

THANANCHAI PANDIT CHADOK:
THE CULTURAL TRANSMISSION OF A JATAKA TALE

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The Thananchai Pandit Chadok (TPC) is a long Buddhist birth story existing in Pali and Thai versions that circulated in palm leaf texts in central Thailand, perhaps as early as the 14th century. After a discussion of the nature and diversity of the Buddhist *jātakas* and their place in Thai art and literature, a summary and partial translation of the Thai version of TPC is presented. Its bodhisatta hero is a royal pandit who answers numerous riddles posed by the king, in this way exemplifying the perfection of wisdom. His answers, drawing on a variety of sources of Buddhist doctrine, including other *jātakas* and *nīti* aphorisms, constitute a series of discourses on moral topics, including the nature of the ideal Buddhist polity. As a result the tale has a compartmentalized structure and, given the premodern context, may have served as a kind of practical compendium or handbook for moral teaching or religious oratory. The thesis also examines the relationship of TPC to two better-known texts with a similar protagonist, the Mahosot *jātaka* (MJ) in the Pali Canon, and the Thai trickster legend Sri Thanonchai (ST). MJ clearly served as a model for the authors of TPC, who expanded certain sections (on the sage's marriage) and added others (his conversion of a *yakkha*.) By contrast, ST is an irreverent antitext, its hero an ambitious and amoral royal servant who subverts authority through puns and taking orders literally, all for personal gain. The story is well-known in Thailand, and in the modern Thai public sphere, where Buddhist moralizing plays a normative role, it has taken on added political meanings. Juxtaposition of the two texts can help us understand the interplay between didactic and satirical modes which is a salient feature of contemporary Thai public discourse.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Veinbergs Hinkle was born on September 26th, 1966 in New York City. He graduated with a BA in History from Cornell University in 1991, and received an MA in History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1995. Subsequently he taught English in Riga, Latvia and studied Chinese in Taichung, Taiwan. After experiencing the 921 earthquake in that city, he moved to Bangkok, where from 1999 to 2007 he taught at Rajabhat Institute Dhonburi, later Dhonburi Rajabhat University. He also assisted with teacher and student exchange programs between DRU and sister institutions in Taiwan and southwest China.

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INTRODUCTION

In the widest sense, this thesis is about the spread of Buddhist narrative into Southeast Asia (specifically Thailand) and its interaction with local cultural forms. Three texts were chosen to illustrate the process: the Mahosot jātakā (MJ), the Thananchai pandit chadok (TPC), and the story of Sri Thanonchai (ST). The first two are Buddhist tales called jātakas which purport to relate the previous lives of the historical Buddha. (The diversity of the jātakas, their reception in Thai literature, and the specific meaning of MJ are the focus of Part One.) The hero of each tale, the bodhisatta character, serves as an example to readers of Buddhist virtues, as well as of the Buddha's determination to achieve nirvana past the confines of one lifetime, in the karmic logic that governs the tales. The Indic MJ and Southeast Asian TPC present models of the perfection of wisdom, featuring Mahosot or Thananchai as a clever royal adviser who solves riddles posed by the king, his answers (especially in TPC) being extended discourses that contain Buddhist wisdom from a variety of sources. Both take place in a court setting and put forward, implicitly or explicitly, ideas about what constitutes good governance in the context of a premodern royal court. In Part Two, we present a summary and partial translation from Thai of TPC, in order to inquire into just what has changed in the localized version, why such a version was necessary given the accessibility of MJ, and to what extent the changes reflect some "indigenous" quality. To anticipate our analysis, the Buddhist authors of TPC followed the model of MJ quite faithfully, but created a text with an expanded array of possible uses for its public, both monks and laypeople.

With the third text (ST) something else is going on besides imitation of an Indic model. ST is a popular work of Thai literature with folk origins which resembles a satirical inversion of the Buddhist tale. Its protagonist Sri Thanonchai,

also a royal advisor in the setting of the premodern court, defies authority and manipulates language in a clever yet utterly amoral fashion for personal gain. The tale's popularity with modern writers and audiences can be interpreted as a reaction to the heavy-handed didacticism of a public discourse touting unity and loyalty to the status quo. Part Three reviews the different versions of ST, and the argument is made that the presence of these two figures under the same name is not a coincidence, but that the utopian discourse of the bodhisatta produces a psychological need for its satirical antithesis. In addition, juxtaposing the two can reveal much about Thai political culture.

The establishment of Theravada Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia, as well as its maintenance and periodic renewals, was of course more than simply a disembodied transfer of texts from Indic points of origin.¹ Instead, it was a multi-faceted process, involving the conscious agency of kings, monks and publics, that can be studied from different vantage points. As a backdrop to our examination of textual transmission in what follows, here we will discuss the conceptual, historical and linguistic aspects of the advent of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Two important concepts in the Buddhist worldview are karma and the sangha community. Through karma (good or bad acts) one advances or falls in samsara, the cycle of rebirths. One way people earn merit is by supporting the sangha or monastic community, the members of which strive to escape the cycle and achieve nirvana, or cessation of being. In its view of the afterlife and of the role of religion in society, this scheme differs from the Western understanding, and also from the perspective of many indigenous peoples such as (we might conjecture) the inhabitants of pre-

¹It was also part of what Georges Coedes (1968) called "the Indianization of Southeast Asia," the historical macro-process which included *inter alia* the borrowing of political concepts and literary forms that were outside the Buddhist sphere and complicate our understanding of, for instance, the Khmer adoption of Buddhism.

Buddhist Southeast Asia. In a cross-cultural comparison of ideas on karma, Gananath Obeyesekere has argued that Indian religious philosophers transformed a “rebirth eschatology” into a “karmic eschatology,” a process he calls “ethicization.”² He finds many cases of indigenous communities believing in rebirth without the notion that good or bad actions will determine the relative desirability of the resulting existence. For these groups, there was in effect no heaven or hell. In Buddhist cosmology on the other hand, these realms feature prominently, but they are not eternal states. This is because they are still located within the samsara cycle, to which all living beings, whether deity, human or animal, are subject. The moral imperatives generated by this view may have acted to subsume local practices, as when for instance activities like hunting are believed to generate bad karma because they entail the taking of life. We can thus read Buddhist ethicization as a civilizing force in the Southeast Asian context. Yet at the same time as they rationalize new modes of behavior, texts like the *jātakas* integrate local views, such as belief in spirits, with Buddhist doctrine. As we shall see with TPC in Part Two, they might have been an ideal medium for reenacting the civilizing moment in Buddhism while reconciling its teachings with what was in place before.

On a more concrete level, the transmission of ideas and texts went hand in hand with travel and study in Buddhist lands by Southeast Asian pilgrims, and the founding of monastic lineages under royal patronage in Sukhothai, the first Thai state. The “reconstitution of Buddhist landscapes”³ in the form of city or forest temples for housing the sangha and stupas containing relics was a civilizing act, putting Southeast Asian states on the map of Buddhism as it were. The enigmatic Buddha’s footprint monuments of central and northern Thailand seem to commemorate the physical

²Obeyesekere (1980), p. 139.

³Blackburn (2007), p. 194.

arrival of the Buddha in new lands, a kind of symbolic enactment of the transmission process. Chronicles like the *Camadevivamsa* from 14th century Lampang in Northern Thailand frame local histories in universalist Buddhist ones, linking their narratives to Indic sources like the *Mahavamsa* of Sri Lanka.⁴ The creation of both monuments and chronicles usually took place under the auspices of local rulers, whose desire for legitimation must have underpinned the spread of Buddhism. Laudatory inscriptions on stupas and idealized lineage narratives in the chronicles attest to this. Transmission took place not only by direct contact with Indic sources, but also between states within the region. This is visible in the Mon influence on Burmese culture, and the role of Thai Buddhism in Cambodia's post-Angkor cultural development, although the full historical picture is often unclear due to a paucity of recorded evidence.

Our textual focus, the *jātakas*, were well suited to the task of communicating Buddhist moral values to a lay audience. In India they are present in temple art from very early, in the sculptures at Bharhut (3rd century BCE), Sanchi (2nd century BCE) and other sites, culminating in the cave paintings of Ajanta (6th century CE).⁵ In Southeast Asia we find them as part of the material legacy of several early states, notably at Pagan and 13th century Sukhothai. In the latter, the aristocratic patron and monastic Si Satha had traveled in India and Sri Lanka, bringing relics on his return, and had a large Buddha image constructed at Wat Si Chum. Inside the structure that housed it, a concealed stairway containing engravings of the first hundred *jātakas* was found, perhaps on the model of the Great Stupa at Sanchi in central India.⁶ Much later, during the early reigns of the Jakkri dynasty in Bangkok and central Thailand, many temples housed renditions of the life of the historical Buddha accompanied by

⁴See Swearer and Premjit (1998).

⁵Ahir (2000), p. 1.

⁶See the contribution of Pattarathorn Chirapavati in Skilling (2008).

separate panels for each of the last ten jātakas, called the Thosachat. By comparing different temples, one can see that certain scenes and poses from each tale came to represent the narrative as a whole, in the process reminding viewers from different segments of society, including the illiterate, of the message. As one student of Thai temple art has described it,⁷

When a Thai sees a royal figure shooting an arrow at a young man standing by a deer he instantly recognizes the King of Benares slaying Sāma, a youth who is the only support of blind parents. In another section of the panel he will see the remorseful king leading the old couple to the body of their son, and finally he will see Sāma, restored to life, garbed as the Bodhisattva preaching to the king and he will remember the whole story of selfless devotion.

This suggests the extent to which, over the centuries, the jātakas became integrated into popular religion in mainland Southeast Asia, as a means of disseminating and rendering memorable Buddhist values visually as well as through narrative. More specifically, as John Holt has explained for the roughly contemporaneous Kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka, depictions in temple art of jātakas like the tale of Prince Vessantara were used as a means of royal legitimation, through the visual equation of king and bodhisatta in the role of benefactors. In Section 1.3 we will analyze two examples of MJ in Thai temple art from the Bangkok Period, in which the wise bodhisatta is shown answering riddles and defending the kingdom, linking wisdom and royal action visually in an accessible public space.

The final dimension of Buddhist transmission, one integral to our project since it forms the medium for texts, is the linguistic one. In the period before Western printing presses were introduced, much prose writing on palm leaf was done in Pali, the sacred language of the Theravada scriptures. As John Okell has pointed out for Burmese, the vernacular was mainly used for inscriptions and verse until the mid-18th

⁷Lyons (1972), p. 4. She is referring to the Sāma jātaka, No. 540, Cowell (1957) pp. 38-54, known in Thai as “Suvannasāma.”

century, except when the work was a translation from Pali.⁸ Pali also had ritual uses such as for parittas or protective incantations, and would have possessed a certain cache or mystique as the vessel of religious truth. Translations (called *nissaya*) could take various forms, as the writer had the option of summarizing, adding ornament and detail, or leaving sections of Pali intact, depending on the intended audience and how the text would be used. In this milieu, to a Thai analog of which the anonymous authors of TPC must have belonged, there was probably little concern with producing original literary works. The Southeast Asian production of localized *jātakas* and other texts like Buddha biographies was fundamentally a process of imitation, where authors rearranged and re-envisioned familiar tropes and themes. In this procedure of transmission as translation, the nature of the “indigenous” contribution clearly differs from that for historical writing or cosmology. Characterizing the *tamnan* or local chronicles of premodern Thailand, David Wyatt has written that they were often written by Buddhist monks and “cast explicitly within Buddhist chronological and geographical frameworks, [...] trac[ing] the extension of the religion to the locality, region or institution with which they are concerned.”⁹ Yet the authors integrate “local origin legends and myths” into the universal picture, and the body of the work typically relates a succession of kings and meaningful events. This also has a chronological dimension, as the narrative is dated according to a local system of ten and twelve year cycles resembling the traditional Chinese one. Rather than imitation, the writing of these works thus entails a fusion of Indic and local material, where the universalizing frame acts as a claim to legitimacy. Something similar takes place with

⁸Okell (1965), pp. 191-2.

⁹Wyatt (1976), p. 109.

cosmologies like the Three Worlds (Traiphuum) of Phra Ruang, whose elaborations on Buddhist heavens and hells contain a great deal that is original.¹⁰

If “indigenization” thus has a different meaning for TPC and other Southeast Asian jātakas and it becomes difficult to determine just what makes them “local,” the question arises why anyone would bother producing such texts if the original five hundred and fifty tales (or subsets such as the Thosachat) were freely available. In Part Two, we attempt an answer through detailed comparison of MJ and TPC, but also by speculating as to how TPC was intended to be used. This means taking into account the conditions of the premodern milieu, which include the diglossic relationship of sacred and vernacular language, as well as the limited access to written works, especially for laypeople. The formal qualities of TPC and its model which differ from the genre as a whole should also be made clear at the outset. Beyond the narrative of the bodhisatta’s life, it is structured around the posing and answering of riddles. What we are calling riddles are “pañho” in Pali, which could just as well be rendered as questions or problems. On occasion they involve puzzles to solve, or punning and wordplay, and in ST this sense of the word is predominant. In the Buddhist texts, however, they are very often simply questions, such as “What is the nature of the devaraja?” More important are the bodhisatta’s answers, which draw on a variety of sources,¹¹ including didactic aphorisms called nīti, other jātakas, as well as the suttas and other parts of the canon. The demonstration of wisdom through this pattern of riddle and answer serves the purpose of leading the audience to enlightenment. After listening to the bodhisatta’s discourse, not only are they better informed, but in some sense they are converted to the Buddhist view. In sum, we should keep in mind that in TPC the riddle is less a puzzle than an invitation to

¹⁰ See the extensive introductory material in Reynolds and Reynolds transl. (1982).

¹¹ See Jaini (1986).

enlightening discourse, an instrument turned to a didactic purpose, as the examples in Part Two should make clear. The puns of ST play a similar structural role, but contain no uplifting message and reflect the contemporary Thai sense of humor.

PART ONE: JĀTAKAS

1.1 Indic Jātakas

Part One will begin by exploring the diversity and mythological richness of the Indic jātakas, by which is meant the set of roughly five hundred and fifty stories that form one section of the Suttapitaka in the Pali Canon.¹² It moves on to look at the Thosachat, the set of ten long jātakas that often stands for the whole collection in the Thai context. We will discuss how the tales depict kingship and its relation to Buddhist moral norms, and introduce the genre of nīti aphorisms, which deal with kingship and are an important building block of TPC. Subsequently we focus on MJ, the Indic model for TPC. To set the stage for comparison of the two texts in Part Two, we examine the details of MJ's narrative structure, where the protagonist solves strings of riddles posed by the king as an illustration of the perfection of wisdom. After this summary, we see how the content was translated into images in temple art, and compare the hero Mahosot to Vidhura, another pandit-bodhisatta and exemplar of wisdom in a different Thosachat jātaka. Finally we introduce the Paññāsajātaka and others produced in Southeast Asia, and review the substantial impact these tales and their Indic models had on traditional Thai literature.

The jātakas in the Pali Canon, along with similar collections such as the Mahavastu existing for the Mahayana, constitute a genre of Buddhist narrative, one with significance for our understanding of popular Buddhism. “For the layman, it is the jātaka stories which provide the main source of Buddhist guidance and

¹² von Hinuber (1999) is a study of the formation of this collection. He does not venture to give a definitive date to the process. Technically speaking only the verse sections of the jātakas are considered part of the canon, unlike the prose narrative which surrounds them. Until the collection was set down definitively, each tale was structured as “a double body of fixed verse and variable prose.” (von Hinuber p. 2.) Here we will consider verse and prose as a unity, as indeed later Southeast Asian publics would have.

instruction.”¹³ Most seem to originate with Indian folktales and were adapted rather than composed by sangha authors. As Foucher noted, the collection is quite diverse, “se présentent sous la forme d’une collection de fables, de paraboles, de fabliaux, de ballades, de récits d’aventure, de contes pour rire ou de contes de fées,”¹⁴ all of this variety reflecting the Indian “génie inventif” in the field of folklore. How then do these borrowed texts function as conduits for Buddhist teaching? The key innovation, one that provides the rationale for the progression of tales and gives them moral import from a Buddhist perspective, is that they are “birth stories” relating the activities of Gotama Buddha in his previous lives, in accordance with the doctrine of samsara or karmic rebirth. This “future Buddha” is often but not always the protagonist of the tale and is referred to as “bodhisatta” or enlightened one, because he has already “formed the resolution to become the Buddha,” assisting others to escape the cycle of samsara and attain nirvana. By this logic, a lay Buddhist audience has much to learn from the retelling of the Buddha’s previous lives and the demonstration of meritorious conduct they hold.

Another necessary underpinning of the jātakas is that unlike ordinary beings, the Buddha has knowledge of his former lives, and thus is able to draw on them in his teaching. Each jātaka follows a common format, with the “present material” as a sort of introduction where the Buddha offers his followers a lesson based on a past life, and the “past material” constituting the actual narrative. Present thus frames past, and in conclusion the characters in the story are identified with figures in the circle of the historical Buddha, such as his relatives, disciples like Ananda, enemies like Devadatta, or pious laypeople.¹⁵ Thus a present/past link is forged between the historical context

¹³Jones (1979), p. xii.

¹⁴Foucher (1955), p. 1.

¹⁵These three sections are referred to as the *atitha-vatthu*, *paccupanna-vatthu* and *samodhana* in Pali. See Jones p. 24. The past material constitutes the body of the jātaka and can be further subdivided into

of the Buddha's life and the more clearly fictional, indeed quite diverse characters in the tales. The former are keys to the latter, historical manifestations of the workings of samsaric rebirth. There are certain conventions: for instance, truly evil fictional characters are generally identified with Devadatta, the Buddha's nemesis, who sought the patronage of an amoral king and professed radical asceticism in order to split the sangha. In every tale, the actions of the bodhisatta reflect the perfection of one of a range of qualities such as *dāna* (generosity) or *metta* (loving-kindness), thus justifying his karmic ascent. It is this that makes the *jātakas* an effective didactic medium for Buddhist publics beyond the sangha itself. As Holt puts it, they "offer tangible illustrations to the laity of what they too might achieve: if not enlightenment in this lifetime, at least favorable rebirths and progress along the path to eventual enlightenment in the future."¹⁶ They are accessible and conducive to imitation even by those who have not dedicated their lives to spiritual practice. The bodhisatta is not presented primarily as an omniscient teacher, but as a living being who may be human, god or animal and is "resolutely struggling to make progress on his own path to his ultimate goal"¹⁷ through performing virtuous actions. Consonant with Foucher's heterogeneity of genre, the characters of the past material are taken from a wide spectrum, including animals, humans from all walks of life (although royalty are prominent,) supernatural beings like naga and yakkhas, and even gods, especially Sakka, their leader.¹⁸ In what follows, we will treat the range of characters appearing in the *jātakas*, as well as the geographical and cosmological setting for the tales.

the prose narrative itself, the verse sections (*gāthā*) and prose commentary on the verses (*veyyākaraṇa*.)

¹⁶Holt (1996), p.74.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁸Jones lists all roles taken by the bodhisatta, as well as the frequency with which they occur, on pp. 15-19.

Animals often feature in the early, shorter tales, which typically contain one event or encounter illustrating a single point of moral doctrine, similar to Aesop's fables, or in the South Asian context to story collections like the Hitopadesa. In the Bhojājāniya jātaka (No. 23),¹⁹ a noble horse goes to war against seven enemy kings, suffering grievous injury but persevering. Peace is restored and he admonishes the king on how to follow a righteous path, then dies. The parrot is another animal featuring in a number of tales due to its ability to speak: in the Mahosot jātaka (MJ) parrots are used as spies in the intrigue between states, although this detail was not included in the TPC. We can note that despite their animal natures, the characters in both cases interact with and give advice to courts and kings.

In the longer jātakas, the focus shifts to human characters from a wide variety of backgrounds. A closer look reveals a bias towards the better-off strata of society, however: According to Jones's tally, bodhisattas from the ranks of ascetics, kings or princes, courtiers or royal advisors, or merchants are represented in at least thirty tales each, but more modest trades or lower castes feature in only a few. In the Amba jātaka (No. 474)²⁰ the bodhisatta is a low-caste forest dweller who is in possession of a magic spell to make mangoes grow out of season. He teaches the spell to a student who later denies its origins to an inquisitive king, upon which the spell loses its power. This illustrates the fruits of ungratefulness. In fact the negative character, revealed to be Devadatta's incarnation, is the true protagonist, with the low-caste bodhisatta functioning as a foil. In addition, Jones notes that the bodhisatta is never female, even in cases where the moral thread of the story would seem to call for it.²¹ This reflects

¹⁹ Cowell (1957) Vol. I, pp. 61-3.

²⁰ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 124. This tale also appears in the MJ.

²¹ I have in mind the Narada jātaka (No. 544), where the king's daughter saves him from heresy and thus would be the logical choice for bodhisatta.

the place of women in Buddhism: although female devotees could attain nirvana, often they are seen as lower on the karmic scale and thus needing rebirth as men.

Consonant with the fairytale roots of the genre, various supernatural beings populate the *jātakas*. Some, like the serpentine nagas and eagle-like garudas, are shown as having an affinity for Buddhism. Although they are enemies, both play the role of guardian in Thai culture, the garuda as the symbol of the state on public buildings and government letterhead, the naga in more religious contexts, as we see in the naga staircases at the entrance of many Northern Thai temples and in the common Buddha image of the naga Mucalinda sheltering the meditating sage in his coils. In the *Bhūridatta jātika* (No. 543)²² the protagonist is a pious naga with a human mother. More problematic perhaps are the *yakkhas*, a category encompassing both demonic, flesh-eating beings and spirits associated with specific places like trees or houses.²³ Both sorts, when they appear in *jātakas*, often desire to hear the Buddha preach in hopes of attaining a better rebirth. In the *Devadhamma jātika* (No. 6)²⁴ a prince in the forest answers a *yakkha*'s riddle in order to free his two brothers, after which the tamed spirit returns to the city with them. Sutherland reads this scenario as a parable of Buddhist "active assimilation" of wilderness forces.²⁵ "The *yakkha* *was* demonic," but experiences conversion and thereafter plays a beneficial role. Buddha and *yakkha* meet in a "classic encounter" of light and dark, "enlightened consciousness" and "coarseness and impurity." As we shall see in the TPC, this captures well the meaning of wisdom in the Buddhist context, as intelligence and insight employ "a reversal of the samsaric trajectory"²⁶ to put sinning beings on the path to nirvana (in other words,

²² Cowell Vol. VI, pp. 80-114.

²³ Haldar (1977), p. 139.

²⁴ Cowell Vol. I, pp. 23-7.

²⁵ Sutherland (1991), p. 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

conversion.) The yakkha repudiates his violent, flesh-eating nature and is tamed, suggesting a civilizational dynamic that must have obtained in large areas of “Indianized” Southeast Asia, although this is difficult to document. Flesh is of the essence: in the Sutasoma jāataka (No. 537)²⁷ a king by chance tastes human flesh, which awakens desire from a previous existence as a yakkha and turns him into a cannibal. Again conversion under the bodhisatta’s influence is needed, the renunciation of the craving for flesh being the last, most difficult step. We can also note in the yakkha – bodhisatta encounters the recurrence of riddles, where those who answer are motivated by the threat of being devoured.

The jātakas thus depict fantastic and threatening beings subordinating themselves to the Buddha and becoming his helpers. Gods are treated in a similar instrumental way, in harmony with how they are viewed in Buddhism, as not omnipotent, just powerful, and not immortal, simply living in comfort for eons. Spiritually they are actually inferior to enlightened humans, since their pleasant existences make them less disposed to realize the Buddhist equation of life with suffering, so they are less likely to free themselves from desire and attain the final goal of nirvana.²⁸ Sakka, king of the gods and the Buddhist version of Indra, often appears in order to influence worldly affairs in the bodhisatta’s favor. In the Vessantara jāataka (No. 547)²⁹ for instance, when the title character gives his wife away, illustrating the perfection of generosity, it is Sakka who takes her. In fact he has engineered the event and frees her, at the same time granting her wishes.³⁰ This is typical of the god’s interventions, which involve manipulation of events with the goal of making humans recognize the power and righteousness of the Buddhist way. In this sense Sakka is

²⁷ Cowell Vol. V, pp. 246-79.

²⁸ Halder, p. 70.

²⁹ Cowell Vol. VI, pp. 246-305.

³⁰ Noted by Collins (1998), p. 516.

quite often a narrative *deus ex machina*, as when in the Narada jāataka he descends to topple the heretical king's false idols.

The setting of the jātakas is delineated in various ways, most clearly, especially in the longer tales, through naming. Although states named are historical South Asian ones, in the context of “former lives” this is an arbitrary rhetorical device with no claim to historical truth.³¹ In many tales a dichotomy operates which is salient for premodern Southeast Asia. This is between the civilized sphere of court and city, and the wilder forest which surrounds them, where ascetics may go to lead peaceful lives, but where one also might encounter malicious spirits or other dangers. Sea voyages by merchants also appear, for instance in the Mahajanaka jāataka (No. 539),³² reflecting perhaps historical contact with Southeast Asia, the Suvannabhumi or “golden land.” Other planes of existence reflecting a Buddhist cosmology are referred to, as with the naga-world of Bhūridatta, and a variety of heavens and hells appear in various tales, when for instance the virtuous King Nimi is honored with a tour of the “Three Worlds” in Sakka's chariot.³³ While MJ and TPC contain arguments about the moral prerequisites for virtuous states, and the last third of the narrative shows relations between states within a sort of international system, the most relevant point about setting would be the distinction between inside and outside the court. As we shall see, the bodhisatta protagonist moves between the two spheres of palace and surroundings, the latter not only forest but everything outside the city gates, several times in the course of both jātakas.

³¹This is worth keeping in mind when we consider Southeast Asian jātakas modeled on the Indic ones. As previously noted, the process of transmission will differ from that which takes place when local elites write chronicles based on Buddhist models.

³²Cowell Vol. VI, pp. 19-38.

³³In the Nimi jāataka (No. 541) in *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 53-68.

This overview of Indic jātakas (those contained in the Pali canon) has tried to give a sense of the diversity they contain that underlies the surface unity dictated by the karmic frame, and by extension by the Buddhist worldview of their compilers. The variety of characters reflects the need to depict a karmic hierarchy where those who violate the precepts are doomed to lower rebirths and those who exercise self-control advance, often despite sacrificing their own immediate interests in the present life. In many jātakas, good and evil have their absolute manifestations in Devadatta and the bodhisatta. Yet it is worth remembering that these are narratives whose message may shift when retold according to authorial intention. This will be evident in our discussion of several of them in court (and thus secular) poetry, just a few among many instances of jātaka storylines being taken up in traditional Thai literature.

1.2 The Thosachat and Kingship

In the Thai context, the set of ten last (and longest) jātakas, the Thosachat or “ten lives”, often stands for the whole collection. Each of these is held to embody one of the pāramī, or perfections, attesting to the high spiritual attainment of the bodhisatta just a few lives away from Buddhahood. As we will see, Siamese temple art treats the ten as a unit. They were known not only to members of the sangha but more broadly, transmitted in educational settings, sermons and even dramatic readings held to make merit.³⁴ Among them the last, the Vessantara jātaka, occupies a special place. Called in Thai the Mahachat, or “Great Life,” it illustrates the virtue of generosity (dāna) in the life of a king who gives up his white elephant, his

³⁴Collins (1998) p. 497 (referring specifically to the Vessantara jātaka.)

throne and finally his children, although in the end all is restored. Peter Skilling mentions “a pervasive belief... that by listening to this jātaka one could be assured of meeting the next Buddha, Metteya,” and cites a Thai author who counted 130 versions of this story in only one region, the North. At one time, princes who entered the monkhood were required to give a yearly sermon on the theme of Vessantara to their royal father.³⁵ One chapter of the classic vernacular poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* depicts a ceremonial reading of this jātaka, suggesting its profound embeddedness in the social fabric.

One can see how the Vessantara jātaka’s wide circulation could act to reinforce social practice, in this case almsgiving. Making merit in this way is an integral part of everyday life in Thailand, and besides keeping the precepts, often little else is required of laypeople than support of the monkhood, whose members cannot do physical work. Thus a social ideal (of giving) was transmitted and reenacted in the reading (private or communal) of the Vessantara jātaka. Another such ideal, given that all of the Thosachat tales are centered on courts and the majority have princes or kings for protagonists, is that of kingship itself. How should a just king, one who follows the dhamma, behave? Steven Collins has suggested that there are really two answers to this question.³⁶ In mode 1 of the dhamma, the king should exercise restraint and punish sparingly. Mode 2 is more radical: causing the suffering of others is brings demerit, so any punishment decreed is in a sense sinful, as is leading armies to war, even a “just” war of self-defense. This dichotomy corresponds to an historical tension in the relationship between kings and Buddhism: the monarch must at once be a worldly actor who must keep a grip on power, and a patron of the sangha who

³⁵Skilling (2009), pp. 175-6. See also Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1969). The poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is now available in an online translation by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpajit at <http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~ppasuk/kckp/kckpmain.htm>.

³⁶Collins (1998), p. 420. See also Zimmermann (2006) for examples of competing articulations of these two principles in Buddhist texts.

exemplifies the pious layman. How are these conflicting ideals reconciled in the jātakas? There is another face to this tension as well. Kings in practice are seen as auspicious beings with good karma, close to gods and Buddhas, whether an explicit devaraja ideology is present or not. The dichotomy of roles in the Indic court explicated by Dumont,³⁷ where the raw temporal power of the Ksatriya is legitimated by the spiritual power of the Brahmin, is not the Buddhist ideal, even if Thai kings are referred to as “kasat” and courts house Brahmin ritual specialists like the purohit in TPC. In short, how can legitimation function for a Buddhist polity, given the ideals of non-violence, renunciation and the moral weight of karma that apply for all its members?

Several jātakas in the Thosachat illustrate the unstable, treacherous nature of life at court, especially in the context of succession. Temiya, Mahajanaka and Chantakuman are virtuous princes³⁸ who must respond to a lack of virtue in their surroundings. Chantakuman’s royal father is led astray, almost has his family executed, and is finally deposed but allowed to live, unrepentant (he is identified as Devadatta, and therefore his nature is evil.) Temiya refuses any of the worldly pleasures of royalty because he recalls (while watching his father pass judgement) that a previous life spent as a king had led to eighty thousand years in hell. Temiya’s alternative, the wilderness life of the ascetic, eventually convinces the whole court, as well as other kings and their followers, to renounce the world. As Collins points out, this utopian outcome mirrors the aspirations of the Buddhist community as a whole to attain nirvana.³⁹ Mahajanaka is driven from court at a young age when his brother

³⁷Dumont (1970). Of course, the actual caste affiliation of South Asian rulers often did not conform to the ideal, as for instance in Nāyaka states of Tamil Nadu. Rao et. al. (1992) explore the dilemmas of legitimation as expressed in court literature and elsewhere.

³⁸Jātaka numbers 538, 539 and 542, respectively. All can be found in Cowell Vol. VI.

³⁹Collins (1998), p. 425 ff.

ascends the throne, later undertaking a sea voyage as a merchant and proving his courage when the ship sinks. As often with bodhisattas, his auspicious identity is legible through signs on his body and otherwise, as when Sakka's throne gets hot when he is threatened. Aided by a goddess, he is chosen to rule a foreign kingdom, yet in the end he also takes the path of renunciation. This is prompted by a vision of two mango trees, one with sweet fruit that is stripped bare by the hungry masses, one with only leaves that is left alone. The former reflects the appealing but ultimately destructive nature of the secular life, with the king as the epitome of that life, disposing of worldly power and pleasure in the highest degree, yet paying a high karmic price in return.

The Nimi jātaka resolves this tension in a different way. A lineage of kings shows great stability over generations, because each occupant of the throne abdicates and becomes an ascetic as soon as his hair goes grey. Succeeded by a son, each on death enters the Brahma heaven. Yet the clan founder in heaven hopes one of his descendants will reach nirvana; thus a bodhisatta is born and named "Nimi" or hoop, since he will complete the wheel of destiny for the lineage. Nimi is a perfect ruler in every way. The bulk of the story consists of verse descriptions of the heavens and hells as the bodhisatta tours them with Sakka's charioteer. With its stress on the virtue of the lineage and on social harmony, this is an alternative to the sort of Buddhist utopia which Collins sketches out, yet it has a definite appeal to those who would use the jātakas in the interests of modern-day legitimation. The Thosachat set of jātakas thus foregrounds the operations of power, showing worldly authority and virtuous behavior (which taken to its logical realization becomes renunciatory asceticism) in a dynamic relationship. This also obtains for those stories from the Thosachat which have royal advisors as bodhisattas, as we shall discuss below.

We have seen that differing conceptions of royal virtue coexist within the *jātaka* collection. Let’s now turn to another source of advice and wisdom on kingship that made its way from India to Southeast Asia: the *nītisastra* collections of aphorisms, part of the Sanskrit literary tradition.⁴⁰ Also known as *subhasita* or “bons mots,” the *nīti* are a key building block of the TPC’s “rigorous moral lessons,” yet their origins are not at all specific to Buddhism. In addition, according to Ludwig Sternbach, with time the *nīti* texts lost their specific association with advice on kingship and “acquired the connotation of excellent, noble behavior, not technically royal, but still moral.”⁴¹ In Southeast Asian versions, however, the person addressed and thus the emphasis shifted back to the king, at least rhetorically. Often attributed to the semi-legendary writer Canakya, the aphorisms are generally more literary than popular in flavor, on occasion being taken from well-known epic poems.⁴² D. D. Kosambi portrayed the other famous producer of aphorisms, Bhartrhari, as a talented yet poor Brahmin limited by caste restrictions from truly experiencing life, his work “a poetry of frustration... in terse epigrams.”⁴³ In Thailand the preeminent collection seems to have been the *Lokanīti*, which has a more specifically Buddhist orientation,⁴⁴ and its section dedicated to kings is one among many, others including the pandit, the good and the foolish, friends, and women. However, the TPC drew its aphorisms from many sources,⁴⁵ and their fragmentary nature prevents us from generalizing about the influence of any given collection.

⁴⁰ For Pali collections of these texts, see Bechert and Braun (1981). An early translation is Gray (1886).

⁴¹ Sternbach (1963), p. 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴³ Cited in Sternbach (1974), p. 50.

⁴⁴ According to Gray, “the *Lokanīti* is taught in almost every monastic school in Burma.”

⁴⁵ In his edition of the Pali version of the TPC, Jaini traced many of them. See Jaini (1986).

The advice to kings contained in Canakya's Rājanīti⁴⁶ seems to run against the utopian message of Buddhist texts like the Temiya jātaka. Kings must protect their subjects and punish lawbreakers: "100. Through fear of punishment the universe enjoys blessings." A king must be ruthless toward enemies and may employ any stratagem to overcome them. This includes enemies among his subjects, as the king is like a gardener who "19. bends down those [trees] which shoot too high [and] divides the united." On a more optimistic note, "69. the king should collect treasure like a bee which does not injure the flowers."⁴⁷ Yet usually there is no room for sentimentality in royal matters. "There should be no friendship with kings," who are "like serpents," or dangerous by nature. The relationship between ruler and subject is non-reciprocal: "239. A king should not be like his subjects, but the subjects should be like a good king." This call for emulation by the people taps into a seductive line of reasoning that kings are more than human, which the Thosachat tales in linking princes with bodhisattas (future Buddhas) might seem to encourage. By contrast, the Lokanīti has a broader perspective, with many aphorisms on how to tell wise men from fools, or good men from bad. Not a few of these find their way into the TPC, as we shall see. The value of learning, which unlike wealth cannot be stolen by thieves, is also stressed. Knowledge is what distinguishes men from oxen. All of this would seem to justify the pandit's independent use of intellect and dissuade him from backing down in the face of royal power and charisma.

In any case, the nīti are a key source of the paññā or "wisdom" that Thananchai communicates, although its relationship to Buddhist doctrine is at times unclear. In the Thai version of the TPC, the bodhisatta protagonist often answers riddles by expanding on the message of individual nīti sayings, in contrast to the Pali version,

⁴⁶Sternbach (1963). The nīti cited here are taken from this collection.

⁴⁷This simile perhaps recalls that of Sanskrit epic poetry where the royal hero is compared to a bee, his consorts being the numerous flowers that he visits. Cf. Smith (1985).

where for the most part they are simply cited in the tersely worded original verse form. Although the majority of *nīti* that appear are not direct advice to kings, their use in a courtly context has the effect of returning them to this function. Whether addressed to the king or not, their didactic character is unambiguous. We shall look more closely at how aphorisms are integrated into the bodhisatta's pronouncements in Part Two, but now we turn to MJ, the Thosachat *jātaka* which was the model for TPC.

1.3 The Mahosot Jātaka

The Mahosot *jātaka* (MJ, No. 546) along with the Vidhura *jātaka* (No. 545)⁴⁸ is one of two in the Thosachat where the bodhisatta role is taken by a royal advisor. The name Mahosot indicates knowledge of herbal medicine, a traditional sort of practical wisdom that calls to mind Thai local knowledge, often the provenance of monks. Mahosot is of commoner origins and seems to play the gifted upstart among established courtiers, who resent his presence. To what extent does this open the field for a different, perhaps even oppositional perspective on the theme of kingship? This will depend on the statements and actions of the bodhisatta himself. To attempt an answer, and to present material for comparison with the TPC, we will first summarize and discuss the plot of the MJ, then look at how certain scenes have been translated into temple murals.

⁴⁸Cowell, Vol. VI, pp. 156-246 and 126-156. An alternative title for the Mahosot *jātaka* is Mahā-Ummagga, or “Great Tunnel.”

Mahosot's birth is presaged by King Vedeha's dream of a column of fire "that would illumine the world,"⁴⁹ a sign marking his bodhisatta identity. From a merchant's family, he demonstrates enhanced powers of perception and decision-making as a young child, assuming leadership of a group of five hundred other youths born at the same time and building a house for their activities. The king decides to test him by setting riddles for him to solve, a long series of which constitutes the first section of the narrative. This is prolonged by suspicious courtiers who want to keep him outside the court and unable to challenge them. But finally he is invited to court, arriving with an entourage of followers. Here there are additional riddles to be solved, but their import changes, since Mahosot is now in direct competition with the other pandits, who fear his preternatural intelligence. He acquires a patron in one of Vedeha's queens, but insists on finding his own bride. Her name is Amara, a "wise and beautiful girl, with all the marks of good luck,"⁵⁰ from a merchant family fallen on hard times. She sustains him when he is briefly forced to leave the court due to the evil machinations of his rivals. His return is engineered by the spirit of the royal parasol, who poses a riddle no one else can answer, and then the narrative moves into its culminating section, that of conflict between states. Here Mahosot, now pre-eminent among Vedeha's advisors, is able to defeat the besieging army of the expansionary king Brahmadata and later foil a plot against Vedeha involving Brahmadata's daughter. Instead he engineers the marriage of Vedeha to the daughter, building an elaborate tunnel to steal her away, and later to rescue the king and the other advisors, who had been taken hostage. Subsequently he uses his powers of persuasion to convince the aggressor to make peace. After Vedeha's death, he goes to serve Brahmadata.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 156.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 182. We noted earlier the auspicious marks on the Buddha's body.

The narrative of MJ falls naturally into three sections: Mahosot's early childhood outside the court, the initial period at court until he is driven away, and the final period after his return when he manages the state's relations with its belligerent neighbors. In all three, Mahosot answers numerous riddles which throw light on how one should behave as a private citizen, as a servant of the monarch and as the leader of one state among others, in accordance with Buddhist norms. This reliance on riddles is another feature of MJ's structure that sets it apart from most others, heterogeneous though they may be. In his study of the formation of the *jātaka* collection, Oscar von Hinuber has noted a "structural reshaping" where "smaller texts enter as building blocks into more substantial ones."⁵¹ Nowhere is this process more evident than in MJ, which by von Hinuber's count contains twelve other *jātaka* narratives, although they lack the full past/present structure of the independent variety. These sub-narratives are put into Mahosot's mouth to serve as moral arguments, as he tells stories to answer the riddles. The effect is one of compartmentalization, a stringing together of stories that brings to mind other premodern works of literature such as the *Canterbury Tales* or the Chinese vernacular novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*.

These two structural features – the overarching tripartite division and the compartment-like narrative thread – are preserved in TPC. The former has shifted, since Thanachai receives royal sponsorship and enters the court very early with parental approval, and thus the initial period where Mahosot answers riddles outside the court is lacking. The final period of international activity is intact, though without the tunnel section, and after the monarch's death Thanachai does not serve another ruler. Thus the two sections before and after court life that asserted the pandit's independence from the king have been removed, although as we shall see Thanachai hardly subordinates himself uncritically, indeed given his function as purveyor of an

⁵¹ von Hinuber (1998), p. 100.

ideal for royal behavior, he must be critical. The more fine-grained compartmental structure of MJ is retained, although the specific content usually differs, the TPC probably drawing from a wider variety of sources, with substantial reliance on nīti aphorisms as well as other jātakas.

Further comparison of Mahosot's class and character with that of his double Thananchai will be undertaken in Part Two. Here we will examine an additional forum where the Mahosot jātika was presented to premodern Thai audiences, that of the temple mural. The Thosachat was especially prominent in the temple art of the early Bangkok period, when large sites would feature versions of each tale in the series, culminating in the life of the historical Buddha.⁵² According to one recent catalog, they constituted the subject matter "for the vast majority of Thai murals,"⁵³ although the tastes and proclivities of the patron were decisive for any given temple. Of interest to us is how the visual representation of the jātakas might have conditioned the audience's understanding of their context, characters and didactic message, as words are translated into images. On a mural panel, the chronological unfolding of the story must be represented spatially. As a result, certain iconic scenes are selected by artists and come to stand for the story as a whole. For the Thosachat stories this is typically done in circular fashion, with the court scenes in the center and other scenes set in forests, on the sea or on a different plane of existence arrayed in the surrounding space. Yet each jātika is depicted in its own way, and for Mahosot the pictorial space is dominated on the one hand by episodic scenes of riddles being acted out, and on the other by panoramas of conflict, especially from the last third of the story.

⁵²Lyons (1972). The printing house Muang Boran has produced separate treatments of the art of individual temples which illustrate this. One example is Wat Suwannaram (1982).

⁵³Jaiser (2009), p. 1.

In a mural from Wat Mahathat in Phetburi (Figure 1), we can observe how pictorial space is used to accommodate a number of riddles.⁵⁴ We find Mahosot seated in his vihara surrounded by followers, all of them still just boys as indicated by their dress and topknots. The white structure is set off from the colored background, which establishes spatially its narrative centrality, and by extension Mahosot's.⁵⁵ Encircling it we find scenes from at least four riddles, without any relationship between the riddle's order in the narrative and its place in the visual composition. One riddle, where Mahosot must identify the true mother of a baby, is represented by two scenes. The decisive one, where (just as in the version familiar from Solomon's judgements) she reacts to his cries, is unremarkable. More striking artistically is the initial one (in the upper left corner) where the false mother, actually a yakkha, steals the child while the true mother is bathing in a lotus pond. The mother's innocent and contented face among the blossoms juxtaposed with the creeping yakkhinī adds drama, and the cultural specificity of the pond as a place for baths may help to localize the story. In the left foreground, the riddle of the skull is shown. This enigmatic vignette (the question as to whether the skull is male or female is solved by the bodhisatta by identifying certain features) is quite laconically presented in the text, in only a few lines. The link between the carrier of the skull, who lifts an admonishing finger, and the riddle itself remains unclear. In practice the picture is open to interpretation by viewers as a warning about the impermanence of worldly things.

The next riddle by contrast has quite an involved narrative behind it. A woman has left her hunchbacked, low-caste husband for someone else, and Mahosot must identify the legitimate partner. As with the baby, there are two scenes, one (at the lower right)

⁵⁴Nidda (2005) Vol. 1, pp. 158-64.

⁵⁵Note that the artist used Western perspective, which dates the mural to the mid-nineteenth century at the earliest. The naturalized Italian artist and founder of Silpakorn University, Silpa Bhiyasri, thought this innovation regrettable. See Silpa (1959).

with the wife making her choice, the second at the time of judgement. The problem and its solution are thus rendered intelligible. A final riddle is remarkable for the role played by Sakka, who rather capriciously fools a cart driver in order to impress upon him the superiority of the Buddhist way. As discussed previously, supernatural beings in the *jātakas* may behave unpredictably, but usually act in support of Buddhism. In sum, the link between text and image seems straightforward here, since the episodic character of the riddles is not difficult to depict visually. The message would be easily read and understood by the public, even those who were illiterate but knew the stories through oral channels such as sermons. On the other hand, once the images are in place, they are in a sense freed from the text and become open to a variety of interpretations, as we saw with the skull riddle.⁵⁶

As the scope of the MJ narrative expands from the boy dispensing justice to villagers, to the young man at court, and finally to the mature royal advisor leading armies against foreign enemies, mural depictions broaden as well. Just as in the narrative Mahosot shows that a righteous monarch can carry out an ethical foreign policy without succumbing to Realpolitik, so pictures of Mahosot on the battlefield must communicate his moral pre-eminence. Our illustration is from Wat Suwannaram in Dhonburi (see Figure 2), a royal temple and thus perhaps an appropriate venue for renderings of Buddhist state imagery, as well as arguably the most artistically

⁵⁶Ahir (p. 27) notes that the Ajanta cave murals from 6th century central India include depictions of several of the riddles from MJ.



Figure 1: The young Mahosot answering riddles (Wat Mahathat, Phetburi)

accomplished example of Early Bangkok temple art.⁵⁷ In such a location, murals might have functioned as backdrops for royal ceremony, for instance the ordination of young princes or the donation of kathin cloth by the king. They would have been part of the spectacle, not simply illustrations of moral tales for a peasant audience. Mahosot wears the radiant golden outfit and pointed crown that signifies the bodhisatta in jātaka murals. This costume is one aspect of the homology between royalty and divinity in Thai figurative art, and wearing it Mahosot becomes no different iconographically from the royal and princely bodhisattas in the other Thosachat tales.

Let's look more closely at how this part of the narrative is translated into images. In the scene where an expansionary rival lays siege to King Vedeha's city and Mahosot must defend it, his figure appears in several places within the panorama. First he is shown at the ramparts with an outstretched hand, commanding the invaders to desist, in fact mirroring one of the standard depictions of the Buddha. Since his army is greatly outnumbered, the bodhisatta must use guile to achieve victory, with the decisive moment (Figure 2) again shown by physical means, through body language. Playing on the enemy pandit Kevdatta's greed, he arranges for them to meet on the field, then drops a gem. Kevdatta, who as an older man is entitled to deference from others, stoops to grab it. Mahosot then presses down on his back, giving a sign that is interpreted by the observers as accepting an offer of surrender. This is an interesting juncture where we see sociocultural norms expressed in tandem with the moral theme. In this sense the gesture serves well as an icon of the narrative, since it conveys Mahosot's cleverness belying his years, as well as the moral superiority of the bodhisatta. His dress and the royal multi-tiered parasol, as well as his obvious youth,

⁵⁷Wat Suwannaram, 1982.



Figure 2: Mahosot vanquishing Kevdatta (Wat Suwannaram, Dhonburi)

make him stand in contrast to his aged opponent Kevdatta, whose saffron string around the torso clearly marks him as a Brahmin. The scene is thus a visual rendering of the victory of Buddhist wisdom over that of other faiths like Brahmanism, a theme

stressed in the present material of the jātaka text. It also suggests that both author and artist were aware of the importance of charisma for the effective exercise of royal authority. “Royal matters” or rachakit, the concern of high officials, must have required this blend of artifice, competence and sense of display to be carried through successfully.

Thus we can read in the murals not only Buddhist moral lessons for a general audience, but specific ideas of statecraft and the spectacle of rule. As Holt points out for Sri Lanka, temple art sponsored by kings like the 18th century Kirti Sri “reflect the manner in which the ethic of kingship in Sinhala [or Siamese] Theravada Buddhist culture had been idealized.”⁵⁸ The focus of the Thosachat on royal lives as presaging the Buddha’s own victorious career sets up a homology between king and bodhisatta that was ideal for purposes of legitimation. “In making this claim [that he is a future Buddha], the king wishes to impress the following parallel on his people: just as the bodhisatta is ultimately concerned with ensuring the well-being of all sentient beings, so, too, the king is primarily dedicated to securing the welfare of his people.”⁵⁹ We shall see in Part Two that the bodhisatta of TPC, although a royal advisor rather than a king, shows similar dedication when he finally achieves the post of uparaja. More generally, while his discourses act to spread the kingdom’s renown, he shows no ambition to rule, and the king plays the role of ideal patron, itself a vital function of Buddhist kingship in its relation to the sangha. However, before leaving the Thosachat, it remains to compare Mahosot with Vidhura, another pandit bodhisatta who deploys his knowledge in service to the state, but who personifies a different virtue, truth rather than wisdom.

⁵⁸Holt, p. 88.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 88-9.

1.4 Mahosot and Vidhura

How are we to understand the virtue Mahosot embodies, that of wisdom or “paññā” in Pali? Tambiah presents a Buddhist definition as a combination of insight and loving-kindness⁶⁰ which seems rather different from the popular conception. In meditation, “wisdom develops concentration and concentration develops wisdom.”⁶¹ Wisdom in these terms thus has to do with powers of perception, attentiveness and concentration that allow the sage to cut through layers of illusion to grasp the essence. Indeed, in the early sections Mahosot solves many riddles through psychological acuity and presence of mind, for instance identifying a thief by his tendency to exaggerate. This knowledge also has a practical dimension, in that it is applied to solve problems. As noted previously, Mahosot’s name was given to him because he discovered a certain herbal remedy or “great drug.” This can be read as suggesting that his wisdom is hardly abstract, bringing to mind the *phumipanya* or “local knowledge” now highly valued in Thailand.⁶² In later sections on the other hand it is sometimes hard to distinguish Mahosot’s guile from simple Realpolitik, as when he sends spies to neighboring states as a precaution against possible aggression. Yet here too the practical aspect reasserts itself in his crowning achievement, the planning and construction of the “great tunnel” in order to vanquish the belligerent rival monarch and win his daughter for King Vedeha. It is significant that the ultimate product of the sage’s wisdom is a feat of engineering, miraculous yet also useful.

Here we will contrast MJ with the other Thosachat tale whose protagonist is a royal advisor, the Vidhura jātaka, illustrating the virtue of truth (*sacca*).⁶³ At the

⁶⁰Tambiah (1984), p. 10.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶²Niyada subtitles her edition of the TPC “a reflection of the local knowledge of the people of Ayutthaya.”

⁶³Handlin (2009) is a thought-provoking discussion of the Vidhura jātaka’s reception in the temple art of Pagan.

outset, Vidhura is a recognized sage and minister, with one hundred kings listening to his eloquent sermons “like wild elephants fascinated by the lute.”⁶⁴ But a yakkha named Puññaka, strong and crafty, undertakes to cut out the pandit’s heart to satisfy the demands of a naga princess, who with her mother exemplifies the devious and seductive nature of women. Assuming a false identity, he plays dice with Vidhura’s patron and wins. Vidhura shows extreme honesty when he refuses to deny total subservience to his king and is given to Puññaka as a slave to cancel the gambling debt. His departure is grandiose, accompanied by his extensive family who bemoan this turn of fate. On the way to the naga kingdom, Puññaka attempts to frighten the sage to death by metamorphosing into various fierce animals, but Vidhura doesn’t give in to fear. Like for Thai forest monks of recent times, this is a mark of his advanced spiritual state.⁶⁵ Hearing the story, Vidhura at once grasps that Puññaka has misunderstood the princess’s request, using his “power to bring to light... absolute truth,” just as Mahosot does in solving riddles. He launches into a discourse about “the good man” (sac-purisa), one who is true to his friends and doesn’t yield to unchaste women. Realizing now that his way of life is sinful, the yakkha is converted immediately. Later in dialog with the naga royals, they understand that “a sage’s heart is his wisdom,” and first the naga king, then Puññaka had made the error of taking the metaphor literally. In a sort of symmetry with MJ, the Vidhura jātaka ends with a dream that symbolically recapitulates the tale, as his original patron sees a tree, whose roots are wisdom, cut down and then restored to life.

Do these two portraits of the royal advisor as bodhisatta differ in their conception of the role of such individuals within the court and more generally? In the present material, which gives the rationale before the narrative itself begins,

⁶⁴The Vidhura jātaka is full of ornate language and imagery in this vein.

⁶⁵Kamala (2003) relates how such monks could face down tigers through enhanced awareness.

similarities dominate. In both cases, wisdom is depicted as useful in debate with those of other faiths, agonistic and a tool for conversion. The Buddha is “keen-witted, and able to crush the arguments of his opponents.” In the past stories, Mahosot demonstrates eloquence in debate with his rivals, Vidhura when converting the *yakkha*. Puññaka is hot-tempered, lustful and duplicitous, and the sage’s eloquent and succinct exposition of the qualities of the *sac-purisa* acts quickly upon him. Vidhura’s character does not develop in the same way that Mahosot’s does: he is mature, well-established and without intellectual rivals, whereas Mahosot must compete within the court and endure exile among the common people. On the other hand, being the *bodhisatta* means success is pre-ordained, and Mahosot always answers the riddles correctly. Vidhura’s public speaking can be characterized as a sermon rather than one voice in a debate, yet it would be wrong to characterize it as purely “religious” as opposed to Mahosot’s “practical” discourses, which also resemble sermons in many cases. In a long speech about courtly duties to his sons before his departure with Puññaka, Vidhura addresses points of behavior and morality in the context of the court, a key theme of Mahosot’s discourses that is amplified in TPC. The wisdom of the two pandits is fundamentally identical, despite being labeled *paññā* in one, *sacca* in the other.

In our analysis of the TPC, we will see a crucial feature of the Vidhura *jātaka* – the conversion of a *yakkha* - interpolated into the storyline modeled on the MJ.⁶⁶ Features of discourse, between Vidhura’s sermons and Mahosot’s sermon-like answers, can also be seen to merge in a sense. We could call this narrative recombination, developed to underscore the Buddhist message of “how to behave,” as

⁶⁶This is not to say that the episode is drawn directly from the Vidhura *jātaka*, since we encounter the meeting between *bodhisatta* and *yakkha* in several other *jātakas*, notably *Sutasoma*. But given that the Vidhura *jātaka* belongs to the *Thosachat*, the authors of TPC must have been aware of its plot and message.

personal morality and self-control leads to escape from suffering and attainment of nirvana. We will now turn to examine the broader context for the transmission process, by surveying jāataka narratives produced in Southeast Asia and looking at several examples of the widespread influence of both varieties of jāataka on traditional Thai literature.

1.5 Southeast Asian Jātakas and Thai Literature

Besides the collection of five hundred and fifty jātakas that are part of the Pali Canon, many other stories of the Buddha's past lives have circulated in the Buddhist world. As Peter Skilling points out, in mainland Southeast Asia such jātakas constitute "a vital part of premodern culture,"⁶⁷ having a close relationship to local literatures in the form both of folktales and of verse productions from courtly milieus. They are found as single tales (certain ones being especially popular in Thailand on a regional level) which in total number in the hundreds, although Supaporn na Bangchang's overview of Pali literature in Thailand cites just five, including the TPC.⁶⁸ However, it is the anthologies called "Paññāsajāataka" which are best known. Two accessible editions of these "collections of fifty" are the Thai National Library version prepared by Prince Damrong in 1923 (in Thai) and the Burmese Zimme (Chiang Mai) paññāsa edited in Pali by Jaini and translated into English by Horner.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Skilling (2009), p. 179.

⁶⁸Suphaporn (1990), ch. 2.

⁶⁹Hor Samut Haeng Chat (1956) is the Thai edition, Jaini (1981) the Pali edition and Horner and Jaini trans. (1985) the English edition. Institut Bouddhique (1953) is the Pali text in Khmer letters, and Shyan Siri (1991) a translation of the Zimme paññāsa into Burmese.

The individual components of these two collections do not fully correspond, as Skilling is at pains to stress. And there are others such as that from Laos, although the Khmer version (only in Pali) seems to be quite close to the Thai.

It is difficult to generalize on what exactly sets Southeast Asian *jātakas* apart from the originals, since the collection in the Pali Canon is also quite diverse and has its own links to folk literature. Reading the *Zimme paññāsa*, some resemble epics or romances, have princes as the bodhisatta-protagonists and revolve around courts, like many of the *jātakas* in the *Thosachat*. On the other hand, many concern discrete areas of virtuous practice, such as giving food to monks (as Skilling puts it, they illustrate the virtues of generosity and ethical behavior, or *dāna* and *sīla*.) so their connection with the everyday life of pious laypeople may be more direct than for the Indic *jātakas*. Comparing the MJ and the TPC should shed light on what changes take place in the transmission of *jātaka* narratives from South to Southeast Asia, since few other Southeast Asian *jātakas* have such a clear link to an Indic model.

In her study of the *Paññāsajātaka*, Niyada makes clear the degree of influence these narratives had on traditional court literature: she counts 63 works in a variety of poetic and dramatic genres, based on 21 of the stories.⁷⁰ She quotes the literary historian Dhanit Yupho, who called the tales of the *Paññāsajātaka* “blood vessels running through the whole body of Thai literature.” According to Dhanit, influence may take the form of direct adaptation of the *jātaka* plot, ideas from the *jātaka* may be mixed with original ones (Sunthorn Phu’s poem *Phra Aphaimani* being an example,) or the poet may take pieces of different stories and reassemble them into a new whole. Niyada found the most imitated story to be the *Phrarada jātika*, with twelve poetic versions. However, we should note that many of these are archival texts which were not widely disseminated, and their production reflects traditional elite writing practice,

⁷⁰Skilling p. 190, Niyada p. 133 ff.

where poetic style (the goal was to sound *paṛoh*, or elegant and gentle) was more highly valued than original content, so that familiar story lines were reused freely. Yet some reworkings of the *jātakas* have become well-known, even classic, for instance the half dozen verse dramas from the court of Rama II, a monarch known for his attention to literature. These include *Sang Thong*, about a boy born from a conch shell to a royal consort who becomes involved in a succession struggle. This work was attributed to Rama II himself, but in addition led a parallel existence in “the ‘little’ tradition of the country people.”⁷¹ To get a better sense of how this Buddhist influence played out in what was in fact a secular context, let’s look more closely at two examples, *Samuttakote* and *Kākī*.

According to the present story of the tale *Samuttakote*,⁷² the Buddha’s purpose is to tell how he “won his wife” in a former life, just as he had won *Yasodhara* in the present one. The moral import is not immediately clear, and indeed *Samuttakote* resembles an epic hero more than a renouncer. He is born a prince, “with golden skin and all the marks,” and a neighboring princess named *Bandhumatī* falls in love with him due to his physical beauty. After he visits playing the lute, the two royal fathers negotiate the marriage. In the park one day the couple aids an injured sorcerer who gives them a magic sword, and they fly to the *Himavanta* mountains, experiencing various wonders. But while they are bathing in a magical lake, the sword is stolen, and they put out to sea holding a dead tree, becoming separated. *Bandhumatī* reaches land first and finds a town, and still having her jewels sells one for a fortune that allows her to build a hall called *Suvannabhumi*, where she settles down to wait. *Samuttakote* has his sword returned by *Sakka* (with apologies,) finds his wife and returns home with her. There he is made king of both realms, building almshouses,

⁷¹Ingersoll (1973), p. 24.

⁷²Horner and Jaini (1985), Vol. 1, pp. 65-84.

while his father retires to an ascetic life, “practicing the five super-knowledges and the eight attainments.” As this last detail suggests, certain religious tropes are present, as when the couple is floating in the sea and the bodhisatta says that suffering is the fate of all living beings, or when he displays generosity by dedicating almshouses. Yet the general tone is one of sensual luxury on the part of the royal protagonists. Of course, some Indic jātakas such as Bhūridatta have a similar lushness, reflecting the diversity of source material.

The literary version of this jātaka, the Samuttakote kham chan, is regarded as one of the high points in Thai courtly poetry. Three prominent figures had a hand in writing it, including King Narai, and it was completed in the 1840s by Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot. The work uses a variety of meters with Khmer and Pali antecedents, each of which is chosen to suggest movement, gravity, conflict or other moods and effects.⁷³ The jātaka storyline is expanded by adding sporting contests such as boat races and wrestling, an elephant hunt, and the battle between sorcerers is described in detail. Samuttakote also has another wife, and must undergo a contest to win Bandhumatī’s hand.⁷⁴ One can read this (following Anthony Reid)⁷⁵ as local color reflecting the practice of early modern Southeast Asian courts, although the battle scene recalls a similar one in the Sanskrit verse epic Raghavamsa, so we should also keep in mind that courtly authors had other models besides the jātaka and may have been more concerned with creating spectacle than with realistically depicting court life. In general, however, to the extent that the Samuttakote kham chan is

⁷³Hudak (1993).

⁷⁴Hudak (1997) discusses these changes, which he attributes to the original author, Maharatchakru. Prince Paramanuchit on the other hand may have brought the story back closer to its original Buddhist antecedent. The authors thus differed in the extent to which they were willing to innovate on the jātaka model.

⁷⁵Reid (1988), p. 173 ff.

“indigenized” at all, it is by these authors rather than by the anonymous ones of the Paññāsajātaka, despite that collection’s Southeast Asian origins.

Our second example of literary adaptation of jātakas in fact uses a storyline appearing in several Indic jātakas featuring a woman named Kākī. The tale is an illustration of woman’s faithlessness.⁷⁶ The title character is the young wife of the king of Benares who is abducted by a guest, actually a garuda in disguise. Taken to the man-bird’s remote palace, she yields to him, and when a court musician sent to rescue her makes contact, to him as well. When he learns of her infidelity from the musician’s song, the garuda sends her back in disgust, but the Benares king refuses to accept her, putting her on a raft to float away to an unknown fate. In one tale the bodhisatta role is taken by the king, in another by the garuda (strange as this may seem to our contemporary sensibilities.) Rosenberg has compared three literary versions dating from late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok, Kākī kham chan in an intricate courtly meter like that of Samuttakote, Kākī klon in a more popular and less recherché form, and a Khmer version.⁷⁷ He generalizes that the earlier kham chan retains the Buddhist moral tone to a greater extent, citing the dedicatory verse on the difficulty of breaking one’s attachment to worldly impulses.⁷⁸ The klon version makes greater use of stereotypical forms intrinsic to the genre. For example, the garuda’s and later the musician’s seductive banter and the romantic description of a forest journey during the abduction are recurring idioms in klon verse that carry no message of ethical censure. The Khmer version, written by the future king Ang Duong during his twenty-year

⁷⁶I draw on Rosenberg (1980) for this discussion.

⁷⁷Gedney (1989) discusses the meters of Thai classical poetry and how they relate to the spoken language. Roughly speaking, kaap and chan were derived from Khmer and Pali respectively and not as suited to Thai sound structure as was klon.

⁷⁸Rosenberg p. 49.

captivity in Bangkok, retains the tone of censure but seems to direct it less at women and more at anyone whose loyalty to the sovereign is questionable.

Following Nidhi Eoseewong, one could argue that each form reflects a certain social milieu, the *kham chan* the feudal hierarchy of the Ayutthaya court, the *klon* the changing society of early Bangkok. In the latter, there was an expanding audience for literary productions that preferred works telling an entertaining, racy stories rather than imparting ethical messages.⁷⁹ All versions, however, seem to tap into a strain of misogynist thinking present in some of the *jātakas*, where women are treated as sensual beings standing in the way of the spiritual advancement of monastics.⁸⁰ Rosenberg also notes a more recent version of *Kākī* that adds a string of further amorous adventures after she departs on the raft. This is a strategy making for increased creativity in the framework of the original tale, which we also find at work in the classic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, where the official version's cutoff point for the exploits of the hero *Khun Phaen*'s descendants was clearly arbitrary.⁸¹ There is a similarity to the creative process in oral folk literature, where authors memorize but reproduce earlier works and build on them. This will be one point to examine in our treatment of *Sri Thanonchai* and its relationship to *jātaka* antecedents.

More work remains to be done on the wide-ranging influence of Buddhist narrative on the development of premodern Southeast Asian literatures. This is a fascinating area of study which has been neglected until recently, in part due to the focus of much scholarship on the response of traditional society and elites to the challenges of the colonial period. As Yuriy Osipov has put it, “it is possible to say

⁷⁹In the case of *Samuttakote*, this seems to be reversed, with the Ayutthaya-era author (*Maharatchakru*) adding scenes of (courtly) entertainment, the Bangkok-era one (*Prince Paramanuchit*) “more intent on clarifying Buddhist precepts.”

⁸⁰See Jones, ch. 5.

⁸¹See Chris Baker's comments to the online translation of this work.

that the Buddhist literary tradition dictated the canonical rules for the local literatures of Indochina,” and this occurred through the use of “a definite cycle of plots, primarily the Bodhisatta’s birth-stories.”⁸² In Osipov’s view, during the eighteenth century and earlier the plots of Indic jātakas were off limits for secular writers, who thus turned to the Paññāsajātaka for source material. Only in the nineteenth century was it possible to draw directly on the Pali Canon in the creation of poetic or dramatic works for court or popular consumption, as in the case of Kākī. Although Osipov does not cite Nidhi, this insight seems to reinforce Nidhi’s picture of societal change underlying shifting literary trends. Let us now turn to TPC, which clearly functioned as a Buddhist text similar to the Paññāsajātaka rather than being a secular adaptation. It is with the tale of Sri Thanonchai that the question of Buddhist influence on secular literature will become salient.

⁸²Osipov (2000), p.7.

PART TWO: THE THANANCHAI PANDIT CHADOK

2.1 Introduction

We have access to two printed versions of this jāṭaka tale composed in Southeast Asia on the model of the Mahosot jāṭaka. One is the Pali version called the Lokaneyya pakkaranam, edited by Jaini on the basis of a manuscript housed in the National Museum in Bangkok.⁸³ In Jaini's view, the origin of the tale is in 14th century Northern Thailand (Lanna), given the wealth of historical, cosmological and other texts in a Buddhist idiom that were produced at that place and time, as well as the Paññāsajataka itself. The second is the Thai version (TPC), edited by Niyada Lausunthorn in 1999 from a version printed in 1881 based on a palm-leaf text in the National Library. She notes the existence of a dozen other such texts, which contain material in both or either of these languages.⁸⁴ Titles differ, but several include "Lokaneyya," so we can assume that Jaini's text, if not physically part of this collection, belonged to the same manuscript tradition. Several considerations motivate Niyada to locate the origin of at least the Thai version in Ayutthaya, not the North. These include the following: the tale is not listed in inventories of Northern temple manuscripts, and the extant texts are written in khom (Khmer) script, not the rounded Lanna script. She avers that the TPC was already known to Ayutthaya literati from its mention by authors writing during the reign of the first Bangkok king.

This question of origins is interesting, but not essential to our reading. More significant is the relationship between the two versions and their languages: it seems clear that the Pali version was written prior to the Thai, and that the latter was meant

⁸³Jaini (1980).

⁸⁴Niyada gives no publishing details regarding the original 1881 edition, but does mention that two later adaptations were printed. The extent to which she made use of the other archival texts in preparing this edition is unclear. The palm-leaf texts all make use of either gold or vermilion lettering and khom or Lanna script. Niyada (1999), pp. 20-1.

to assist Buddhist practitioners who were not conversant in Pali. The verse sections of the Pali version, as Jaini points out, were in many cases taken from *nīti* texts and as such are often traceable to sources like the *Lokanīti*. These are rendered in prose in the Thai version, one reason the latter text is considerably longer. Also, the occasional Pali phrases present in the TPC may have allowed its readers to refer back to the Pali version, or generally to know where one was in the text, perhaps not a straightforward matter when working with palm leaves.

One would like to know more about how the relationship between vernacular and literary languages worked in the premodern context in general. Certainly today Pali chants and prayers are used by devout laypeople as well as monks and are considered efficacious even when the chanter knows no Pali. In the Burmese case, Pali was a major influence on the development of a literary language. Like Thai but unlike Sinhala or other South Asian vernaculars, the structure of Burmese is radically different from Pali, lacking verb inflections and noun declensions. A genre of texts called *nissaya* were created for the exegesis of Pali writings, following the Pali with its Burmese equivalent word by word and using particles to indicate case endings.⁸⁵ This influenced both vocabulary and grammar, giving rise to literary norms which are still standard in formal writing of all types, not just Buddhist texts, and must be learned separately from the spoken language. This is not what took place with Thai, where however a type of diglossia between “royal language” and everyday language is present⁸⁶ and is also quite relevant for the TPC. In Thai, royal vocabulary and exalted terms of address are applied to deities and the Buddha as well as to monarchs,⁸⁷ and

⁸⁵ Okell (1965) treats this influence from a linguistic perspective, and includes a list of particles. Tin Lwin (1963) presents a typology of *nissaya*, from free translation to embellishment with ornate language.

⁸⁶ This is also the case for Khmer, the source of much of Thai *rachasap* or royal words.

⁸⁷ Diller (2006), p. 574.

we shall meet all three of these categories in the TPC (since the bodhisatta is in fact the future Buddha.) The modes of address in the extensive court dialogs would be of interest to linguists, as Thananchai himself is referred to in various ways at different points in the narrative, beginning as a child and ending as the uparaja and orator with a divine audience.

In what follows, we will present partial translations of certain representative episodes in the TPC, interspersed with commentary and a summary of intervening events. Taken from all three sections of the story – Thananchai’s youth, his initial period of solving riddles at court, and finally after his return from exile when he engages with other states – the translations focus on areas where the TPC seems to innovate or otherwise depart from its Indic model. In the process we will see how the sage uses the pretext of solving riddles to present Buddhist doctrine and “wisdom” more generally. While some comparison between Pali and Thai versions is in order, the focus is not primarily linguistic, but instead seeks more general insight into how the creative process conditions the transmission of narratives in premodern Southeast Asia.

2.2 Preliminary Material

In the dedication, the narrator invites his audience to listen in order to obtain merit, prosperity and general advantage. The language is elaborate and ambiguous at points, similar to the beginning of the Thai cosmological work “Three Worlds.”⁸⁸ The narrator refers to himself as “the Buddha’s servant,” now a standard first-person pronoun in high-register Thai.

⁸⁸Reynolds and Reynolds transl. (1982).

Dedication

The Buddha's servant makes reverential obeisance to the Buddha, the Lord of the World, the right-enlightened one, he of beautiful conduct and endless wisdom and calm, like a great ocean reaching to the shore of wisdom. His knowledge extends to the limits of what is knowable. The Buddha's wisdom extends into the Three Worlds, like a crystal lantern that eliminates the darkness. Our teacher the Buddha has an exalted nature due to this wisdom, which is the highest of the high, viewing the world with all manner of foresight. Thus we call him the Buddha of Wisdom (Paññādhika Buddha.) The Buddha gave a sermon to his disciples to help them cross this wide and deep ocean, the ocean of samsara, to the farther shore. This is the path of escape to the heaven of the great immortality, nibbana. Let the Buddha hear those respectful words, on the ten virtuous things: the four ways, the four fruits, plus nibbana makes nine, and with the Scriptures, which contain 84,000 dhammic bodies, there are ten. The dhamma is a refuge for all beings, including gods, yakkhas, asuras, gandharvas, garudas, nagas and humans, all will pass into heaven and nibbana. They will escape the conditions of incarnation (jāti,) old age, illness and death, and will leave no trace, achieving true happiness without equal. The Buddha's servant reveres his lord's dhamma, and his virtues, 227 in number, including a pure mind, happy in its solitude. He is a magical person with a nature free of defilements and demerits. Let all danger be eliminated from my nature, through the revered power of the Three Jewels. The Buddha's servant will tell the story of Phra Lokanay, adorned with riddles of various meanings, in order to lead good people into belief. Those who wish to listen will be guided to advantage both at present and in the future, including those who wish for prosperity – please listen! My discourse will contain clever maxims laid down by the being called Lokanay, which I will present in accordance with the creed, with intelligence and knowledge, and with the dhamma of merit through listening, beginning now.

Wisdom is focused on as the Buddha's distinguishing trait, a key element in the spiritual quest to escape samsara. This is consonant with the reading of the Mahosot jātaka as an illustration of the perfection of wisdom. Enumerating virtuous things and listing good and bad qualities as done here is also a feature of Thananchai's answers to riddles in the body of the TPC. He often gives such a list, then elaborates on each element. The name "Lokanay" is not used for the bodhisatta elsewhere in the TPC, only "Thananchai." The former seems to function as a title, the latter as a personal name.

Present Material

The Merciful Lord and right-enlightened one told the story of Phra Lokanay, and no one could tell it but him. Yet the question arises, where did the Victor over Mara tell it? When was it told, and why? When the Buddha told this story, who was present, who had asked him for advice? The Buddha explained: the right-enlightened Conqueror of Lions told it at the great vihāra Phra Jetawan at the time when he was dispensing advice to all beings in the world. On this occasion he gave advice to Lord Pasenadi, the King of Kosala, about the case of the monk Angulimala. Ānanda was the one who requested that the Buddha tell the Lokanay story. “Do any of you know the story of Lokanay?” The Buddha in the evening left his place of seclusion and sat on an exquisite dhammic seat decorated with seven types of gem. After he had told it, the merchant Singgāla and his followers were helped to attain the path and its fruits, in other words they attained arhatship. And the rest of those assembled attained a lesser state, as was fitting, with auspicious perfection.

Then the aged Mahāthera Ānanda expressed his thanks to the Buddha. “Lord of the beautiful visage, your sermons are the fruit of genius, which lead us to wonderment and belief. I know of no one who having heard them does not feel pleasure, abandon wrong views and unbelief, and become cured of willfulness, turning to right views and belief in the Buddha. For what happened today was truly a miracle.” And the Lord of the World with the auspicious visage, hearing Ānanda’s praise, was moved to speak further. When the Kosalan king went to listen, the Buddha saw this and wished to give him advice. He said to Ānanda: “I will give a speech that castigates wrong views and turns its hearers away from willfulness and towards belief in the Buddhist religion. This is within the current Buddha’s scope, it is no miracle. Other tathāgatas did not have such excellent wisdom, but coming into the world as the bodhisatta he achieved it. The tathāgata thus had the wisdom to castigate the yakkha king, who was cruel and used harsh speech, but like a miracle, the Buddha’s words silenced him. Ānanda then clarified: “The past story is therefore how the Buddha cured the yakkha king of willfulness. Please tell it to us, your assembled followers. King Pasenadi of Kosala will be first among us. We will gladly receive your wisdom.”

The initial questions present the jātaka structure of present and past material in a straightforward way that would make its logic accessible to audiences beyond the monastery itself. Less clear (and meriting investigation) is the question of how the past story (about Lokanay/Thananchai) relates to the present story (about Angulimala.)

In choosing this as his present material, the author is not following the MJ, where it consists of a simple demonstration of the Buddha’s omniscience that led to

conversion of all his followers. In the Angulimala sutta,⁸⁹ the Buddha converts a robber who collected the fingers of his murdered victims, his name meaning “garland of fingers.” The Buddha meets him in the forest and, as the robber approaches with bloody intent, “performs a wonder of psychic power” so that he cannot come close. Angulimala tells him to stand still, but the Buddha makes a play on words, telling him that contrary to his perception “I am standing still, but you are walking.” The hidden meaning is that the Buddha harms no living being, and on experiencing the sudden realization of this truth Angulimala is instantly converted. This use of a clever turn of phrase (in addition to “psychic power”) to bring about a change in viewpoint itself demonstrates the power of wisdom (and rhetoric.)⁹⁰ After his conversion, Angulimala becomes a monk, a faithful follower who eventually achieves arhatship despite the horrendous nature of his sins. Later he became associated with assisting women during difficult births and is still invoked in that context.

Viewed from a different angle, Angulimala is a classic case of an evil nature stemming from bad karma being turned onto a different karmic path through self-control and the renunciation of the passions. These themes are foregrounded in the Sutasoma jāataka, which uses the Angulimala story for its present material. (In fact, the TPC has likely borrowed that feature from this jāataka, as well as other details such as the name of King Korabaya, his state Kuru, and capital city Indapatta.) There are also echoes of the Vidhura jāataka, where the violent and willful Puñña is converted in a similar manner. The author of the TPC seems to have fused these elements from different jātakas, showing that the work is not a straightforward imitation of the MJ.

⁸⁹In the Majjhima-nikāya II. Horner transl. (1957), pp. 284-92.

⁹⁰In an essay on Angulimala, Gombrich (1996) notes that “playing with words... is one of the commonest of his [the Buddha’s] skillful means” (p. 135) to conversion. However, Gombrich’s reading of Angulimala as a Shaivite devotee who is collecting fingers as “the result of a vow, in which the worshipper tries to attain the iconic form of his god” (p. 152) is not relevant in the context of the jāataka, where this figure is assimilated to a yakkha.

As we will see in the next section, the curing of willfulness through listening to the dhamma applies not only to the yakkha Nanda in TPC (paralleling the Sutasoma jātaka) but also the subduing of aggressive rival monarchs through debate instead of warfare in the last section. The idea that the (rather passive) act of listening has beneficial spiritual effects applies to TPC’s audience as well. With this we move into the past material and the story of Thananchai himself.

Past Material

At that time the Beautiful Lord made radiate from his Buddha-like mouth a sweet smell like the scent of a lotus in bloom, and his glowing voice was authoritative yet gentle. The voice (?) of the great Brahman extended out to his right beautifully, like Erawan’s trunk, out of his rag robes. He spoke with reference to the thera Angulimāla, using the Buddha’s mode of speech. He addressed the sangha: “In a previous life, Angulimāla was a great yakkha, base and cruel, taking the lives of other beings. His hands were always wet with blood. If you are ready to hear, the tathāgata will tell of this previous life, now only a memory. King Korabaya reigned at the great city of Indapatta, and his chief queen was named Atulā, among numerous consorts. The purohit at that court was named Duja Brahman, a teacher of laws and norms, and the senabodhi, the king’s executive, was named Usuka. The four branches of the military – infantry, elephants, cavalry and chariots – were counted in the hundreds and thousands. At the four gates of the city were four sumptuous homes, and in each there lived a rich merchant.

The merchant at the Western gate is Thananchai’s father to be. The bodhisatta descends from the Tavatimsa heaven into his mother’s womb, along with five hundred devas who will be born at the same time (to the wives of the merchant’s assistants) and form his retinue. Meanwhile, King Korabaya has a premonitory dream where a red flame (or lotus) within a circle of light illuminates the world. This heralds the birth of a new philosopher who will replace his old advisors and protect him, say the Brahmins. Unlike in MJ where the king waits seven years before searching for the person who will fulfill the dream, Korabaya sends out religious officials immediately. They find him, identifying him by his golden skin and other auspicious signs, and

provide him with a uniform, a stipend and four wet nurses. Despite his precocious intelligence he is less active before entering the court than is Mahosot.

When he turns seven, Thananchai is given four riddles to solve by the king. After a week, he makes his entry into the court, with his five hundred followers carrying tribute and holding torches. They present themselves to the king and “sit in their proper places.” Korabaya is pleased at this display, but asks why torches are needed during the day. It is like tribute, Thananchai’s father responds, eliciting laughter from the courtiers. This prompts the boy to launch into a discourse on fire, how it is necessary for life and to combat cold and exhaustion. Without it one can’t prepare food or heat water to wash babies. Calling his opponents “rogues and fools”, he calls for respect for fire, which can destroy forests and dwellings, just as one should respect the poor and not see value only in wealth. He finishes his oration with a string of analogies – a person without friends can’t accomplish anything, just as a flame without air must go out, and a brave person is like a strong flame. The final analogy verges on Buddhist doctrine: “A flame is like good deeds that have accrued, and allow one to obtain what one desires, human, heavenly and nirvanic prosperity. If one desires omniscience, this is also within reach. Without a doubt, through accumulated merit one will prosper in every rebirth, until nirvana is attained, like a strong flame with an abundance of fuel that lights the way.”⁹¹

It then comes time to answer the four riddles, called here *vidakkapañho* or “questions for reflection,” since they pertain to the deeper meaning of certain phenomena – how a fat gourd can grow on a thin vine, or why eyebrows and body hair stop growing, but facial hair does not. To take the latter, Thananchai explains that it is actually a courtly political metaphor: old advisors, used to royal power and not

⁹¹ However, Thananchai does not explicitly compare the extinguishing of self and desire upon attainment of nirvana to the snuffing out of a flame, a well-known Buddhist simile.

intimidated by it, report in an impartial and straightforward way, and therefore are like hair of unchanging length. New advisors on the other hand are changeable, not daring to contradict the king and exhibiting “prejudice due to fear” when they report. On this basis Thananchai lists five requisites for choosing courtiers. In the Pali version, each of the bodhisatta’s answers contains several *nīti* verses, but in Thai they are integrated into the narrative. Thus he applies these aphorisms in giving metaphorical answers to rather vaguely phrased questions, using his rhetorical gifts and command of Buddhist moralizing to good effect. This is a pattern that we will see repeated numerous times in TPC. The episode ends with the king together with the purohit and various merchants paying obeisance to Thananchai and giving him valuables which he uses to found an almshouse.

2.3 Taming Nandayakkha

Thananchai is now established in the estimation of the court, although perhaps he has already made a few enemies among those who could not answer. There follows a veritable tale within the tale, one connected to the present material and not included in MJ, that we might call “the taming of the yakkha.” It is this section which is arguably the true fulfillment of the present material, everything subsequent showing the value of wisdom but not relating directly to the conversion of Angulimala. One day the king goes hunting in the forest. While chasing a deer he becomes separated from his escort and stops to rest in the shade of a teak tree.

The yakkha lord named Nanda had taken that tree for his dwelling, however, and grabbing the king by the throat and holding firmly, he asked, “How are you called, sir? Are you some sort of lord or high official? You have invaded the shade of my tree.” “Yes, I am a king named Korabaya.”

Nandayakkha asked, “Sir, do you know the way of finest things (Malatara dhamma) or not? If so, tell it to me and you will be set free. But if you don’t know, I will eat you.”

Korabaya is distraught at this, and asks for seven days in which to consult his court.

Nandayakkha agrees, but warns him not to go back on his word. Home again, no one at court is familiar with the riddle. The king would like to ask Thananchai, but as others tell him, the boy is still young and “the scent of mother’s milk is still on his breath.” Nervous at the looming deadline, the king consults the monks:

On the fifth day, a meeting of monks was called in the royal temple. With the sangharaja at their head, they were asked to help think, but this group with its venerable presiding member came up with nothing. At the first watch, the king put on white clothes, and carrying flowers and incense he went to see the sangharaja to make an offering. “You were willing to help think, but it’s already evening with no result. Is there still any hope? If so, please keep at it.” And falling silent he returned to court. At the second watch he put on red clothes, and holding a small fan went back to see the sangharaja. “You are knowledgeable in the study of Buddhist scripture, so why aren’t you able to provide an answer?” “I would suggest that this doctrine is very subtle in nature and difficult to comprehend.” So the king, sorrow in his heart, returned to his court once again. And at the third watch he put on a suit of Benares cloth and jeweled raiment and went a third time. This time he roared like a tiger at the sangharaja and his monks: “You seem to be foolish men devoid of wisdom, and we won’t get an idea out of you.” The monks listened and were silent, afraid of saying anything in response. The king thought better of it, and went back to court.

On the seventh day, he leaves the city to give himself up, his thousands of consorts following with “their hair down,” and his courtiers crying and wailing, “declaring their love for the king.” But he passes Thananchai’s house, and as it turns out the boy is familiar with the Malatara dhamma. “I would be happy to explain, as they are the Buddha’s words from the sermon on the occasion of his victory over Mara.” His parents are apprehensive at the thought of sending him to face a ferocious demon, but he placates them with an analogy:

“Father, mother, please don’t worry. The yakkha is strong, but what can he do to me? He is like the sun, its rays can dry up only shallow pools, they can’t harm the deep waters of the great ocean, or even make them warm. Here the sun is by analogy the bold yakkha, and I, who flourishes in the loving kindness of the Brahma-world, am the ocean. The sun’s rays cannot discomfort me, and the yakkha does not constitute any danger.”

They travel to the forest on elephant back. The bodhisatta’s charisma has an effect on the yakkha, as his voice “filled him with love, like one loves one’s own son. The more he heard Thananchai’s voice, the more love he felt.” The bodhisatta refuses to step into the tree’s shade, not only because he would come under the spirit’s power, but because it isn’t polite behavior. Nandayakkha asks him to explain.

“I keep the Sujarit dhamma... You don’t call out, don’t rush into the house pell-mell, that is the first characteristic. Then you don’t use harsh words or speak in a chest-thumping manner, demanding that others listen. That is another characteristic. And also, you don’t boast or speak highly of yourself, as if you couldn’t find anyone else to praise you. That is the third. All of these are bad habits, and you should try to get free of them. If so, you will have the Sujarit dhamma. Nandayakkha, I have it, and that is why I won’t enter your place until I am invited in.”

Such basic norms of behavior (what Thananchai calls the “sincere” or “proper way”) are necessary if one is to understand more subtle doctrines such as the Malatara dhamma. “Crude individuals...who kill people and have bloody hands” do not qualify, only those “whose hearts are worthy,” or in other words who are established in the Kalyani dhamma. The “beautiful way” is thus preliminary to the “finest way.” Intrigued, the yakkha tells Thananchai he wants to leave behind his willfulness.

To accommodate the sage, Nandayakkha “creates a high seat, decorated and exquisite, above which he fixes a white umbrella.” Now, after bathing and applying fragrant balm, everything is ready for the exposition of dhamma. The king, who has been watching surreptitiously, concludes that the yakkha is no longer dangerous and comes to listen as well. The Kalyani dhamma, Thananchai explains, consists of

keeping the five precepts. Those who take life (the yakkha's vice) will reap the fruits: after initial rebirth in the Danadukkha hell, one will ascend through existences as a hungry ghost, beast, asura and finally as a human, but even then the initial lives will be unpleasant, involving loss of eyes or ears and futile striving. Those who commit theft will follow a similar path until the human world is attained, when poverty, slavery or outcaste status will be their fate. Illicit sex will bring eventual rebirth as a hermaphrodite (katoey), while lying makes one a crude, smelly person who no one believes, and drunkenness expresses itself in the karmic scheme as insanity. We see here that fear of bad rebirths through knowledge of the laws of samsara is the motivating element in the "beautiful way" leading to reformed behavior. Of course, at bottom it is nothing more than the five precepts, the basic rules that all Buddhists try to follow.

Thananchai moves on to the "finest way," again using a negative approach. He lists the ten desires (kilesa) which hinder its attainment and include greed, anger and stubbornness. If it is difficult for people to free themselves from these negative attributes, that is because by nature people are impure and have a natural inclination towards negative traits. The desires themselves are due to bad karma: a killer, for example, will exhibit all ten bad qualities in future lives, but other vices may bring some into play but not others.⁹² One has to be "born again" by becoming a follower of the Buddha in order to extinguish these desires. At this point Nandayakkha submits: "Please let me become your disciple." All return to the city, the yakkha together with the soldiers. Thananchai finds him a place to stay in the forest nearby and brings him sweet porridge daily. The yakkha will reappear periodically throughout the story to assist Thananchai, having become his magical helper.

⁹²This persistence of specific negative traits in later lives brings to mind the Sutasoma jāataka, where the king is naturally attracted to eating flesh due to a former existence as a yakkha. This vice becomes an addiction and only when he is strong enough to renounce it is he able to convert and be saved.

It is worth reflecting on the nature of the “riddle” posed by the yakkha and of Thananchai’s answer. It is not a riddle in the modern sense of a puzzle or mental exercise that the reader attempts to solve along with the characters in the story. Instead it is simply an unknown, a mysterious “law” or “way” that affords the bodhisatta the opportunity to expound on points of Buddhist moral doctrine. He goes about this in a quite formal and drawn-out manner, sitting in a special seat and beginning with advice to follow the five precepts before coming to the “Malatara dhamma,” the extinguishing of the ten desires. This pattern is repeated many times in the course of the TPC, so that the text begins to seem less a narrative than a compendium of discourses or sermons that those who spoke on Buddhist topics in public might have made use of. On his return to court, Thananchai will continue to answer riddles in this way, with the difference that rival pandits propose alternative solutions, which however are never correct and merely serve as foils for the sage’s perfect wisdom.

2.4 Riddles at Court

Thananchai has now earned the king’s gratitude. Back at court, Korabaya asks the boy’s parents to give him over to royal care. This includes a stipend and a residence near “the royal road” where he will stay with his entourage of five hundred, who are entitled to demand service from the local population. From this point onward, Thananchai will be in permanent attendance at court. The king then sends officials to search for other youths bearing the auspicious marks, instructing them to pose “the riddle of good action” to groups of young people in each part of the city. At the southern gate, the boy who speaks up is the son of a prostitute. He answers that a

good person is one who wakes early, pays attention to his appearance, eats fine food and sleeps on a fine bed. He need not concern himself with working the fields, engaging in trade or otherwise making a living. The youth at the eastern gate, the son of a gambler, says that good action is to follow one's impulses, looking at and listening to what one pleases, smoking and enjoying oneself. Sin or karma need not come into consideration. The final boy at the northern gate, a wrestler's son, believes that good men have "hard hands and sharp tongues" and never back down in conflicts. All of them are quite articulate in defending these positions, which clash in different ways with Buddhist ideals of behavior and thus contrast with the bodhisatta's approach.

When they are formally made royal pandits, Thananchai argues that these figures in fact are not suitable, since family background determines moral fiber (*marayat*) and thus has significance for politics. The king counters with *nīti* verses: being clever is qualification enough, and the boys are like lotus flowers that have risen from the mud. They are given names (*Sundaralay*, *Ittharāman* and *Abhaya*) and take up residence near Thananchai. Angered at the aspersions he has cast on them, they desire revenge and observe him closely, looking for weak points.

With the selection of the pandits, the stage is set for posing riddles. While the king's motive for creating this situation is not stated, it seems to fit the cultural atmosphere of the court, where various amusements are cultivated. In the Thai case one thinks of courtly verse, which in practice often degenerated into exercises in wordplay in order to demonstrate the author's facility in negotiating artificial metrical constraints. Yet the sage's message is a moral one, and a court where such messages are proclaimed may be seen to have its moral aura burnished, approaching the sort of ideal Buddhist polity Thananchai later explicates in the *Kurudhamma*. Thananchai's answers, often developing the themes of *nīti* maxims, become small orations, although

as we shall see their content may not always fully correspond to standard Buddhist views. In any case it is here that the hybrid nature of the TPC, the interweaving of jātaka and nīti, reveals itself. The following example is fairly typical, the Piyatara pañho or “riddle of the best-loved.”

One day King Korabaya went to sit in the Golden Hall. All the officials, royal servants, philosophers and royal pandits were there as well, arranged around the king according to rank. It came into the king’s head to test the wisdom of the four philosophers, so he posed the riddle of the best-loved to them. “Listen everyone, I’m going to ask the philosophers a question. What is it that people love the most?” The bodhisatta addressed the throne: “No one can love anything more than himself. Love of self is greater than love of any other being.” As for the other three pandits, Sundaralay asserted that a daughter or son should be loved more than any other being, Ittharāman one’s wife, and Abhaya one’s parents.

The king inquired further, starting with Abhaya: “What is your reason for choosing love for parents?” “Begging permission to speak, our father and mother favor us with their aid and patronage more than anyone else. Every son and daughter receives the constant aid of their parents. They willingly provide food, from mother’s milk to rice, and a happy life is always led, whether eating, sleeping, or sitting, in proximity to one’s parents. When we are small, if our parents leave us we are sure to cry, or if we wake up and they are not there it’s the same. For these reasons I believe no love is greater than that for one’s father and mother.”

Ittharāman went on to explain his answer. “With your leave, when our parents are already gone, is there anyone greater than a wife? Within the circle of our friends and relatives, there is no one to share our good moments and bad with except one’s wife. The bond of life between wife and husband is a constant one, and therefore no love is greater.”

Then it was Sundaralay’s turn. “With your permission, wherever in the world we are from, when we are small all of us are raised in the house of our parents. And when they are gone we derive sustenance from our wife’s home. And when we are old and feeble, unable to earn a living, at that point we turn to our daughters and sons for support. For this reason I believe love for one’s children is greater than any other.”

Taken individually these arguments are inoffensive, but it would be difficult to choose one over the other, barring judgement from personal experience, which here would certainly be a partial and biased approach. In narrative terms, however, they are not

meant to be taken seriously, but are only put forward to contrast with the longer and better reasoned response of the bodhisatta.

The King then turned and addressed the bodhisatta: “Thananchai, how do you see it? Explain to your father how it is that love of self is the greatest love?” “With respect, every being on earth loves other beings, but no love is as enduring as the love of self. Daughters and sons love parents greatly, but will they do so when there is no longer a common home, when they have gone away to live elsewhere? This would lead to contradiction and resentment, to difficulties of various sorts. Thus a child’s love declines and does not endure. Love of self lasts for all time. It doesn’t decay the way other sorts of love do. That is my motive for choosing love of self as the strongest of loves.” And the bodhisatta, in his exegesis of the riddle of the greatest love, surpassed any earlier attempts, uttering the verses as follows:

Natthi vijāsamavittam *natthi byādhisamo arim*
Natthi kammam samam balam *gacchantam anugacchatīti*

“With your permission, no matter how much wealth we obtain in this world, whether gems, rings, silver or gold, it can’t match the wisdom of these words. Having such knowledge is better than having wealth. Without knowledge, one can have parents and grandparents, or a lot of material goods, but the goods can disappear any day or time, and we become poor and weak. Because when we have no access to knowledge, we don’t know how to go about making a living. And even if someone with knowledge can’t find wealth, he can create it through the power of knowledge.⁹³ With knowledge, whatever place or rank one finds oneself in, one will flourish there. With knowledge one always finds a way to get silver and gold, that’s why it’s better than wealth. When wealth disappears due to dangers posed by kings, thieves, fire, water, without knowledge there’s no way to survive. One can’t recover quickly without knowledge.

Please listen to my next argument. An enemy in battle is not as bad as illness in the body. Illness that arises in one’s body is much worse, when it has the chance to do harm, it can strike at any time and force troubles on you. It’s impossible to avoid disease, unlike an enemy, who one can flee from. One’s relatives can help defend against enemies, but that’s not true for illness. One can handle an opponent with the help of followers of high status, but one can’t combat illness in this way. Another point is as follows. The power of things, however great it is, is not as great as the power of karma/actions. The resulting karma is very strong, as strong as the Chaddanta elephant, the Balahaka horse, and the Kumbhanda yakkha, in fact even these cannot compare. Any being will

⁹³The term used here can connote magical power as well as intelligence.

fall short if it vies in strength with karma. There are various ways one can fall into distress, don't set bodily power against karmic power, because nothing can stand up to the power of karma.

Thananchai builds his argument by analogy, establishing the superiority of knowledge and karma, both of which adhere to the individual. In fact these are constant themes in TPC as a whole. There is a literary touch in the mention of famous beings that embody strength. In effect, each line of the *nīti* verse is subject to expansion and elaboration, resulting in a work of persuasive rhetoric.

A person with wealth is not the equal of one with knowledge, an enemy in battle is not the equal of illness in the body, other powers are not the equal of the power of karma, and further there is an analogy with other loves not being equal to love of self. You preserve wealth in order to protect yourself from harm, but being wealthy brings its own tasks and worries. As a result you want to be rid of the wealth to relieve the burden on the self. A time-honored tradition among people of good birth is that one could lose wealth, but not give up one's wife, protect her with one's wealth, and not to think twice if it was used up in the process, due to love for her. But even the loss of wealth and close family members does not mean losing oneself. To preserve one's honesty is key, because abandoning it means earning demerits. Loss of wealth and wife is not the last step, which is sinful action. Committing sin out of love for one's wife is not appropriate, because as a result one experiences sorrow in the four nether realms (*caturabāy*). Then neither wealth nor a wife's love can help you, only the fruit of good action can help you get through sorrow in other, future worlds. Good action is one's best friend. One's relatives and friends are in this world, and some of them love you only for your wealth and will ignore and despise you when it is gone. They love you only when you have good fortune, there are hundreds and thousands of instances like this.

It's very hard to find another person who loves you equally from beginning to end. Out of hundreds and thousands of people one might find only one. Then you may be together without splitting or growing to despise each other, in this world. But even that doesn't mean you will be together in other worlds. Although you exhibit all the virtues, generosity and loving kindness, this only lasts until one gets to the cemetery. The other person won't follow you there, but will return home. It's only your body that is consumed. Children, wives or relatives, no matter how much they love you and are reluctant to part, can't follow you. But the merit you have made will stay with your self in future worlds. For this reason a person who does useful things and leads you to do what is proper, whoever it may be, is valuable, but one's relatives, if they lead you to do things without good result, are like a disease in one's body. Illness can

occur in a person's body, causing suffering in various ways, keeping the person from being happy. A person who is one's flesh and blood but who leads one to do bad things is like a disease, bringing troubles both in this world and in other worlds. The opposite sort of person is like medicine from the forest. Usually such medicine, if one consumes it, destroys all sorts of disease. So if a person who is not close to you does something useful for you, and leads you to do virtuous deeds, leads you to happiness, and to escape from sorrow in this world and in other worlds, by analogy he is like medicine from the forest, a person who suppresses the disease in one's body.

Arriving at the crux of his argument, Thananchai attacks his opponents' thesis that relatives are the highest good. Although his point that knowledge is more powerful than wealth is consonant with the *jātaka*'s message of perfect wisdom, his praise for what might be construed as the virtue of selfishness seems surprising. One could also address the much-discussed question of *anatta* or non-self, the Buddhist denial of the soul, at least in scholastic if not popular conceptions. In asserting that karma is continuous, but all concrete links with previous lives are severed, Thananchai has perhaps got the balance right. But what of loving-kindness and concern for others as paths to acquiring merit? The message here is akin to that of Vessantara, who gave away his wife and children: love of others is a kind of attachment which can hold you back from realizing spiritual goals. To turn the final point on its head, one can be generous to strangers and thereby earn more merit since there is no question of self-interest.

Thananchai's comparison of the helpful stranger to forest medicine is taken from the *Lokaṇīti* section on "friendship":

A beneficent stranger is a true relative,
A relative of no benefit is a stranger.
A disease, though arising in the body, is not beneficial,
An herb from the forest is a boon.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Gray, p. 19.

It is difficult to say how widespread this view would be within Buddhism. Certainly the superiority of friendship to the sexual bond between male and female is a common Buddhist theme frequently manifested in the *jātakas*.⁹⁵ Since the sangha community consisted of individuals who had formally renounced family ties and were engaged in striving toward the goal of arhatship, such stories may have served as justification for what must have been the difficult emotional task of detachment from the love of family and all other desires. It fits well with Thananchai's main argument here, that the spiritual path must be traversed alone in the final analysis.

The bodhisatta goes on to solve several more riddles using *nīti* maxims in this way. He also interacts with other figures at court, exposing a corrupt court judgement by the *senabodhi*, who in his capacity as military leader will later become Thananchai's nemesis. In a long exchange with the *purohit*, who is in charge of religious matters, Thananchai expounds on that office's duties, as well as those of the king. As a result the *purohit* renounces Shaivism for Buddhism, another manifestation of the conversion effect implicit in the bodhisatta's displays of wisdom. Yet his next discourse will antagonize both the military and the religious official, and even the king himself.

One day King Korabaya went to the Great Hall of Judgement with his entourage of officials and advisors, people both big and small. The four pandits were in attendance. The king addressed the four, asking who deserved to be treated with respect, or what behavior would be deserving of respect.

The bodhisatta addressed the king and answered that one with good ears and eyes is so deserving. For their parts, Sundaralay said it would be a gentleman, *Itthāraman* a person with a good heart, and *Abhaya* one of good actions. The king then chose to question *Abhaya* first. "So, why do you believe that the doer of good acts is the one who is worthy of respect? And who would such a person be?" "I would humbly suggest that the *senabodhi* is such a person. Normally the *senabodhi* takes a general interest in many different areas, across the capital. Of all those doing the king's business, if anyone does a bad job, the

⁹⁵See Jones, ch. 5.

senabodhi will threaten them, with words if appropriate, or with a beating, and with shame in the eyes of the populace. The offender may even be put to death. There should be no bias, even for those whom the king says should be protected. Those who do the right thing are praised by the senabodhi, who thus confers standing on them within the group. For any sort of activity, if the senabodhi lauds it, everyone else will follow suit. The same is true if he criticizes it. For this reason I believe that all people should hold the senabodhi in esteem, because of his good acts.

Next the king posed his question to Itthāraman. Why should we respect the person with a good heart, and who might such a person be? “By your leave, my lord, this person is the purohit.” The learned purohit is of the brahman caste, and he shows composure in both body and mind. Whether he is walking, standing or sitting, eating or doing anything else, he is gentle and courteous in his ways. The purohit also gives eloquent and just counsel to the king on a permanent basis, he is like the king’s teacher, and he does his utmost to uphold the royal name and its honor. Whoever keeps company with him, when that person gets on the king’s bad side and is criticized, the purohit with some judicious words can elicit the king’s mercy and keep the matter civil. The king may still punish the one who did wrong, but then again he may not. For these reasons I hold that the person most worthy of our respect is the purohit.”

The king then asked Sundaralay to explain his position that a certain good person is worthy of respect. “This good person I hold to be the ruler himself. The king makes an effort to bring prosperity to the common people. He admonishes them to cultivate the fields and paddies, in every village, every corner of the land. It is only he who can do this. Also he serves as a judge in matters concerning the population and never puts this burden down. He subjects those who have gone against the norms set by the court to his authority, those who should be beaten are beaten, and those who deserve death are executed. But those who follow the law of the land are praised and encouraged. Those who are loyal to him but can’t earn a living he supports and provides with wealth and subsistence. And he grants status to loyal subjects who lack it, making the small people big. For these reasons I respectfully hold that the one we all should respect the most is the king himself.”

As with the “riddle of best things,” it is hardly possible to differentiate these arguments, as each pandit has chosen to praise a member of the court. Sundaralay’s stress on the link between the king and the common people (“phrai” is the term used in Thai) and his encouragement of prosperity through agriculture is notable, and the ruler further serves as protector and social safety net. These are key features of an idealized monarchy on the paternalist model.

Finally came Thananchai's turn to defend his views. Why did he choose the person with good eyes and ears, and who might that be? "Buddhas, paccekabuddhas, Buddha-sāvakas, and men of integrity are those with good eyes and ears, or divine hearing and penetrating vision. They are the thinkers, the ones who provide us with analysis and judgement, who are able to distinguish right from wrong and virtue from vice, merit from sin, the advantageous from the harmful. This is another sense of having good eyes and ears. It extends to the men of integrity who have heard the dhamma preached and are able to determine what produces merit and what does not. Those who have learned by heart how to live in accordance with the precepts have good eyes and ears. Such people cannot be happy in the presence of sin, they despise the crude and the sinful. No sinner can find respect from those with these qualities. The person with a virtuous heart will not enter into murder, theft, sexual misbehavior or wrong views. He or she will maintain proper bearing, proper words and a proper mind. It's something both good and productive, auspicious both in this world and in other worlds. Giving respect to the senabodhi, the purohit or the monarch will bring happiness and prosperity in the present world, but not in subsequent worlds. Giving respect to Buddhas will give you this in all worlds, and you will gain the wealth of humanity, the wealth of the heavens and the wealth of nirvana.

And also, by your leave, the senabodhi has been called a man of good acts, but I can't agree with Abhaya. Why? The senabodhi's concern is to preserve the authority of the king and carry out the royal tasks through coercive force against people as a whole. The senabodhi's character is marked by anger, bravery and power. It can't work in favor of patience and self-restraint. It works through anger, in fulfilling its duty it will kill, whip or imprison, cut hands and feet, stab and pierce. What's more, his manner of speaking does not coincide with his manner of acting, quite the opposite. The mouth says one thing, it charms and implores, but the action is crude and merciless. I would draw an analogy with sugar cane juice mixed with poison, if a person doesn't notice and consumes it he will meet his end, or at least suffer almost mortal pain. So the sense of this mixture of sweet juice and poison is that the senabodhi's sweet tongue is just in the mouth, his actions are crude, and associating with him will lead to misfortune and eventual destruction.

Thananchai's linking of "good eyes and ears" with discernment in the moral sense is consonant with his general understanding of wisdom. Contemporary Buddhist practice attributes these heightened sensory qualities to monks who have expertise in meditation, for instance a well-known forest monk who used this sort of skill to gain a

deeper understanding of his followers' abilities and mental states.⁹⁶ One might include these with other types of advanced knowledge, like the ability to know one's past lives, that are accessible only to the various grades of Buddha. When the bodhisatta attacks the senabodhi as a hypocrite, this seems directed at Usuka as an individual. Yet his initial statement that the exercise of coercive power by the ruler necessarily calls for and encourages sinful character traits is more fundamental, echoing Collins' distinction between the realist and idealist Buddhist views of temporal power. Thananchai goes on to argue that knowledge and stature are dangerous when possessed by evil people, and his argument culminates in an appeal to "courtiers of ancient times" who upheld moral norms, unlike the degenerate courts of his time. The purohit too "is simply greedy, and his teaching is contrary to the dhamma and concerned only with royal status and honor. The main thing it imparts to the ruler now is pride, and concern for wealth, tribute and followers." Pride is like a stone pillar, lifeless and inflexible. As for the kings of today,

they are not really virtuous or pure. They are not paragons of fairness as ancient kings were. Their behavior is crude, they have people killed out of vengeance and use violence more generally to obtain wealth. They should administer just punishment, even to the death, but instances of violence suggest to me that they can't be called men with good hearts.

These rather utopian words mark an ominous turn in Thananchai's standing in the eyes of the king. The sage's honesty will soon provoke resentment not only among the powerful courtiers, but in the occupant of the throne himself.

⁹⁶See Tambiah (1984) p. 45 ff. on psychic powers (iddhi) acquired through meditation.

2.5 Political Riddles and the Kurudhamma

With the next riddle, on the uparaja, the king begins to regard Thananchai's answers with suspicion. "Uparaja" is a title open to two interpretations: it may mean "viceroy", the second in command, or "crown prince", heir to the throne. In the history of the Siamese court the first was more salient, until the modernization of the monarchy by Rama V brought a more regulated system of succession with the designation of the heir. If in answering this riddle Thananchai betrays an ambition to hold the office, he will be revealed as power-hungry and disloyal in the eyes of the king. The other pandits each expound on one field where the uparaja must show aptitude: war, jurisprudence and royal matters, and construction in the palace and capital. Thananchai points out that none of these tasks require a philosopher or even moral acuity, since war leads to sin, and in passing judgement or approving contracts bias and partiality are unavoidable. In his view, a calm and composed demeanor and the determination to uphold the five precepts are enough. In support he relates a version of the Kurudhamma jātaka (No. 276).⁹⁷

This is the story of a righteous kingdom called Kuru, where everyone down to the lowliest slave keeps the five precepts. A neighboring kingdom, Kalinga, suffers from a perennial lack of rain, which in turn has brought famine and disease. First the Kalinga king is advised to give alms, then he borrows his neighbor's royal elephant, but to no effect. Finally he sends messengers to ask the people of Kuru about the nature of their "righteousness." From the queen mother, the uparaja and the purohit, down to the doorman and the courtesan, all hesitate to respond because they are unsure of their worthiness. Each relates some minor sin they committed (usually just in his mind) that may have broken a precept. In the process one gets a glimpse of everyday life at court at various levels. In the end the Kuru precepts – which are in fact the

⁹⁷Cowell Vol. II, pp. 252-60.

same as those professed by all Buddhists – save Kalinga. It is the self-critical quality and therefore lack of pride among the Kuru citizenry that assures the polity's virtue, a direct link between individual behavior and the fate of the kingdom. Collins points out how morality is here imputed to have magical rain-making powers, which is how it brings prosperity.⁹⁸ Did this tale hold a particular appeal in the polities of mainland Southeast Asia, where drought has always been a concern of governments? Recent research on the relationship between climate and history in the region has shown that periods of severe drought, in the mid-eighteenth century and on several occasions in previous centuries, coincided with major upheavals in the political status quo, such as the fall of Ayutthaya. It is thus suggestive that the TPC would link the ideal polity to an abundance of rain and maintain that moral behavior provides for water security and thus political stability.

Thananchai retells this story, but has each Kuru citizen detail how his position should be carried out in a virtuous manner. Jaini may exaggerate when he calls this “a virtual textbook on polity,”⁹⁹ but nevertheless it is worth looking at. The tasks of the purohit, for instance, seem to include instructing the king on many different issues, such as teaching him not to use wild elephants for court functions. The uparaja needs to show concern for various interest groups in the polity and avoid conflict with other high officials. The setthi, or merchant, must pay detailed attention to the quality of rice, just as the official who collects rice revenue must be honest in handling grain. Whether this is to be done in the interests of the producers or the state remains unstated. The message of such idealized renderings is that harmony brings prosperity. Yet the more detail the sage gives about the virtuous polity, the worse the existing

⁹⁸ Collins (1998), p. 464.

⁹⁹ Jaini (1986), p.xl.

polity looks in comparison. As a result, the king suspects Thananchai of harboring unsuitable ambition.

From here on, acrimony dominates at the court, and the bodhisatta's standing among the other officials is on a downward trajectory. The king has the pandits compete in a race to get back to the city, but Thananchai wins by riding on Nandayakkha's back.¹⁰⁰ The riddles take on a sharp edge, and at one point the sage answers by retelling the Ulūka jāta (No. 270),¹⁰¹ a dystopian parable about the misadventures of an owl who becomes king of the birds but leads his subjects to ruin because he is blind during the daytime. Thananchai insists that he is loyal, using the Amba jāta to illustrate how ungrateful, disloyal people face destruction "in this world and the next." The king and the senabodhi discuss getting rid of him, but they fear he will make use of supernatural powers (itthirit) to fight back. Exile could also backfire, as they expect him to find allies among rival states and return to lay siege to the capital. The last straw comes with the riddle of the devaraja:

Then the king went to the golden hall called Mahavisālamālaka with his entourage. Seeing the four pandits come to attend on him, he said "The four of you will approach me and utter one word." The bodhisatta did so, saying "Devaraja," and the other three followed suit, saying the same word. The king addressed Abhaya first: "This word means 'excellent king.' Please explain." "This king has executive power and is adept at repression. He is someone with willpower and an illustrious name, and can bend others to his will. If one has to administer beatings, or make heads roll, or have someone trampled by an elephant, he has the capability, and so he is an excellent king."

Next Itthāramaṇa was asked. "An excellent ruler is one who knows his society, both the higher and lower ranks, and can recognize the wise, the brave and those with power. This is the definition of excellence." Sundaralay spoke as follows: "The excellent king is one who can handle many different matters at once, because this is the typical situation for kings. He must know in detail the calendar for sowing and harvesting, when mango trees flower and bear fruit, and

¹⁰⁰The theme of mythical being as vehicle has resonance in the Indic cultural context, where each god rides a different animal. See Thierry (1986), p. 153 and Pou (1992) p. 330 for examples of this from Khmer literature.

¹⁰¹Cowell Vol. II, p. 242-3.

when merchants do their buying and selling. There are many issues, for instance the provisioning of the army, providing for royal servants big and small according to the list of ranks, and for the consorts as well. Religious, judicial and military matters, the suppression of thievery – the king must have stamina to keep all of this going.

Finally it was Thananchai's turn. "A person whose power to coerce and suppress extends over many countries is easily called a king. But in my view there is a deeper truth which is difficult to see clearly. A person who can find no followers will have no power, he will be alone. But we can call even that man a king, since in a deeper sense he is a state. The body of this state has nine entrances, and four roads going in, the gate of the eyes for one. The lord who manages the realm is the subconscious, the uparaja is the will, the one that has feelings and can distinguish merit from sin. There is a senabodhi, who is the determination to control the moods. Then there are three officials who handle all royal business, a court secretary who controls emotions and two ambassadors who are spirits of agreement and receive sensations. There are five doormen, who are nothing other than the five senses. So, the monarch is the subconscious, and he furthermore has 52 ministers in total.

Thananchai goes on to break these down: seven are crude, seven indecisive, six are servants of evil people, and so on. While the good ministers are more numerous, on the whole the king has no peace from the warring factions of his government. "As a result, the king, that is the subconscious, in essence becomes a slave at the mercy of his very self." Having finished, the bodhisatta laughs loudly. The response of an angry King Korabaya, that the sage is "playing at comparisons" and has "squeezed my neck and tramped upon my head," is quite ominous. Despite Thananchai's attempts to exonerate himself, the king is adamant. That night Thananchai wonders resentfully what would happen if he gave himself free rein to deal with his courtly enemies. Eventually he decides to flee the city, stopping only to inform his parents of his decision.

2.6 The Courtship of Kalyani

Realizing Thananchai has fled, the king is distraught. He lies down, puts his head in his hands and reproaches himself. “I am a careless, unthinking person, who shouldn’t have listened to the senabodhi and his desire for revenge. Alas, I am like a blind man. If my life or throne is put in danger, if rice becomes expensive or disease spreads, who will help me?” The narrator comments that Korabaya and Thananchai had made merit together in former lives, and only for this reason did the king’s sorrow not result in death.

Entering the forest, Thananchai puts on ochre robes and a turban, and packs gems and a crystal flute. After traveling some distance he sits down under a tree and starts to play the flute, attracting forest spirits who listen to his music and then his exposition of Buddhist doctrine, rewarding him with precious stones. He elaborates on the meaning of each syllable of a Pali phrase, “itipiso bhagavā,” and relates the tale of a mahout who is saved from snakebite through the power of the three jewels. As previously with Nandayakkha, the spirits are converted by this means.

Thananchai moves on, approaching a cotton merchant’s house and catching a glimpse of the merchant’s beautiful daughter:

In that house there was a lady whose name was Kalyani, the daughter of a cotton merchant. She was sixteen years old and beautiful to look at, since she possessed the five beautiful qualities. That morning Kalyani’s father was picking cotton in the field, and the girl brought some food out to him. Walking along the path she saw Thananchai from a distance. “That man has a good figure and must be of noble birth,” she thought to herself, “but whether he’s clever or not is another thing.” This she decided to find out. For his part, Thananchai noticed Kalyani’s beauty as well, and also wondered about her cleverness. He came closer, and when he was just a few steps away he stopped and addressed her. “You have a prosperous look. Are you in danger, or are you safe from danger?” Kalyani understood that he was asking if she had a husband or not. She answered, “It is you who prosper, sir. I am not in danger.” And Thananchai understood that she was still single. He came closer and asked her name. “My name is that which is most perfect about women,” she answered. “Lady of the

auspicious visage, a woman's perfect features are called the five kalyani. So I am right that your name is Kalyani?" "Indeed, my name is Nang Kalyani. And what is your name?" "Auspicious lady, it is something that does not please the king. My name is that which he detests. And when I speak in public, the audience always declares me the victor. The king doesn't like that either." From this Kalyani guessed correctly that his name was Jaochai.

"So, Kalyani, how far have you come, and how much farther are you going?" the bodhisatta asked. "I don't know how far I have come, or how far I have to go." "Why do you say that?" Kalyani responded as follows. "Asking how far I had come, you were referring to former lives deep in the past. Asking how far I was going, you meant lives to come far in the future. But I don't know how many lives I have been born into, or how many I will experience after this one. I don't know these things, but I do know the nature of the ultimate life." When the bodhisatta asked what that was, she explained that it was the life of an arhat. "Whoever becomes an arhat has reached his ultimate life."

The bodhisatta then asked whose place she was going to, and she replied, "To those with the greatest merit." "That must mean your parents," said Thananchai, and he was right. "Auspicious-looking one, where has your father gone?" "To the decorated forest." "Do you mean to the cotton fields?" "Yes, he went to pick cotton." "I will go there with you." "Fine, but don't walk too close to me."

We can note a certain symmetry in the pair's questions that shows their suitability for each other. Through riddles which operate quite differently from those set by yakkhas or kings, each tests the other, at the same time adhering to rules of propriety between strangers of different gender.

In the field, Kalyani helps her father pick cotton, singing while Thananchai plays the flute, and "the effect of the two together was extremely fine." The girl's father understands they are a good match:

"Young man, after hearing you play the flute and seeing your face, I feel a great sympathy toward you. If you are satisfied with our daughter, you can have her now. We won't oppose you." "How so, father?" asked Thananchai. "Will the girl oppose her father? If you offer her to me, will she go along with it? I was satisfied with her since I laid eyes on her. Father, you are truly merciful." "Young man, in fact our daughter is very headstrong. Do you really think you can be together with her?" "If that is one of her qualities, so be it."

That evening after work is done, Kalyani's mother serves a meal of rice and fish, and the young couple continue their dialog.

When they had eaten their fill, Thananchai asked the father about his daughter's headstrong qualities. "Jaochai, you can ask Kalyani yourself." "So, are you really so headstrong?" "Yes, it's really serious. On the lowest level there are two things, on the medium level twenty, but the most complete list would include a thousand." "So, person with the prosperous look, please list them." "Alright, the two basic elements of my stubbornness are that I am sure to curse you, and I am sure to beat you. On the medium level, I can curse in ten different ways and I can beat in ten different ways. For cursing, the first is calling you a thief, the second a fool, the third an outcaste, the fourth a jackal, the fifth a bad person, the sixth a son of slaves, the seventh a hired boathand, the eighth a person who eats leftovers at the temple, the ninth a person who eats in market shops, and that's all ten [sic]. The ten ways I will beat you are as follows: with a stick, with the palm of my hand, with my fist, with my elbow, headbutting, kicking, scratching, pinching, biting and finally by pulling hair."

Thananchai vows to tolerate this, but only if she tolerates his one headstrong quality: "I will forbid you to do these things." She agrees, and we see another side to their punning test of wills. A further exchange of riddles follows, in a different tone. Kalyani asks first:

"What is the misfortune of women in this world?" "Kalyani, it is the actions of a husband who is angry, who doesn't love his wife and loves other women instead. This is a woman's misfortune in this world. One could say that even if a woman possesses the treasures of Jambudvipa, if her husband loves other women besides her, she is fated to taste misfortune forever."

On hearing Thananchai's answer, Kalyani felt an immense pleasure, and falling to her knees she touched his feet with her forehead. For his part Thananchai addressed her: "I have a riddle for you too, Kalyani." "Ask it and I shall answer." "What person is the benefactor of women in this world?" "The person who deserves the highest praise for his behavior regarding the woman who is his wife is as follows. Generally it is the husband who has come upon difficulties and fallen on hard times, yet makes great sacrifices to take care of his wife. Not thinking of his own life, undergoing hardships, to the point where he suffers the wrath of royal power. Then even while experiencing such misfortune, he will not let it touch his wife. When man who steals and robs to feed his wife and children is caught by the owner of the property, he is punished with the five chastisements. He is thrown in jail, whipped, and finally led away

to be executed on the gallows. At that point he pleads with the authorities, repeatedly urging them to let him see the face of his wife before the end. He asks for mercy on this one point. And he will let the blame be attached solely to himself, even if it means giving up his life – such a husband has demonstrated the highest virtue towards his wife.” Thananchai was completely satisfied with this answer.

Thananchai stays with the family, supporting his new wife with his flute playing, since her “clan was formerly well-off but had fallen on hard times.” Meanwhile at court, the city spirits are unhappy with the bodhisatta’s absence, as in MJ. They express this by making trouble at odd hours: the city drums each beat out a different syllable – da, do, du, di – and Nandayakkha, although he avoids committing any sins, causes strange portents to appear and makes terrifying noises. The purohitas interpret the drumming as a riddle signifying danger to the royal body and make sacrifices, to no avail. (The spirits protest that they pay attention to moral behavior rather than ritual, showing that in the world of TPC, Buddhists have better control over the supernatural than do brahmans.) Finally, officials search out Thananchai and pardon him, and he returns to solve the riddle: “da” signifies the ten (dasa) virtues, “do” is anger (tosa), “du” evil (a Pali prefix) and “di” goodness (as in sammādiṭṭhi or right views.) Here we can note how the sage’s mastery of the Pali language is what allows him to interpret the riddle, just as he earlier analyzed a Pali phrase letter by letter for the forest spirits. The arbitrary quality of these feats of linguistic cleverness is similar to that shown in Thananchai’s interpretation of the riddle of best things as referring to the cessation of desire.

This sets the stage for Thananchai’s reconciliation with the king, which will take place simultaneously with the presentation of his new wife. The sage refuses the king’s offer of concubines as a reward, stating he doesn’t want any other woman. Kalyani is sent for, dressed by Thananchai’s mother and provided with cartloads of gifts for the palace officials. The bodhisatta reflects on the nature of friendship

between men, which includes not coveting another man's wife or property, suggesting that Kalyani's presentation at court is part of establishing a new relationship of trust with the king. Indeed, there are two sides to TPC's espousal of monogamy, which Jaini states is unique in Pali literature.¹⁰² On the one hand Thananchai is faithful to Kalyani, which is motivated in classic Buddhist fashion through recourse to the karma of past lives. Kalyani and Thananchai each recount how they had formerly been royal spouses, first when Kalyani suffered under a jealous chief queen, then when Thananchai was a king whose queen (Kalyani) urged him to show mercy to a convicted thief for the sake of his family. On the other hand, a further extended section of the narrative deals with how Kalyani resists a series of attempts at seduction by her husband's enemies after he leaves to do battle. These scenes are played to comic effect as Kalyani uses cunning to humiliate them. The theme of protection of feminine virtue from outsiders seems quite traditional, perhaps making the argument for monogamy less surprising than it might seem at first glance. Of course no one is arguing that the king should only have one wife, just his elite servant, and the underlying purpose may be just as much to regulate affairs at court by avoiding conflicts of passion as to assert a more "modern" outlook. In any case, the king has now accepted Thananchai back into the court and made him uparaja. Narrative focus now shifts to the international stage, and Thananchai must leave aside his earlier criticisms of the hypocrisy of exercising power and demonstrate how a virtuous foreign policy is conducted.

¹⁰²Jaini (1986), p.xxviii. However, the theme of conflict between royal wives, present in several Paññāsajātaka stories as Jaini elsewhere notes, was further transformed into a popular theme in Thai literature, for instance in the Early Bangkok court drama *Sang Thong*. See Ingersoll (1973).

2.7 Victories over Kings

Having become uparaja, Thananchai must prove his military worth. A neighboring king named Ābhangī had been his rival for the title, and has been pursuing an expansionist policy vis-à-vis other states in the region. Thananchai promises to lead his five hundred followers to neutralize this threat. His strategy follows the outlines of the MJ narrative, his men entering the rival kingdom as merchants and fraternizing with local forces. Thananchai does likewise and succeeds in making contact with Ābhangī's commanding officer, who tells him an interesting fact about the king.

“People, our king is really excellent, there is no equal to him at court. Every night at midnight by candlelight he goes out alone and takes a walk around the city. He often does this after the first watch. This is something I feel is worthwhile.” And whatever they thought of it, his followers all agreed with him, each praising the king in their own way. But Thananchai spoke up in opposition. “I don't think it's good at all for the king to act this way.” The commander asked him why this was so. “Let's say I am the king. If I go out without my entourage and signs of rank, even during the day it's not desirable, to say nothing of the nighttime. A variety of bad things could happen. There are people in the village who steal and rob. What if they come up without me seeing, swarm around me and catch me, imprison and beat me, and torture me in various ways? No one will believe it if I tell them I am the king, and even if they did, I've already been injured and offended, and my honor and rank will have been ruined. Those people will tell themselves, we are really something, we've got the king! You might suppose there is no problem if no one sees me on these night trips, but if I get lost somewhere where there are thorns and brambles, or I trip on a branch, even if it doesn't hurt much and just leaves a small scar, the size of a sesame seed, people may ask how the foot of the king got such a scar. If I tell them it's because I was out at night, what of the person who was on duty with the responsibility of protecting me from harm? If I tell them I just had a walk around the palace, they won't believe me. They will think to themselves, this king tells lies. So I don't think it's good, the king going out at night like this.” The commander on hearing this saw that Thananchai was correct, and asked, “Sir, what is your name?” “My name is Jao Japphayā.” “So, Jao Japphayā, I agree with what you are saying. If you had a face to face audience with the king, could you tell him this as well?” “Yes, I think I could, sir.” And the commander took him for a special interview with the king. The king himself saw the wisdom of Thananchai's words, and thought that this person could be useful to him. “Jao Japphayā, now and in the future, you must be my attendant.” From that time on Thananchai was able to get close to King Ābhangī.

Later a festival for the army is organized, with much feasting and drinking. This provides an opening for the conspirators, and Thananchai's men mingle with Ābhangī's and pick fights:

His allies saw the time was right and got into groups. They took sticks and lumps of earth in hand and threw them back and forth, nodding as a signal. Then all at once they ran in and caused real chaos. The five hundred officers saw this and went out to suppress it, and were taken by Thananchai's allies, one ally taking one officer. Seizing them by the arms they carried them into the forest.

It was as if Thananchai himself suddenly had the power of a large elephant. He leaped up, raising a sword in one hand, with the other grabbing the king and lifting him onto his shoulder. Brandishing the sword he rushed out of the center and his allies, holding their prisoners, followed him. The king's consorts and others of the inner court let up a cry "Jao Japphrayā has seized (jap) the king (phrayā)!" The royal guards heard this and wondered why they were calling the king's advisor and making such a ruckus. Couldn't they find him? At last they caught sight of Thananchai with the king over his shoulder and it dawned on them. But they could only watch helplessly as their lord was carried away, unable to follow.

Note the pun in Thananchai's name, a mark of his cleverness. The sage intimidates Ābhangī, warning of the terrors of bad karma and the thirty two hells that await rulers who abuse their power. The aggressive king backs down and recognizes his error, and his followers also have a change of heart:

"All of you, please answer my question truthfully. Of all the kings of Jambudvīpa, whose sin is the greatest?" And they answered as one man: "Our king has sinned more than any other. The reason is that he makes war on everyone else, be they big or small. And we all go along with this evil, so we are sinners just as our king is."

They set out for Indapatta to pay obeisance to King Korabaya. Addressing the latter, Ābhangī shows no resentment against the bodhisatta: "I, a servant of the Buddha, consider Thananchai to be like a parent to me. His teaching has helped me avoid

doing evil.” The sage’s own statement about his accomplishment seems self-congratulatory, but can be read as a statement about the application of virtue to international relations:

“Everything I did was through the power of loving-kindness. It was an act of generosity that can be compared to that of a craftsman in metal who takes unworked gold that contains impurities and smelts them out, making the gold truly pure and beautiful. I seemed to mistreat them, but they feel neither anger nor melancholy. In fact the blemish of anger has been extinguished in them. That is by way of analogy. There is another one for warriors who go into battle with few soldiers but many ideas who gain victory over an opponent with few ideas but a large army. It’s like Indra’s victory over the asuras, the mythical lion alone against a herd of elephants, the great tiger and many pigs, or the eagle and all other birds.”

The chastened captive is then released, having accepted Korabaya as his liege. This is the prelude to an extended sermon by Thananchai on the moral behavior of kings and related topics.

As the siege is lifted and no outside threat presents itself, the new uparaja Thananchai turns his attention to governing the city, and here we find new policies reflecting the sage’s moral orientation. Thieves are pardoned by the property owners they had victimized, and the prisons are emptied. Thananchai calls the poor people of the capital to a meeting. After warning of the negative karmic effects of stealing, he shows benevolence: “If you have no way of earning a living, tell us and we will take care of you.” Each receives a sealed letter to open in time of need, and the thieves are also provided with interest-free three year loans in order to reestablish themselves. The results of this social experiment are salutary: no one locks their doors, it rains at regular intervals, and rice is cheap, all due to the power of Thananchai’s words. It seems that the sage has realized the Kurudhamma political ideal of virtue leading to peace and prosperity, although it is only a brief interlude as outside threats again present themselves.

The senabodhi, Thananchai's nemesis, flees the city and approaches yet another king, Virodha, with a proposal to attack Indapatta, claiming that taking the city will be easy, since the soldiers observe the precepts and won't kill. The sage's attempt at utopian governance seems to have come up against reality. An invasion force is assembled, but Thananchai, sensing danger, makes preparations himself and quotes nīti verses on the treachery of former allies. Virodha's army threatens on the horizon, but Nantayakkha saves the day by making his body huge and frightening them into hanging back and laying siege to the city. Here Thananchai takes the initiative (unlike in MJ) and proposes the dhammayuddha, or "conflict under law," to King Korabaya as a way to settle matters.

"By your leave, don't be surprised. This time I will take on the burden of waging war, but we will do it not with weapons, but through "dhamma war." Victory will come by revealing the law. Let me demonstrate my abilities for you in this area." He urged the king to return to his place. King Virodha heard the sound of gongs, cries and hubbub from the ramparts above his camp. He asked his officials what the people of the capital were doing that was so noisy. "Sir, they are enjoying some entertainment, feasting and drinking alcohol." On hearing this, Virodha felt pity in his heart, and he ordered Usuka to prepare the troops for an attack. Usuka did so.

There were questions from the troops, however. "Senabodhi, you want us to fight with ghosts and yakkhas? Who could do this? We can fight other humans, but not yakkhas." "At midnight, did you hear it? It was like the ground was caving in. When they have a giant yakkha protecting them, how can we invade their city?" The senabodhi was at a loss for what to do, not seeing how he could force them to obey.

King Virodha then consulted his purohit. "Teacher, how can we attack this city?" "Sir, send a messenger to King Korabaya, requesting that he bring his army out onto the battlefield. If he refuses, his resources will soon be used up." Virodha prepared a message as the purohit instructed and sent it out in the care of royal messengers. On receiving it, Korabaya called for Thananchai, who recommended accepting the challenge. "However, we will do it in a righteous way, with the dhammayuddha, without weapons." This proposal reached Virodha, who again consulted his purohit. "Teacher, do you look on this favorably?" "Sir, I do." They wrote back inquiring about the conditions. Thanachai prepared an answer:

“Have each king ride in his royal vehicle with his entourage and all four branches of the army. The philosophers from either side ride on the yoke, above the vehicle, and face each other. Both of them will converse, asking and answering riddles. The king whose philosopher cannot answer must give his word to surrender. The king whose pandit answers successfully has achieved victory. Tomorrow morning let us meet on the field called Dumarājamaṇḍala to begin the Dhammayuddha.”

This was sent to Virodha and his advisors, who consented to the terms. He had the area to be used for the dhammayuddha swept and cleared, so that it would be ready by morning. His vehicle was pulled by four auspicious steeds, the color of red lotuses. It left for the field with the escort of four types, in great numbers on all sides. They held red flags and parasols, and the vehicle itself was red, beautiful and radiant. It was bright like the star Rohinī in the constellation Thong Noppakhun or a like a shining golden sun. Virodha’s purohit had a red jewel that shone brightly from behind the royal vehicle.

It was near dawn. Thananchai had the people of the capital dress and carry shields of silver, gold and crystal. Those with crystal shields he had stand around the outer ramparts of the city wall, those with silver shields stood in formation along the middle ramparts, and those with gold shields manned the innermost ramparts. The women of the court, known for their beauty, held musical instruments ready at the gate of the maṇḍapa. The order came that when the king came out to the field of dhammayuddha, they were to begin playing in unison, while the three rows of shieldholders on the ramparts were start singing and dancing, moving their shields in time with the music. Thananchai yoked the four horses, each of a different color, to Korabaya’s royal vehicle. An umbrella of exquisite color and shape like a parimandala of the moon was set over the royal vehicle. Numerous soldiers marched around it for protection, all wearing white with white ornaments, holding flags and parasols, jāmorn and fans [royal regalia]. Thananchai’s five hundred followers wore elegant white clothes, including turbans. Each held a crystal, and they arranged themselves to the front of the vehicle.

As in certain other passages, such as the first torchlit entrance into court of Thananchai and his followers, the attention to visual description suggests parallels with jātika murals. The spectacle and pageantry that accompany the disputation that has replaced battle give a hint of the magical power associated with wisdom in the Buddhist context.

The riddle posed by Virodha’s pandit concerns the nature of the dhammayuddha. Thananchai’s response presents it as a question of self-control, with the “war” being conflict with one’s own desires, and victory leading to arhatship and

eventual nirvana. He contrasts this with the bad karmic results of committing violent acts during physical war. The other party has no answer to this, and Thananchai continues to speak until Virodha admits defeat. From this point on, the sage's renown spreads and other rulers visit in order to benefit from his teaching. He answers their riddle-like questions on habits to cultivate or avoid (the latter include drinking alcohol and raising animals.) Ābhangī returns and (as Jaini notes)¹⁰³ he is called the founder of Hongsawadi and Tharawadi, names of historical Southeast Asian states that rarely appear in the jātakas, the typical names for states or cities being South Asian. This seems to hint at the civilizing role of Buddhist norms in the formation of such states, although historical detail is lacking. The authors of TPC, whoever they were, must have been familiar with the idea of traveling to foreign lands to receive moral teaching from those with a claim to continuity with the true Buddhist lineage, even though Thananchai is a future Buddha rather than a disciple. As the sage holds forth, the narrative has reached its culmination, demonstrating the ever more glorious intellect of the bodhisatta, until Sakka (king of the gods) and his angels descend to listen as well. A final cycle of questions is posed on the Kurudhamma for a second time, reaffirming that its ideal of the virtuous polity is the central message of the TPC.

2.8 A Magical Rain

The TPC ends with the death of King Korabaya (unlike the MJ, where the sage goes to work for another ruler and former adversary.) Thananchai supervises the coronation of his seven-year-old son, who takes the title of Kururaja, although this event is mentioned only briefly. The bodhisatta also teaches the boy his proper role

¹⁰³Jaini (1986), p. xxxiii says that these names “confirm the provenance of our text.”

according to the Kurudhamma, and his mother the queen, his future wife, and everyone at court from the uparaja and purohit to the drivers and doormen are educated in this doctrine, clearly a recipe for a virtuous and stable polity. The last scene to be narrated in detail unfolds at the close of Thananchai's final discourses, when Sakka and the rulers have left.

Then the crowd was happy, flags were unfurled, some of them clapped and cheered "sādhu" in unison, there was quite a tumult. Lord Sāmalasethī and the other lords, officials, and royal servants also cheered their praise. Paying obeisance to the bodhisatta, and each bidding farewell to him and to King Korabaya, they returned to whence they had come. The king and the Bodhisattva then returned to the capital Pārā. In the city at midnight, Lord Amarin [Sakka] created seven types of rain and had them fall in sequence. In the great capital Indapatta, a rain of water fell and cleansed it of all defilement, purifying the city's ground. Lord Amarin then sent a rain of sand, and the shower made the city's geography clean and free of mud and filth. Then there was a rain of flowers of all colors in miraculous fashion, the scent permeating people's hearts. Next came a shower of husked grain, the fourth in sequence. Fifth was a rain of sweets and edibles of excellent taste, scattered all around. The next shower brought cloth and ornaments, falling in abundance throughout Pārā. That was the sixth, but the seventh had seven types of jewel, which fell all over Indapatta, reaching the level of people's necks.

The next morning at dawn, the bodhisatta had the jewels of seven types brought from the field facing the palace from the street, and from the palace itself, and put in the treasury. As for the jewels that had fallen outside that area, he had the victory drums beaten as a message for the people that they could take them for themselves. If someone had jewels rain onto his house, that person had the right to them. From the outset on that day, he showed he was willing to be generous, as a lesson to all the villagers and city dwellers to sacrifice in order to make merit. And so in the capital Indapatta prosperity increased, and everyone was very happy and satisfied.

Comparing the Thai and Pali versions of the "seven-fold divine rain," we find something more complex than translation at work. Each type of rain is merely listed in Pali, but the Thai version characterizes the effect of each, as water and sand cleanse the city physically, the scent of flowers touches the people, and so forth. Thananchai shows his concern for the common people when he manages the distribution of jewels, while retaining the palace prerogative on jewels within its boundaries. Even though

the miraculous event is consonant with the Pali jātaka repertoire, one could speculate that this last detail might reflect, if not Southeast Asian practice, the expectations of its audience as to what an idealized state ought to do for its subjects.

2.9 Comparing Thananchai and Mahosot

How similar are the Indic MJ and Southeast Asian TPC? We have seen how the story of the bodhisatta Thananchai was modeled on that of Mahosot, with the principle characters (king, bodhisatta, and the royal advisors and courtiers who oppose him) all behaving in similar ways. The plots of both jātakas follow a broadly similar development, following the life of the sage through his youth, an initial period at court ending in expulsion and wandering, and readmission as the uparaja, when he becomes active in Indapatta's relations (through war and otherwise) with other states. This raises the question of how to justify producing a text like TPC, if MJ as part of the Thosachat was widely known, and if the nature of "the canon" precluded unlimited creativity in the production of texts which supposedly contained the word of the Buddha handed down over the centuries. As Hallisey puts it in his presentation of the non-canonical Tundilovāda Sutta from Sri Lanka, its creation "contravened the limit of a closed canon" of received texts, so that one can ask "if nothing new was said, why was a new text needed or desired?"¹⁰⁴ The answer may lie in exploring the broader context of TPC and the uses to which it might have been put by local Buddhist publics. In this section we will first examine several passages of TPC which did

¹⁰⁴Hallisey (1990b), p. 161.

innovate on the model and explore possible motivations for such changes. Then we will consider how TPC might have been read in the premodern context and where it might have fit in the range of texts actually circulating at various times in the Theravada Buddhist realms of Southeast Asia.

The structure of MJ is unusual among *jātakas*, since the format of riddle and answer as a demonstration of wisdom (*paññā*) makes for “stories within the story” that draw on a variety of Buddhist textual sources, including other *jātakas*. TPC retains this compartmentalized structure, but Thananchai’s answers utilize a greater range of sources, such as *nīti* verse rendered in prose and expanded on, as we saw in Section 2.4. The sage’s discourses effectively displace the narrative for long stretches and present Buddhist teaching in an accessible fashion. We would like to propose that TPC functioned as a kind of compendium of such discourses that could be resorted to as a handbook by monastics or educated laity for personal edification, or as a model for oratory, the presentation of moral lessons to a wider, perhaps illiterate public. In using terms such as “handbook” and “compendium”, we are attempting to relate features of TPC, the ways it innovates on its sources, to the context of premodern Southeast Asia. We are not arguing that this text belongs to the extra-canonical genres of Buddhist writing from medieval Sri Lanka that are known by these terms in English.¹⁰⁵ Tracing the links, if they exist, between TPC and this literature is beyond the scope of the current work. However, TPC shares certain features with texts like the *Tundilovāda Sutta*, including a didactic orientation to a lay audience. It is moreover interesting how such features are also common to the *jātaka* form that constitutes the narrative frame of TPC. In effect, advice on “how to behave” is presented within the life story of the bodhisatta, which is itself held up as a model to emulate. Added to this is another possible function, the provision of a model for

¹⁰⁵See Hallisey (1990a), pp. 206-7, Heim (2004), p. 21 ff.

Buddhist polity and behavior at court, exemplified by the Kurudhamma as discussed below.

Thananchai's conversion of Nandayakkha is the first major insertion in the narrative, justifying wisdom as the taming of the supernatural. Mahosot has the support of the spirits, most significantly when the parasol deity and others agitate for his return to court. Yet Nandayakkha (not present in MJ) is practically the sage's sidekick, reappearing at several points in TPC and acting in his favor (while carefully avoiding killing or other sinful actions, since he is now a civilized Buddhist.) Their relationship demonstrates Thananchai's control over supernatural forces, something highly accomplished monks were believed to possess in Thailand, but were forbidden to show off openly.¹⁰⁶ It also brings to mind the use of magic and outright control of spirits by the hero of the "indigenous" Thai classic poem *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. Admittedly, other *jātakas* such as the *Bhūridatta jātika* contain complex depictions of supernatural characters, and as we have seen this is one of the defining features of the genre. Whatever its source, Nandayakkha's "making his body huge" recalls a familiar scene in the Ramakian that is depicted in the murals of Wat Phrakaew. The timing of their initial encounter is also significant: by solving the *yakkha's* riddle, Thananchai saves the king's life and provides a basis for their relationship, Korabaya being beholden to him.

The *yakkha* incident also establishes that riddles will function as a means of conversion, in contrast to the more utilitarian problem-solving of the young Mahosot before he enters the court (as illustrated in Figure 1.) The violent forest-dweller Nanda becomes an obedient disciple who regulates his behavior in accordance with Buddhist norms, hesitating to take life even when his city is at war. And it is

¹⁰⁶Tambiah (1984) shows that prominent forest monks in Thailand were believed to have a special relationship with the spirit world.

Thananchai's intellectual acuity, along with the rhetorical force of his arguments beyond their moral content, that bring about the moment of conversion. This theme is later repeated with the brahman purohit at court and finally with the aggressive kings who give up their territorial pretensions after losing the dhammayuddha. Earlier at court, the addition of the three competing pandits produces a contrast for every riddle between their plausible but flawed answers and the sage's correct ones, which are ornamented with similes and other rhetorical devices. This emphasis on debate between right and wrong views shifts the focus from the narrative to the content of Thananchai's answers. It suggests that TPC was more than just a story, but that its riddle and answer format was consciously adopted by the authors as a medium to convey points of Buddhist moral doctrine and at once demonstrate their superiority to competing ideas. Finally, the implication of the Nanda episode that conversion was also a civilizing process has special significance in the Southeast Asian context.

In the episode of the sage's marriage, many elements are common to both MJ and TPC, but the order of events is different. In MJ, Mahosot is encouraged to marry when he turns sixteen by Queen Udumbara, an ally from a former life and his protector at court, but missing from TPC. He insists on finding his own bride in the city, and just like Thananchai tests her cleverness by posing riddles. However, unlike Kalyani she is brought back to court immediately and received "with great honor."¹⁰⁷ As in TPC, the bodhisatta's enemies try to trick his wife but are unsuccessful due to her intelligence. In MJ this is the catalyst for his expulsion from court, which again is quite short. In TPC the expulsion follows on a drawn-out buildup of animosity between the sage and the other advisors, and his period of exile features a longer and more involved series of events, including his interaction with tree spirits, in what is

¹⁰⁷Cowell, Vol. VI, p. 185.

more clearly a marginal space, not just the city outside court.¹⁰⁸ The trickery of the advisors becomes attempted seduction, and Kalyani's wifely virtue is emphasized. The ribald humor of TPC in this passage echoes scenes from the court dramas of Early Bangkok, which according to Nidhi Eoseewong reflect popular or folk sensibilities also evident in the work of the greatest poet of that period, Sunthorn Phu.¹⁰⁹ Both parts of the ambiguous message of the Kalyani episode, which stresses the virtues of monogamy reflected in Thananchai's happy match, but also the imperative of female loyalty, are innovations not found in MJ.

A final significant discrepancy between MJ and TPC is the latter's use of the Kurudhamma jātakas at two crucial points in the narrative, first when Thananchai is considered for uparaja, second in the sage's final oration for Sakka, angels and kings. Its inclusion is consonant with the nīti verses that are the source for much of TPC's "wisdom," since they originate in collections of advice for princes. The Kurudhamma covers a broader section of court society than we meet in TPC, where only the king and his major advisors (the senabodhi, purohit, and pandits) appear consistently. As Collins has observed, it contains a utopian element, but in TPC the demonstration of Thananchai's brilliance takes center stage. In the Kurudhamma, no one saves the Kuru state or leads it onto the path of virtue, since a happy equilibrium has already been achieved. Instead, the people at court have internalized the imperative of virtuous behavior: when queried by the messengers, they are able to recall petty violations that attest to their highly developed self-control. This in turn somehow results in a collective auspiciousness that is difficult to emulate. In effect, virtue,

¹⁰⁸ Also, Mahosot earns a living as a potter while in exile, while for Thananchai this seems too lowly an occupation, and he plays a crystal flute instead.

¹⁰⁹ Nidhi (2005) notes that the monkhood also came in for Phu's satire, and that "this sat well with many bourgeois laymen who had long been critical of the activities of certain monks... and thought the monks generally old-fashioned." (p. 180) Yet Nidhi does not take into account satirical tendencies within Thai Buddhist literature such as those discussed here.

effective rule, and control over the natural world (in the form of rain) are linked. It is exactly this sort of linkage that would interest the users of TPC, which conveys a kind of “applied” knowledge that posits a magical relationship between personal behavior and the wider world, both natural and political.

The authors of TPC thus innovated in a limited fashion on the model of MJ to create a new text by a process of recombination, drawing on other texts such as the Sutasoma and Kurudhamma jātakas, and expanding minor sections of MJ such as the Kalyani episode. While these modifications in some sense must have reflected “indigenous” concerns, they are rarely wholly original. Thus it is important to try to place TPC in relation to contemporaneous Buddhist texts, especially ones that may have been conceived with similar purposes in mind. In other words, looking to other extra-canonical Pali texts could suggest parallels and help clarify the context of the text’s composition. For example, similarities exist between TPC and the substantial literature of 12th and 13th century Sri Lanka concerned with lay conduct. Maria Heim notes “summaries, compendia and commentaries” that “collect and distill the essentials from a vast literature and make them manageable for didactic purposes.”¹¹⁰ One aim of such “handbooks” and “manuals” was to explain topics like dāna or generosity “within a summary of lay morality.” Within Thananchai’s discourses, many passages do the same, and more generally it overlaps with the import of the jātakas, which present the actions of the Buddha in his previous lives as illustrating such virtues. An additional parallel between TPC and the Tuṇḍilovāda Sutta is the use of similes, although according to Hallisey these are not uncommon in Buddhist texts generally, since “analogy and simile were apparently considered very effective teaching tools, appropriate for even the dullest student.”¹¹¹ Whether there was direct

¹¹⁰ Heim, p. 23.

¹¹¹ Hallisey (1990b) p. 163.

influence on TPC by such texts would be difficult to determine without a more detailed examination of the variety of non-canonical Pali writings circulating in Southeast Asia than is possible here.

Taking into account TPC's contested provenance, either from medieval Lanna and thus closer in time to Heim's texts, or a product of Ayutthaya and thus (perhaps) roughly contemporaneous with the sutta Hallisey analyzes, these can only remain suggestive parallels. The context was clearly a premodern one, where monks copied palm leaf texts by hand and there was no easy access to fundamental teachings, since when monastic libraries existed, their contents were hardly standardized. These difficulties of transmission lead us to propose that TPC was created as a compendium to fill what must have been large gaps in dhammic knowledge and make the Buddha's teaching more accessible, at once a didactic work and also possibly a model for oratory. What is unambiguous are the lines of transmission between MJ and TPC, and only with the third and final work does the relationship between texts become altogether problematic. Sri Thanonchai is a clever royal advisor who is outside Buddhist literature and by nature inimical to its moral message. Instead his story stems from folk roots and has been elaborated in secular literature, so that he is much better known to contemporary Thais than his bodhisatta namesake. It is to this figure that we now turn.

PART THREE: THE TALE OF SRI THANONCHAI

What is the connection between TPC and the tale of Sri Thanonchai (ST)?

Although the name of the protagonist would lead us to identify him with Thananchai in TPC, this is hardly decisive, since it belongs to the standard repertoire of kings and states made reference to in the Indic *jātakas*. For instance, the king in the Vidhura *jātaka* is also named Thananchai. But there are other similarities: Sri Thanonchai is also a clever courtier of commoner background who engages in wordplay and debate. In fact, the relationship between ST and TPC is controversial, partly because the boundary between religious and secular literature is crossed. Suphaporn characterizes the TPC as (like the *Paññāsajātaka*) an attempt to combine an entertaining story line with dhamma teaching. The “trickery and artifice” of Sri Thanonchai was somehow transformed into Thananchai’s “cleverness in dhamma.” Or perhaps it went the other way - she calls for further study as to which work influenced the other.¹¹² By contrast, Niyada’s response is categorical:

The above assertion is rather far from the truth. TPC has nothing in common with ST, a Thai folktale where the protagonist engages in trickery and deceit, winning out through dishonest means. It really won’t do to link these two stories, one with the bodhisatta, the other with a trickster [as hero]. It shows that the author [Suphaporn] has not analyzed the case in depth. In actuality TPC is modeled on MJ, an important story which demonstrates the excellent wisdom and charisma of the bodhisatta.¹¹³

At first glance, Niyada’s argument seems convincing, and she has likely considered the matter more carefully than Suphaporn, who is writing a general overview of Pali literature in Thailand. Niyada has established the close relationship between TPC and MJ, but is all speculation on putative links between TPC and ST illegitimate, the

¹¹²Suphaporn (1990), p. 114.

¹¹³Niyada (1999), pp. 19-20.

product of a misleading coincidence of names? At this point we should take a closer look at the narrative of Sri Thanonchai, who from a Buddhist perspective might be seen as the evil double of the bodhisatta Thananchai.

A childless couple prays for a baby, and when the woman finally conceives, “Indra, king of the gods, heeded their plea and sent down from heaven an angel to occupy [the woman’s] womb.”¹¹⁴ She has a dream, according to which the boy will be “intelligent but rather unscrupulous.” He is born, and they have another son five years later, who Sri Thanonchai looks after. One day, after being scolded and told to wash the baby and “clear” the house, Sri Thananchai cuts him open and washes out his guts, then throws all of the furniture in the canal. Despite claiming that he followed instructions to the letter, he is disowned by his parents and flees. He then goes to a temple and gains the abbot’s trust, but eventually seduces a female pupil, is ejected and returns home. He is then sold into bondage by his parents, first to a vendor of sweets, then to an official. By interpreting orders literally, he causes a series of problems for his master, such as getting the betel nut dirty and embarrassing him by relaying his wife’s message out loud at court. Eventually he has ruined the official, burning his house down, hanging his buffaloes and poisoning his mother. In desperation, the man presents his recalcitrant servant to the court in order to be rid of him. Owing to his “impeccable conduct,” Sri Thanonchai is given land and title, soon becoming a royal favorite. This mode of entry into the court, neither by merit nor birth, but through a kind of negative selection, is the mirror opposite of the bodhisatta’s in TPC. The trickster’s further success can only be an indictment of the nature of royal power and those who gain access to it.

As a courtier, Sri Thanonchai gets ahead by playing games with words, such as when he gains a large tract of land by “swinging a cat” until it dies. When a Lankan

¹¹⁴This summary of ST is based on Maenduan (1991).

holy man engages him in a debate on points of doctrine, Sri Thanonchai bluffs with a specious holy book and intimidates his opponent into fleeing before the contest has even started. A Frenchman's talking mynah bird is eaten by Sri Thanonchai's stork before it can say a word. Nor is the king spared, and when presented with the trickster's fart in a dish, the monarch finally loses his temper and sentences him to drown in an iron cage. However, Sri Thanonchai manages to entice a passing captain of a Chinese junk to trade places, becoming even richer in the process. Trading in China, he is tested by the emperor and returns safely. Back at court, Sri Thanonchai obtains another official's daughter for a minor wife by saying he will treat her "like his own child" when in fact he begets a child by her.

More bluffs and puns follow, until finally the clever courtier meets a young man who is the reincarnation of his dead brother. This person bests him at punning, making him stop putting off indefinitely a task he had promised to do "in two moons" by pointing to the moon's reflection in the water. This is so distressing to Sri Thanonchai's competitive nature that he wastes away and dies. But still he gets the last laugh: when the king sends the court ladies to defecate on his funeral pyre, their private parts suffer since he had caustic wood used as kindling.

The ST is classified as a "nitaan" or popular tale, and the existence of variants in all four regions (in the Northeast he is called Chiang Miang) as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia, most clearly in Cambodia, support this. The coarse humor and defiance of authority from below might suggest folk origins. However, most Thais would know the story not in folktale form, but from numerous verse and prose treatments dating as early as the court of Rama III, as Kanyarat has established.¹¹⁵ Of the works she analyzes, not all cover the whole story: some focus on incidents at court between Sri Thanonchai and the king, leaving out his early life and the encounters

¹¹⁵Kanyarat (1998), ch. 2.

with foreigners. Other authors attempt to show him in a positive light by expanding on his time as a temple boy when he does show generosity, or interpreting his triumphs over foreign visitors as expressions of patriotism, even part of the struggle to preserve Thailand's autonomy from the colonial powers.

One major change in certain texts is the excision of Sri Thanonchai's first and most egregious sin, the murder of his brother, which in the standard version provides a shock, establishes his willingness to stop at nothing, and sets up his eventual downfall at the hands of the vengeful reincarnation. A major Northern version changes this but retains the brutal tone perhaps typical of folktales: Sri Thanonchai is one of three sons of a beggar woman who cursed her enemies, making him "the nemesis of kings" and the others tormenters of monks and Lawa tribespeople (each of these other sons also have tales associated with them.)¹¹⁶ Even more interesting politically is a version that manages to defuse much of the story's anti-establishment qualities. In it Sri Thanonchai is adopted by the king following warnings that his own son the prince is "difficult." But in fact this son makes an excellent king who tolerates his foster brother's tricks and generally epitomizes the Buddhist virtues of fairmindedness and loving kindness. This version has been linked to the Bangkok court milieu, and prominent place is given to explanations of ideals of kingship and details of royal ceremonies. It is Prince Damrong Ratchanuphap who introduces the printed text, but remarkably this did not become the "received version" as with so much else he produced.¹¹⁷ Finally let us note the Cambodian equivalent known as "Thnenh Chey." It seems that here the killing of the brother is elided, but otherwise the hero conforms to Sri Thanonchai's ambitious amorality, becoming a rich man's slave in order to ruin him and facing in debate a Chinese delegation who believe that "there are no

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 112-7.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 53-64.

philosophers in Cambodia.”¹¹⁸ We find a mixture of familiar and novel themes, which confirms our general impression of the close contact and affinity between Thai and Khmer cultural production.

Both in its details and in its overall narrative structure, the ST clearly differs from the TPC. One might detect the influence of Buddhist norms (and perhaps more specifically of TPC) in those versions of ST that try to find redeeming features in Sri Thanonchai, but the standard story is quite free of Buddhist moralizing, beyond the general karmic frame where the initial killing of the brother creates negative karma that bears fruit when the trickster meets his match. Sri Thanonchai also brings off his tricks without the help of psychic powers, and his puns involve real plays on words, tapping a rich vein of this sort of Thai humor. ST is remarkably free of superstition, in comparison with both the *jātakas* and traditional poems like *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*.

These differences can be read as reflecting the varying aims of didactic and satirical literary genres. The narratives work at cross purposes, one (the TPC) legitimating the state whose members practice virtue and self-control (the *Kurudhamma* ideal), the other questioning this legitimacy and refusing to take it at face value. In the TPC, the presence of the bodhisatta at court makes for the greater glory of King Korabaya, as his state retains its independence, becomes a mecca for seekers of wisdom and even receives the jeweled rain of divine favor. Religious virtue thus shores up temporal power, in a relationship that mirrors the historical model of Asoka, the “wheel-turning” enlightened monarch who gains legitimation through patronage of the Buddhist sangha, as Tambiah has shown.¹¹⁹ The Ayutthaya court in ST is not the idealized entity of the TPC, but is at once historicized and subjected to satire. Uninvited foreign visitors and the Chinese emperor pose threats that are not

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 179-89.

¹¹⁹Tambiah (1976).

met with military power or superior virtue, but averted by Sri Thanonchai's bluffing (with the Lankan holy man) or brazen cheating (with the Frenchman's bird.) Virtue does not translate into power, and if you are the weaker party, any subterfuge can be justified if it meets with success. Within the court, Sri Thanonchai's punning and trickery reveal and subvert power relationships, as when the official loses face when his wife calls him home for dinner. These relationships reflect a social hierarchy that is never questioned in the TPC. Indeed, the ribald and transgressive aspects of the ST's humor, as when the court ladies defecate, suggest that the tale functions to undermine the dominant moralizing discourse that is reproduced in the *jātakas*, among other places.

It is worth drawing out parallels between the two narratives within a broader cultural and political context. We can concede Niyada's point on the absence of direct influence, but explore the idea that the TPC and ST are in a reciprocal relationship, that they work in tandem within the Thai cultural space. Bloch and Sperber discuss the way cultural norms mandate certain types of behavior, but don't obviate human psychological predilections in other directions. In order to satisfy these predilections, other competing norms operate simultaneously but indirectly, through ritual or otherwise.¹²⁰ For instance, patrilineal societies may recognize the rights of relations on the mother's side in ritualized fashion, even though such people cannot inherit property. Fundamental psychological notions of proximity to kin and fairness are thus assuaged, while the dominant mechanism of inheritance in the paternal line is left intact. Buddhist cultural norms like the virtue of generosity (*dāna*) are transmitted through *jātakas*, among other ways, and constitute the dominant discourse. Yet the realization of these norms occurs within a society of self-interested individuals concerned with making a living (*haa kin* in Thai.) Making merit by giving can be a

¹²⁰Bloch and Sperber (2005).

selfish act, if it is done to demonstrate the superiority of the giver, and this will always be the case to some extent. In TPC, the bodhisatta exhibits perfect wisdom and becomes uparaja not for personal gain, but in order to promote the well-being and spiritual advancement of humanity generally. Yet this is not a realistic model for political behavior, and any normative system that assigns the role of infallible moral arbiter to the king or his courtier will simply reinforce political hierarchy. Analogous to the rights of the sister's son in Bloch and Sperber's example, the story of Sri Thanonchai serves as a kind of "authorized transgression"¹²¹ which takes narrative rather than ritual form.

This reading implies that the cynical humor of ST appealed to its commoner (or socially diverse) audience precisely because the moralizing discourse of political virtue failed to account for the real workings of autocracy in a hierarchical society. As Nidhi Eoseewong puts it in an essay on the political meanings of ST, "Thai people of a certain era liked to read or listen to this tale [ST] not because they were in rebellion against authority, but because they had to constantly subordinate themselves to authority. They achieved gratification in seeing authority provoked, not of course by their own actions, but in the imaginary world of the tale."¹²² Yet it is an open question whether Sri Thanonchai, today an archetype of the political gadfly, really had this function in traditional society, or whether the story has gained prominence due to contemporary political debates and concerns. Kanyarat mentions but leaves out of her analysis six different ST versions produced from the 1950s to the 1970s, some of which seem to have expanded the narrative into topical areas, having Sri Thanonchai serve as a soldier in the Vietnam War for instance. Nidhi discusses two competing

¹²¹Ibid., p. 163.

¹²²Nidhi (2005), p. 4. In the same way, Bloch and Sperber point out that the transgressive norm of the sister's son is not necessarily acted on to address real material inequity, but may just take the form of "a topic of conversation with occasional symbolic enactments." (p. 162)

interpretations of the tale, one which sees the trickster's smooth-tongued nature as reflecting Thai character, and another which reads the tale's message as one of defiance of authority, whether of parents, abbot, employer or king. Indeed, one can infer that the former reading is in step with the post-1976 intellectual atmosphere which has focused on defining a "Thai identity" (ekkalak Thai) aimed at reestablishing social and political conformity after the student unrest of the mid-seventies.

Conversely, the Sri Thanonchai of the latter reading (the dominant one, as Nidhi points out) is emblematic of a contrarian strain in Thai political discourse. As such we can treat the tale as a cultural norm (in Bloch and Sperber's terms) which is not in equilibrium with the dominant (Buddhist) legitimating discourse, but is necessary psychologically as compensation in the face of idealized narratives that ignore actual relations of power.

In publishing the TPC, in effect bringing it to the attention of the literary public, are intellectuals like Niyada attempting to displace Sri Thanonchai in the popular imagination? If we are correct in interpreting the significance of ST in Bloch and Sperber's terms, this would be a vain endeavor. Yet perhaps in the Ayutthaya period the bodhisatta-hero of the TPC was the more salient archetype, and people really believed that a virtuous court would assure regular rains and prosperity. The cultural norms of the Pali jātakas could be carried over into the Southeast Asian context with fairly minimal adjustments, and "wisdom" retained its meaning of quasi-magical doctrine, not manipulation of arbitrary rules. More likely, religious thought and utopian conceptions of political life have always coexisted with, and provided shelter from, the withering realities of society governed by self-interest, but these conceptions have themselves been parodied when they serve to legitimate the winners in the political game. In that case, Sri Thanonchai would be less a symptom of the contested politics of modernity than a transgressive voice present (even if unrecorded)

in folk discourse from the earliest times. We can treat the presence of both narratives in the Thai cultural milieu as evidence of the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of cultural transmission. Both bodhisatta and trickster (under the same name) function as cultural archetypes, the former due to the imprimatur of religion, the latter owing to less institutionalized sources such as popular sentiment or repressed political strivings. Clearly we will never be able to delineate exactly how each narrative may have influenced the other, but juxtaposing them can help shed light on how secular and religious discourses co-exist and compete, as well as how traditional narratives take on new meanings, in the contemporary Thai public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The three texts examined in this thesis bridge two divides, a geographic one and a religious/secular one. In the former case, the Indic jātakā MJ was transformed or reshaped into the Southeast Asian jātakā TPC. In the latter one, the idealized bodhisatta-courtier of MJ and TPC stands in uncertain juxtaposition to the sardonic royal social climber of ST. Here we will discuss how the bridging is accomplished, and then look at further avenues of inquiry, which might include other groups of texts within secular Thai and transnational Buddhist literature.

From the outset we have stressed how the jātakas form a unique cultural resource due to their diversity of subject matter and karmic logic. One could speculate that the way different jātakas depict the bodhisatta as animal, human or god meant that when transmitted to Southeast Asia, their worldview and cosmology may have more easily melded with local ones. Local beliefs about spirits (of place, for instance) were integrated into the world of yakkhas and other supernatural beings of Indic mythology, and at the same time given an ethicizing gloss. Moral lessons drawn only from the historical Buddha's life experiences would not have accomplished this. Thus the jātakas provided a suitable narrative frame and served as ideal conduits for imparting Buddhist moral norms, which are themselves rooted in the idea that karma determines rebirth, to Southeast Asian lay publics. The anonymous authors of TPC were most likely monastics writing for such a public, and instead of reworking MJ using unambiguously "indigenous" elements, they recombined stories and lessons drawn from the jātakas as well as from other Pali texts, expanding certain passages to fit local sensibilities.

The Nandayakkha episode (2.3) would be an example of recombination, the courtship of Kalyani (2.6) one of expansion and adaptation to local norms. Taking the

latter first, Thananchai selects Kalyani as his life partner after a charming test of wits. Later it is revealed that they were each other's royal spouses in previous lives and thus fated to be together. While certainly drawing on a conception, seen in several jātakas, of ideal marital relations as a chaste partnership, the episode also seems to reflect an adjustment to the Southeast Asian norm of relative gender equality. Certainly it differs from the monastic perspective common to many jātakas that treats women as objects of desire and therefore obstacles to spiritual advancement. The sage's encounter with the yakkha is quite significant, as it is the first riddle solved on behalf of the king and sets the stage for all his later discourses. By converting Nandayakkha, Thananchai establishes the powerful role of wisdom that comes to fruition in later acts of conversion involving the king's rivals. The taming of a yakkha, magical forest denizen and eater of human flesh, can be read as demonstrating the power of Buddhism as a civilizing ideology in which lack of self-restraint causes the greatest demerit. As detailed in Section 2.9, it is the focus on wisdom as power that allows for the expansion of Thananchai's discourses into vessels for moral teaching. This accounts for our hypothesis that in the premodern context, under conditions of textual scarcity and ignorance of Pali, TPC functioned not as a simple tale, but as a compendium of moral doctrine that facilitated access to and dissemination of key Buddhist teachings.

As we saw in Part Two, Thananchai's moral advice often has a specifically political or courtly aspect. The sage's last discourse recounts and expands on the Kurudhamma jātaka, a picture of the ideal Buddhist polity which puts forward a path to utopia through the virtuous behavior of every citizen. Throughout the text much is said about the behavior of courtiers, both in the negative examples of the senabodhi and purohit, the dominant military and religious figures, and in the positive one of Thananchai as uparaja, when robbery and hunger are eradicated. While once giving in

to suspicion and the machinations of Thananchai's enemies, King Korabaya is more uniformly benign than his counterpart in MJ, whose obtuseness is revealed in the tunnel incident. In the final section of TPC, Korabaya's patronage of the sage brings him first security and ultimately glory, as Sakka and the angels come to his capital city to listen to the dhamma, and finally the jeweled rain falls. One might read the relationship between Korabaya and the bodhisatta as a model for relations between ruler and sangha, or even in contemporary political terms (taking Thananchai as courtier rather than religious personage) as supporting the picture of the virtuous and wise official whose loyalty to the throne guarantees internal and external peace. The latter reading would be a profoundly conservative one, which perhaps illustrates the danger of treating what in fact is a type of hagiography as a political blueprint.

It may be the ubiquity of such didactic narratives that creates a desire for stories that deflate the pretensions to omniscience on the part of the elite. ST is a reversion to folk realism where the royal servant upends his state of servitude and takes advantage of his lord. This picture may reflect more accurately than does TPC the economic realities of the premodern Siamese state, where high officials, while not holding feudal tenure in the Western sense, "ate" the proceeds of the lands under their jurisdiction and directed a percentage to the king. Royal service was thus potentially a route to personal gain on the backs of the populace. The subversive element of ST may have afforded satisfaction to commoners resentful of those born to power. The tale would also serve as a warning to Thai people today who find themselves in hierarchical social contexts, working in a government office for instance, which clever but unscrupulous people often learn to exploit. Sri Thanonchai manipulates language by punning or taking statements literally, and unlike Thananchai's riddles, this is humorous in a specifically Thai way. This brings to mind Nidhi's analysis of the development in the Early Bangkok period of a literate public of diverse social origins

who consumed literary works for entertainment rather than treating them as magical objects or vessels of “wisdom.” Although Nidhi does not mention ST in this context, the first literary versions appeared at roughly the same historical moment. As the public sphere continued to expand in the twentieth century, satirical treatment of even the most respected individuals and institutions became commonplace, as one can see in political cartoons directed at “the royal-noble elite” which were published in newspapers during the 1920s.¹²³ In the contested politics of post-WWII Thailand, Sri Thanonchai and his cleverness in the face of authority seem to have had significance for the banyachon or intellectual class, who often had to struggle to be heard under conditions of dictatorship. In any case, the modern popularity of ST suggests that any attempt to revive a model of the official as bodhisatta-sage and thus as infallible political actor would be bound to fail. Yet periodically there are calls for something that resembles it, in the form of “good men” who would intervene to resolve endemic problems of social injustice, political polarization and corruption.

Leaving aside current politics, we can discuss two directions for further research, one each on either side of the divide between religious and secular literature. Following Niyada’s work on the Paññāsajātaka, one could explore the influence of those stories and their Indic models on Thai literature, several examples of which were discussed in Section 1.5. One could ask how much of the jātakas’ Buddhist essence is preserved when the narratives are removed from the frame of present and past material, or in other words from the karmic link to the life of the historical Buddha. A likely effect would be that the royal aspect, clearly present in the Thosachat, would displace the sacred aspect. Put differently, from a moral tale that happens to involve kings and princes, the jātaka would become a celebration of royalty that uses its association with the victorious and omniscient bodhisatta to burnish or even sacralize

¹²³See Barme (2002), illustrations in Chapter 4.

the image of the king. The secular version of Samuttakote, written in part by King Narai himself, exhibits this type of shift. Another question would be how the jātakas in Thai literature relate to concurrent instances of non-Buddhist textual transmission, such as when the Ramayana was transformed into the Thai Ramakien. There is also a linguistic dimension to “Indianization”, in the question of the relative influence of Pali and Sanskrit on the Thai language. On the one hand, Pali was the language in everyday use for worship and ritual in premodern Thailand, yet at the same time Indic vocabulary entered Thai through massive borrowing from Sanskritized Khmer. All of these questions relate to how the Buddhist idiom manifests itself in Thai culture, as well as to how one draws the line between religious and secular literary spheres.

Another direction for research would be to see how, outside the jātakas, related genres of Buddhist writing produced in Southeast Asia build on their Indic antecedents. Biographical writing on the historical Buddha may exhibit parallels, since after all the jātakas form a kind of extended biography of the Buddha in his previous lives. In Thai temple art, series of Thosachat murals typically culminate in the representation of the life of the Buddha, and just as with the jātakas, the logic of rendering narrative visually means that certain scenes come to stand for the whole. Frank Reynolds has traced the tradition of Buddha biography, showing how post-Asokan writers compiled the scattered information contained in canonical texts and embellished on it, resulting in “an increased emphasis on the royal and mythic qualities of the Buddha.”¹²⁴ Sacred biography was also practiced in Thailand and “perhaps brought to its fullest development” by Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot in the mid-nineteenth century.¹²⁵ Elements of this version have taken firm root in Thai

¹²⁴ Reynolds (1976), p. 46.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 53. Paramanuchit also completed the poetic version of Samuttakote discussed in Section 1.5. His work on Buddhist texts was perhaps undertaken at the king’s request when he held the office of Sangharaja.

culture, such as when the Buddha is said to have floated a golden tray in the river, thus echoing the activity on the major Thai holiday Loy Kratong, or in the figure (prominent in mural treatments) of Mae Thoranii, who vanquished the army of Mara by wringing out her hair and washing them away.¹²⁶ Such images and practices would seem to contain an indigenous element, yet just as with the relationship between MJ and TPC, there will always be a great deal of ambiguity, as local beliefs became rationalized and subsumed within the Indic worldview. Clearly the impact of Buddhism on Thai culture has left a rich textual and visual legacy that has meaning for Thais of the present and deserves attention on its own terms.

¹²⁶See Paramanuchit (1997), plates after pp. 76 and 82 for illustrations of these scenes.

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