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Author(s): Penny van Esterik and John van Esterik

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Royal Style in Village Context: Translation and Interpretation of a Thai Tonsure Text.

By

PENNY VAN ESTERIK
JOHN VAN ESTERIK

The Thai tonsure ceremony marks the transition from childhood to adolescence, and was traditionally performed before a young man could enter a Buddhist monastery as a novice. At the present time, Thai villagers recognize that children should wear topknots if they have been continuously sick without apparent cause, or if their behavior is unruly or inappropriate.

The topknot cutting ceremony in rural Thailand is seldom emphasized in village ethnographies. Kingkeo, working in a village in Cholburi province in 1964, observed only two children wearing their hair in topknots, and had no occasion to view a tonsure ceremony in the four fall months she resided in the village (Kingkeo 1967: 84). Other scholars report that the ceremony has "fallen into disuse" (Benedict 1952: 32), "is totally absent" (Kingshill 1960: 188), or "has disappeared completely" (DeYoung 1955: 57). Textor notes that the number of children wearing topknots has decreased since the thirties in Bang Chan and that elaborate rituals have declined steeply (Textor 1960: 407). Writing earlier, Landon observed that "neither boys nor girls wear the topknot any more except in an occasional back-country town, or perhaps in some unusually devout family" (London 1939: 234). Yet, at the turn of the century, Young wrote that "no other event in the life of any Siamese is celebrated with anything like the expense that attends the topknot cutting, except perhaps a funeral" (Young 1898: 84).

In our fieldwork in Uthong district, we had occasion to see many children wearing topknots, but few tonsure ceremonies. In addition to seeing two third day rituals, we were shown numerous photographic

Table 1 Distribution of Ceremonies Among 178 Household in 1973

Ceremonies	Ordination	Wedding	Household merit making	Tonsure	Special temple merit making	Funeral
Numer held in 1973	26	14	9	7	5	4
Percentage of all ceremonies	40%	31%	14%	11%	8%	6%
Average cost of each ceremony	4,500 baht*	14,500 baht (includes inheritance)	2,000 baht	4,750 baht	2,350 baht	20,000 baht

* baht=\$U.S. .05

records of recent ceremonies in the village. Based on a survey of 178 households, we estimate that fifteen to twenty percent of the children in this community wear topknots. The topknots may be ritually removed in an elaborate ceremony as described in this text, or several children may have the village monks perform a less elaborate version in the monastery grounds. Table 1 indicates that tonsures are not insignificant in number or in financial investment in this village. Within 178 households surveyed, there were seven elaborate tonsure ceremonies held during 1973.

However obscure and statistically insignificant these ceremonies may be today, there is much that can be learned from them, concerning the maintenance and transmission of Brahmanical ritual and its relation to Theravāda Buddhism. Further, these ceremonies provide an opportunity to examine the relation between a literate royal tradition, and a predominately oral village tradition. We have argued elsewhere that it is not productive to characterize this dichotomy as a distinction between the Great and Little tradition, canonical and folk Buddhism, or, particularly inaccurate, as a distinction between Buddhism and animism (Van Esterik, P. 1973; Van Esterik, J. 1977). Goody has recently contrasted a preliterate tradition and a literate tradition showing how many intellectual and cognitive developments may be tied to this difference in mode of communication (Goody 1977). The text presented here is clearly part of a literate tradition with a long and complex history. However, the text itself was transmitted orally over several generations. The specialist who allowed us to copy the text confided that he had only recently written down the text in order to make sure that none of the words would be lost when he passed it on to his students. Nevertheless,

we have noted a number of garbled phrases throughout the text.

The text comes from a village in Uthong district, Suphanburi province, and is the property of the most active and respected ritual specialist in the village. Also a village headman, Mr. Y. learned the ceremonial texts and ritual actions from his father, who spent thirteen years in the monkhood. Although Mr. Y. only spent two years in the monkhood, his son was a leading monk for ten years, and would be ideally suited to follow in his father's footsteps. Mr. Y. is presently teaching the rituals to two other male kinsmen who regularly assist him in performing the ceremonies.

We have referred to Mr. Y., and other ritual specialists as brahman substitutes (Van Esterik, P. 1973: 89) since they perform rites of passage which are not the concern of Buddhist monks (see note 28). The most common occasions requiring the services of a brahman substitute are housebuilding, marriages, preordination rites, and tonsures.

The tonsure ceremonies have clear Vedic antecedents. Thai Brahmanical treatises list the tonsure, or *chulakantamangala*, as the ninth rite of the *vidhi decamangala*, or the ten auspicious rites (Gerini 1895: 2). The following text is clearly not Indian in origin, nor is it identical to the texts in use for royal tonsures, or the public tonsure ceremonies which take place in Bangkok in the Brahman temple every year. These contexts have been described elsewhere (cf. Gerini 1895; Van Esterik, P. 1973). The text contains clear references to Brahmanical literature, and occasional phrases in Pali or corrupt Sanskrit. Wales observes that since the court Brahmans in Bangkok do not understand Sanskrit "they mumble both instructions and mantras indiscriminately" (Wales 1931: 55). But this Thai text is also a mixture of direct addresses to the participants, 'stage' instructions for carrying out the ritual, and descriptive standards for conducting an appropriate tonsure ceremony.

In spite of the ultimate Indian origin of tonsures, and the identification of this as a 'Brahman' ritual, the ceremony itself is clearly identified with Buddhism. At some point in the past, the royal tonsures may have been much more 'Brahmanical' than 'Buddhist', but since the reforms of King Mongkut, Brahmanical rituals have been reinterpreted in a Buddhist idiom, whenever possible. In the village, monks participate in this ritual and often actually cut the topknot. In the text, there are many references to Buddhist ethics and ideology. As the notes should make clear, the metaphors stressing high status refer to 'royal style', not to Brahmanical style. Note that in Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia, the classical Brāhman-Kṣatriya relationship is reversed to emphasize the superiority of the King over the Brāhman

(cf. Tambiah 1970:252). But the Brahmanical tradition only has meaning in the context of the institution of the Buddhist kingship.

This village text is in three parts, one for each day of the ceremony. Part one is recited on the first day at the home of the sponsor of the ceremony. This introduces the ceremony and refers to previous episodes in the ritual life of the child, including ceremonies held after his birth. The second part, recited the following day, describes the preparation of the house, the ritual equipment, and the child for the ceremony. After the monks chant, and the specialist makes offerings, the guests are entertained by theatrical events and a party. Dawn of the third day, the topknot is cut, and the third part of the text is recited. This section includes instructions to the child and a blessing.

Parentheses are used to separate out translators' comments, or a phrase added to clarify meaning. Words or phrases that remain unclear to us are also indicated in this manner. May we remind the reader that the text does contain logical gaps, due, perhaps, to the assumption that the participants and the ritual specialists share mutual understandings about the performance of ritual and the meaning of key symbols. For this reason, it is important to follow the notes, which supply additional contextual information.

Day One

ukasa van sathitava sirasanrenadan (corrupt Sanskrit) Let me bow my head and by my actions and words show respect to the Triple Gem,¹ to the three excellent ones. Now, let me pay respects to those who gave birth to me, my father and mother. In addition, I wish to pay my respects to those great persons, those who taught me, that is to say my preceptor and my teacher.²

Now I honor the gods, Brahma-Indra, Indra-Siva, and Nārāyana,³

1. The Triple Gem (*ti ratana*) is the three revered things; the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Monkhood. The Gems are the core of the most common Buddhist confession of faith, the Threefold Refuge, "I take my refuge in the Buddha, the Teachings and the Monkhood." Such phrases are said before every Buddhist ritual in Thailand. The house would contain an altar with a Buddha image to which the practitioner could address his remarks.

2. Preceptor refers to a monk in the ordination ceremony who has inducted and will continue to induct the ordinants into the monkhood. In Thailand most men are expected to be monks for at least one Lenten season. The teacher is the *acaraya* (Sanskrit), or any teacher who may instruct the child from school teacher to teacher of rituals, etc. Teachers are highly respected in Thailand and there are often rituals commemorating an individual's teacher.

3. The gods mentioned are the chief gods of Hinduism, Brahma, Śiva and Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa). Note however, that the first two are combined with the chief god of the

and all the gods of the zodiac. I wish to perform the ceremony of strengthening the spirit (*khwan*) of the topknot.⁴ Please banish all kinds of dangers. We must have great happiness for the sponsor of this ceremony, and for the child who is to have the topknot cut from the crown of his head in these next few days.

Great good fortune, glory, prosperity, excellent things. This moment is the auspicious time.

May you have an auspicious topknot ceremony that will produce luck that will follow this boy (girl) as he (she) grows up. This good fortune will allow you to find a knowledgeable person who will come and give his blessing to the child and teach it. Father and mother must make sure that the child attends to this good speech and my wise words. The elders, by time-honored royal tradition, must establish a sense of obligation in the child (to the child). Your father and mother did something for you which is greater than all the elements and deeper than the sea (profound). Animals come to be born in the womb following sexual intercourse, and there, in the womb, the offspring develops. Your mother knows, while she is pregnant, the suffering of caring for the fetus. She does not allow any injury to befall the fetus whether she stands, walks, sleeps, or sits.⁵ Thus she waits with care. When

Buddhist scriptures, Indra, the ruler of the sensual world. Brahma often joins Indra or Sakka in the scriptures. Śiva is often taken as the meditation prototype while Nārāyaṇa is known for his three steps that covered the known world. The Royal Brahmans in Bangkok have three temples one each to Śiva, Gaṇeśa (Śiva's son), and Viṣṇu. Only recently (1972) have they built a statue of Brahma (in the temple courtyard) apparently in response to Brahma's popularity among their Buddhist constituents. Brahma is popular because he is associated with fortune-telling practices and also because a statue of him in a major Bangkok hotel is thought to be powerful.

4. *Khwan* is the spirit or soul of an individual, usually in Central Thailand that of a child or youth. Metaphorically, it is associated with the top of the head, specifically the whorls of hair on the crown of the head. A child's *khwan* is thought to be weak and thus given to travel from the body in which case the child becomes ill or insane. The *chuk* (Sanskrit, *cūdā*=topknot) is one, two, or three, tufts of hair left on the child's head after shaving the rest of the hair. It is thought to symbolically hold the *khwan* in and thus maintain the child's health and its good-natureness. In the village we studied, only sickly or "problem children" were given topknots. The rite of passage, the tonsure ceremony, helps to induce this sickly or troublesome child into adulthood with an awareness of his responsibilities. After the cutting, the child goes from guest to guest bowing obsequiously and accepting a coin or two for his efforts.

5. These four positions are not incidental. They are the four *ariyabat* of the Pāli canon and are most often used in the scriptures in discussions of meditation. The adept can meditate in all four positions which are taken to be the sum of all the positions the human body can take.

people eat raw food, she refuses spicy, hot dishes, fearing that the baby in her womb would suffer.⁶ Your mother suffers in order to nurture the womb carefully until the ten months⁷ is completed.

Then the baby in the womb is born looking pleasant with attractive skin and complexion. It is complete in all ways. Thus, mother finds the baby increasingly attractive. She takes care of the baby, holding it to her breast asleep, giving it her milk and rice water. She suffers greatly, looking after and loving the girl (boy) child. They sleep for long periods in a hammock together.

Parents and guardians never tire of watching over the child.⁸ Love arises for the girl (boy) when she (he) wakes from sleep. Mother carries the baby slowly so it does not cry, and she puts it into a basin to bathe it. This is done each and every day. She smears a flour paste on the baby to give it a bright skin when it grows up.

The auspicious time for shaving the baby hair⁹ must be determined and the day set. At three months of age they shave the soft head. When the hair grows long, they tie and prepare the topknot. The parents turn the hair, gently, into a round ball and they put a bright gold pin decorated with a cloisonne in the royal style in the topknot. This jewel is of a value befitting the family. It is of great value. This child, being of a good family, has worthy relatives who come and celebrate the making of the topknot in a way befitting the occasion.

Then the child grows through the stages of youth. If the child is female of high station, she is shaved at eleven years of age. Similarly, the boy¹⁰ is shaved at thirteen years of age, although it is not forbidden for boys to be shaved at fifteen. The parents want to conform strictly to the regulations with regard to the correct day, year and month, following traditional custom. Therefore, they seek an astrologer who will choose the auspicious time, the year, month and day, for the parti-

6. Hanks writes that hot foods such as chili peppers should not be included in the diet of pregnant women, lest they "burn the baby's skin" (Hanks 1963: 37).

7. Several village women referred to pregnancy as being ten months in duration. Since most village women nurse their infants until they become pregnant again, the first time they ovulate and menstruate may signal the beginning of a ten-month pregnancy. Similarly, among Himalayan women, a child is thought to be in the womb for ten months (Jones and Jones 1976: 93).

8. The word for watching over here is the same as used in connections with guarding a young prince (to wit: *aphibān*). This is an example of "royal style" in the text.

9. Baby hair is called the *phom fai*, fire hair, which is considered womb hair. This ritual of cutting the fire hair is still common in Thailand and appears to act as a rite which identifies the child as an individual cut off from the womb.

10. The child is referred to here by a pronoun used for royalty, *sadēt* (McFarland 1969: 880).

cular age and sex of the child (cf. Gerini 1895: 35–8 for proper times).

Following the prediction of the astrologer, tell everyone the date, tell relatives on both sides, father's father, mother's father, mother's mother, parents' elder sisters, mother's younger siblings, parents' older brothers, father's younger siblings, and all the rest.¹¹ Tell everyone the important appointed times, both night and day, for the auspicious occasion. Invite the monks to come and chant the Buddha's words on the day of the victorious, auspicious ceremony, together with an old, skilful teacher, the astrologer, the whole family, and the elders. They all will help in the observance of cutting the topknot on that day.

Hit the gong three times and shout "ho" with great feeling.

Day Two

Great success, power and prosperity in plenty. (in *Pāli*) There is great magical power in this auspicious moment of oblations (to the spirits). With great fanfare even those on the side of the enemy are welcomed. This day has been prepared for. Fishy smelling and sweet ingredients protect the food.¹²

I urge you to hurry, neaten up, prepare and clean the house. Open the partitions to all the rooms; let out the corruption. Sweep the verandah outside the main part of the house. Pin lengths of cloth together and cover the ceiling with them, tying them firmly. Place bright mirrors with decorative designs carefully on the house poles and windows. Cover all the poles with good red cloth. From the ceiling, hand lanterns; drape nearby, woven hangings and choice clean garlands of flowers. Spread out large mats and decorate the back of a bamboo chair with a long white cloth to make it look pleasant (a seat for the child). Set up a large seating platform inside the house.¹³ (platform for

11. In this passage the relatives are given titles. The uncles are called *mōm*, a title used for members of the royal family while others are addressed as *khun* a term that was once used for nobility.

12. The fishy smelling food probably refers to a mixture of fish and peppers with a particularly unpleasant smell. Informants reported that this was the favorite food of evil spirits, and if this was offered to them, they did not bother the rest of the festivities, or interfere with the effectiveness of the ritual, hence, the reference to the "enemy."

13. "Inside the house"—The Thai house is divided into a number of levels which symbolize relative status of house members and guests, and symbolize the integrity of the household unit. Usually the only room with walls and a door in the house is the bedroom of the heads of the household. This room is built on a higher level than the others, or it is given a high threshold symbolizing its separateness. At the next level is the main living area for the household where other family members sleep and at the edges of which guests are greeted or household duties performed. This is the inside referred to in the text. Lower than this level is the verandah where guests or lower status persons may sit or sleep. Lower still is the kitchen and then the beaten courtyard around the house.

monks). Place objects for worshipping the gods in a circle. Arrange a set of glasses with gold rims filled with flowers, and place these in every niche and shelf. Put an ancient bronze pot down (garbled word). Everything is set in order and on display. Take kaffir limes and the pods of the acacia tree; take silver and gold leaves (variegated leaves of the picture plant), and insert Bermuda grass¹⁴ into the bronze pot, following traditional customs.

Place a knife, and scissors on a bronze tray. Put a golden ring on it; stick a ring to a candle as an offering. Pile betel leaves together. Put a bottle of perfumed water, together with the betel on the monks' platform.

Lay a sword on the "gem stairs".¹⁵ Have ready a line of standing swords, gold swords, antique guns with a design covering the whole outside, a golden spear, and an ancient sharp elephant goad with a round hilt. Put all these between two shields. Gather together a "*Campa kris*" with a scabbard that has a carved design in the shape of a bird's beak. These are all the kinds of weapons characteristic of ancient times. Make ready the ceremonial dais¹⁶ for seating purposes. At once, supplicate the monks humbly to come from their several monasteries.

Sharpen a banana tree stalk. Get two long beautiful pieces of red paper. Bring papaya and yellow squash, and cut out designs on the outside of these. Twist and turn strips of bamboo, wood, leaves and stems. Work these together in various designs using only the bright, good ones—the dark green, purple, black and red ones. Join them together keeping them looking neat (these form leaf plates for offerings and the bamboo fence demarking sacred space).

On the top of the dais, arrange a white cloth to make it look proper. Arrange it into three levels for the offerings. At the bottom, tie the

14. Kaffir limes and pods of the acacia tree are both used for washing the hair so they are eminently suitable here in a tonsure ceremony. Acacia pods are used to make the beads in the Buddhist rosaries. In Burma these pods were steeped in water and guests to a child's birth ceremony washed their hands in the effusion (Gerini 1895: 147). Bermuda grass (*phraek*) is one of the five auspicious offerings characteristic of Brahmanic ritual in Thailand (cf. Kingkeo 1967: 88; McFarland 1969: 600; Gerini 1895: 40, 64).

15. The "gem stairs" probably refer to the approaches to the *Kailāsa* mountain, the place where Śiva performed the topknot cutting on his son (Wales 1931: 127–8; Gerini 1895: 95). A *campā kris* apparently refers to the kingdom Champa that existed in Cambodia and Vietnam from around 400 A.D. to 1475.

16. *Bencha* or dais is a special platform for the bathing of the child after the topknot is cut. It represents the *Kailāsa* mountain on which Śiva cut his sons' hair (Wales 1931: 127). It is a square structure with a pointed canopy all in white. Before the bathing takes place it holds the offerings to *ketu* (Gerini 1895: 41).

banana leaf cones¹⁷ so that they look like horns pecking over the edge of a cliff. Then have writing that is in the design of a stone of alternating colors. Bring pieces of good wood lined up in good order (garbled word). Have pictures of an ox, a gaur, a buffalo, a lion, an elephant, a tiger, a bear, a pig and a deer along with the picture of the kind of rabbits that jump in a row.

There should be a group of musicians who compliment one another well in a string and percussion orchestra. There is a large gong of good quality which sounds sweetly, and an appropriate tabor and conch shell. When the sun is at an angle (garbled word) begin (the ceremony) with the setting of the sun.

You people, who are elders, conduct the monks to their places. Adorn the boy (girl) that will have his (her) hair shaved. Please listen to this. Adorn the child with many auspicious things. Put on a gold topknot coif with a design, a pin, a necklace, a diamond-shaped pendant with rubies for decoration, a gold arm band with carved meander designs, and a cloth over the shoulder. Whatever is worn, put dots on the child's face in a tier design (··). Have the child wear a ring set with pieces of decorative glass crystals and good quality colored Pagan cloth.¹⁸ 'OM'¹⁹, gather the *dhoti* into a 'swan's tail' and tuck it into the belt. Put on a fine cord with a bright decorative design that reflects light. (A girl child) wears a silk and silver cloth made from a Northern Thai skirt.²⁰ Wear a shiny gold bracelet designed with curves. Have a new soft carpet on the floor and triangular pillows, and carry the child to sit within the sacred circle.

The monks chant Buddhist mantras and auspicious chants from

17. The *kruai* is a banana leaf cone which is used to cover food and flowers, and most commonly in the village, betel leaves and areca nuts. In the text, these cones are to look like "horns pecking over a cliff." A Siamese rendition of the first topknot cutting describes Śiva dressing the hair into a mass that projected forward like a horn (Gerini 1895: 22). Perhaps this provincial text is making a reference to this old official rendition. The pictures of animals parallel practices in Royal Tonsures where representations of animals of the heavenly mountain surround the mount *Kailāsa* (Wales 1931: 128).

18. Pagan—the word in the text is *phukām* which is a transcription of the Burmese for the ancient Buddhist capital of Burma (c. 1000 A.D.-1400 A.D.). This is followed by a phrase meaning "husks of camphor" which may refer to the type of design of this apparently highly regarded cloth.

19. OM—The Hindu or Brahmanic incantation syllable is possibly used here because the child is about to complete the adornment and be presented to the guests.

20. Northern Thai skirt—This sentence is to be used if the tonsured child is female. The lower cloth is called *krong thong* in this text and in ones researched by Gerini some eighty-five years ago (Gerini 1895: 46).

the seven chapter book and the twelve chapter book.²¹ They give blessings.

Slowly hit the gong stopping at appropriate points during the chanting of the Buddha's teachings.²² Strike up the orchestra,²³ the lout flutes (garbled) and the gongs. It is important now to shout 'ho' for victory.

Day Three

Great harmonious success. (in *Pāli*)

This is the auspicious, powerful moment, the royal fortunate time, the hour selected by the astrologer's predictive techniques. Silver rays bright in the sky from the sunrise appear at the edge of the room and the universe is full of water;²⁴ the sky is spread with bright gold light.

Hit the gong to announce the sunrise.

A great number of monks, including renowned monks, elders and other relatives, all help to decorate the boy completely with a bounty of trinkets. The hair is curled into three parts and is decorated with silver and gold leaves (the variegated leaves of the picture plant). Bermuda grass as well is inserted among the three curls as is a bright nine-gem ring.²⁵ He wears a nice, neat, white lower garment. Carry him

21. The seven and twelve book chants are the two most important texts for Thai Buddhist liturgy. Both were established as suitable texts for monks for use in ritual some hundred years ago, and they consist of a number of *paritta* and other chants (Wells 1960: 268 ff.). Some of these *paritta* or protective chants were composed as recently as the late nineteenth century by both Thai Kings and leading monks. In this ritual the monks give the precepts, a *paritta*, ("may all evils be averted" Wells 1960: 22) and then chant the whole of the seven *tamnan* (books) (Gerini 1895: 47-8) a not uncommon practice at a household ceremony.

22. A gong is used by the Brahman substitute at all rituals at which he officiates. The gong here is sounded three times at the end of each section in the seven *tamnan*. The Brahman substitute, having been a monk, knows the correct places to sound the gong, of course.

23. The string orchestra (*mahori*) consists of a Chinese derived two stringed soprano "violin", a Chinese derived alto violin, a three stringed instrument derived from the Indian *vina* which is plucked with a cylindrical bone plectrum tied to the fore finger of the right hand, a flageolet, an oboe, and the finger held cymbal. The percussion orchestra (*pīphāt*) consists of xylophones, circularly arranged gongs, an oboe, drums and cymbals (cf. Kaufman 1964; Brandon 1974: 126-33). During the playing of instruments, the candidate and the monks leave. The guests enjoy a feast and theatrical performance long into the night if the sponsor can afford such entertainment.

24. Universe full of water suggests the beginning of the world according to Hindu cosmography, which is analogous to the beginning of the day.

25. The three objects, gold and silver leaves (actually the variegated leaves of the

into the sacred circle and seat him.

Hit the gong three times and shout ' ho '. The monks now chant the Jayanto protective verse.²⁶

Sound the conch loudly and start to play the music. The monks descend to cut the topknot with the golden knife and scissors and to sprinkle holy water.

The skilled musicians blow the conch, play the xylophones and the tabor drum loudly. The child is purified. They finish shaving off the topknot. The child enters and sits on the dais gracefully (where he is to be bathed).

Invite three monks to come and pour golden water from a silver and bronze bowl.²⁷ When that is successfully finished, the child is washed handsomely. Now the Brahman²⁸ comes to pour water from the conch shell to bless the child so that he will develop and endure. Now he is carried back into the house.

picture plant), the bermuda grass plaited into a ring, and the nine gem ring are each placed on one of the three parts of the topknot (Gerini 1895: 64). These objects are considered protective amulets during the cutting process. The nine-gem ring which symbolizes the nine "planets" provides protection against evil influences coming from any "star" and thus ensures prosperity and success. Such a ring is presented by the King to the tonsure candidate just before the cutting in the Royal tonsure (Wales 1931: 130).

26. *Jayanto paritta* is the Great Victory chant which asks that the child have victory as the Buddha did over the king of evil, *Māra*, at the foot of the Bodhi tree. When the chant reaches the word *sise* (on the head) the Brahman substitute sounds the gong three times. This is the auspicious moment (Gerini 1895: 65). After the hair cutting the monks complete the three final stanzas of this chant which asks for the blessing of the gods and the Buddha (cf. Gerini 1895: 65; Wells 1960: 193). This *paritta* is associated with the god of the descending node of the moon, *Ketu* (Wells 1960: 205) who is or was the primary god for oblations during the tonsure ceremony (Gerini 1895:41; Graham 1924: 255).

27. The text describes the monks descending to cut the tonsure and then to bathe the child, practices still followed in the village. Gerini (1895: 66) reports that King Mongkut did not approve of these activities as they conflicted with monastic discipline. Usually elders cut the topknot and bathe the child. This is what is commonly reported as being the case in the literature on the tonsure (Benedict 1952: 32; Graham 1924: 256).

28. The ritual practitioner is here called *Phrām* (Sanskrit: *Brāhman*). Village practitioners may be actually called this. These men deal with Brahmanical knowledge which may be defined as knowledge of the texts, equipment, action and timing necessary for rituals which install and set boundaries around objects or people in their correct positions within the idiom of Buddhist-Hindu symbolism and cosmography (after Van Esterik, P. 1973: 117).

In preparation for calling the *khwan* of the child, I have the *bāisī*²⁹ raised from the dais and have it put onto the bright throne (the bamboo chair). There are cups and round dishes of savory and sweet things, all delicious and tasty, together with all kinds of food, set out as is done according to traditional custom.³⁰ Put a golden bowl³¹ on top of the *bāisī*. Embroider together a display shaped like a lotus bud,³² flowers, jasmine garlands, three pieces of banana leaf and three pieces of wood. Place these together (to form the outside of the *bāisī*) and cover the whole structure with a golden cloth.³³ From all the different colored flowers and designs, choose flowers and put them in a golden bowl. Have a nice tray with a pleasing design on it. Gather together three gold rings with designs, an attractive perfect candle, a candle holder, and betel leaves. Put on a pedestral tray an open, young coconut, and in a bowl with a golden cover, put a silver perfumed spoon with a pleasing design. Have all these things, and a bowl of good smelling oil. Then invite the *khwan* of the child.

Lord *Khwan*, I say to you, do not avoid us by staying in the waters, in the wilderness, in caves or on the ground. You spirit, do not stay there delighting in the trees and green forests, and all the different kinds of animals.

Come down and stay here where you can enjoy these valuable things of gold and silver, jewels, slaves and male and female servants. Please come and stay here in this room of this house, and receive these gifts as recompense.

Dear *Khwan*,³⁴ please come and stay in this child's body and give

29. This object, the *bāisī* is basically a tall cone of cooked rice, often decorated with flowers and topped by an egg. Some *bāisī* are cone structures made out of other materials. Their term apparently comes from Cambodian *bāi* meaning rice. The *sī* is from the Sanskrit *sī* meaning auspiciousness, etc. Gerini argues that *bāi* originally comes from the Sanskrit *paysa* meaning oblation of rice, milk and sugar used in Hindu rites (Gerini 1895: 156).

30. These are offerings for the *khwan*.

31. This bowl is called the *khan* and is used to carry betel and areca nuts as offerings to monks.

32. The lotus bud shaped display is the *phum*, a floral piece in the shape of a lotus bud which is used as an offering to a monk or a Buddha image.

33. This cloth and the three pieces of banana leaf are wrapped up by the officiant at the end of the ceremony and given to the child. The child takes this mass and holds it tightly for three nights. If nothing happens to the child during the three days the ritual is deemed a success. The cloth and leaves represent the returned *khwan*.

34. *Chao* is used here in its poetic sense meaning third person inferior, but it is followed by the word *ōi* which is a term of endearment generally used with a woman or a girl. Therefore it is translated as "dear."

him (her) happiness, health and comfort in all ways. Beginning today, allow him to develop into a religious student.³⁵

Take a small candle with three lines on its side. Tie strings around the child's wrists³⁶ making them look superb, then make a loud noise on the gong. Light the candle as it sits in the flat candle holders. Pass the candle to the right seven times. This is important. Extinguish the candle. Put powder on the child's face. Make the *unālom* sign there.³⁷

By this consecration, the child is left pure according to the tradition of the Brahman teachings. Thus the blessing is accomplished.

Put young coconut milk and the egg for the *khwan* on the golden spoon and feed it three times (to the child, i.e. *khwan*). To inform the *bāisī* (and the gods?) hit the gong loudly and say 'ho' loudly, like the sound of an earthquake. Have the orchestra and the Indian gong make a loud sound. Shout 'ho' loudly.

Many people have come to the house. They have met to help bless and instruct the child. Father and mother, please listen carefully and note this speech.

Once again, I pay obeisance to you, ancient teachers, superior creations.³⁸ This is a high born son, this excellent one is superior. This child's birth was difficult. If the child has much merit, in his next life may he be reborn when Buddhism is taught, and be born into a good family.

There are two additional kinds of children. The second kind is when the child's goodness is the same as the father's. The third kind

35. In the Vedic system, the life of an individual Aryan was divided into four stages, the first stage being that of the *Brahmacārin*, or celibate religious student. At this point, a student puts his childhood behind him, and begins the study of the Vedas. After the tonsure ceremony the young person has presumably left his childhood behind him. The word in the text translated as religious student is (in Thai) *phramacāri*, i.e. *brahmacārin*.

36. "Tie strings on the child's wrists" refers to the white cords the practitioner ties around wrists in an effort to hold in the *khwan* (cf. Tambiah 1970: 231). These are the *saisin* cords which demarcate sacred places or act of conduits of sacred power. Rāma, in the popular Rāmāyana story well loved in Thailand, has his wrists tied with grass for protective purposes by his mother (Gerini 1895: 163).

37. *Unālom* is the sign of Śiva (Wales 1931: 132) or the representation of the tuft of hair that appeared between the Buddha's eyebrows as one of the thirty-two characteristic marks of superior beings (McFarland 1969: 1004).

38. This seems to be part of a *wai kru*, the ritual for paying respect to one's teachers. It is seen in all parts of Thai life from school rooms to boxing matches (cf. Kingkeo 1967: 86 ff.).

is when the child's goodness is lower than that of the parents'.³⁹

The child should respect the superior type of family, one that is headed by a learned man. The superior man gives his blessing. This human being grew with a sense of obligation, with support enhanced by his Lord Protector, the topknot. (the child grew up under the top-not's and his parent's protection).

This child will be ordained (as a monk), and will bow at his (parents') feet, to watch, to care for, and to support his parents with food. Establish him daily in (garbled word) the foundations of Dhamma.

You, child, be careful from sunrise to sundown.⁴⁰ Follow the instructions of your father and mother. Do not join with bad friends. In addition, keep the precepts and perform almsgiving with respect; do these things daily.⁴¹ Think of the Triple Gem every morning and night. In addition think of the result of previous action, *karma*.⁴² Remember this well.

These are the words of the Buddha. If a person is careful, and controls his mind, future dangers should be destroyed, all suffering will be vanquished.⁴³ Thus, this is the final, complete teaching.

I will bless you with four kinds of 'majesty'. May the great teacher Buddha give you long life and happiness, by his great, sublime, miraculous power. May you have purity, excellence and all happiness

39. The three kinds of children are referred to in *The Three Worlds according to King Ruang*, a fourteenth century non-canonical text, widely known in central Thailand through sermons and religious art. In it three kinds of children are defined: *abhijataputra*, children who are higher in status than their parents, *anujataputra*, children who are equal to their parents, *avajataputra*, children who are lower in status than their parents. Their relative status refers to their presumed merit accumulation.

40. The boy (or girl) is requested to be careful because a characteristic of Thai adulthood is self-control. An adult cannot be overconfident or foolish.

41. "Do these things daily" or continually suggests the important concept in Buddhism of forming a habit of doing good things. Such habits give rise to continually doing good. The word used is *nit*, (Sanskrit values, *nitya*) which means constant and in the Sanskrit phrase *nitya snāyin* refers to continual sacred ablutions. Precepts are the *śila*, five of which are expected to be followed by a Buddhist at least on holy days. These are: refrain from killing, stealing, lying, performing unlawful sexual acts, and using intoxicants (i.e. alcohol).

42. Karma is the law of moral cause and effect found in Buddhist thought. What is done today, good or bad, will have a result, good or bad respectively in the future for the individual actor.

43. The word used for suffering is *dukkha* which in Buddhism is the first of the Four Noble Truths, "all is suffering". Suffering exists not only because there are unpleasant experiences in life but also because pleasurable experiences are short-lived or illusional. The Buddhist salvation is escape from suffering.

in this part of your life. May you have long life, longer than expected. May your appearance⁴⁴ be bright, as bright as the moon. Furthermore, may you be content and separated from danger, and far from suffering of every kind. In addition may this power be established in two ways. May you have the strength of wisdom that enables you to be a sage. Secondly, may you have the physical strength almost equal to that of a king; may you be able to fight and defeat your enemies. This is the moment to end Buddha's blessing.

Now I will teach traditional homilies to do with the ways of the world. Do not upset your father and mother, do not cause them suffering. May you have a beautiful complexion and happiness through the years. Beautiful rice will come to you from the north. Many beautiful things will come from the south. Suffering will decrease, you will not know sickness, not at all. May you be a very wealthy man. As it is with your spiritual side, so let it be the same with your non-spiritual possessions. May you have an abundance of property. When you become a monk, may you be a great one, a *Sangharaja*.⁴⁵ When you leave the monkhood, may you be a great noble. May you have a good spouse, a real wife. You will teach this woman. May you have a status greater than that of your family. As a husband, be honest with your wife. May you have great wealth and a number of male and female servants. May you have a surplus of rice and excellent salt.⁴⁶ Because of your excellence, you will trade in land and gain a profit every time.

May your life now have complete good fortune (in *Pāli*).
Hit the gong three times and shout 'ho' for victory.

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44. Appearance is translation of a word from Pāli, *vanna* meaning color, appearance and caste or class. In Buddhist belief the better looking one is the more merit one has from past lives. The Pāli suggests that caste or class correlates with appearance and part of that connotation is found in the text.

45. *Sangharāja* is the title for the highest ecclesiastical office in the Thai monkhood, an unlikely goal for a village boy. This suggests not only a royal style but affirms the possibility of upward mobility that commentators have noted which here is made explicit in this provincial text. This is confirmed by the following hope that after leaving the monkhood the boy becomes a noble. Present day Thailand abounds with examples of these monkhood to secular life upward mobile movements (cf. Tambiah 1976: 288 ff).

46. Reference to salt supports the argument developed elsewhere (Van Esterik, P. 1973: 197) that the village ritual is clearly performed in a "royal style". The child is given royal prerogatives, including the right to salt which was a royal monopoly.

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