival. Surely he sought to be a popular leader and Buddhism was – or became – a popular religion. Doctrinally it ignored society's ranks. Any free male of age could become a monk, a being above kings. Symbolically, it made king and commoner alike, all lay people as opposed to monks (Boon 1983:214-16). Yes, ranking remained but now by moral achievement, not birth. That implicitly challenged hereditary elites, lords who likely stood in Ramkhamhaeng's way. It also opened the way for able newcomers – another source of popular support. Yet this not enough to imagine a ground swell. Theravada Buddhism was a "democratic religion" (Weber 1967:240) but that principle's practical benefits were too subtle, its payoffs too scattered, to explain a swift and enduring shift in religion. No, it took passion to make a religious tide. Had Tai animism collapsed? Was it a rebellion against Khmer royal cults or a grassroots revival of Mon Buddhism?

Any shift came down to temples and shrines. Here, as priests or patrons, local elites laid claim to rule. These sacred sites could be bastions for the established or avenues for the ambitious. The established might own an altar or even a rite so that only their blessings made worship 'work;' the ambitious might sponsor a ceremony to win honor and ally with the established, or they might even found their own shrine to cement both status and privilege.

Whatever the mix, any new religion broke old monopolies. That hit the old elite, but then historically many survived to make new monopolies, rededicating their old shrines to the new deity. Enter Theravada Buddhism. Like any new religion it undercut established lords; unlike earlier cults monopolies did not just reestablish the old elite. No, it set up monks as a new local elite who held the one local monopoly that mattered most. True, monks needed lay support and many had strong local ties – so petty lords had an 'in' – but Sangha loyalties tied monks

to a wider, ultimately royal world. Here, at the top, was a lay monopoly worth having: the ruler was patron of religion with rights to appoint Sangha leaders and recognize monastic lands.

In effect Theravada Buddhism favored the king and weakened petty lords who, as group, impeded political consolidation. True, the actors cannot have known the outcome, but to us the structural change is clear: monks provided a functional and symbolic alternative to local lords. Comparison shows the shift. Upland Tai animists hint at how it once was; their lowland Buddhist cousins show how it ended up. Consider, then, that upland lords rule small clusters of villages. The elite lives close to commoners, and even hamlets often have a noble or priest. In size this is little more than the lowland villages where the only figures of lordly eminence are the monks, leaders whose ordination guarantees their stature as birth and title do in the uplands. In the uplands petty lords provide day-to-day leadership – giving advice, mediating disputes, organizing communal activities. In the lowland village monks, especially the abbot, often do the same. In both uplands and lowlands these leaders hold rituals for rain and the common weal. Where his lord defines an upland Tai's identity (Bourlet 1906:527; Degeorge 1928:605-07), a Buddhist temple often defines a lowland village. Where upland Tai see their lord as necessary to order (Robert 1941:26, Buddhist Tai see their temple as vital to civilized life. Both upland lord and lowland temple act as centers of local redistributive economies (cf. Taillard 1977a). The upland lord's house is usually the settlement's largest (Roux 1954:369), whereas the Buddhist temple outdoes anything in lowland villages (e.g. Condominas 1975:257); both are built by the people and then used by them as a community center for festivities, meetings, lodging guests and so on. In sum, monks and their temples occupy much the same niche as the upland's petty lords.

Of course this is sociology, not history. To say they occupy the same niche does not mean that monks actually nudged out local lords. Perhaps the upland Tai way never left the uplands or true lords shunned villages. Then Buddhism just filled a vacuum. Empty or not, it matters little sociologically. Once

monks had a place as local leaders less was left for petty lords of any ilk. Here "less" encompasses the surplus needed to support local leaders as well as the sanctity vital to leadership.

A glance at Tai chronicles (*tamnan*) gives clues to the historical shift. In these tales the great leaders are often magically powerful hermits (*rusi*) and other charismatic religious leaders (*phakhao*, *phumibun*, *khruba-achan*). Clothed in charisma, they built cities, spawned polities, vanquished evil spirits and implanted Buddhism. Neither true monks nor traditional Tai lords, they stood midway between the two. Like the monks they were ascetics empowered by Indic ritual knowledge. Like Tai lords they were active leaders and often of superior birth. Were these men actual historical figures (Charnvit 1976:42) or just mediators in the myths that told how the Tai came to rule (Vickery 1979)? One suspects a bit of both, but either way they marked a transition between animist upland Tai and Buddhist lowlander. Symbolically and perhaps historically, they made the niche monks would fill, perhaps displacing traditional Tai chiefs.

Yet local lords were not the only casualty. These great charismatics – half man, half god – undid themselves. Once monks held sway, true sanctity lay in the Sangha and villagers needed no greater leader. Still, if such sanctity ever slipped away, charismatics arose to seize it. In myths such men withdrew once Buddhism prospered only to reappear whenever it faltered. History tells roughly the same tale (Ishii 1986). Troubled times spawned popular religious leaders who could topple thrones. We can see, then, why kings favored a strong Sangha, or at least why it favored them.

Clearly the spread of Theravada Buddhism helped in Sukhothai's most pressing task: the consolidation of royal power. We've argued that monks supplanted petty lords or at least cut into their leadership. To review, consider the many ways urban rulers won. Monks might play politics but in the end they could not take up arms. Putting sanctity in the Sangha kept it within monastic discipline and out of the hands of local 'big men.' The Sangha recognized the king as owner of the land, not the spirits

that sanctioned autochthonous rights. Indeed, now monks mediated between human and divine worlds, relegating spirits to the margins and making their practitioners—perhaps the old elite—marginal (Pottier 1973). Celibacy kept monks from establishing their own line or building a power base through marriage alliances. Monastic literacy opened the countryside to communication, and thus control, from the court. Indeed, symbolically Buddhist rites opened the village in contrast to animist ones that required closure (Condominas 1975). In short, Theravada Buddhism changed the game. These long-run structural changes moved competition out of the countryside and into the courts, making politics a struggle within rather than between elites. So the top won.

In many ways so did the bottom. We've already noted Theravada Buddhism's democratic aspects. We stressed opportunities but it also meant rights and autonomy. What the countryside lost in power it gained in claims against its rulers. Now peasants were people too. If the court still monopolized honor, being 'civilized'—indeed human—no longer trickled down from a royal cult. No, as Buddhists, commoner and king were all civilized and human; each had access to the Sangha.

That access had implications. A Buddhist temple made a village complete—an almost self-contained moral entity. Hence it no longer needed the king and his cult to win the favor of the spirits or the blessings of civilization. That slashed the sinews of Khmer rule and so served the early Siamese well. Yet once that work was done the Sangha could no longer be free. Thus the Siamese polity imposed central controls to keep the monkhood orientated to the center, not the village (O'Connor 1985). That worked well enough in the Central plains where central rule sapped the village in many ways. But look at the Lao. As Taillard (1977b) argues, the Lao village with its temple has the autonomy to oppose state rule. So we see what Theravada Buddhism offered the bottom.

If both top and bottom won, who lost? The middle—petty local lords, entrenched leaders who would have blocked the consolidation of urban power. So Buddhism takes its place in

Ramkhamhaeng's struggle against competing elites. Yet even as rule and religion fed on each other, neither escaped ethnicity. If each people had their own leaders, then ethnicity crosscut these strata.

### **Ethnic Alliances**

To state the struggle simply we have sometimes described it as if Ram Khamhaeng fought all lesser lords. Such a war no ruler could win. He had to have allies. While the elite intermarried, commoners would have helped to keep the power blocks ethnic. So let's return to Inscription One to see what it says of ethnic alliances and royal power.

The inscription honors, perhaps empowers, a throne that Ram Khamhaeng has erected. Why does this laurel come so late? He has already ruled many years. He has built an empire. So the throne does not establish his rule. Nor by itself does it prove prowess, wisdom, or piety as his other deeds do. Why then does he take this moment to recite his whole career as if this were its culmination? Well, perhaps it was. Let's say his throne consolidates a major alliance with or perhaps through the Sangha. On holy days monks take the throne. Is this just a gesture of respect, an empty ritual? No. A ruler's every move matters, yet does this deed coopt just a few charismatic monks or is the Sangha a vehicle for wider interests? Note that apparently the Supreme Patriarch does not come into the city to take the throne on holy days (i.e. III/21: Ram Khamhaeng goes out to pay homage to this highest monk). That fits a forest monk, but then it seemingly leaves the throne to the older sect of town monks. Were these Mon, his allies on other grounds? Or were they Khmer converted to the new cult?<sup>11</sup>

Ceding his throne makes Ram Khamhaeng a Theravada Buddhist monarch, not just another Tai or Khmer lord like his rivals. It splits his realm into two interdependent halves, the monarch's and the Buddha's realms (*anachak* vs. *Phutthachak*). Yet as he halves one polity there are hints that at the same time, perhaps by the same means, he is making two polities into one. The clue in a new name. Initially Ram Khamhaeng's

realm is simply Sukhothai. Then, as Wyatt (this volume) notes, once the throne passage begins it becomes Si Satchanalai Sukhothai, adding the name of Sukhothai's nearby sister city. The old name never reappears but the new one occurs twice more.

Looking beyond Sukhothai we see twin cities are an early Tai if not regional pattern. So along with Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai go Chiang Mai and Lamphun, as well as perhaps Lopburi and Suphanburi. Tradition says Vientiane was once two cities (Vieng Chan - Vieng Kham [Hang 1970:105-106]), the Lao capital of Luang Prabang's ancient name is a twin city doublet (Sieng Dong - Sieng T'ong [Rispaud 1937:88]) and legends tell of many twin cities on the Korat plateau (Keyes 1974:503), one pair perhaps set up as an 'inner' and 'outer' capital (Higham and Amphan 1982:109).

Why does this dualism recur? Twin cities appear to be the first solid step up from 'each-vs-all' single city rivalry, but instead of evolution let's look at ethnic succession and alliance. So let's say the first cities were Mon. Many had irregular or round earthworks. Then the Khmer came, perhaps as conquerors, imposing strict rectilinear order wherever possible (van Liere 1980:274; Groslier 1973).<sup>12</sup> Did they remake conquered towns? Well, apparently someone changed Chiang Mai and perhaps Lampang from round to square (Nyberg 1976:29-33), but then the Khmer also built new towns near the old ones. Either way they apparently kept the old, whether as an earlier name or a lesser neighbor. Was it to tap ancient chthonic powers? If so, intermarriage did the same.<sup>13</sup> So what began as a Khmer outpost ruling a nearby old Mon town may have ended up as ritually specialized twin cities with allied elites. Enter the Tai. Woodward (1986:248) speculates that, under Khmer patronage, some Tai chieftains took over old Mon towns on the fringes of the expanding Khmer empire. That was in the 10th to 12th centuries, but by the 13th century of Ram Khamhaeng and Mengrai perhaps the 'younger brother'<sup>14</sup> was strong enough to challenge his elder sibling. Hence where Khmer had not woven alliances well, the Tai replaced them (Sukhothai?, Lanna?).

Where Khmer elites had deeper roots (Lopburi?) the Tai might enter as a third party (Ayutthaya?), but then marriage alliances and perhaps local cults worked best with two parties, and so one (the Mon?) lost out.

Let's try to flesh out this guesswork. Consider Mengrai's twin cities. Chiang Mai is a Tai ruling city while Lamphun, its sister city, is heavily Mon. Apparently Chiang Mai is the political capital, Lamphun the cultural one (Griswold and Prasert 1971b:194; Maule 1984:1; contra Vickery 1976:373-374). Next consider Sukhothai, a Khmer outpost now under the Tai. Like Chiang Mai it is the ruler's seat. It also has a sister city, Si Satchanalai. Is this twin then like Lamphun – mostly Mon? Our evidence is slight but significant: like Lamphun, Si Satchanalai has the twin polity's preeminent Buddha relic.<sup>15</sup> What makes this Mon? Historically relics support autochthonous rights against conqueror's claims (O'Connor 1985). Hence this was a possible Mon bastion against Khmer and Tai conquerors. Did conquerors fear these relics or was this just a division of ritual powers? Ram Khamhaeng dug up Si Satchanalai's relic but he did not bring it back to his capital. Instead he built a stupa over it, encapsulating as a patron what perhaps he could not hold as a ruler.<sup>16</sup> Is it chance then that he raises his throne, perhaps subordinating Si Satchanalai, just a year after he has finished his stupa that holds his underling's relic? Yet relic-ruler tension remained. Hence decades later a new relic would snub Sukhothai's ruler only to display its powers in Si Satchanalai (Griswold and Prasert 1972:65, 68). Perhaps Sukhothai never surmounted this dualism. Chiang Mai went a bit farther when it got its own great relic, breaking free of Lamphun's ritual powers. Still Chiang Mai's major relic never succumbed to the center. Like all the Tai Yuan, it came to rest on a mountain *outside* the king's city, keeping ruler-relic tension alive. Only the Siamese at Ayutthaya ended this dualism, fusing rule and ritual power to make a single center, and they did it exactly the way Ramkhamhaeng got control of autochthonous spirits – they stripped away local rights and referents. Hence the Siamese ended up with a virtually generic great relic (*mahathat*) in each major town, not a uniquely named relic that legend wove into

the landscape.<sup>17</sup>

Buddha images told another tale. Where relics were tied to the land, images flowed readily and rightly to conquerors (O'Connor 1985). Was Sukhothai, the once-Khmer, now-Tai seat of the ruler also the image center?<sup>18</sup> Surely its counterpart, Si Satchanalai, was the relic center. This split puts Ramkamhaeng's throne in a new light. Is it like the pedestal of an image? He mounts it to rule and monks mount it to preach, raising each to preside over those below and before them just the way a main image (*phraprathan*) presides over a temple. Hence the simple equation that the Siamese would later say in so many ways: king = monk = Buddha image. Is this Ram Khamhaeng's answer to Si Satchanalai's relic powers? Indeed, is it the Khmer and early Tai reply to the Mon? To tighten this link between ethnicity and foci of sanctity, note that an image has a front and back, a left and right, and is often housed in a rectangular temple. That all echoes the rectilinear – a Khmer pattern. In contrast, a relic may be approached from any direction and is often housed in a round stupa. That embodies the curvilinear – a possibly Mon pattern, at least once they face the rectilinear Khmer.<sup>19</sup>

A further pair, Lopburi and Suphanburi, offers a twist on this Mon second-city pattern. Charnvit (1976:22) argues the heavily Khmer Lopburi was the cultural center, whereas the more Mon Suphanburi (Griswold and Prasert 1972:30-31) was a center of manpower and military might. That partly flips around the ethnic roles, and so it cautions us not to type the Mon rigidly. On the other hand, as the Lopburi-Suphanburi alliance created Ayutthaya (Charnvit 1976) it gives further evidence that Tai polities arose from ethnic alliances. That gets us back to the possibility that Si Satchanalai was the Mon partner and lets us add one last clue.

Vickery (1986) notes that Sukhothai inscriptions have several “pottery-related expressions” of apparently Mon origin and that villagers still call the earliest local pottery Mon. Foster (1982) tells of Mon pottery villages. True, these are later immigrants but did they slip into an ancient ethnic niche? The



Mon town of Lamphun had major kilns. All of this urges us to identify the kiln-dotted Si Satchanalai as a Mon town. After all, its pottery traditions go back to perhaps the 10th century, whereas the once-Khmer, later-Tai Sukhothai had no known early kilns (Hein, Burns and Richards:1985).<sup>20</sup>

Now let's step back from this hodgepodge of clues to look at the larger configuration. Ethnic alliance was just one of the moves in an ongoing elite rivalry. Yet Ram Khamhaeng's throne may be a watershed if it embodies the incorporation of Si Satchanalai. What did this sister city's possibly Mon elite get? We know that later the king-to-be (*upparat*) ruled in Si Satchanalai and that princes often ruled where they had local ties. So perhaps Sukhothai's new throne came mortgaged to its sister city's ruling house. If so, did these (Mon?) lords bump out a secondary Tai line? In the uplands the Tai elite had two lines, one of rulers (*chao*), the other of priests (*mo*) (Condominas 1980: 289 fn1, 295). Later Inscription Two would honor a noble Tai line that differed from the ruling one. Is it significant, then, that its author was a monk? Had this new alliance or Buddhism driven this other Tai line out of the court and into the monastery? We can only guess. We can, however, be certain that this was an era of struggle between competing ethnic and local elites.

## Conclusion

We should expect struggle. Sukhothai was new. So was Tai rule. Society was in flux, power fluid, religion changing. All of this is beyond dispute; all argue for competing elites. My paper builds on this, suggesting a rivalry so pervasive that we might rethink the way Sukhothai was.

Why did we not see this before? In part we knew too little. Now knowing more we see more. Yet what hid the struggle was not just what we knew of the past but what we assumed from the present. Our era accepts Buddhism, urban rule, royal power, and the polity's integrity without a second thought. These are the pieces and the players. Intent on the game we can imagine no other. We never ask 'who made it?,' just, 'who's winning?' Yet this is all Ayutthaya's legacy: a struggle within an elite. It

is not what Ramkamhaeng knew: a struggle between elites.

A struggle within an elite helps explain why some cry fraud and others listen eagerly. True, the charges began with evidence but that is now a hodgepodge held together by a style of reasoning less suited to academic discourse than palace intrigues. Of course.

If the evidence is empty, why do the charges seem to ring true? Whatever the inscription actually says, we know how modern Thai rulers have used it to argue for national solidarity and royal greatness and to legitimate their own patriarchal rule. For their purposes it is just too perfect. So perfect indeed that if it did not exist they would have had to invent it. Exactly! That plays well. So too does the implicit elitism that lets one man fool an entire society and scholars for seven generations, bending them all to his will. Surely this notion came out of Bangkok, whether or not the inscription did. So the author was a genius (Piriya 1988:64)? Yes, of course, he would be if one lives in academic circles where brains justify one's standing. Or is genius just the only way to save a feeble argument? So the drama turns on *deus ex machina*, yet is it not a bit late to revive divine kingship?

I pieced together many clues, most unknown to Mongkut. Their pattern fits what it has taken scholars a long time to learn about the region and political evolution. To forge this in the 19th century would have taken a sociological sophistication on a par with Mongkut's supposed linguistic genius. Must we now make Max Weber the reincarnation of this great king? How far will this go?

## NOTES

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D. C., March 17, 1989. My thanks to Betty Gosling for organizing the panel and to her, our other panel members and the audience for their comments. I am indebted to the University of the South for a faculty research grant and to the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin for arranging access to their library.
- 2 Did a ruler need to know his vassals' palaces? No. Indeed we don't even hear about *his* palace. So the little said on monasteries is perfectly consistent and thus evidence for authenticity. True, one might turn this around to say it too proves ignorance—a forger could not know wooden palaces that had long since rotted away— but this then contradicts the fundamental assumption that the forger is quite clever. Why would he fall silent where he had a free hand to add convincing details? One cannot make the forger a genius and a fool, invoking each only where it suits the argument.
- 3 Here and elsewhere Tai refers to not the entire family of Tai peoples but the branch linguists call Southwestern Tai. This group includes Siamese, Lao, Yuan, Lü, Black Tai, and White Tai, among others.
- 4 It would also be quite uncharacteristic of the alleged forger, King Mongkut, who as monk and monarch actively implemented the final stage of Siamese *wat*-centered Buddhism.
- 5 In itself this makes us wonder how a clever forgery based on later inscriptions could have gotten the tone so wrong, setting itself uniquely apart from what it sought to imitate. Again, it is hardly fair to invoke the genius of the forger

only where it suits the argument.

- 6 The laws attributed to King Mengrai, Ram Khamhaeng's contemporary, attest to this problem. He forbids letting those with rank and power seize the land others have built up (Griswold & Prasert 1977:152).
- 7 Hence in Mengrai's laws ['Article' 15] and Lüthai's Inscription III [II/34-47] we hear the ruler lecturing lesser lords to be good to the common people (Griswold & Prasert 1977, 1973).
- 8 Tai farmers often plant fruit trees near their houses, but whole groves suggest commercialized agriculture. Inscription One mentions tamarind trees. Diller (1988) notes that this originally African tree may have been planted "partly for trade" as it had commercial value to Arab traders who probably brought it east from India. Is it chance then that Ram Khamhaeng used the Arab word bazaar (*pasan*) to refer to his city's market (Griswold and Prasert 1971a:213 fn 89)? His policy on orchards may have recognized commercial interests.
- 9 His word for orchard, *pa*, was more commonly used for forest or thicket (Piriya 1988:14), yet this seemingly odd usage fits his policy well. One cleared *pa* (forest) to make *rai* or, under his rule, orchards. It was the same land, at least as distinct from *na*.
- 10 Lest this be interpreted as proof of forgery, Mongkut took great care to endow the *wat* he built and using known inscriptions would have led him to believe it was common practice. Elsewhere (O'Connor 1985) I have argued that one sect of Sinhalese monks, following their country's practice, popularized land endowments.
- 11 Given the temple-centered character of Khmer rule one suspects Sukhothai's old temples had an entrenched, Khmer-influenced monkhood. Penth (1986:3) says that the Tai at Sukhothai initially borrowed a Mon script and then, as they started to study Buddhism, adopted a Khmer script for religious purposes. That argues for strong Khmer fac-

tions in the Sangha and fits well with the throne making a new alliance.

- 12 For simplicity I am positing a single 'Mon' era, but for the Northeast, Moore (1988) shows that during the second half of the first millennium AD irregular sites governed by topography were sometimes replaced by larger, more regular sites that defined a territory. She postulates that this pattern may have spread from the Central Plains. We might then posit a still earlier shift showing the influence (though not the rule) of Dvaravati.
- 13 Shorto (1976:132-133) reports that Mon had an ancestral house protector spirit that descended in the male line and a village spirit that gave rights to land and descended in the female line. Given this configuration we might expect a Khmer lord to marry a woman of a Mon ruling house.
- 14 Diffloth (personal communication) says that in Khmer and some upland Mon-Khmer languages *Sayam* (i.e. Siamese) means younger brother. In itself this is a clue to Siamese Tai's initial relationship to their Mon and Khmer predecessors.
- 15 So says Inscription One. Although some reconstructions place a Temple of the Great Relic in Ram Khamhaeng's Sukhothai, Gosling (1983:181-83) argues that this is an anachronism.
- 16 Note that although this occurred seven years before inaugurating the throne he records it only after the throne passage. This final section makes him an emperor; prior to the throne passage he only justifies his rule of Sukhothai.
- 17 In general the Siamese shifted sanctity away from the relic but even early Bangkok hints at the continuing ruler-relic tension. Note that its Temple of the Great Relic (Wat Mahathat), the usual seat of the Supreme Patriarch, had close ties to the adjoining Front Palace (Wangna) which, as the seat of the 'Second King' (*upparat*), was the structural equivalent of Si Satchanalai.

- 18 Significantly images were instruments of Khmer rule. In the late 12th century Jayavarman VII sent images to what were probably the realm's major provinces (Wolters 1974:369 fn 102) and expected that replicas of these province's deities be sent to the capital (Kulke 1986:11, 15).
- 19 Obviously both sides had relics and images, so the question is which focus of sanctity had the greatest cultural emphasis. This does not deny mixtures such as putting a relic in an image or images on a stupa. Actually some of the mixtures reinforce the contrast. For example, the Mon-influenced Tai Yuan put four Buddha images back-to-back in an open pavilion, thereby approximating a stupa. Similarly, the Khmer-influenced Siamese built elongated and squared off reliquaries, thereby imposing a rectilinear style.
- 20 Still more tentatively we might propose an ethnic division of labor with the Khmer, then Tai, as rulers and the Mon as craftsmen and perhaps traders. Both Si Satchanalai and Lamphun's kilns produced for trade, and possibly export through the Mon port of Martaban. In the Lopburi-Suphanburi alliance it was the seemingly Mon Suphanburi that had the foreign trade advantage (Charnvit 1976:24; Vickery 1976:135). Still earlier the irregular earthwork settlements in the Northeast may have harvested salt for trade (Moore 1988), although if these were Mon they stood apart from Dvaravati.

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## Abbreviations

ASEMI - Asie du Sud-est et Monde Insulindien

EHS - Epigraphic & Historical Studies

JSS - Journal of the Siam Society

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