

A Note on the “Missing” Part in Mahaachaat Khamluang

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I first undertook serious study of the Thai poem *Mahaachaat Khamluang* (*mahāachāat khamlūang*) during two seminars on Thai literature offered by Professor William J. Gedney in Ann Arbor in 1978. I learned a great deal in those seminars, and I think that it is appropriate for me to offer a small part of what I learned in them as my contribution to this volume in Professor Gedney's honor.

The *Mahaachaat Khamluang* is well known to all Thai scholars of language and literature as one of the oldest and most important pieces of literature in Thai. Based on an original Pali text, it relates the events of the *Vessantara Jataka* (*wēetsāndōon chaadōk*) the story of the last incarnation of the Buddha before he attained enlightenment. The tale is presented in thirteen titled sections, each of which is written in a number of verse forms including *khlooj*, *rāay*, *kāap*, and *chǎn*. Each line of verse in Thai follows a line of the Pali original. Stanzas are not numbered, but the complete text is more than 350 pages in length.

In a preface prepared by the Fine Arts Department for a published edition of the poem, the following brief history of the text is given.¹ The Thai version was originally composed at the command of King Trilokanat, according to the chronicles, in 1482, but six of the chapters were said to have been lost in the sack of Ayutthaya by Burmese invaders. Then, in 1815, King Rama II of Bangkok commissioned a group of scholars and poets to recreate the missing sections and thus produce a complete text. The belief that much of the poem had been lost was commonly held. In 1932, for example, Prince Damrong wrote that most of the text of the poem dating from the time of King Trilokanat was lost and that only the section entitled *Thotsaphorn* (*thótsaphōon*) contained the original wording.² Some time later, however, other copies of the text that also appeared to have the original wording, some in more than one version, were discovered in Bangkok.

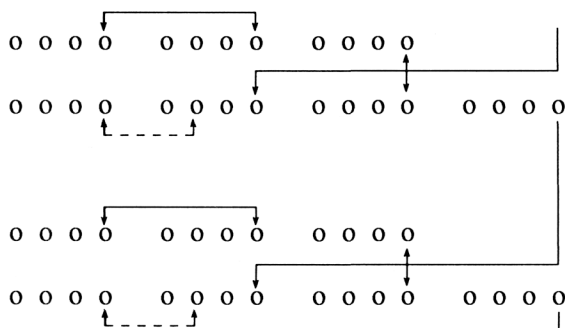
One of the rediscovered sections is the one entitled *Matsii* (*mátsii*), which was discovered in three versions. In preparing the text for publica-

¹ *Mahaachaat Khamluang* (Bangkok: Khlang Witthayaa, 1973), pp. iv-v.

² Prince Damrong Rajanubhap, “*Banthúk samaakhom wannakhadii*” [Notes of the Literature Association], in *Mahaachaat Khamluang* (1973), p. iv.

tion, the Fine Arts Department selected what appeared to be the oldest of these three versions because it was felt that readers would want to learn about the language in which the work was first composed, and not simply to learn the events of the already well-known story. In their introduction, the editors express their regret that “unfortunately, a small section is missing.”³ While preparing for my presentation on *Mahaachaat Khamluang* in Professor Gedney’s seminar, I discovered that there was no reason for the editors to feel any regret because there actually is no missing section.⁴ I demonstrate my point below.

Part of the poem is written in a kind of *kàap* with twenty-eight syllables per stanza. Although the text does not label any of the verse forms, the pattern appears to be that of the form known as *kàap sūraaṅkhanaaṅ*. The typical rhyme pattern of this type of *kàap* is given in standard diagram form below. Each circle represents a single syllable, and solid lines connect syllables that are required to rhyme. [Editors’ note: Dashed lines indicate additional possible rhyme positions.]



It is from one of the passages written in this type of *kàap* that a section is said to be missing. For the most part, that passage reads very smoothly with all the expected rhymes in their proper place. The sense of the text is also easy to follow. Each stanza follows logically on from the preceding one until an editorial note identifies the point at which something is said to be missing. That note also implies that the old manuscripts were consulted but were no help in resolving the problem.

The problem segment begins following the ninth line of the passage duplicated below from the text published by Khlang Witthayaa (1973); this segment involves three consecutive lines. The ninth line should be the first

³ *Mahaachaat Khamluang* (1973), p. v.

⁴ As I was preparing this note in the summer of 1986, I happened to become acquainted with Mrs. Manthana Kiattipong of the Faculty of Humanities of Chiang Mai University. She has studied the *Mahaachaat Khamluang* extensively and agrees with my analysis. I would like to thank her for her interest and support.

half of the fifth stanza of the passage; however, following that line are three questionable lines in which the rhyme and structure patterns break down, and the flow of the narration is disrupted. The last two lines of the passage then return to the expected pattern. I have designated the three questionable lines with the letters A, B, and C and reproduced them below.

หสาว

คุณหงษ์โปผูก กระเหว่าเหล่านก พลัดแม่สู่ญหาย

อุปริปลลเล

ตกตักติดตม อดนมปางตาย คุณแก้วแม่หาย ไม่คอยมารดา

เต มิดา วีย อุกกณณา

หนึ่งบุตรเนื้อทราย ชีโรทกบวราย ทรามรักษเสนาหา

สมนตามภิชาวิน

ยกหูขู คอยถ้ามารดา เห็นแม่กลับมา รุ่งเช้าเขยชม

อานนทีโน ปมุกิตา

รุ่งเช้ารุ่งขวา ชมรอบมารดา แล้วเข้ากินนม

วคมานาว กมปเร

ลองเชองเรอไป ให้แม่ขึ้นชม ให้ลื้อมารมณฺ์จุสองพวงงา

ตยชช บุตเต น ปสสามิ

พระแก้วแม่เออย บุรโพนย้อมเคอย คอยรับมารดา

ขาลี กณหาขิน จุโร

วนนนี้ไปไหน ไม่รู้เห็นหา ้อสองพวงงา กณหาขาลี

จกิลิว มิดี ฉาป

หนึ่งคือแม่ทราย แม่ณกลัตวร้าย คือแม่ราชสีห์

*** → (ที่ตรงนี้ฉบับเดิมตก หาฉบับสอบไม่ได้)

ปกชี มุตดาว ปชรา

A อยู่หลงลูกหาย พรานไพรจรัย กากแก้งฤษยา

โอรหาย บุตเต นิกขมม

B ลูกตนไว้ ผนนพ่อนจรัลี หาเหยื่อเพื่อศรีสวาดิลูกพวงงา

สีนีวามิสคิกขินี

C ฆ่าลูกทิ้งเสีย รongเปล่าปลยวตา เย็นแม่กลับมา บเห็นใจหาย

ตยขข ปุตเต น ปสสามิ

ดุจออกมารดา ลเจ้าเข้าป่า เพื่อผลเพรางาย

ขาลี กณหาชิน จุโร

เย็นแม่กลับมา แก้วแม่สูญหาย ปีมชีพทำลาย มอดม้วยมรณา โสดแล

The Fine Arts Department editors' note suggests that at least the second line of stanza five is missing. It appears that lines A and B are to be grouped together as a single stanza. Line A does have the twelve syllables expected of the first line of a *kàap sùraaṅkhanaaṅ* stanza, and line B does have the expected sixteen syllables; however, the expected rhyme between the twelfth, twentieth, and twenty-fourth syllables of the stanza does not exist. Also, this grouping of line A and line B into a stanza would leave line C as another incomplete stanza.

It could be argued that line A is the second half of a stanza, with the first half among the missing material. This would mean that lines B and C form a stanza, with the rhyme formed by the syllables *naa*, *taa*, and *maa*. But two problems argue against this interpretation. First, it is unlikely that line A is the second line of a stanza since it has only twelve syllables instead of the sixteen that would be expected. The second problem is the opposite of the first. The first line of a stanza normally has only twelve syllables, but line B has sixteen, meaning that the stanza formed by lines B and C would have thirty-two syllables instead of the normal twenty-eight. Such a distortion of the pattern is very unlikely, and this argues strongly against the idea that lines B and C were intended to form a stanza.

The arrangement of lines in the printed text is also a problem because the flow of the narrative is disrupted. Prior stanzas, written in *râay* and *khloong*, tell that Matsii has gone to the forest to gather fruit, but on her return cannot find her children, Kanhaa and Chaalii. The *kàap* section under discussion here describes her sadness by comparing her feelings to those of mother birds and animals that have been separated from their offspring, but the problematic lines of verse do not continue with that theme and are difficult to interpret, whether they are considered individually or in pairs. Translations of the problematic lines are given below.

Line A: Children, left behind, disappear. Cruel hunters did them harm.

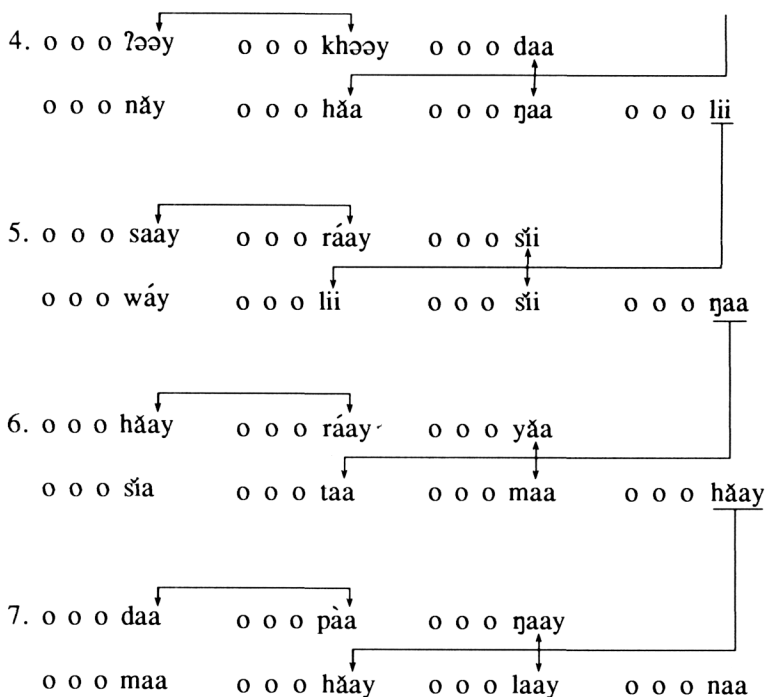
Line B: Leaving my children behind, going to the forest, to find food for the beloved children.

Line C: Kill the children. The nest is empty. In the evening mother returns and, not seeing them, is distraught.

After going through the text a number of times, I became convinced that there is nothing missing at all. Instead, the original lines of this passage have somehow been mixed together. This escaped the notice of the editors, and so the problem has been brought into the printed text. Lines A, B, and C can be rearranged as shown below. (The Pali lines have been left out in order to emphasize the Thai structure.)

1. ดุจนงษ์โปฏก กระเหว่าเหล่านก พลัดแม่สุญนาย
ตกต่ำติดตม อดนมปางตาย ดุจแก้วแม่หาย ไม่น้อยมารดา
2. หนึ่งบุตรเนื้อทราย ชีโรทกบวาย ทรามรักษเสนา
ยกหูชูคอ คอยถ้ามารดา เห็นแม่กลับมา วิ่งเข้าชอยชม
3. วิ่งชายวิ่งขวา ชมรอบมารดา แล้วเข้ากินนม
ลองเของเรองไป ให้แม่ชื่นชม ให้ลื้อมอารมณ์ดุสองพงงา
4. พระแก้วแม่เออย บุรโพนยอมเคอย คอยรับมารดา
วนนนี้ไปไหน ไม่รู้เห็นหา โอ้สองพงงา กัณหาขาลี
5. หนึ่งคือแม่ทราย แม่นกสัตว์ร้าย คือแม่ราชสีห์
B→ ลุกตนไว้ ฝนนอ่อนจรัล หาเหนือเพื่อศรีสวัสดิ์ลูกพงงา
6. A→ อยู่หลงลูกนาย พรานไพรจรัย กางแก้งฤษยา
C→ มาลูกทิ้งเสีย รงเปล่าปล่ยวตา เย็นแม่กลับมา บเห็นใจหาย
7. ดุจออกมารดา ลเจ้าเข้าป่า เพื่อผลเพรางาย
เย็นแม่กลับมา แก้วแม่สุญนาย บิมชีพทำลาย มอดม้วยมรณา
โสดแล

What I have labeled as line B now forms the second half of a stanza with the ninth line of the passage, the line that precedes the editors' note about the "missing" material. What I have labeled as lines A and C now form a new stanza together. I have numbered the two new stanzas 5 and 6 in the reconstructed version given here. The structure and the rhyme patterns of each of these stanzas match perfectly those of the other five stanzas of the passage. The reading of the revised stanzas also allows for a clearer translation of each line, one that provides for a smooth narrative flow. A diagram showing the position of the rhymes in the proper line arrangement is given below. Stanzas 4 and 7, those that precede and follow the problematic stanzas, are included to show how the rearranged lines fit in. The rhyming syllables are given in the diagram in transliteration, and a translation is also provided.



Stanza 4. Oh my dear, precious children. You used to wait to greet me as I returned. Where are you today? I seek you, *but cannot find you*. Oh my dear, beautiful Kanhaa and Chaalii.

Stanza 5. A mother deer, a mother bird of prey, a mother lion, leaves her children behind to go search for food for the beautiful children.

Stanza 6. Left behind, the children are lost. Cruel hunters do them harm, kill them, leaving an empty nest. In the evening she returns and is distraught.

Stanza 7. Like them, I, your mother, left you to go into the forest to find food. In the evening I return, (but) my precious children are gone. My life is destroyed. I am dying (from grief).

With this rearrangement of the lines of the poem, we have a more complete and far more satisfying reading of this important piece of Thai literature. The only “unfortunate” thing about the rediscovered manuscripts is that the editors did not note the mixed wording in time to correct it for the printed version.

References

Mahaachaat Khamluang.

1973 Bangkok: Khlang Withayaa.

Mahaachaat Khamluang.

1953 Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.