A Note on the "Missing" Part in Mahaachaat Khamluang

Patcharin Peyasantiwong

I first undertook serious study of the Thai poem Mahaachaat Khamluang (mahāchāat khamlūan) 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 (vētsāndōc 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 khloog, rāay, kāap, and chān. 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 (thōtsaphōc) 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 (mātsii), which was discovered in three versions. In preparing the text for publica-

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." 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. 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 suitäankhanean. 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 Withhayaa (1973); this segment involves three consecutive lines. The ninth line should be the first

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.
หัวฉ่ำ
ดุจมองไม่ปลูก กระหว่าเหล่านก ผลัตแม่สูญหาย
อุปราพลเฉล
ตกต่ิดเตะ ตุ่นมะบางตาย ดุจเก้วแม่นาย ไม่เคยมารดา
d เคราะ รีด อุกฉาน
หนีบุตรเนื้อถวาย ฮิโรกับราย กระมังกันแสน
สมณสามกิ่งสาว
ภูซูอ คอีลามะตา เนื้อแม่กลับมา ริ่งเข้าเขยขยม
ผานวิว พฤกษา
ริ่งเข้ายร้องไป ใหม่แม่ชมชม ใหม่สิ่งอารมณ์ดูดส่องฟงบาง
ด้วยขา ปุกเต้น ประสาน
พระเก้วแม่รอบ บุริมพันยอมคอย คอยรับมารดา
ชาลี ถนนมาขึ้น ลุก
วันนี้ไปไหน ไม่รู้หนน่า ขอส่องฟงบาง กัสนหาชาลี
อภิลิว มิ่ง อาย
หนีฟื้นแม่ชาย แม่นกสิตราย ศิ่นแม่ราชสีห์
*** → (ที่ตรงนี้บับเดิมท้าย หาบับสอบไม่ได้)
ปกข์ มุดดา ปะร่า
A อยู่หลงลูกหาย พานไม่รู้จรำย กำลังตกอุทัย
รอนาย ปุกเต้น นิภัย
B ลูกคิวนำ ผ่านผ่องจริง ต้นเรือเพื่อศรรศาสคณ์ลูกฟงบาง
สีหน้ามิ่งสีที่หัว
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 käap sùraŋkhanaag 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 nāa, tāa, and māa. 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 khlooŋ, tell that Matsii has gone to the forest to gather fruit, but on her return cannot find her children, Kanhaa and Chaalii. The käap 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. ดุษังชัยปลุกกระหว่าเหลานก ผลดแมสูญหาย
dukkhatidha odampongthai tukhaawemahay maiyommarat
2. หนึงบุตรเนือทราย จิรากับราย ธรรมรักสนหา
yakunndoc kooyamaaraa heenmaaglemma ringgaayyamo
3. วิงษาวิจิตร ภมรบมารา แลกขกินมอง
longhongrongo pi hinnmaayinmaa hinnmaamaradhiphongnaga
4. พระแก้วแม่เออย บาริณียอมเคีย คือรับมารา
waninniphiin maiyeenha jiosongnaga kikanlaysli
5. หนึงคือแม่ทราน แม่นกัศตราราย คือแมราชิ
B→ lokthain iw teannoonjorlew hanebyo pueriwaatidikongnaga
6. A→ อยู่หลวงลูกนาย พรรษาไพราราย กาลแกลงลุ่ยยา
c→ makukangseuy rangplaplayyada yeenmaaklamba bennjihay
7. ดวงยามารา แลกเข้าป้า เพื่อแฉะราบาย
yeenmaaklamba gawamussuyan ippaangkalaay notdumwamaraya

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.
4. o o o ṭeey o o o ḳeey o o o daa
    o o o nāy o o o hāa o o o ṭaa o o o līi

5. o o o saay o o o rāay o o o sīi
    o o o wāy o o o līi o o o sīi o o o ṭaa

6. o o o hāay o o o rāay o o o yāa
    o o o sīa o o o taa o o o maa o o o hāay

7. o o o daa o o o pāa o o o ṭaaay
    o o o maa o o o hāay o o o laay o o o nāa

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

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