

COMPETING MODES OF REMEMBRANCE: TSUNAMI COMMEMORATION IN  
TAKUAPA, THAILAND

A thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Chantal Elisabeth Croteau

May 2016

© 2016 Chantal Elisabeth Croteau

## ABSTRACT

On the morning of December 26, 2004, a massive tsunami struck the western coast of Thailand. The wave, powerful enough to carry a large fishing boat more than one kilometer inland, claimed thousands of lives and changed the landscape of Thailand's picturesque Phang Nga province forever. Drawing on ethnographic data collected in the summer of 2015 and again in December 2015, this thesis seeks to understand and make sense of the ways in which the Indian Ocean tsunami is remembered and memorialized within the Takuapa district of Phang Nga. Through the analysis of various tsunami-related sites in Takuapa – the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park, local tsunami museums, and Buddhist temples – this thesis investigates the relationship between vernacular ways of remembrance and official modes of commemoration in Takuapa. Observations of these spaces, participation in tsunami anniversary rituals conducted at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park, and interviews with Takuapa citizens reveal tensions between different modes of tsunami commemoration and remembrance within Takuapa and elucidate the complicated, often overlapping, relationships between social contexts and notions of Buddhist impermanence, expressions of attachment, and processes of letting go.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chantal Croteau was born in New Hampshire on July 31, 1990. She received a Bachelor of Arts from the Department of Psychology at Bowdoin College in 2012. Upon her graduation from Bowdoin, she relocated to the Takuapa district of Thailand where she worked as an English teacher in Bangsak village from June 2012 to March 2014. In August 2014, Chantal returned to the United States to pursue a higher degree in Asian Studies at Cornell University. From 2014 to May 2016, Chantal studied for her Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies at Cornell.

This thesis is dedicated in memory of  
Mr. Dongprasert Oonyon (Phi Dong)



ขอบคุณสำหรับความช่วยเหลือและความสนับสนุนที่ให้ตลอดมา  
ขอให้พี่โต่งพักผ่อนให้สงบ  
พี่โต่งจะอยู่ในความทรงจำของชานทาลเสมอ

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project could not have been possible without the generous support of many different people and organizations. I would first like to thank the Cornell South Asia Program, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, the Mario Einaudi Center, and the Cornell Graduate School for their valuable financial support of this project, without which this thesis could never have materialized. I would also like to thank my amazing thesis committee for their unwavering intellectual and moral support of my project. My advisor, Professor Anne Blackburn, has seen this project through all of its stages, patiently providing advice and feedback at every step of the way. I am truly grateful for all of her input and support. My committee member, Professor Tamara Loos, has also been an incredible asset to this project. Her deep understanding of Thailand's history and her critical eye have enriched this thesis in tremendous ways. I would also like to thank Professor Ngampit Jagacinski for her dedication to my project and her endless work to help my Thai language abilities grow and improve.

I would like to give a special thanks to all of those in Thailand who have helped this project develop and take shape over the past four years, especially Khun Laksakan Sangkapradit, whose invitation to teach at the 35<sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School in 2012 began my relationship with Thailand. I greatly appreciate the support of all those in the English Office as well: Phi Phrim, Phi Um, Phi Jen, and Pa Jaeb, who patiently answered my never-ending questions about language, culture, and religion. My colleagues, Phi Koi, Khru Dang, Phi Bee, and Phi Em also aided this project in significant ways; their valuable insights and reflections on local religious practices and forms of commemoration have provided important nuance to this project. I would like to thank Pia, Phi Ti, Phi Jit, Tong Thanit, and Phi Nong for their friendship over the past four years. Their kindness was a key factor in my decision to stay teaching at the 35<sup>th</sup>

Rachaprachanukhro School for a second year. I would additionally like to thank all of my students, whose smiles and laughter never failed to brighten up my day.

I am also incredibly grateful for the help of Fiona Parsons, Amanda de Normanville, Gary Soden, and Phi Bill Jarusathon for all of their support both during my time teaching in Bangsak and while I was conducting fieldwork. I would like to give thanks to my interlocutors in Nam Khem, Phi Sakda, Phi Phet, and Phi Samarn, for their thoughts and reflections about the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park and local religious practices. I am especially indebted to Pin and her family, who have shown me overwhelming kindness and generosity.

I would like to give a special thank you to Phi Dongprasert Oonyon, his incredible kindness and unwavering support of my project. From long afternoons spent tutoring me in math before I took the GRE in October 2013 to countless conversations spent early on during my time in Bangsak translating others' comments into a Thai that I could understand, Phi Dong was always there for me. His passing in February 2016 came as a great loss to the 35<sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School and the Takuapa community. His spirit, generosity, and big heart will always be missed.

At Cornell University, I would like to thank Erick White for his helpful feedback at every stage of this project. His dedication to others' academic development is truly inspiring; I am so grateful for all of his comments and his patience in reading my thesis draft. I would also like to thank Alexandra Dalferro for her support and guidance. Her creative thoughts and reflections have greatly enriched this project. Special thanks to Brianna Pomeroy, Sheryl Lim, and Manasicha Akepiyapornchai for their endless emotional and intellectual support over these past two years. I am also grateful for Chairat Polmuk's helpful insights. Chairat is always ready with a source recommendation and advice about how to think through difficult theoretical constructs.

I additionally would like to give a special thanks to Canbekir Bilir for his unwavering belief in my abilities and intellect. His support has been invaluable throughout this process.

I would also like to thank my parents: Daniel Croteau and Teanna Spence. For twenty-five years, they have supported me through every decision and moment. Their love and kindness has made me who I am today and I am incredibly grateful for all of the opportunities that they have given me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter One:.....	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two:.....	13
The Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park	
Chapter Three:.....	37
Tsunami Memorial Ceremonies	
Chapter Four:.....	58
Tsunami Memories in the Everyday	
Chapter Five:.....	80
Tsunami Museums: Education and Tourism as Means of Remembrance	
Chapter Six:.....	99
Conclusion	
Bibliography.....	102

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure One:.....	1
Map of the Takuapa District	
Figure Two:.....	2
Map of Nam Khem, Takuapa Town, and Bangsak	
Figure Three:.....	3
Buddha statue at the 35 <sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School	
Figure Four:.....	18
Shrine for <i>Krom Luang Chumphon</i> at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park	
Figure Five:.....	20
Shrine for <i>Jao Pho Bun Thale</i> at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park	
Figure Six:.....	21
Buddha statue at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park	
Figure Seven:.....	27
Park grounds	
Figure Eight:.....	33
Memorial walkway at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park	
Figure Nine:.....	46
Wreath added to the memorial walkway before the 11 <sup>th</sup> year anniversary ceremony	
Figure Ten:.....	46
Plaque at the memorial walkway in the days leading up to the 11 <sup>th</sup> year anniversary ceremony	
Figure Eleven:.....	61
Nam Khem, sunset at the beach with Mae Da	
Figure Twelve:.....	68
<i>Wat Ratniramit</i> in 2012	
Figure Thirteen:.....	76
Remnants of a hotel found along Bangsak Beach	

# Chapter One

## Introduction

On the morning of December 26, 2004, a massive tsunami struck the western coast of Thailand. The wave, powerful enough to carry a large fishing boat more than one kilometer inland, claimed thousands of lives and changed the landscape of Thailand's picturesque Phang Nga province forever. There is no easy way to quantify loss or damage, to sensitively depict the staggering numbers of lives taken, injuries suffered, or material destruction endured as a result of the wave. In Thailand, the tsunami claimed more than 5,000 lives, 70% of which came from the Takuapa district of Phang Nga.<sup>1</sup> Within Takuapa, the fishing village of Nam Khem was the most severely affected town. According to a United Nations Development Project report, Nam Khem lost more than half of its population in the disaster and of the village's nearly 1,500 homes, only forty-nine stood after the wave retreated.<sup>2</sup>

Fig. 1: Map of Thailand

Source: "Google Maps,"  
www.maps.google.com.



<sup>1</sup> According to Monica Falk, in *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand: Socio-Cultural Responses* (New York: Routledge, 2015), Phang Nga officially reports 4,225 persons dead, 1,696 persons missing, and 5,597 persons injured after the tsunami. A total of 3,808 of the deaths reported occurred in the Takuapa district (12).

<sup>2</sup> "Baan Nam Khem: A resilient fishing community in Thailand," UNDP, December 22, 2014, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.th.undp.org/content/thailand/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/12/22/baan-nam-khem-a-resilient-community-in-thailand.html>.

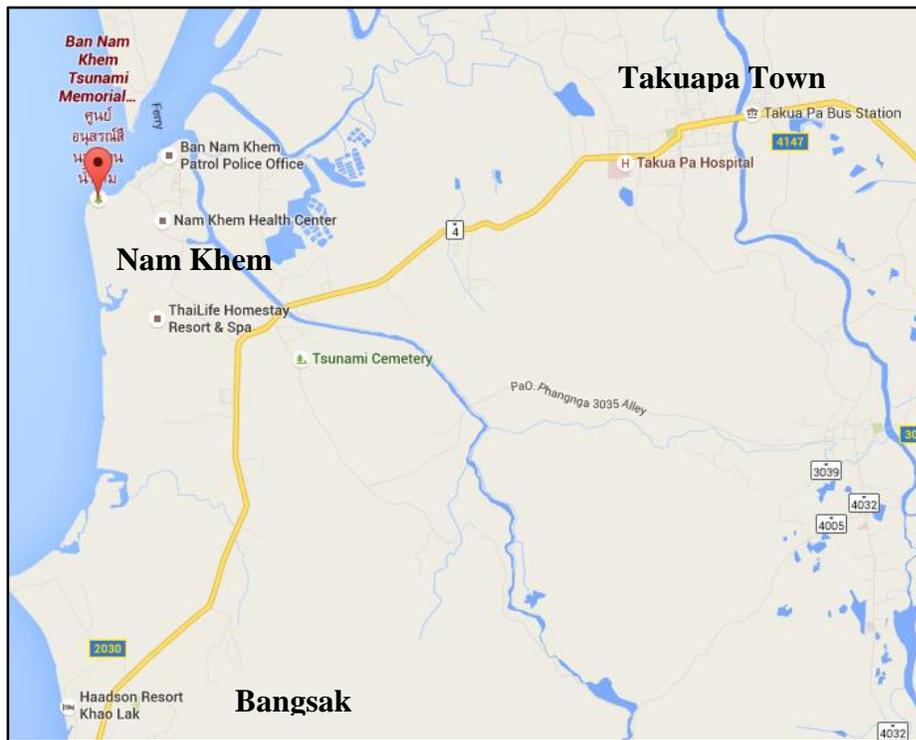


Fig. 2: Map of the Takuapa District.

Source: "Google Maps," [www.googlemaps.com](http://www.googlemaps.com).

My connection to the Takuapa district began several years after the tsunami, when I started teaching at the 35<sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School in Bangsak. I taught English at the boarding school from June 2012 until March 2014. Bangsak is a small community located along the coast. It is about fifteen minutes by motorbike from the village of Nam Khem, thirty from Takuapa town. The 35<sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School was built immediately after the tsunami and was originally intended to serve children whose lives had been affected by the disaster. Incredibly, the boarding school opened in April 2005, just months after the tsunami struck.

Today, subtle traces of the tsunami can still be found on the school's grounds. For example, in the southwestern corner of the campus, tucked away amongst towering trees, is the shell of the preceding school's canteen. The original school was destroyed in the tsunami. In the center of the campus, close to the flagpole and the principal's office, is a Buddha statue. According to my students, the statue, which was also at the earlier Bangsak School, survived the

tsunami without experiencing any damage. Now, the statue sits protected in a room of glass. The students are the caretakers of the image; they change out the lotus flowers and sweep the room each day. Sometimes, as I sipped a cup of Birdy instant coffee at my desk, I would see my students, marching in line from breakfast to morning assembly, momentarily pause in front of the Buddha, their hands quickly raising to *wai* the image before hurrying after their classmates. Whether they were paying respects to Buddha, wishing for success on an upcoming exam, or making merit for those they have lost, I do not know. But contained within that split-second *wai* was the faint trace of the tsunami, the subtle remnant of the disaster that receded more quickly than the pain of its arrival.



Fig. 3: Buddha statue at the 35<sup>th</sup> Rachaprachanukhro School

This thesis is an investigation into the ways in which the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami is remembered and memorialized within the Takuapa community. Though many outside of the region may perceive the tsunami as a past event, stories, like that of the Buddha statue relayed above, demonstrate that the tsunami has remained very much present for those living in the

Takuapa community. The wave is constantly referenced in daily speech, in jokes about the loudness of the sea on a particular evening and in stories of tsunami ghosts flagging down truck drivers, asking for rides and then disappearing along the way. Objects and places in Takuapa are also described by their connection to the disaster. A temple in the heart of Takuapa town is, for example, often referred to as the tsunami temple because of its role in body identification after the wave.

These different ways of relating to the tsunami in the present are what sparked this research project. Through an examination of various tsunami-related spaces, both official and unofficial, this thesis attempts to understand the places that the tsunami occupies within Takuapa today and how the local community remembers, forgets, and, as anthropologist Kathleen Stewart terms it, “unforgets” the wave.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the current project departs from the earlier scholarship on the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami within the Thai context, which has tended to focus on the immediate aftermath of the wave. For instance, Bongkosh Rittichainuwat’s research on Phuket’s tourist industry after the tsunami utilized data collected primarily between 2005 and 2006.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, anthropologist Monica Falk’s work on post-tsunami recovery practices in Phang Nga addresses the socio-cultural responses to the disaster within the context of the first few years after the wave.<sup>5</sup>

The current project seeks to address this gap in the literature by documenting the ongoing commemorative practices and modes of tsunami remembrance in Takuapa. Through a process of recording and analyzing tsunami narratives, objects, and forms of memorialization, this thesis

---

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Bongkosh Rittichainuwat, “Ghosts: A Travel Barrier to Tourism Recovery,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38 (2010): 437 – 459; Bongkosh Ngamsom Rittichainuwat, “Responding to Disaster: Thai and Scandinavian Tourists’ Motivation to Visit Phuket, Thailand,” *Journal of Travel Research* 46 (2008): 422 – 432.

<sup>5</sup> Falk, *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand*; Monica Lindberg Falk, “Recovery and Buddhist Practices in the Aftermath of the Tsunami in Southern Thailand,” *Religion* 40 (2010): 96 – 103.

creates a space for the expression of the wave's continued presence in Takuapa within the existing discourses about the 2004 tsunami. Significantly, this thesis does not give a voice to the documented tsunami stories. Rather, this project offers these narratives, these memories, these tsunami fragments a blank page, a site upon which to impress their feelings, sentiments, and questions. And, importantly, by recording the ongoing modes of tsunami remembrance and the continued effects of the wave felt across the Takuapa community within its pages, this project participates in its own form of tsunami commemoration. It functions as a commemoration of the narratives shared with me, of the objects that embody the tsunami found throughout the region, of the beaches marked by the wave and its devastation, and of the people who were lost both in the disaster and during the process of constructing this project. This thesis is, at its core, a tsunami memorial site.

The current project finds its roots in moments encountered while teaching in Bangsak and in data later gathered while conducting fieldwork in the region. From June to August 2015, I collected information through participant observation, informal interviews, and casual conversations about several different types of tsunami spaces scattered across the Takuapa district, including memorial parks, museums, and Buddhist temples. Then, in late December 2015, I returned to Takuapa to observe tsunami memorial ceremonies held throughout the region on the eleventh year anniversary of the disaster. It is important to note that the focus of this research is on tsunami-specific spaces and ritual occasions. Therefore, this project does not examine other memorial practices conducted at Buddhist temples or at homes throughout the region in significant detail. While these broader practices and rituals come into this project at various moments, the research emphasizes tsunami-related spaces and forms of commemoration. Future research will productively explore the relationship between tsunami-specific

memorialization and everyday commemorative practices, including worship at temples and at home shrines. A close examination of these different forms of remembrance will serve to illuminate more clearly how local Thais move between tsunami and non-tsunami commemorative spaces.

This thesis serves as the first attempt to document and analyze different forms of tsunami remembrance in Takuapa and how these forms relate to discussions about the Thai nation, to proper Buddhist religiosity and practice, and to appropriate affective displays of loss. It asks how these different official and vernacular tsunami spaces, vernacular here meaning everyday and colloquial, are used in tsunami memory construction, maintenance, and forgetting; how the local community interacts with and perceives these spaces and these spaces' connections to forms of commemoration. This project views tsunami memorialization through the lenses of individuals, the Takuapa community, and the multiple, overlapping publics functioning within the district. It strives to make sense of the circumstances or situations in which expressing attachment to those lost in the tsunami is permissible, the instances in which letting go of the tragedy is the ideal, and how these notions of attachment and acceptance, which are intimately tied to Thai Buddhist concepts of impermanence and suffering, can be understood within different social contexts and publics.

Thai social contexts are contingent upon a multitude of variables that are constantly shifting – gender, economic class, seniority, and location, to name a few – and can be best understood through the lens of กาลเทศะ (*kalathesa*). The word *kalathesa* literally means time (กาล, *kan*) and place (เทศะ, *thesa*), but, as anthropologist Sophornvaty Vorng suggests, *kalathesa*

is used in the vernacular to mean “appropriateness, balance, situation, and context.”<sup>6</sup> Vorng writes that many of her informants linked notions of *kalathesa* to the idea of knowing one’s own place and position in reference to others within the immediate social context. Anthropologist Penny Van Esterik, in her work on gender and materiality in Thailand, echoes this sentiment, writing that *kalathesa* “explains how events and persons come together appropriately in time and space. Knowing *kalathesa* results in orderliness in social relations, *khwam riaproy*.”<sup>7</sup> Not knowing the context or incorrectly identifying *kalathesa* can lead to tensions within social interactions and is viewed by many as deeply problematic. Take, for example, netizen responses on Pantip, a Thai blogging website, to media coverage of singer Prachathip “Singha” Musikapong’s funeral in 2015. “You need to have *kalathesa*,” one frustrated blogger wrote in response to a photo depicting a young cameraman standing on a set of stairs behind Singha’s family during his funeral, dangling the camera over Singha’s father’s head, in order to get a clear shot. “ใส่เสื้อผิดกาลเทศะ,” another exclaimed, “[the reporters] wore shirts that were inappropriate for the time and place.”<sup>8</sup> As these examples illuminate, understanding *kalathesa* is an important marker of proper sociality and behavior.

Within the Takuapa district, notions of *kalathesa* influenced the ways in which information was relayed to me and how narratives of the tsunami were presented. One of Vorng’s interlocutors, a teacher in Bangkok, says of *kalathesa*:

You’re constantly interacting with other people and gauging what level you are, and what level they are. You’re doing it all the time, like [thinking of] how to address a person,

---

<sup>6</sup> Sophontavy Vorng, “Beyond the Urban-Rural Divide: Complexities of Class, Status and Hierarchy in Bangkok,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39 (2011): 683.

<sup>7</sup> Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand* (New York: Berg, 2000), 36.

<sup>8</sup> “สื่อมวลชนบ้านเรา กาละและเทศะ อยู่ที่ไหนเหรอ,” *Pantip*, August 2, 2015, accessed March 2016, <http://pantip.com/topic/34002067>.

whether you need the politeness marker, or not, how courteous you have to be to them, how low you have to bow when you walk in front of someone. Everyone does it automatically, and they really don't think about it.<sup>9</sup>

The above explanation clearly outlines how concepts of *kalathesa* function in the everyday. In Takuapa, like in Bangkok, people were always interpreting how they were positioned in regards to someone else. Factors such as gender, seniority, and class – class here marked by a number of variables, including education level, quality of education, family background – were constantly being juggled. This affected the types of information, stories, and narratives that I encountered in any given situation or context. What a female teacher could say when surrounded by her superiors in the office was very different from what she could explain if we were conversing alone outside of the school's grounds. Similarly, a male colleague might have felt more able to talk about the tsunami in laidback party settings, where physical and social intoxication led to a loosening of strict social hierarchies, as opposed to at a formal school event or even at home.

Importantly, there is no simple formula for making sense of how *kalathesa* shapes a certain situation, because, at any given time, all of these variables – class, gender, age, religion, seniority, family history, communal influence, education, ethnicity, location, etc. – are being negotiated and interpreted. Nonetheless, it is necessary to note that ideas of *kalathesa* and notions of appropriate social behaviors deeply influenced the information that my contacts relayed and the ways in which that information was presented. Speech, behavior, and emotions were all impacted by the location of the conversation and the people present within that context. The meaning of my own presence as a researcher also shifted with the situation. In some settings, I was a teacher, in others a researcher from a prestigious university, a young sister, a friend, an

---

<sup>9</sup> Vorng, "Beyond the Urban-Rural Divide," 682.

adopted daughter, or a student. Each of these occupied positions affected the types of questions I could ask and the kinds of answers I received. This project pays careful attention to how different social positions and hierarchies shaped the presentation of the tsunami narratives shared with me and influenced the production of commemorative rituals and practices. As a result, the current research offers a nuanced approach to understanding trauma and its emotional expression; it works to highlight the complexities of emotional and affective displays of tsunami memories within the Takuapa context.

The following chapters are arranged by space, though, it is necessary to keep in mind that these spaces cannot be understood as completely distinct. They overlap and interact with one another in significant ways. The second chapter of this thesis, “The Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park,” presents a case study of a tsunami memorial park located in the village of Nam Khem. This section analyzes how the official memorial space frames, narrates, and structures the 2004 disaster and elucidates the tension between the continued lived-ness of the tsunami in Takuapa and the memorial park’s tendency to locate the event within a frozen temporal past. This chapter further examines how arguments about religion, proper Buddhist practice, and the nation are currently being made by and through the park.

The third chapter, “Tsunami Memorial Ceremonies,” provides an in-depth analysis of the eleventh year anniversary ceremony held at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park on December 26, 2015. The chapter moves through the various stages of the commemorative ceremony and investigates how these rituals engage with and often challenge larger regional narratives about tsunami memorialization and acceptance.

The fourth chapter, “Tsunami in the Vernacular,” explores the spaces that the tsunami occupies in the everyday. This section is an investigation into the tsunami’s archive, an archive

which is made up of tangible and intangible fragments – disjointed memories, gaps and silences in conversations, details that run on repeat, like the color of a shirt or the scrapes on a child’s knees, clear and sharp, and the ones that remain blurry. Structured as a collection of anecdotes, each anecdote exemplifying one particular strand of vernacular remembrance that I encountered over the course of my time in Takuapa, this chapter is an examination of the physical places, discursive spaces, and social contexts in which the tsunami is present.

The fifth chapter, “Tsunami Museums: Education and Tourism as Means of Remembrance,” analyzes the genre of the tsunami museum and the ways in which tsunami museums participate in modes of commemoration. This section seeks to understand how tsunami museums relate to tsunami memorials and the relationship between education and memorialization.

It is important to note that this thesis, like all projects, has limitations in scope and detail. Though my relationship with the Takuapa district began in 2012, I did not formally begin collecting data on modes of tsunami remembrance in the region until June 2015. As a result, the information included here is necessarily incomplete, representing only a few of the nuances and complexities found within processes of memorialization and remembrance in Takuapa. Because my time in the field was so short, roughly three and a half months in total, I was unable to collect extensive data on other tsunami-related sites in the region, such as the tsunami victims’ cemetery in Bang Muang or the Patrol Boat 813 memorial site in Bang Niang. Though I visited both of these sites multiple times, even attending a memorial ceremony at the Patrol Boat 813 site on the evening of December 26, 2015, I have chosen not to include these locations in the formal analysis of this thesis due to a lack of robust data on these sites.

Furthermore, few formal interviews were collected over the course of my field research. This was partly due to access, as the majority of my fieldwork took place during the monsoon season when mobility was constricted by torrential downpours, and partly a result of time constraints. Both the exclusion of other tsunami-related sites found in the Takuapa region and the low number of formal interviews conducted are limitations that will need to be addressed in any future manifestation of this project. Talking with more people about practices of remembrance, their reasons for visiting or interacting with a space, and their feelings about the various tsunami memorial sites will provide greater nuance to this project. Similarly, the ability to collect observational data on the other tsunami spaces over a longer period of time will significantly contribute to this project in any future elaborations.

#### A Note on Language

For most places and names, I utilize the Royal Institute's *Romanization Guide for Thai Script*.<sup>10</sup> However, I chose to honor how my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances write their own names in cases when the colloquial version differed from the official Romanized form.

Below is a list of the common Thai words utilized throughout the thesis:

Phi – a polite term used to refer to someone who is older than the speaker

Nong – a term used to refer to someone who is younger than the speaker

Khru – teacher

Mae – mother

Pho – father

Lung – uncle

---

<sup>10</sup> *Romanization Guide for Thai Script* (Bangkok: Royal Institute, 1982).

Pa – aunt

Wat – a Buddhist temple

## Chapter Two

### The Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park

The Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park (สวนอนุสรณ์สึนามิบ้านน้ำเค็ม) was opened in 2005, nearly one year after the tsunami devastated the district. An exhibit in the park's gallery, entitled "History of the Park's Construction," reveals that the original idea for the park came from Royal Thai Army General Lertrat Ratanavanich, who is currently a spokesperson for the Constitution Drafting Committee formed by junta leader General Prayuth Chan-ocha in 2014.<sup>11</sup> This exhibit also displays a list of the park's sponsors, which includes an array of international and Thai organizations. A large portion of the park's funding came from the German-owned multinational corporation, Thyssen Krupp AG, which donated over twenty million Thai baht for the construction and maintenance of the memorial park.<sup>12</sup> Bang Muang's Sub-district Administration, the Royal Thai Army Center for Natural Disaster Relief, and ITV Broadcasting also contributed a significant amount of financial support for this project.<sup>13</sup>

The Tsunami Memorial Park occupies a space of about five *rai*, or roughly two acres, of land in the village of Nam Khem. According to one of my interlocutors, who runs a jewelry shop at the park with his wife, this land was publically owned prior to the tsunami. The road leading to the park is sparsely populated, though recently restaurants and minimarkets have started popping up along the path.

---

<sup>11</sup> Amy Sawitta Lefevre, "Thai Junta Appoints Panel to Draft New Charter," *Reuters*, November 4, 2014, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-politics-idUSKBN0IO0OS20141104#ZV49IpDhtQmtlMkd.97>; Mongkol BangprapaPatsara Jikkham, "Public Constitution Vote Likely," *Bangkok Post*, November 7, 2014, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1517544F0424CE68?p=AWN.B>.

<sup>12</sup> Twenty million Thai Baht, in 2005, was roughly equivalent to \$550,000 USD.

<sup>13</sup> Bang Muang is a sub-district of Takuapa. Takuapa is a district of the Phang Nga province. Nam Khem, where the tsunami memorial park is located, is a village included in the Bang Muang sub-district.

The first time I visited the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park was in November 2012. On a lazy Saturday afternoon, my good friends, Phi Dong and Tong, invited the Chinese language teacher and me to the park. “Close to Phi Dong’s home,” Tong explained with a grin, “very beautiful.” Without waiting for us to really agree to the trip, the two of them hopped onto Phi Dong’s motorbike and zoomed off, gesturing for us to follow. Every once and a while, the boys would pull over on the side of the road to wait for us. Just as we were about to catch up, they would zip back onto the street and impatiently yell out that we were too slow. I felt tempted to remind them that just yesterday Phi Dong had scolded me for reckless driving, defined by him as reaching speeds above twenty-five miles per hour, but decided against it. Instead, I urged my clattering blue motorbike faster.

The park was crowded as we pulled up at its back entrance. From the parking lot, I could see kids playing football on the beach, families sitting clustered under the shade of tall trees munching on *khanom*, or snacks. Tong hopped off the motorbike first and went to buy a nearly reflective yellow soda, durian-flavored, that he sipped noisily as we wandered around the park. Phi Dong, in charge of the tour, quickly directed us to the highlights – the rusted fishing boat, the large golden Buddha, the pathway constructed to look like a wave that contained names and photos of those lost in the tsunami. In total, we spent only five minutes in the park that day, before Phi Dong mentioned that it was time to go. When I asked why we had to leave so suddenly, Phi Dong complained that it was because of my slow driving. “If you drove faster,” he said, “you would have had more time.” In reality, he had a funeral to go to, but he did not tell me that until much later. I took a last look at the park, at the shops selling souvenirs, at the fishing boats returning to the harbor, before getting on my motorbike and following Phi Dong back to the school. On the way to Bangsak, Tong made faces at us from the back of the motorbike. Wang

Xin sang, “Complicated,” by Avril Lavigne. It was a perfect moment, a perfect day. Bright sun, a slight breeze. No rain clouds in sight.

To be honest, at first, the hurried tour of the park left me a bit confused. For days, I pondered why we had spent twenty minutes driving to a location that we visited for only five; why, if he was so short on time, did Phi Dong bring us to that spot in the first place instead of showing us a new site closer to Bangsak. The park was beautiful, the drive to Nam Khem breathtaking. But I kept wondering why we visited that place in particular. At the time, I did not know the extent to which the tsunami had affected both Phi Dong and Tong. And, despite the fact that we were at a tsunami memorial site, the two of them made no allusion to their experiences with the wave, just as Phi Dong had casually omitted his reasons for rushing back to the school. So, I kept turning over the question in my mind: why that park on that day?

Eventually, bits and pieces of information began to fall into place. A funeral for a close relative, mentioned in passing on an evening not long after the visit to the park. A party invitation extended in English - “come to father’s birthday, father is thirty-one. Oh, no. Ha ha. Sorry, brother. Brother’s birthday. No father. Father is dead. Eight years already.” References to living with a sister and her boyfriend, to having an adoptive host mother. Small, subtle details that added up so that when the tsunami finally made an appearance in conversation, it no longer came as a surprise. In this way, I began to understand the significance of our hurried tour of the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park. It became clear that, for Tong and Phi Dong, the park served as a site of commemoration for those they lost in the tsunami and the trauma generated by the wave.

This chapter grows out of my experience with the tsunami memorial park that sunny day in November 2012 and my later confusion surrounding the rushed outing. In this section, I

explore the relationship of the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park to Takuapa. Through a detailed description of the park – its structuring and organization – this chapter examines the various significances and meanings that the park maintains for both individuals and the larger community. It asks the questions of: for whom was the park built, what does the park do, and what roles does the park play in Takuapa? The first sub-section of the chapter, “The Park’s Religion: Navigating Discussions of Proper Practice,” opens with a tour about the park’s various shrines and addresses how arguments of religion and proper Buddhist practice are made both in and through the memorial park. The second sub-section, which focuses on the Tsunami Gallery located on the park’s grounds, assesses the ways in which the memorial park is situated within domestic and international narratives. And the final section zeroes in on the park’s tsunami memorial walkway itself, analyzing the memorial structure’s official nature and temporal rigidity. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park functions as a contested site in Takuapa, where local community members actively engage in debates about proper religious practice and the correct modes of memory production and maintenance.

### *I. The Park’s Religion: Navigating Discussions of Proper Practice*

The entranceway to the park is a wide paved road that floods in the rainy season. The path weaves around the outer edge of the park and brings the visitors past the official entrance. Stairs lead up through the entrance to a cement courtyard that is demarcated by a white wall lined with neatly trimmed hedges. On the side of the wall that faces the driveway are the Thai and English names of the park, written in large black letters. Based on my observations, the formal entryway is infrequently used. Most visitors prefer to park their cars or motorbikes closer

to Lung Pao's boiled peanut and grilled egg stand, which is set up at the end of the driveway, not far from the beach.

On my visits to the park, I would usually leave my bike next to Lung Sawai's snack cart and, after saying a quick hello, head towards the shrine for *Krom Luang Chumphon* (กรมหลวงชุมพรฯ), which is located along the edge of the park. In life, *Krom Luang Chumphon*, whose official name is Prince Abhakara Kiartivongse, was one of King Chulalongkorn's children. Due to his fundamental role in modernizing the Royal Thai Navy, *Krom Luang Chumphon* is often referred to as the father of the navy. He was also a highly esteemed healer. He died in the early 1920's and, according to legend, on the night of his death a huge light shot across the sky and fell into the ocean near the Chumphon province.<sup>14</sup> Those who saw the light decided to build the first shrine for *Krom Luang Chumphon*. Today, there are more than two hundred shrines for him across Thailand.<sup>15</sup>

*Krom Luang Chumphon* is commonly worshipped by members of the Royal Thai Navy and by fishermen. However, as Phi Phet, the kindly middle-aged groundskeeper at the Tsunami Memorial Park, informed me, many lay persons pray to *Krom Luang Chumphon* for help selecting winning lottery numbers and for conceiving children. These devotees will bring cups of soda or rice whiskey for the spirit. If they receive what they asked for, they will return to the shrine to fulfill their vow, usually by setting off red firecrackers.

---

<sup>14</sup> “อิทธิปาฏิหาริย์กรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์ / *attibattihan krom luang chumphon*,” accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.amuletcenter.com/product-th-534821-กรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์,กรมหลวงชุมพร,เสด็จเดี่ยว.html>

<sup>15</sup> “กรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์ สิ้นพระชนม์ / *krom luang chumphon khetudomsak sin pra chon*,” accessed December 1, 2015, <http://guru.sanook.com/26225/>.

The shrine for *Krom Luang Chumphon* is situated at the far end of a black, marble courtyard. The circular courtyard is lined with bushes, the entrance way to the courtyard framed by tall trees. Visitors must remove their shoes before walking into the space. The shrine itself consists of a bust of the prince that rests upon a black platform. In front of the statue is a two-tiered offering stand, on the upper level of which is a bowl for incense. Small bottles of red and orange soda, with their caps removed and straws inserted into them, are also frequently left on this shelf. When I asked a colleague why offerings were arranged this way, she explained that “spirits cannot drink the water without a straw. They will be thirsty if we don’t provide one.”

On the lower platform of the offering stand are two clay rabbits, both about twelve inches tall. The rabbits sit on their hind legs at the edge of the platform, colorful garlands often draped over their ears. In the middle of the platform are ornate vases filled with white and red flowers. Symmetrically arranged around the base of the offerings table are two large, floral-patterned vases, four potted plants, and two black and white turtle sculptures. A small Thai-Chinese Buddhist figurine, dressed in green and red, is also found at the foot of the offering table.



Fig. 4: *Krom Luang Chumphon*

Located close to *Krom Luang Chumphon*'s shrine and tucked behind a cluster of trees is a shrine for a local deity, *Jao Pho Bun Thale* (เจ้าพ่อขุนทะเล). The shrine is housed within a small building. The outside walls of the building and the building's front pillars are painted white. The floor of the shrine is made of sea green tiles that cover part of the interior walls as well. In the front, under the pointed tin roof, is a wooden sign with the shrine's name and a long garland of fake yellow flowers. Just outside the shrine, on the side closest to the beach, is a magnificent wooden spirit house.

The inside of the shrine consists of various platforms, each at a different height. On the floor, which is only slightly raised from the ground, is a large incense bowl. A metal candle holder shaped like an old-styled Thai boat and two colorful vases filled with flowers rest upon the next step. Sometimes, food is also left on this platform as an offering to the deity. On the highest step sits the shrine's deity. The deity resembles an old man with white hair, white eyebrows, and a full white beard. He wears green pants and a piece of purple and red plaid that has been wrapped around his upper body. His arms, shoulders, and forehead are coated with gold flakes. Two small figurines, a man and a woman, sit in front of the deity. These figures wear green bottoms, white shirts, and red sashes. Water bottles left in offering to the deity are also placed upon this step.

According to Phi Sakda, who sells grilled fish at the Nam Khem market, the shrines for *Jao Pho Bun Thale* and *Krom Luang Chumphon* are worshipped in similar ways. Phi Sakda informed me that fishermen from Nam Khem often visit both shrines, usually in the morning before leaving the harbor or on the third day after the full moon. They will bring offerings for each spirit and ask for a safe and successful fishing trip. Phi Phet further explained that devotees will come to ask for winning lottery numbers and children from both spirits. My own

observations support this notion. In my field notes, I had recorded that each time someone came to fulfill their vow, red firecrackers were set off in front of both *Krom Luang Chumphon's* shrine and the shrine for *Jao Pho Bun Thale*.



Fig. 5: Shrine for *Jao Pho Bun Thale* located on the grounds of the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park

A short walk from *Jao Pho Bun Thale's* shrine is a giant Buddha statue. The towering golden Buddha was added later to the park, though most people I chatted with could not remember the exact year in which it was installed. Estimates range from three to seven years after the park's opening. The Buddha sits cross-legged upon a white lotus flower, his eyes half-closed and gazing down, his back facing the sea. His right hand rests on his right knee, the palm facing downwards. His left hand rests flat on the bottom of his right foot, the palm facing up. It is a gesture representing Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. Plastic bottles filled with water are left in offering to the Buddha on a square, black marble platform. Yellow flowers are also given in honor of the Buddha.

Below the offerings is a large placard that contains the words of a Buddhist prayer. Visitors are asked to repeat this prayer three times for the Buddha and again for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Underneath the prayer are the words: “พูดดี ทำดี คิดดี ชั่วชีวิต จะมีแต่ความสุข,” which translates to “speak well, do well, think well throughout your lifetime and you will have only happiness.” Behind this platform and leaning against the white lotus flower is a large sign, also made of black marble, that details what devotees should and should not ask from the Buddha. In gold letters, this sign tells devotees that they should ask for:

Good things for your life; to understand the dharmas of the Buddha; to realize, see, let go, and get out of suffering; to see yourself so that you can correct yourself; to dare to face truth in order to keep your words; to always be mindful; and to be opened to the light path for your journey in this human world and to see light in your journey to nirvana. It is then recommended that devotees not to ask for “money, [to win] a lottery, wealth, honor, high rank, or anything else that causes one to cling or lust. Because too many of these things will lead to suffering.”



Fig. 6: Buddha at the Park

Through detailing what are good and appropriate things to ask for from the Buddha, the marble sign is making a claim about what constitutes proper Thai Buddhist religiosity. In this case, a proper Thai Buddhist will ask for things that help one in the pursuit of enlightenment, whereas an improper Thai Buddhist requests things that further attachment to the world, such as winning lottery numbers and an improved position in society. The statue's decrees take on an even greater significance when considered in lieu of its location at the park. Not far from the shrines of *Krom Luang Chumphon* and *Jao Pho Bun Thale*, where many locals go to request exactly those things that the sign strongly recommends against pursuing, the Buddha statue can be seen as claiming a moral high ground. The subtext of the sign's message is that the Buddhist path, as how it is defined and limited by the sponsors of the statue, is the correct path.

This debate about proper religious expression and engagement arose several times throughout my stay in Takuapa. On one afternoon, for example, I asked a group of my colleagues if they knew the location of a small Chinese shrine in Bangsak. Phi Sakda and his wife had told me about the shrine the previous day, informing me that possession ceremonies take place at the shrine nearly every night, but I had never come across the shrine before.

"It's so close to school," Phi Jen explained, "have you seen the tiger on the side of the road? That's it."

"Yes," Pa Jaeb added, "it's very close to my house."

"Have you been to a ceremony there before?"

"No, I don't like. I... well, some people really believe. But me, I think it's not real." Pa Jaeb said, her words carefully chosen and delivered, as the oldest member in our office, with uncharacteristic restraint.

Perhaps as she expected, Pa Jaeb's response opened a discussion about possession practices and Chinese Buddhist temples within Thailand more broadly. Several of my colleagues echoed Pa Jaeb's feelings, one woman going so far as to say that "it's just a way for [mediums] to make money." Others demonstrated their disapproval more subtly through sentences like, "oh, well, it's those people's belief." One friend, however, pushed back against her colleagues' dismissal of the Chinese Buddhist practices. She began talking about her cousin who had a small shrine at his home. "I used to go all the time, very often. I was even vegetarian," she said, as a few colleagues familiar with her affection for grilled pork chuckled. "I've seen possession, so many times."

This brief moment in an open-air office on a rainy July afternoon illustrates the many ways in which Thais are navigating the relationship between different forms of worship and making their own claims about what counts as proper Thai religiosity. An interaction I had with Lung Sawai at the memorial park further highlights this ongoing process of negotiation. Lung Sawai, who is originally from Nam Khem, sells snacks at the Tsunami Memorial Park. One day early on in my field research, he had asked me why I was visiting the park. "I have seen you many times," he said, "what do you do?" I explained, gesturing to *Krom Luang Chumphon's* shrine, that I was a student studying about religion and the tsunami.

"That's not religion," he said gruffly.

Lung Sawai then explained to me that the park's shrines are not included under the umbrella term religion (ศาสนา) at all, but are rather described by the term *nap thu* (นับถือ), which loosely translates as to revere or to respect. He continued, stating that "religion, all religion, teaches people how to be good. Something that teaches that must be a religion" whereas worship of spirits, such as *Krom Luang Chumphon*, is practiced only to achieve material ends.

Lung Sawai's and my colleagues' comments, coupled with the stark contrast between the smaller shrines at the park and the imposing Buddha statue, are indicative of a larger tension existing within Thai society today. Debates over what constitutes proper Buddhist religiosity and practice have been occurring within the Thai context, both in everyday life and in academic circles, for many years. Religious studies scholar Justin McDaniel documents the prevalence of these debates in his work on popular religion in Thailand. In *The Lovelorn Ghost & The Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*, McDaniel details the everyday use of religious amulets in Thailand and the arguments over religious purity that interest in these amulets generates. He quotes a famous monk, Phra Dhammapitaka, as stating that there is “a crisis [wikrit] in modern Thai Buddhism... [because] both monks and followers practice magic not Dhamma.”<sup>16</sup> McDaniel also critiques social anthropologist Stanley Tambiah's idea of a “cult of amulets” on the grounds that it maintains “the dichotomy of good forest monks who meditate and those who deal in materialism.”<sup>17</sup> McDaniel's work, in which he argues that individual Buddhist practitioners and Buddhist material culture must be studied seriously as examples of true Buddhism, participates in and engages with these ongoing discussions about proper Thai Buddhist religiosity. Religious studies scholar Donald K. Swearer, in *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, similarly addresses the current debates over proper religion and practice. Swearer writes that “any attempt to understand religion that does not take into account the historical and cultural richness of the lived tradition runs the risk of reductionism and distortion.”<sup>18</sup> Swearer's

---

<sup>16</sup> Phra Dhammapitaka as quoted in Justin McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost & The Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 191.

<sup>17</sup> McDaniel, *The Lovelorn Ghost & The Magical Monk*, 190.

<sup>18</sup> Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), xv.

work, like McDaniel's, illuminates the intense debates surrounding notions of Buddhist practice and philosophy that are unfolding in academic circles across the globe.

However, the tensions exemplified by Lung Sawai's and my colleagues' comments hold a significance that extends beyond the context of scholarly debate; their remarks are also deeply political. In early December 2015, *Asian Correspondent* reporter Alistair Denness published an article explicating the link between Thailand's increasingly strict military government and the rising Buddhist extremism within the country.<sup>19</sup> Denness argues that Buddhist extremism lends itself easily to the junta's plans and warns that Thailand may be approaching a new era of restriction, a sentiment reiterated by several recently published pieces on the government's tightening of the country's lèse-majesté laws.<sup>20</sup> Though far from the nation's capital, where much of this drama is unfolding, Takuapa community members are actively working through these issues and trying hard to understand their place within the categories of proper Thai religion and proper Thai citizenship.

However, more research must be done in future manifestations of this project on understanding and explicating the ways in which the district of Takuapa fits into the Thai nation. During the political riots of 2013 – 2014 that eventually led to the military coup that installed General Prayuth Chan-ocha as Thailand's Prime Minister, I observed Takuapa transform into a

---

<sup>19</sup> Alistair Denness, "Buddhist extremism in Thailand fits neatly into junta's plans," *Asian Correspondent*, December 1, 2015, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/12/buddhist-extremism-in-thailand-fits-neatly-into-juntas-plans/>.

<sup>20</sup> AP News, "Thai fortune teller accused of insulting monarchy dies in military prison," *Asian Correspondent*, November 9, 2015, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/11/thai-fortuneteller-accused-of-insulting-monarchy-dies-in-military-prison/>; AP News, "Thai police probe US envoy over comments about monarchy defamation law," *Asian Correspondent*, December 10, 2015, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/12/thai-police-probe-us-envoy-over-comments-about-monarchy-defamation-law/>; "Thailand police investigate US envoy for lese majeste," *BBC News*, December 9, 2015, accessed December 11, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35048293>; "Thailand printers refuse to print New York Times cover story," *BBC News*, December 1, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34977045>.

slightly fanatic yellow-shirt support zone.<sup>21</sup> Footage of the protests in Bangkok played continually on a large screen in the school's computer room, teachers wore red, white, and blue armbands and whistles around their necks, and long lines of cars would zip down the road in front of the school, honking their horns vigorously and prompting my students to race out of class and cheer. Any inquiries into the roots of these protests led to the accusation of being a red shirt. Furthermore, colleagues warned me against donning anything red while driving around town, stating that "red is a dangerous color. If they see you wearing red, maybe they will hit you." Though I never encountered political violence in Takuapa directly or through stories, the idea that excited gossip about the possibility of violence existed is quite telling.

These examples are not to say that dissenting or more moderate positions were absent in Takuapa. A few of my friends relayed to me, when we were alone, that they did not have strong feelings one way or another about the issues, one friend explaining with a shrug that "I was able to study at university because of Thaksin's policies." Nonetheless, the atmosphere in Takuapa at that time was highly charged and worked to regulate expressions of more nuanced opinions. It also raised questions about Takuapa's location within the Thai nation, a few interlocutors expressing feelings of isolation from the Bangkok capital. Whispers of war and the splitting of Thailand into North and South were also present. While conclusions about Takuapa's relationship to the Thai nation cannot be made within this project, at this time, it is still important

---

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that post-tsunami recovery in Takuapa was conducted against a backdrop of increasing polarization in Thai society over the figure of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted from office by a military coup in 2006. The division of Thai society over Mr. Shinawatra led to the formation of the red and yellow-shirt movements, red-shirts organizing in support of Mr. Shinawatra and the yellow-shirts mobilizing in an effort to remove him from Thai politics. The red and yellow-shirt movements took to the streets again in 2010 and in 2014, the most recent round of protests having led to the military coup that installed General Prayuth Chan-ocha as Thailand's Prime Minister. For more information, see: Denness, "Buddhist Extremism.," "Profile: Thailand's reds and yellows," *BBC News*, July 13, 2012, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13294268> ; "Thailand Profile – Timeline," *BBC News*, August 15, 2015, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15641745>.

to consider how these arguments about proper Thai religion and citizenship playing out in Takuapa, at the memorial site specifically, fit into or are connected to the larger political situation in Thailand.

## *II. The Park in Domestic and International Narratives*

From the Buddha statue, visitors can either walk straight ahead into the park's recreational space or loop back around to the memorial walkway. The recreational space includes several tables and benches for people to sit at. Often times, families will come to the park in the afternoon to watch the ocean, eat snacks, and relax. There is a paved path that snakes throughout the park, which some use as an exercise path, though it is only about 200 meters long. Phi Phet's wife runs a snack shop at the far end of the space, where she sells packages of spicy noodles and ice cream cones. Behind her shop is a small children's playground and a tsunami gallery.



Fig. 7: Park Grounds

The four-room tsunami gallery is tucked behind a few souvenir stands and shaded by tall trees. There is no curator at this small museum and the space is often empty. The entrance room to the museum is undecorated. On the front desk are two guest books, both flipped open to a random page, and a miniature model of the park. Comments left in the guest books reveal that many visitors understand the Tsunami Gallery as part of the memorial park and as participating in commemoration of the tsunami. Take the following messages, for example:

“I would like to express my sorrow/regret for the victims who faced the loss from this event.”<sup>22</sup>

“For the recollection of the natural disaster, “tsunami,” which will never be forgotten. Together, we will help cure the agony and prevent this kind of loss from happening ever again.”<sup>23</sup>

“In loving memory of all who were lost, those named and unnamed. May you rest in peace.”

Each of these comments offers condolences for those lost in the tsunami. The messages do not address the gallery specifically, but rather the event that is commemorated within the gallery and the larger memorial park. It thus appears that while the gallery participates in general tsunami education and presents historical information about the tsunami in Nam Khem, visitors to the gallery do not primarily view the gallery as a space for education, but rather as a site of

---

<sup>22</sup> Translated from the original message: “ขอแสดงความเสียใจกับครอบครัวผู้ประสบภัยที่สูญเสียในครั้งนี้”

<sup>23</sup> Translated from the original message:

“รำลึกถึง เหตุการณ์ภัยพิบัติทางธรรมชาติ  
‘สึนามิ’ จำได้ไม่ลืมเลือน  
ช่วยกันเยียวยาความเจ็บปวด  
และป้องกันอย่าให้มีความเสียหายเช่นนี้อีกเลย”

remembrance and commemoration. This pattern raises questions about the relationship of the gallery's mission to visitor perception, exemplifying that museum missions do not always account for or line up with visitor interpretation, engagement, and understanding. Though visitors likely learned about the tsunami in Nam Khem in their usually guided tours of the gallery, the guest books demonstrate that visitors typically made sense of their time in the gallery as a form of tsunami commemoration.

Passing through a set of glass doors located to the right of the front desk, visitors enter into the first room of the gallery. This exhibit contains a large golden statue of *Krom Luang Chumphon*. The statue is mounted upon a foundation that is shaped like the bow of a boat. In the sculpture, *Krom Luang Chumphon* is standing with his hands clasped loosely at his waist. Surrounding him are the images of seven sailors, who are depicted in full salute. These figures are much smaller than that of the prince; they come up only to his knees. In the center of the sculpture, leaning against *Krom Luang Chumphon's* right foot and located behind the naval officers, is a clock. The symbolism of the clock is open for interpretation. Perhaps it represents *Krom Luang Chumphon's* role in modernizing the Royal Thai Navy or his precision as a naval commander. In December 2015, I noted that the clock had been moved to the back of the statue, so perhaps the clock is truly just a clock.

The first exhibit is focused on the park's history and includes several photos of the park's construction. Next to the photo collection is a display outlining the reasons for the park's construction, the park's funding, and the park's intended usages. The signboard maintains that the park was built to "remember those who died and were lost in the tsunami," to provide a place for relaxation, and to be an important tourist attraction in the future. On the same signboard, the

tsunami gallery is described as “an exhibition of the park.” No complete statement of the gallery’s mission is provided.

The second room displays two large photo collages of pictures from the tsunami. One collage depicts the tsunami’s effects on the local environment, the other, with photos of upside down trucks and crying civilians, emphasizes the human suffering caused by the wave. A collection of informational posters is also included in this exhibit. One poster outlines the science behind tsunamis, describing what tsunamis are and what happens to plate tectonics during an earthquake. Another poster, entitled “What to do if a Tsunami Occurs,” explicates how civilians should act during a tsunami. Subheadings of this poster include “how to prepare for a tsunami” and “what to do if you’re on a boat.” This poster also lists the government and local community’s expected roles during a tsunami.

The final room of the gallery is the most elaborate. It contains a large photo board that details the Royal Thai Army’s relationship to the park as well as a three-paneled presentation of the army’s assistance to the region post-tsunami. This chronologically arranged display documents the army’s support to Phang Nga at three different moments: immediately after the tsunami, one year later, and in the long-term. Significantly, this is the only exhibit in the museum that is written in both Thai and English. Whereas knowledge about tsunamis and the park’s sponsorship is made accessible only to those able to read Thai, the gallery strives to inform foreign visitors of the Royal Thai Army’s efforts to aid in the region’s recovery by providing English translations for the final exhibit. In this way, the tsunami gallery is deeply political. The small museum maintains that the Royal Thai Army, which is intimately connected to the Thai monarchy, takes care of its citizens, a sentiment that has been frequently evoked by Thailand’s

military leaders to justify their reign.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, the gallery frames the tsunami as an event in which the Royal Thai Army rose up to the challenge. The army protected its citizens where the 2005 government and its red shirt followers failed to do so. Rumors of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra turning down foreign aid post-tsunami and inhibiting recovery efforts, which are widespread in the region, also contribute to this narrative.

However, despite the tsunami gallery's overt participation in Thai national politics, the gallery and park cannot be conceptualized solely as a national project. In her research on representations of the American war in Vietnam, anthropologist Christina Schwenkel employs the notion of "recombinant history" to make sense of the ways in which national histories traverse borders of the nation-state. In her introduction, Schwenkel explains that recombinant history is a term borrowed from David Stark's notion of "recombinant property." Schwenkel uses recombinant history to "signify [the nation] as a "geo-body" with shifting borders of knowledge that delimit and expand "national" history."<sup>25</sup> She posits that:

By transcending the nation, recombinant history foregrounds the mobility of memory and resulting frictions in historical knowledge production. When applied to changes occurring at Vietnamese public sites of memory, it provides a framework for addressing the reconstitution of knowledge and history, based not on displacement...but on processes of encounter, contestation, and rearticulation. In signifying the diversification and uneasy coexistence of competing historical truths and logics of representation, recombinant history demands the decentering of modernist celebratory metanarratives of the nation-state to allow for memory practices that exceed the frame of autonomous and bounded "national histories."<sup>26</sup>

The memories that are produced within the Tsunami Gallery are thus similarly deeply embedded in a process of memory exchange that cuts across national boundaries. The various, overlapping,

---

<sup>24</sup> Glen Lewis, "The Politics of Memory in Thailand and Australia: national identity, the media and the military," *Media History* 8 (2002): 77 – 88.

<sup>25</sup> Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

and often competing narratives of the global event constantly interact with one another, creating new memories of the tsunami through their collision. In this way, the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park must be understood as engaging in processes of transnational remembrance and commemoration as well as participating in internal politics.

### *III. The Tsunami Memorial Walkway: Official Narratives and Temporal Rigidity*

Roughly fifty meters from the Tsunami Gallery is the official memorial structure. The memorial walkway is found on the outer edge of the park and is lined by two curved walls designed to represent a wave. The wall closest to the parking lot is made of unpainted concrete. It has a viewing window in its side, through which one can see a rusted fishing boat that reportedly had washed up onto shore during the tsunami. Plants poke out through the boat's exterior.

The inner wall of the memorial walkway is made out of small, terra cotta bricks. Clusters of blue and white tiles, arranged in diamonds, decorate the wall. In the center of these tile formations are black squares containing names and, less frequently, photos of those lost in the tsunami. A count made in July 2015 showed that 393 Thai names and 79 foreign names were commemorated in the memorial. Most commonly, the plaques included five Thai names. The names were arranged hierarchically by age and gender, such that names of older men came first, followed by the names of older women, male children, and female children respectively. Some plaques, usually commemorating foreigners, contained only one name and a photo. By 2015, nearly ten years after the memorial was constructed, many of the plaques were illegible or missing. A few offerings were left for the deceased, including lollipops, fake flowers, a child's watch, and an elephant key chain.



Fig. 8: Tsunami Memorial Walkway at the Ban Nam Khem park

Most often, foreign and Thai tourists visited this section of the tsunami memorial park, the local Thais preferring to play football on the beach or gather around the park's many picnic tables. This stark difference in patterns of engagement with the memorial wall can be understood in multiple ways. One way centers on feelings of exclusion that were generated by the walkway's official commemoration of only certain lives.

In actuality, the path memorializes little over one tenth of the total people lost from the Takuapa district in the tsunami.<sup>27</sup> Some, such as Phi Samarn, the owner of the park's jewelry store, view inclusion on the wall as a personal decision. Phi Samarn said that he had been asked whether or not he wanted to include his son's name on the wall. "People could choose," he said, "if they wanted a space." However, anthropologist Monica Falk, writing about post-tsunami recovery in Thailand, argues that the inclusion of certain names over others was actually a sensitive issue for many of her contacts who felt that they were not given the opportunity to

---

<sup>27</sup> Monica Falk, in *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand: Socio-Cultural Responses* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 12.

represent their families on the official wall. Falk details one of her interlocutor's experiences at the Tsunami Memorial Park on the park's opening day in 2005. She writes that when her friend "walked through the lane with the rose in her hand, looking for the names of her close friends, her mother, relatives and others she had lost, she realized that their names were missing and she felt traumatized by the Western woman who gave her the rose."<sup>28</sup>

The memorial's exclusion of certain people and narratives is a feature common to commemorative structures more broadly. Given their inherent task to remember someone or something, memorials necessarily put forth only specific narratives while prohibiting other interpretations of the event from existence within the memorial space. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, in their introduction to *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, highlight this point, writing that "most commemorative rituals, nonetheless, intentionally confirm limited and one-sided significance by defining what should and should not be remembered of past events, thereby rendering mute alternative interpretations of the past."<sup>29</sup>

This sentiment is echoed by Nicola Tannenbaum in her essay "Monuments and Memory: Phaya Sihanatraja and the Founding of Maehongson." She writes, "whether it is grandmother Mo or the students killed in 1976, monuments and statues are arguments about history, and how the past should be remembered and commemorated, if at all."<sup>30</sup> Within this framework, the Nam Khem memorial's narrow portraiture of the tsunami might be one way to explain why so few locals visit the walkway.

---

<sup>28</sup> Falk, *Post-Tsunami Recovery*, 170.

<sup>29</sup> Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, "Introduction," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>30</sup> Nicola Tannenbaum, "Monuments and Memory: Phaya Sihanatraja and the Founding of Maehongson," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 137.

At the same time as it makes official specific, necessarily exclusive, narratives about the tsunami, the memorial also depicts the tsunami as an event existing in a definable unit of time. That is, the memorial presents the tsunami as being an event of the past. This relationship of the Nam Khem memorial to the temporality of the tsunami is exemplary of what scholars Edward Simpson and Malathi de Alwis see as an inherent feature of memorials. In their research about memorials commemorating natural disasters in Gujarat and Sri Lanka, Simpson and de Alwis explain that, “the memorial flattens the extremes of individual memory – replacing it, and, therefore, in a sense, denying it or suppressing it, with something altogether more palatable, if not anodyne. This is perhaps one of the fundamental functions of a memorial.”<sup>31</sup>

As the authors suggest, memorials for natural disasters attempt to soothe the rawness of the disaster. In order to move on from the disaster there must presumably be a point from which to move on from. One way to create this point in time is to restrict the painful event to the past. The tendency of memorials to relegate that which is being memorialized to an earlier time point inaccurately limits the scope and existence of the event, as scholar Michael Lambek suggests. Writing about remembrance as a moral practice, Lambek posits that, “the objectifying devices of contemporary Western memory production have at least three significant qualities that distinguish them from the idea of memory as an ongoing practice: they freeze words and images; they put frames around them; and they render remembering mechanical and impersonal.”<sup>32</sup>

This idea can be extended from memory production to material memorial construction. Most commonly, the construction of a memorial hinges upon the idea that the event being memorialized is over. Though some memorial projects, such as Guenther Demnig’s recent brass

---

<sup>31</sup> Edward Simpson and Malathi de Alwis, “Remembering natural disaster: Politics and culture of memorials in Gujarat and Sri Lanka,” *Anthropology Today* 24 (2008): 7.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Lambek, “The Past Imperfect: Remembering as Moral Practice,” in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 238.

brick movement in Germany, work to integrate traumatic memories into the present, most memorials restrict the event to the temporal past in an effort to promote survivor recovery.<sup>33</sup> However, in striving to bring peace to those who have suffered, memorials artificially freeze the disaster in time and overlook the continued present-ness of the event. The Nam Khem walkway can be understood in this light, its tall curved walls and rusted fishing boat portraying an image of an event that has come and gone. The exclusion of family members as well as lived experiences from the memorial wall is one way to understand the lack of local engagement with the memorial.

However, to complicate this slightly, it should be noted that Phi Dong, who first brought me to the Tsunami Memorial Park, was from Nam Khem. Phi Dong also lost many loved ones in the 2004 tsunami. And yet, when we arrived at the site on that sunny November afternoon, he directed my friend and me to the memorial pathway before showing us the other sites at the park. This exemplifies how, for Phi Dong, the park was a memorial first and foremost. It was not a place he came to hang out with his friends, play football, or relax in the evenings. Rather, the park was a place of commemoration, for people lost in an event so huge and impossible to reconcile completely. Phi Dong's perception of the walkway as opposed to Falk's interlocutor's reaction to the park exemplifies the nuances and complexities of tsunami memorial commemoration in Takuapa. As will be shown more clearly in the following chapter, there is no one way to memorialize the tsunami in Takuapa nor is there a single path towards acceptance of the event.

---

<sup>33</sup> Eric Westervelt, "Stumbling Upon Mini Memorials to Holocaust Victims," *National Public Radio (NPR)*, May 31, 2012, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2012/05/31/153943491/stumbling-upon-miniature-memorials-to-nazi-victims>.

## Chapter Three

### Tsunami Memorial Ceremonies

On December 26, 2015, the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park held its eleventh year anniversary tsunami memorial ceremony. I attended the morning event with a local student, Pin, and her family, who I had unexpectedly met and become quite close with when I got a flat tire on my way to the tsunami memorial last June. Pin's father, Pho Ta, has the only mechanic shop within a two-mile radius from the park. This chapter starts at Pin's home and moves through the various stages of the commemorative ceremony, exploring how the rituals engage with and often challenge larger regional narratives about tsunami memorialization and acceptance. Through a thick description of the commemorative morning's events, I elucidate the complexities implicit within tsunami memorialization in Takuapa and demonstrate the nuances of individual responses to official modes of tsunami commemoration.

\* \* \* \*

"*Mae*," Pin called from the living room, a tiny open space that abuts her father's mechanical shop. The pounding on the bathroom door and the chorus of "Hurry up!" continued. Pin raised her voice louder, "*Mae!*"

After a moment, her mother poked her head around the corner. "We'll go to the park first *na*," Pin said. Mae Di glanced at the clock and nodded. It was half past nine already. "Take the food with you," she instructed. Pin grabbed the blue bag on the table, inside of which was a four-tiered stainless steel container filled with curries, a box of freshly made Thai sweets, and a large plastic water bottle. The package was to be offered to the monks at the memorial ceremony. Mae Di watched to make sure we had everything before returning to scold her eight year old son. Pin

and I then slipped on our sandals, picked our way carefully through the shop where her father was replacing a flat tire, and hopped onto my motorbike.

The drive from Pin's house to the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park, Suan Ha (สวนห้า) as it is more commonly called, is less than one kilometer. By the time we arrived, however, the driveway leading to the park was overflowing with vehicles. I wedged my bike into a narrow spot between two cars before we hurriedly made our way to the courtyard, where a large group of people sat clustered under the shade of a pavilion tent. When we reached the tent, Pin went to place the offerings her mother had prepared earlier that morning on a long table set up in front of the monks' platform. The table was already heavy under the weight of numerous travel containers, offerings made by members of the Nam Khem and surrounding communities.

The offerings presented at the memorial ceremony on December 26<sup>th</sup> are rooted in a larger Buddhist practice of ritual merit exchange. Swearer describes merit making rituals as examples of "reciprocal exchange," in which a "layperson-donor offers material gifts for the benefit of the monastic order. In return, the virtuous power of the sangha engenders a spiritual reward of merit (*puñña*), thereby enhancing the donor's balance of kamma/karma, which in turn, affects the status of the person's rebirth on the cosmic scale."<sup>34</sup> Swearer's explanation of merit reciprocal exchange can help to make sense of the role that the offering of food to monks plays in merit making and merit transference within Thailand. Thai Buddhists will often prepare food for monks on their birthday, which they maintain will help protect them in the upcoming year. Similarly, I observed friends and colleagues make offerings at temples when they wanted to offset a particularly bad bout of misfortune. For instance, in 2013, one colleague of mine began to make weekly offerings of fresh food, instant spicy noodles, and packages of milk at a small

---

<sup>34</sup> Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 19.

temple on an island off of Nam Khem's coast. She started this routine after a fortune-telling monk at that temple explained to her that increased temple participation and periods of vegetarianism would be her only chance at finding a spouse. In all of these examples, the object of food is the means for generating merit, both through offering food and by consuming only certain types of food.

Anthropologist Patrice Ladwig, writing about Buddhist ritual practices in Laos, suggests that food can be understood as a "container" for merit that enables merit to "be expressed in its materiality."<sup>35</sup> In this way, food is a material object of ritual exchange through which merit can be generated and transferred to the deceased. Ladwig further argues that "food as an object is needed to reinscribe the relationship into the social – a capacity that the transfer of merit alone would hardly accomplish."<sup>36</sup> In other words, the offering of food to monks and the subsequent consumption of that food, both by the monks and those who presented the food in offering, works to ground the relationship between the living, who are generating merit, and the dead, who are receiving the merit, in a social reality in which relationships between the living and dead continue despite obvious material separation. Ladwig's discussion of feeding hungry ghosts in the *boun khau padab din* ritual, in which food is directly given to the spirits without the aid of monks as intermediaries, emphasizes this point most clearly. The notion of feeding highlights the social relationship and exchange between the living and the dead.

This connection across different spiritual plains, manifested in patterns of food offering and consumption, also exists in Thai Buddhism. In Phang Nga, there is a notion that food prepared with the intention of transferring merit to the deceased should include food that the

---

<sup>35</sup> Patrice Ladwig, "Feeding the dead: ghosts, materiality, and merit in a Lao Buddhist festival for the deceased," in *Buddhist Funeral Cults of Southeast Asia and China*, eds. Paul Williams and Patrice Ladwig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 134.

<sup>36</sup> Ladwig, "Feeding the dead," 135.

deceased had enjoyed eating when they were alive. For example, if, in life, the deceased liked to eat *nam prik*, a spicy sauce made from shrimp paste and chilies, then loved ones might prepare *nam prik* to offer to the monks. It is believed that when food is being offered, the departed are receiving not only the merit but also the food itself. A colleague in the English department further elaborated on this point, explaining that it is important for family members to make and bring food for the deceased often. Otherwise the deceased will become hungry and start to visit relatives in their dreams, asking for food and drink. The numerous food offerings made at the 2015 tsunami memorial ceremony can also be understood within this social framework of ritual exchange and care taking.

When Pin returned after carefully arranging the stainless steel container and water bottle on the table, we went to find seats on the far side of the courtyard where a few red plastic chairs remained vacant. From this vantage point, I could see that the giant pavilion tents formed an L-shape along the outer edge of the space. The tents were organized by religion, with the Buddhist tent forming the largest section at the ceremony. In this area, several rows of chairs were set up to face the monks' elevated platform. Next to the platform was a table holding photos of the deceased, the pictures arranged in a wide circle and connected by a long strand of pirit thread. The monks held the end of the thin, white thread, so that the merit generated through their chanting could be passed onto those whom the tsunami had claimed. Small water bottles, with their caps twisted off and straws sticking out from the top, stood in front of the photographs. Anthropologist Monica Falk, writing about post-tsunami recovery processes in Phang Nga, wrote that photographs of the dead or missing were typically displayed "on a special platform or beside the monks" during weekly temple ceremonies. She notes that the photographs played, at the time

of her research in 2005, an almost “sacral role for the mourners.”<sup>37</sup> Falk’s observations can help to make sense of the importance of these photographs for those present at the memorial ceremony, eleven years after the event.

An announcer gave a short introduction to the event before passing the microphone off to the Phang Nga provincial governor, who spoke about the incredible resiliency of the Nam Khem community and expressed his deep sorrow for those lost in the 2004 disaster, including the eldest princess’ son, Khun Poom Jensen. At the conclusion of the governor’s address, Buddhist community members rose to pay their respects to the king’s grandson, their Muslim and Christian neighbors remaining seated. Whereas I had observed friends from other faiths participate in celebrations for the royal family before – a Muslim colleague even serving as our school’s representative at the king’s birthday ceremony in 2012 – non-Buddhist community members did not join in the commemoration of Khun Poom at the tsunami memorial park. These differences in participation illuminate the strong connection between Buddhism and the royal monarchy in Thailand and suggest that expressions of royalism by non-Buddhist citizens are perhaps mediated by religious obligations and practices.

Khun Poom’s official photograph was enlarged and contained within an ornate gold frame that stood at the entrance to the tsunami walkway. Pin and I rose to join the other Buddhist members in a loosely defined line that snaked its way around the courtyard. One of the event’s staff members, a woman in a bright orange t-shirt, was handing out white, long-stemmed flowers to place in front of the picture. We each took one. When we made it to the front of the line, having dodged many rogue elbows, Pin swiftly inserted the stem of her flower into a block of

---

<sup>37</sup> Monica Falk, “Recovery and Buddhist practices in the aftermath of the Tsunami in Southern Thailand,” *Religion* 40 (2010): 102.

green foam. I attempted to follow her example but, after nearly breaking the fragile stem in half, I decided to place the white flower onto a decorative silver tray instead.

After we exited the line, Pin and I went for a brief walk along the interior of the park, pausing to take photos at an area that looked as though it was specifically designed for souvenir picture taking. There was a large poster that read “11 years Tsunami: Ban Nam Khem,” in both Thai and English, as well as a collection of beautiful flowers and plants that had recently been added to the park. Bored with the day’s formalities, Pin designated herself official photographer and made me take several pictures underneath the sign before finally agreeing to return to our seats. On the walk back, we passed a small snack shop where lunch packets of rice and curry, later to be distributed to participants, were being stacked. The packets were numerous and obscured the shop’s large front window entirely.

Next to the shop was a makeshift stand selling tsunami memorial souvenirs, such as books on the tsunami written by Nam Khem locals and anniversary t-shirts from the earlier years. Displayed were a few olive green shirts from the third anniversary that read “our home, our beach, we will protect always” and extra-large shirts left over from the much publicized ten year anniversary of the previous December. The day before, I had purchased a book about tsunami rehabilitation and compensation from the souvenir stand while I was attending an educational presentation about disaster prevention in the Phang Nga province. The event, which was hosted by the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation and largely attended by local schools, had consisted of a round table discussion about disaster preparedness and a live demonstration of Nam Khem’s rescue services. I was filling Pin in on the event’s comical ending as we meandered back to our seats when a voice behind us called out my name. Spinning around,

I spotted a close friend's older sister and her infant daughter. "Phi Duang," I called out happily, pressing the palms of my hands together in a Thai greeting, "*sawatdi kha*."

She smiled as her daughter, who had been only a few months old the last time I saw her, stared at me, uncertain of what to make of the white-skinned and red-haired stranger. "Who did you come with," Phi Duang asked.

"My student," I said, gesturing to Pin who had taken her seat in the back, "and her family *kha*. And you? Phi Dong? Your mother?"

"No, no, they are at home."

"*Kha*," I murmured, surprised. Having been familiar with the tsunami's deep impact on her family, I had not expected her to come to the park alone.

"But stop by later, *na*," Phi Duang added, "*Mae* has been asking after you. She is at home today, she didn't have work. Come see her, *na*."

"Of course," I promised, before heading off to join Pin in the back.

"What happens next," I asked Pin as I sunk back down into my chair.

"Now there are rituals," she explained, pausing a moment to take a selfie on her phone. Head tilted to the side, right hand raised in a peace sign, one, two, three, smile. "They take a long time... many hours." I nodded and turned my gaze to the front, where a group of Muslim men donning traditional dress were standing. One man with a microphone gave a speech about the significance of the tsunami and how to make sense of what happened. Then, the group began to chant in a language that was not Thai. When I asked Pin what language they were speaking, she explained that it was *phasa khong khao* or "their language," which she later described as Malay, though she seemed a bit uncertain of that fact.

When the Muslim service concluded, the Christians rose as a group to begin their ceremony. A young man, who I recognized as the vice director of the Nam Khem Christian School, opened with a speech about the glory of God. His commentary was followed by a reading of Psalm 23, which comes from the Old Testament and describes God as a good shepherd, as both a protector and a caretaker. The group then sang “Amazing Grace” in Thai and English, followed by a Thai song about trusting in God. This pattern of alternating between scripture and songs continued for about thirty minutes, the ceremony ending with one final song about God.

At this time, the Buddhist ceremony began. Pin and I were shortly joined by her family, who had just arrived at the park. We sat together – Pin on my left, her mother and father on my right. Her younger brother Prame was not interested in chanting, unsurprising for an eight year old. Instead he wandered around the edge of the courtyard with his neighborhood friends, returning to his seat every once and a while to play a game on Pin’s smartphone. Pin also had trouble sitting through the ceremony, preferring instead to look at photos on Facebook. However, after her mother’s constant pleas for her to pay attention and sit respectfully with her hands pressed together in a *wai*, Pin tucked her phone away and listened to the monks.

The chanting continued for about one and a half hours. Towards the ritual’s conclusion, people who had brought their family members’ photographs to the park and who were making merit specifically for their lost loved ones approached the monks’ platform. Keeping their bodies lower than the monks, oftentimes shuffling forward on their knees, the family members placed food in the monks’ alms bowls. After the monks had eaten, the chanting resumed. An older monk began to walk around the Buddhist tent, splashing water from a bowl onto ritual

participants as a blessing. When the chanting had concluded, community members rose from their seats and headed towards the tsunami memorial walkway.

When I had last visited Suan Ha in late August 2015, many of the tsunami walkway's plaques were illegible or missing. However, the walkway had transformed in the days leading up to the commemorative ritual on December 26<sup>th</sup>. New pictures had been placed over the faded photographs, protected by a layer of clear tape and framed by gold, blue, or silver tape. Sheets of white paper had been tacked on top of the old plaques as well, the names of lost loved ones re-written in sparkling gold letters, and fresh flower wreaths had been added to the walkway in an extension of a common Thai funeral practice.

The memorial walkway was bustling with activity when Pin's family and I ventured through the space. Families and friends gathered around their loved ones' squares, tucking flower garlands, candles, and incense in between the bricks. Some brought their own photos of relatives not officially commemorated on the wall to add to the memorial. One of these photos was of a young girl, maybe seven years old, dressed in white. The picture was framed by a wreath of red, yellow, and white flowers.



Fig. 9: Wreath added to the memorial walkway before the 11<sup>th</sup> year anniversary ceremony



Fig. 10: Plaque at the memorial walkway in the days leading up to the 11<sup>th</sup> year anniversary ceremony

The changes that I witnessed unfolding within the memorial space – the touching up of old plaques, the addition of flowers, and the level of community engagement – stood in stark contrast to what I had previously understood and been told about the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park. Just months before, I had seen the walkway as an overlooked space, one that was forgotten and unattended to by local community members, no longer important eleven years after the tsunami struck. From visits conducted between June and August 2015, I jotted down that while both international and Thai tourists commonly meandered through the memorial walkway, local Thais rarely ventured through this part of the park, preferring instead to gather around the picnic tables, chatting with their friends over plates of papaya salad, fried chicken, and sticky rice. My colleagues in Bangsak had confirmed this pattern, offering two explanations as to why fewer Takuapa locals visited the walkway: one, the memorial walkway was not actually for

Thais because Thais do not commemorate their dead by publically writing names on walls and two, local Thais generally did not like memorials because the structures brought up old feelings of sadness and loss.

The first explanation offered makes an argument about what constitutes proper Thai religiosity and works to otherize modes of commemoration that fall outside of that narrowly defined category.<sup>38</sup> Some of my contacts claimed that the memorial wall was Chinese in origin, others stated that “Thai people don’t do it like that. Thais will commemorate within the temple or at home.” Interestingly, despite these claims of the wall’s inauthenticity, the memorial overlaps in considerable ways with other modes of commemoration in Takuapa. From research conducted at three temples in the area - *Wat Ratniramit* (วัดราชบูรณินรมิต) in Bang Muang, *Wat Yan Yao* (วัดย่านยาว) in Takuapa, and *Wat Nam Khem* (วัดน้ำเค็ม) in Nam Khem – I noticed that the tsunami memorial walkway is structured similarly to the commemorative spaces on the temples’ grounds. At all three temples, memorials for the deceased could be found along the outside wall of the temples’ compounds. Sometimes these memorials took the form of large, decorative urns that stood independently near the wall. These urns contained the ashes and small bones of the deceased, the fragments left over after the cremation ceremony, and the outside of the urn usually displayed the name and photograph of the deceased. At *Wat Ratniramit*, the memorials were smaller and built directly into the wall. These memorials looked like small open-front houses made up of a roof and two or three levels. Some of these memorials were painted in bright colors, others were decorated with garlands of fake flowers, vases of fresh flowers, and

---

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that Thai religiosity is often understood as Buddhist religiosity. The category of “Thai” is frequently defined as ethnically Thai and religiously Buddhist. Thus, when my interlocutors referred to Thai religion, they were almost always referring to only Thai Buddhism.

small objects, such as teddy bears. These memorials also displayed the name and photograph of the deceased and contained an urn of ashes. A colleague relayed that relatives of the deceased would often visit these memorials, lighting candles and incense to honor the dead. They would also bring food to feed their lost loved ones so that the spirit would never go hungry. Though some of the commemorative structures had, like the plaques on the memorial wall, fallen into disrepair, the majority of the memorials were tenderly looked after. It should also be noted that these spaces were typically reserved for wealthy patrons of the temple, suggesting that economic and social class mediate modes of Buddhist commemoration in critical ways. Most commonly, Takuapa locals will release the deceased's ashes into the sea after cremation.

As can be seen, the tsunami memorial walkway's structure echoes that of the memorials contained within the temples. Both spaces include photographs of the deceased and names of lost loved ones written upon walls. Furthermore, family members of the deceased interact with the spaces in like ways. Relatives will bring flowers, candles, and incense to both places. These similarities between the spaces and the worship at those spaces raise the question as to why many of my interlocutors dismissed the tsunami memorial walkway as non-Thai. The answer, I postulate, is linked to the second claim that "Thai people don't do it like that. Thais will commemorate at a temple or at home." It is not the practice of writing a name upon a wall that was problematic for many of my interlocutors, but rather the space in which the memorialization occurred. It appeared that many took issue with the memorial walkway's publicness, an official publicness that, while no more public than the Buddhist temples, created, for some, an inappropriate display of trauma and loss.

The argument of the tsunami memorial walkway's problematic publicness calls attention to the function and place of emotions within Thailand as well as the many different types of

publics, official and non-official, that exist within the Thai context. Social theorist Michael Warner critically examines the formation and maintenance of overlapping publics in a collection of essays entitled *Publics and Counterpublics*. He suggests that “publics exist only by virtue of their imagining” and that the definitions of public and private spaces, spaces as both concrete places and discursive zones, are particularly elusive.<sup>39</sup> He writes that:

Public and private are not always simple enough that one could code them on a map with different colors – pink for private and blue for public. The terms also describe social contexts, kinds of feelings, and genres of language. So although public and private seem so clearly opposed that their violation can produce a sharp feeling of revulsion, the terms have many different meanings that also go unnoticed.<sup>40</sup>

Warner’s framework proves useful in the consideration of the different types of publics that are actively being engaged with and criticized within the discussion of the tsunami memorial walkway’s appropriateness and authenticity. While both the walkway and the local temples are public, official spaces, regulated by particular rules of behavioral conduct and emotional expression, the temples open a space for permanent memorialization that is couched within a rhetoric of Buddhist impermanence. Within the temple, permanent commemoration is not seen as a contradiction to Buddhist narratives of letting go because the temple frames the memorials as being part of the Buddhist tradition. The freestanding urns, the photographs, and the plaques containing names are thus acceptable and appropriate, despite their permanency.

The walkway, however, is problematic because it is not directly situated within a framework of Buddhist teachings or practices. The commemoration at the walkway may take a similar form as memorialization at the temples, but the tsunami walkway is located outside of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 27.

temples' public. Therefore, for some community members, the walkway's perceived permanency represents an inappropriate attachment to those lost in the tsunami. The claim of the tsunami walkway's improper publicness is, therefore, not a question of public versus private, but rather a question of different types of publics and their relationship to correct emotionality and affective expression within Takuapa.

Some responses to the commemorative ceremony held at the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park can also be made sense of within this system of overlapping publics and privates. A few of my interlocutors explained that they do not attend tsunami-specific merit-making rituals at either the memorial park or the local temples, preferring instead to invite monks to conduct the rituals at their homes. Phi Koi, a friendly, easy-going woman who worked together with me at the school, relayed that participation in the rituals was dependent upon the individual family. "Some go," she said, "to the park or maybe the temple. But others will do something at home. They'll ask monks to come, feed the monks there. They don't go to the temple. They don't like that. They are too shy."

Phi Koi, through highlighting the different spaces for commemoration and the reasons behind engagement with certain spaces over others, sheds light on the various types of publics existing within the Takuapa community. The memorial walkway, the Buddhist temples, and the home are all spaces that are, within the context of tsunami memorialization, public and official in particular ways. However, the relationship to the public and private functions differently within each of these spaces. Gender and queer studies scholar Megan Sinnott suggests in her research on urban Thailand that the dormitory in Thailand functions as a space that is not fully private nor public, which enables certain relationships to develop within the dorms' ambiguous

boundaries.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the Buddhist temples and the home are places that cannot be defined as solely public or private. They are official spaces, regulated by Buddhist behavioral norms, at the same time that they afford or offer a level of privacy that is different from what the memorial walkway provides. Though the spaces themselves are actually quite public, the experience of those spaces as private gives individual community members a feeling of security that, as their comments suggest, they cannot find at the tsunami memorial walkway.

The second explanation described above highlights the extensive personal trauma caused by the tsunami. This notion was most clearly relayed to me by one of my colleagues, Khru Dang. Khru Dang is originally from Bangsak and she became an adoptive mother for a local student after the tsunami struck in 2004. When I asked her about the Tsunami Memorial Park in Nam Khem, she said:

I have never been to the park. Thai people, we don't want to think about it. We want to forget about it, don't want to think about it again and again. I went to a tsunami memorial ceremony only once, in 2008. I didn't like it. It made me sad. I felt very sad, very sorry.

At my house, no one likes the tsunami.

In her statement, Khru Dang maintains that Thai people want to let go of the traumatic past and move forward into the present, but the memorial parks and commemorative events, through their continued evocation of the wave, block local Thais from achieving this goal. In these spaces, Takuapa citizens are directly confronted with the pain and suffering generated by the 2004 disaster.

Khru Dang's strong wish to let go of the tsunami past – that is, a past colored and defined by the wave – can be understood through a Buddhist emotional framework proposed by

---

<sup>41</sup> Megan Sinnott, "Dormitories and Other Queer Spaces: An Anthropology of Space, Gender, and the Visibility of Female Homoeroticism in Thailand," *Feminist Studies* 39 (2013): 333 – 356.

psychological anthropologist Julia Cassaniti. In her book *Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community*, Cassaniti argues that lay Buddhists in a rural Northern Thai community actively work to incorporate the Buddhist idea of impermanence (อนิจจา *anicca*) within everyday life through the cultivation of specific emotions - letting go (ปล่อยวาง *ploy wang*) and acceptance (ทำใจ *tham jai*).<sup>42</sup> The Thai phrase *tham jai* literally translates to “make heart” and refers to an internal process of constructing emotions. Ultimately, Cassaniti suggests that the ability to let go and accept life’s both positive and negative events are important signifiers of proper emotionality in her research community.

I would argue that emotions function similarly in Takuapa as well. Observations gathered over the past four years from funerals and moments of sudden, devastating loss, which are all too common in a rural Thai community, indicate that people in Takuapa actively work to include ideas of impermanence into their everyday lives. When a beloved teacher passed away, student and colleague responses centered on acceptance. “น้องทำใจไม่ได้เลย,” one friend exclaimed, “I can’t accept it at all.” Similarly, a former student asked her peers on Facebook about how to accept what transpired, writing that “I understand when we lose someone important, acceptance is difficult and that we will suffer... but how much must we suffer? How can we ever accept?” “เข้มแข็งนะ,” others urged, “be strong. Everything comes and goes. Accept, make your heart.” The more distant acquaintances used these words to help others work through their grief, whereas

---

<sup>42</sup> Julia Cassaniti, *Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

close friends tended to reiterate these phrases as a way to remind themselves of how to move forward.

The significance of cultivating acceptance within the Phang Nga province can also be seen in the events of a funeral for one of my ninth grade students, who had died unexpectedly on the boarding school's grounds in November 2013. My colleagues in the foreign language office and I attended the first day of the funeral, piling into the school's rickety van after classes concluded in the afternoon to make the hour drive to the temple. When we arrived at the temple, we were warmly greeted by two adults who led us to the inside of a meeting hall where my student's coffin rested. Then, with a kind smile, they excused themselves to greet incoming attendees. After they left, my colleague Phi Um whispered to me that the two adults were our student's parents. I was startled - "but they are so calm!" On the way home, after the monks' had completed the first day's rituals, Phi Um explained to me that the director had offered to conduct a formal police investigation into the mysterious causes of our student's death, but that the parents had declined. "They had made their peace with what happened," Phi Um told me, "they accepted that their son is gone and that the best thing to do is let go." Several other teachers chimed in at that point, exclaiming with notes of admiration in their voices that his parents had "made their hearts very well, they accepted."

As evidenced by these examples, people in Takuapa work hard to incorporate notions of impermanence into their everyday lives. In a region so often and intensely confronted with young or unexpected deaths - painful losses caused by road accidents, rainy season illnesses, and the sea - embodying the emotion of *tham jai* becomes a crucial component of moving on. This can help to explain why many Takuapa locals avoid and remain critical of the more permanent tsunami memorial sites.

However, as the events at the eleventh memorial ceremony elucidate, many Nam Khem locals view the tsunami park in a different light. For them, the park is not a barrier to proper Buddhist emotionality, but rather an important site at which they can move as a community towards acceptance of the wave's devastation. Significantly, the park enables a process of communal emotional recovery in which villagers actively work together to accept and let go of the event. Whereas Cassaniti's framework centers on individual emotional practices, the widespread local engagement at the tsunami memorial ceremony suggests that community togetherness also plays a critical role in processes of acceptance and modes of coping with disaster.

The importance of community in disaster recovery is elaborated upon in a book written by a group of Nam Khem authors entitled *Tsunami: Waves of Reform*, which explains that a strong sense of community cohesion in Nam Khem was generated in the aftermath of the wave.<sup>43</sup> The closeness of the Nam Khem community was something that I personally observed throughout my research in the area. Whenever a villager's son ordained as a monk, the whole town would parade through the streets, dancing and laughing their way to the temple. Similarly, funerals in the community were widely attended, townspeople gathering at the temple or home to pay their respects to the deceased and offer support to their neighbors. Though of course not every family engages with the community in the same way, the sense of togetherness in Nam Khem is particularly strong. Thus, it makes sense that people in Nam Khem would want to commemorate the tsunami together, regardless of religion, in one central place. The memorial park functions as the site through which Nam Khem can remember the tsunami and work as a

---

<sup>43</sup> ปรีดา คงแป้น, ปิยานนถ ประยูร, หนูเพ็ชร แสนอินทร์, มณีรัตน์ มิตรปราสาท, ตร. นฤมล อรุโณทัย, และ นิคานนถ รัตนนาคินทร์, *สีนามิ คลื่นแห่งการปฏิรูป. Tsunami: Waves of Reform* (Bangkok: มูลนิธิชุมชนไท, 2015).

community to accept the wave's devastation. Acceptance and letting go of the past, in this instance, facilitated through community relationship and support.

The tsunami memorial event's significance within Nam Khem stands in stark contrast to the wider community reactions' to tsunami memorials that I encountered over the course of my research, thereby exemplifying the nuances and complexities of tsunami memorial commemoration in Takuapa. As mentioned earlier, for some, like Khru Dang, the tsunami memorials and commemorative events serve as a barrier to acceptance, a blockade hindering them from letting go of the difficult past. But for others, like the families crowded around the tsunami memorial park's courtyard in late December 2015, these spaces and rituals play an important role in the cultivation of acceptance. The permanent, though constantly evolving, memorial provides a space for Nam Khem to filter and sort through tsunami memories, those particularly stubborn moments that resist interpretation, the fragmented details that run on repeat. The park, through enabling the village to come together in a yearly ceremony of remembrance and commemoration, becomes an antidote to these painful shards, a kind of fragrant eucalyptus balm that soothes the rawness of the event and opens up the space for community acceptance.

\* \* \* \*

With slow, deliberate steps, Pin's family and I traversed the length of the tsunami memorial path. We paused to look at the new photographs added to the wall and moved around families commemorating their lost loved ones, maintaining a respectful distance and silence. When we reached the end of the memorial walkway, we turned right and headed towards the park's edge. Prame ran out ahead onto the beach, on a mission to find tiny sand crabs. The little boy from next door, Cha Om, waddled after him on his tiny three-year-old legs. Pin moved in small circles around her mother and me, trying to find the best light for taking selfies. “ຂໍ້ໂຈ້” her

mother called out after her, teasing her by using the southern Thai word to describe a pretty girl a bit too into her looks. Pin laughed and continued snapping photos on her phone. Her father meandered into the center of the park, where he spotted a group of friends congregated near the lunch packets of rice and curry. The men sat chatting for a while under the shade of a big palm tree.

Eventually, we met up with a group of neighbors, who invited us to join them for lunch. We sat together, huddled around bamboo mats, eating the food that had been prepared earlier in the morning for the monks. Salty fish that should be eaten in small bites with rice. Spicy orange curry with pineapple rings and large, fresh prawns. Stir fried vegetables, green chicken curry, sweet, aromatic desserts. We sat chatting and laughing for a little over an hour before heading back to Pin's home.

After Pin's family had fallen into a post-lunch slumber, with the exception of her father who had gone back to his morning task of fixing tires, I slipped out to quickly visit Phi Duang's family just down the road. "Chantal," Phi Dong, a close friend of mine and Phi Duang's younger brother, called out as I pulled up to the front of his family's one story cement home, "how was the ceremony?"

"Good, hot. But good. You didn't go?"

"No, I had to stay at school," he replied. "today, I have duties at the canteen." I smiled. After three years, I knew him well enough to know that this was the polite reason he gave for not attending something that he didn't want to.

"How is your mother?"

"She's inside, you should go see her. She's with Phi Duang and the baby," he said as he hopped onto his motorbike. "I am going back to school."

“Drive safely *naa*.” He glanced down at the scabs covering his elbow, remnants of last month’s crash. “*kha*,” he said as he spun the motorbike around, “I will.”<sup>44</sup>

After Phi Dong left, I walked into the house and joined Phi Duang, Mae Da, and the baby in the kitchen. We sat chatting for over an hour, catching up on all that had happened since the previous August, before I excused myself to head back to the school where I was supposed to meet up with some students on their way to a second memorial ceremony. As I bid the three of them a good afternoon and started on the short drive to Bangsak, I could not help thinking about an evening nearly a year ago, when Mae Da and I watched the sunset together from the tiny stretch of beach located not far from her home. As we stood watching the sun’s rays sink into the sea’s turquoise waters, Mae Da relayed to me her own tsunami narrative, a powerful and strikingly honest story that elucidated the nuances and complexities implicit in tsunami remembrance and commemoration. Her narrative, the pauses and halts, the circles, the jumps, the fragments, has haunted me ever since, reminding me that this work and this project has a purpose. This project is not solely about documenting and analyzing memorial spaces and ceremonies; it is also a project of providing these narratives and experiences, which exist both in the official memorial spaces and in the vernacular forms of remembrance, a space for expression. A place in which the narratives can go, can flow, can exist and be heard.

---

<sup>44</sup> In Takuapa, it was not uncommon for an older man (*phi*) to use the female politeness marker *kha* instead of the masculine *khrap* when talking with children or with younger women whom they viewed as very close friends or as younger sisters (*nong*).

## Chapter Four

### Tsunami Memories in the Everyday

“Teacher, can you hear that? The sea? It’s so loud.

Tsunami is coming. No, just kidding *khrap*.”

\*

“*Phi*, last night I had a dream about a tsunami.”

His gaze locks with mine. Dark eyes cloud over.

“The sea is loud tonight,” he says.

His face suddenly serious. Tight jaw, pursed lips.

“Tsunami is coming.”

Then, in a flash, the seriousness is gone.

Light returns, a smile.

“No, just kidding,” he says, “It’s only the waves. No tsunami.

Just a dream. Chantal บ้าจริง

You’re crazy.”

\*

In Takuapa, the tsunami can be found everywhere. It exists in objects, both old and new, in signs for tsunami evacuation routes dotting the rural highway Route 4, in imaginary lines of the water’s height drawn across walls, in photographs no longer decipherable, the memories contained within their frames made foggy by saltwater and sand.<sup>45</sup> It is there in houses, in forgotten canteens now overgrown with vines. It fills the pauses, the spaces, the gaps in conversation. It tumbles out in the middle of parties, in accidental, haphazard, chaotic ways. Sometimes it rushes in like the sea during a rainy season storm, knocking people down, a sudden and startling presence. Other times it seeps into moments, a temporary and fleeting apparition, a ghost both metaphorical and real. It challenges. It pushes against. It demands recognition and symbolization, interpretation, at the same time that it asks to be let go.

The tsunami’s ubiquitous presence in Takuapa has sparked the current chapter. This section is an exploration into the unofficial ways of remembering and forgetting the tsunami in

---

<sup>45</sup> Fuyubi Nakamura, “Memory in the Debris: The 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami,” *Anthropology Today* 28 (2012): 20 – 23.

Takuapa, an examination of the physical places, discursive spaces, and social contexts in which the tsunami is present. The chapter is structured as a collection of anecdotes, each anecdote exemplifying one particular strand of vernacular remembrance that I encountered over the course of my time in Takuapa. Though I separate the stories in order to emphasize specific themes, the narratives and events cannot be understood as completely distinct. These narratives are intricately woven together, their details and significances entwine and overlap in endless ways. Therefore, though I present the stories independently, each anecdote must be made sense of in lieu of its interactions with the others, its engagement with the different forms of vernacular commemoration, and its relationship to tsunami remembrance, forgetting, and “unforgetting” more broadly.<sup>46</sup>

Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, in her work on cultural poetics in rural America, reflects upon the relationship of everyday stories to processes of forgetting and unforgetting that can often fall outside of the dominant culture’s hierarchy of thought and analysis. In a chapter on unforgetting, she writes:

I wonder if this is not what Heidegger (1971) called the certitude of forgetting – the origin of conceptual and representational thought in the act of forgetting that every clearing also conceals. It seems to me a kind of disciplined amnesia that replaces real space and time with a classificatory, tabular space (Fabian 1983) and re-members things only as fixed symbols or examples of ideas – as afterthought, illustration, ornament, or supplement. As Fabian (1983) argues, the result is a radically taxonomic model of culture that sees it as a process of selection and classification rather than a mode of creation and production.

The question, then, is how to “un-conceal” through un-forgetting (Heidegger 1971), how to arrest the progress of transcendent critique long enough to recognize the practices of concealment and forgetting inherent in all modes of explanation, description, and analysis. How to suspend the urge to Truth long enough to notice the nervous force and density of a lived cultural poetics caught in its own tensions of forgetting and unforgetting. It is an effort that leaves analysis and description caught in the space of alterity itself where the other remains exorbitant – an irreducible enigma that “refuses to

---

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

be tamed or domesticated by a theme” (Levinas 1981: 100) and opens into tensions, latent possibilities, and states of desire.<sup>47</sup>

This passage eloquently presents a framework through which to make sense of the tsunami’s place within the Takuapa vernacular. Stewart’s discussion about the processes of representational thought inherent in practices of forgetting and the concealment contained within every act of explanation, remembrance, and forgetting is particularly useful when thinking about everyday tsunami memories. In the case of the tsunami, forgetting and remembering take many different forms. For some, the tsunami’s extremeness created gaps in memories, little pockets of blank spaces in narratives, interpretations, and significations of the wave. For others, forgetting just happened, the details fading with time’s relentless push forward, the sharpness of experiences dulling with the weeks, the months, and the years. And yet, at other moments, forgetting involved active choices about what to recall and include within narratives of both the tsunami and oneself. This mode of forgetting works similarly to *tham jai* or acceptance, as outlined in the previous chapter’s discussion of Cassaniti’s research; in this instance, letting go of specific moments occurs as a result of deliberate choices and actions to forget certain details and remember others.

Importantly, as Stewart notes above, each process of forgetting and remembering conceals details, moments, feelings, and memories. In this way, any act of remembering, forgetting, and unforgetting, including this chapter which documents my own recollections and interpretations of others’ tsunami memories, is necessarily incomplete. Though the anecdotes that make up this chapter are intended to elucidate a few recurrent themes in tsunami vernacular remembrance, as how I observed during my time in Takuapa, the narratives, because of engagement with processes of recall and concealment, resist conclusive classification and

---

<sup>47</sup> Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, 71.

interpretation. They raise questions, some of which cannot be answered, others of which take on varying degrees of relevance depending on the context, the situation, and the moment. In their subjects, objects, and temporality, these stories present certain types of information while necessarily obscuring others. These narratives can never create a complete picture. This chapter is, therefore, not intended to provide a comprehensive, fully generalized interpretation of tsunami vernacular remembrances. But rather to give readers a few examples of the spaces that the tsunami occupies today and the types of questions that can be asked, explored, looked into when analyzing tsunami vernacular remembrance and forgetting in the Takuapa context.

### *1. Fragmented Temporalities*

*January 2015*

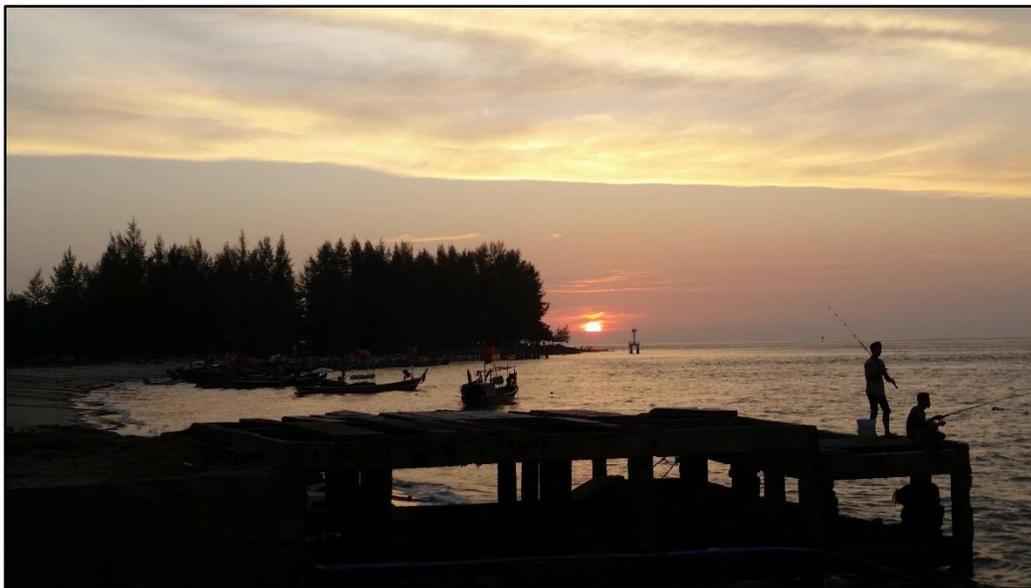


Fig. 11: Sunset at the beach with Mae Da

Mae Da met me on the narrow concrete road. “This way, *nong*,” she said as she veered left off the main path suddenly, continuing down a small muddy walkway that led past a pile of old car tires stacked by a concrete house with a terra cotta tile roof, past lines of clothes drying in the early evening sun, past a pack of mangy stray dogs lounging in the shade of a palm tree. The dogs, sleepy from the heat, did not blink as we walked by. “Dong said you went to see the

sunset. But I knew you didn't know the way," she explained as we made our way down to the sand, sidestepping mud and plastic bags imprinted with 7-11's green logo. We chatted amiably about Thai food, the frigid weather in Ithaca, New York, and our families until we reached the water's edge, where, lulled into a stupor by the soft pink light and the sound of waves gently lapping the shore, a comfortable silence settled over us.

The beach, a roughly thirty meter stretch of land nestled between a wooden fishing pier and a concrete foundation that stuck out awkwardly from the sand, was different from what I had expected. Gone were the tourists clad in bikinis and speedos, walking down the coast hand-in-hand, gone were the children splashing in the water. This was not a beach for leisure.

On the left, past the pier where two men sat in deep concentration, their eyes trained on their fishing lines, was a cluster of small boats anchored close to the shore. The boats rocked back and forth with the waves. In the morning, if the weather was good, these boats would head out to sea, their owners hoping for a bountiful catch. To the right, further down the coast, was Nam Khem's main harbor, where a collection of blue and orange fishing boats and towering ferries, which shuttle cars to and from the nearby island of Kho Khao, were docked for the night. "It's beautiful, Mae Da."

She smiled and nodded her head, her eyes still locked on the sea, her profile lit by the sunset's golden light. Then she turned and pointed at the foundation behind me. "That was the Nam Khem harbor before. But now the harbor sits there, where you see the boats." She rotated a bit to her right and gestured to a palm tree. "A white man used to live here. He was an old man. When the water came, he climbed this tree. His house was destroyed, gone. He went back to his country after that. He was an old man. But he climbed up the tree and survived. Many could not climb or run, so they died." She paused for a moment and turned back to face the sea. Having

previously heard from Phi Dong the extent of the tsunami's effects on his family and feeling that perhaps this conversation was too close to home, I opened my mouth to change the subject. But before I could say anything, Mae Da continued her story, her body pivoting towards me, her eyes locking on mine.

“I was at work, at a hotel,” she said. “A hotel in Khao Lak. There was this little girl. A *farang*. She had scrapes on her knees. They were bleeding. On her knees, so bloody. And she was crying. Her parents – I don't know what happened to them. That girl, she had scrapes, all on her legs. Her knees. She cried and cried. I held her close to me. I needed to go to Takuapa. My mother was at home. That girl was sobbing. I felt so sorry for her. She was hurt. I wanted to go to Takuapa. Drive my bike there. That girl? I didn't know her parents, where they were. I just held her. Told her it would be okay. I was in Khao Lak. Her knees, so cut up. Many scrapes. On her knees. I was at work.”

She said all this without pausing for a breath, in a steady stream of narration that seemed to loop back around inside of itself, continuous yet convoluted, fragmented. When she finished, she smiled at me and, without waiting for me to utter the only words that I could think of - “เสียดใจ ด้วยค่ะ / *sia jai duai kha*,” a phrase similar to the American “I am so sorry for your loss,” told me that it was time to go because the sunset had finished and the beach was not beautiful in the dark. As we walked back along the muddy path, our conversation returned to food and my frustration at the absence of spicy dishes in American cuisine. The seriousness of the previous moment all but gone, its remnants having dispersed and retreated with the tide.

\* \* \* \*

To this day, Mae Da's story haunts me. Her earnestness, the way her eyes searched mine as she spoke, the chaotic language, the details that were not mentioned and yet, in their absence,

ever more conspicuous. I am not sure why she chose to tell me her story. Perhaps she had heard from her son that I was studying about the tsunami. Or maybe the fact that I was not Thai engendered a certain level of comfort, my Americanness opening up a space for the details of her experience to be shared. But no matter the reason, it seemed quite clear to me that this was not a narrative Mae Da had rehearsed. Her words had a striking rawness to them.

Mae Da's story speaks to how the trauma generated by the tsunami affects the ways in which the tsunami occupies vernacular memories. That is, her narrative elucidates what many trauma theorists see as the fundamental unknowability and un-interpretability of traumatic events. Anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his research on paramilitary violence in Colombia, describes the unknowability of traumatic events through the metaphor of *la rosca*, a "doughnut-shaped pastry with a hollow center."<sup>48</sup> When discussing the shifts in Colombia's violence, Taussig writes:

So what's new? Well, the use of overt violence is new, that's true, but it was always there, really, hovering in the wings. What stays the same, the very same, is the hollow center we can never get to know. The *rosca*.<sup>49</sup>

The hollow center that Taussig presents through the symbol of *la rosca* resists interpretation. It can never be known or made sense of in the linear chronology of cause and effect. It exists in a different temporality. Trauma theorists Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière directly address this presence of a non-linear temporality in instances of extreme trauma. In an interview with Cathy Caruth, a trauma theorist at Cornell University, Gaudillière states:

---

<sup>48</sup> Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 117.

<sup>49</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 117.

But we are not accustomed to think about a temporality that doesn't work with either the normal rhythm or the normal direction of the arrow of time. Francoise said, nicely, that these patients are opening to us the door of time, and I would add that they're opening to us another theory of time.<sup>50</sup>

Davoine continues:

Because we are impregnated by tenses, by past, present and future, the other point these patients wipe out is the sense of causality. For us, the past causes future consequences. It is necessary for science. But when the arrow of time doesn't work, when the past and future are always present, it is very disturbing. These patients always state the present.<sup>51</sup>

I include these comments not to psychologize Mae Da or to simplistically situate her narrative within a context of largely Western-based trauma theory, but rather to demonstrate how events, such as the tsunami, can disrupt temporality for those who survived. Davoine and Gaudillière explain the various ways in which traumatic events disturb the linearity of time. Mae Da's story can be understood within this temporal framework. Her narrative exemplifies how the tsunami broke apart linear time, fracturing clearly defined paths of cause and effect, past to present to future. In her story, the tsunami exists within its own temporality. There were no clear markers of time in her narrative. She did not open her story with "that day" or "ten years ago." Unlike most other tsunami narratives that I encountered, which started as the wave was approaching, Mae Da's retelling began in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The linear structure of first the tsunami came, then I did this, then this happened was missing. There was no tsunami in her story. There was only the girl in her arms, her mother at home, and a trip to Takuapa.

---

<sup>50</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Mad Witnesses: A Conversation with Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière," in *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 90.

<sup>51</sup> Caruth, "Mad Witnesses," 91.

The significance of Mae Da's narrative extends beyond its relationship to temporality. The roughness of her words is, I would argue, not solely linked to the deep trauma caused by the wave, but also to the unspoken social rules that discourage discussion of serious emotions and events. From my own experiences in Takuapa, I observed that other Thais tended to consider dwelling on a serious topic as negative. I noted that people who became particularly stuck on events, such as breakups, were often teased by their friends as being crazy or censored by their friends, who would change the subject as soon as the event came up or, sometimes, ignore the comments made entirely. Furthermore, I saw that whenever someone expressed feeling stressed or nervous about a situation, others would typically respond by saying “อย่าเครียด อย่าคิดมากเกินไป” or “don't be serious, don't think too much.” These words, which are typically used in conjunction, function to regulate improper displays of emotionality and attachment to events, people, and situations. Being serious is a sign of being unable to let a situation go, letting go, as the last chapter mentioned, functioning as an important signifier of proper emotionality in the Thai context. I believe that these social guidelines for displaying emotions may have contributed to the rawness of Mae Da's narrative. It is likely that she has not had the opportunity to share her story often, both because it is a very painful experience to talk about and because it is not appropriate to discuss in a social setting. As my older colleague once stated, “we never talk about the tsunami here. It's a pity. I think we should talk about it. But we don't. We're not supposed to.”

## *II. A Continued Present-ness*

*June 2012*

On a Tuesday nearly four years ago, I made the spontaneous decision to stop at *Wat Ratniramit* in Bang Muang when driving home from the Takuapa bus station. I had passed the

Bang Muang temple many times before, but, still being new to Thailand, I had not worked up the courage to venture inside the temple complex on my own before that afternoon. I made the wide left turn into the complex, passing underneath the temple's gleaming gold archway, and parked my motorbike next to a small stand selling amulets. The man behind the counter caught my eye as I walked past, giving me a curt nod.

The temple complex was more spacious than I had expected. Uncertain of where to begin, I headed towards a small shrine in the back, trying hard to stay inconspicuous, which proved impossible once the temple's many stray dogs caught sight of me. A pack of roughly twenty dogs barreled towards me, growling and barking ferociously, alerting everyone to my presence and prompting a monk to race out of his dorm and shoo them away. Once the dogs were under control, the middle-aged monk and I began to slowly meander around the temple's space. We chatted lightly as we walked, the monk relaying that the temple had been built over a hundred years before and that it currently housed six monks. The monk paused at the outside corner of the large temple hall, which was closed in the late afternoon, to explain that the Bang Muang temple had become a makeshift refugee camp, providing shelter and relief to weary survivors, in the aftermath of the tsunami. He told me that many people came to the temple seeking counseling, to find out what they should do for the loved ones they lost, how they should make merit for them, what rituals to perform when there was no body or confirmation of death. The monk then halted for a moment, turning his gaze towards the temple's entrance, which faced west towards the sea, before informing me that he was from Nam Khem.

"I lost my family," he said, "my sister and my son. After they died, I became a monk. I have stayed here since then." There was a tenseness to his jaw as he spoke. When he turned back towards me, his eyes were filled with tears that did not fall but shone glassy in the afternoon

light. I did not know what to say. What do you do in these moments when loss suddenly stares you in the face? Do you say that you are sorry? Or that you are also sad? Or do you let the loss simply exist, let it fill up the space around you, let it build into a moment of tension so that it can disperse, diminish, dissipate? So that it can go into the ground or up into the trees, so that it can settle like a thin dust over the temple's golden Buddha statues where eventually the rain will come to wash it away?

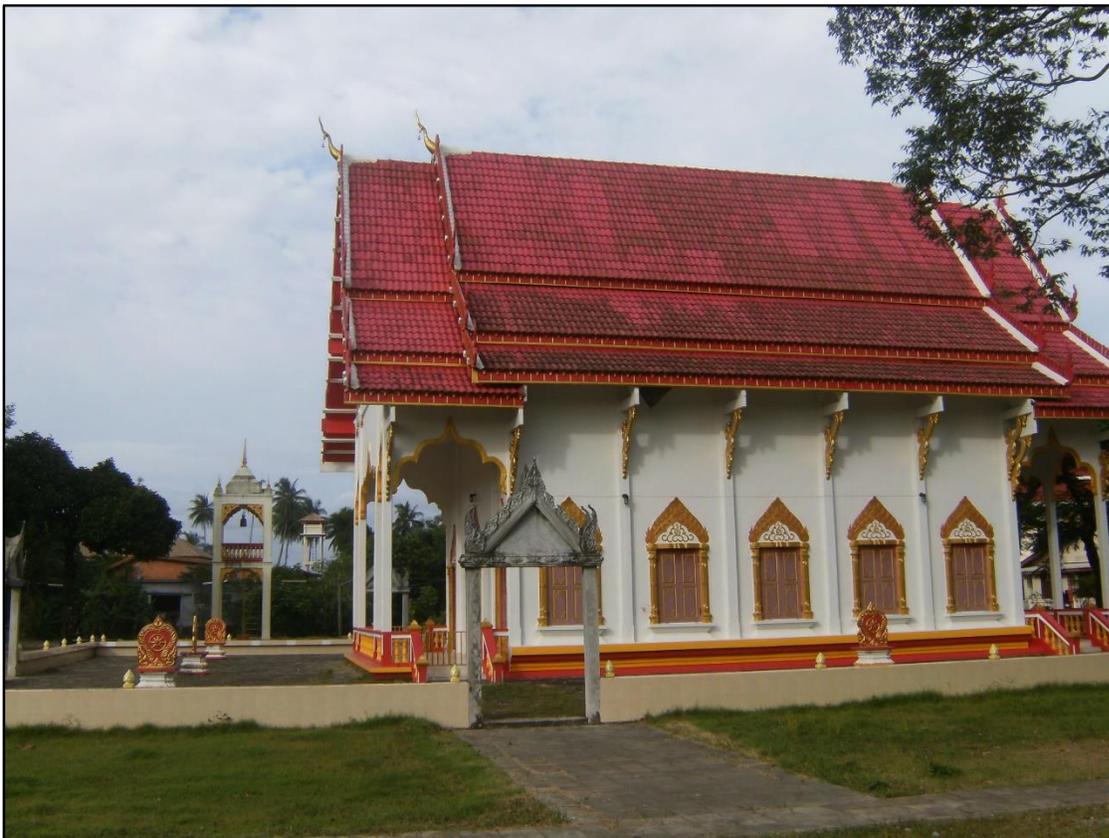


Fig. 12: *Wat Ratniramit* in 2012

\* \* \* \*

The monk's narrative relayed above, like Mae Da's story, illuminates the continued present-ness of the tsunami in Takuapa today. Stories such as these that appear unexpectedly out of a conversation, abruptly entering moments and just as quickly leaving them, contain within their words the tsunami's ongoing existence and demonstrate the saliency of tsunami memories in Takuapa. For many, memories of the tsunami occupy a space just under the surface level.

There, they exist in a tumultuous limbo, constantly ready to spill out into conversations and moments when something, such as a foundation of an old building or the offhand reference to family photographs now disappeared, triggers their release. Sometimes the tsunami memories abruptly burst into conversations, directly addressing those present and refusing any form of censorship. In other moments, the tsunami would arrive more subtly in conversations, like, for instance, when Phi Dong would warn me not to go to the beach after dark. “It’s not beautiful at night,” he would say, “you can’t see the sea,” the subtext of which being that I would not be able to see the water retreat as it does when a tsunami is coming. This visual clue is what saved many people in the Nam Khem community, including Pin and her family.

And sometimes, the tsunami would appear in the form of jokes. My students constantly referenced the wave through jokes about the loudness of the sea. “Tsunami is coming,” they would giggle, motioning in the direction of the coast, the splendid color of the water just visible through the trees from the school. Or if I passed students on my way to read at the beach, they would tease me saying “don’t go teacher, big tsunami. Ha ha ha.” The frequent jokes embody the tsunami’s ever-present threat, a future possibility that occupies the present time, and remind listeners that the tsunami maintains its significance, now, more than eleven years after the tsunami crashed into the coast.

These different examples of the tsunami’s ongoing present-ness raise questions about the social contexts and moments in which it is permissible to talk about the disaster and its immense consequences. In the two anecdotes documented above, the speakers and I had been alone in a public space that, at the time of our conversation, had been empty. It seems that the privacy of the conversations, coupled with my own foreignness, created a context in which it was acceptable to reference the pain and suffering caused by the tsunami directly. The relationship

between different types of private and public spaces to modes of addressing the tsunami is an important aspect to expand upon in future manifestations of this project. It appears that different social settings – public or private, official or unofficial, individual or communal – enable distinct types of tsunami memories to surface and influence how various forms of remembrance are attended to, engaged with, and accepted.

### *III. Conversational Bursts*

*December 2012*

On an evening a handful of days before the eighth anniversary of the tsunami, the school's director sat entertaining some official visitors outside of the school's homestay. The director, his guests, and some male teachers, Phi Dong included, were chatting over fried chicken and Leo beers. I ran into them on my way home from the office and they invited me to join. After a few moments of polite chitchat, the athletics coach asked me to sing a song for the visitors, requesting "My Heart Will Go On," the slow, melancholic ballad from the *Titanic* film. I did not make it through the first line before Phi Dong stopped me. "Too sad," he interjected. The Thai language teacher sitting next to me, Phi Nong, then asked me if I knew about the tsunami. "*Kha.*"

"It was very bad here," Phi Nong said. "Many people died. Phi Dong's family too." I turned to look at Phi Dong, but his gaze was trained on the edge of the table. When he finally lifted his eyes, I tried to give him an encouraging smile, painfully aware that I did not know the proper way to respond to this new information, especially within a public party setting. "Don't smile," Phi Nong instructed, "It's sad." He then laughed, showing that he was only teasing me, before he switched the conversation back to the upcoming football matches.

A few weeks passed before Phi Dong brought up the tsunami to me. As we sat drinking iced tea at a pavilion by the school's front gate, Phi Dong told me that funny, happy-go-lucky Tong lost both his parents in the tsunami. I then asked Phi Dong where he was when the tsunami struck. He was silent for a while, his eyes focused on something past my shoulder. "Phuket," he said finally. Then he looked at me, his round, gentle eyes clouding for a moment – "the bridge... I couldn't get back. I couldn't get home." We rarely talked about the tsunami again after that day. Sometimes his family would come up in conversation, but we hardly referenced the wave directly. Tong, likewise, never brought up the tsunami, except when the sea was being unusually loud, the waves crashing against the coast in a deafening roar. "Tsunami is coming," Tong would then say giggling, sticking his tongue out and making a ghost face. "Blaaaaaaaaaaaaah."

\* \* \* \*

The above conversations serve as further examples of the tsunami's ongoing significance within Takuapa and highlight how the tsunami is often addressed on registers that seem, in many ways, counterintuitive, such as when the tsunami erupted in the middle of parties when group camaraderie and usually, in the case of my male acquaintances, alcohol whittled away at carefully maintained affects. Another example of intoxication's facilitation of tsunami memory expression is contained within the following anecdote. On a balmy evening in 2013, on my way home from the beach with a friend, I stopped briefly at the school's gate to wish the campus' security guard a good night. A few of the school's employees were gathered around the security guard's station at that time, watching a boxing match on the crackling television. Open bottles of Leo beer and half-empty cartons of cigarettes littered the table. One man, Khun Phap, offered my friend and me something to drink. We politely declined and excused ourselves to go to bed, when Khun Phap told us that his family had been killed in the tsunami and that he now lived

entirely alone. Startled, my friend and I completely froze, unsure of what to do. “I am so sorry for your loss,” I finally whispered as he stared at me, his eyes foggy from the alcohol. Then a male teacher, who had just arrived at the security guard’s station, chimed in, “you’re not alone Khun Phap, you’re stuck with all of us!” A few of the others chuckled, but Khun Phap’s face remained still. When my friend and I turned to leave, Khun Phap’s eyes continued to follow our movements, though it seemed like he was not really seeing us, his mind somewhere else, far from that tiny open-air hut and the TV blaring a muay Thai match.

The narratives presented at parties, enabled through forms of social and physical intoxication, reveal the continued experience of the tsunami in Takuapa. Moreover, these sudden and unexpected comments once again raise the question of in which contexts is it okay for people to address the tsunami or express the pain caused by its arrival. In both of the above examples, the tsunami was brought up in a nearly all male group setting in which alcohol was actively being consumed by most present at the gathering.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that certain unofficial public spaces, especially those involving alcohol, facilitate and allow for the expression of particular types of tsunami narratives and memories. While censorship of stories still occurs within these group settings, the forms that the social censorship take differ markedly from patterns of censorship observed in other contexts. This highlights the fact that different social settings influence both the types of tsunami memories being expressed and the forms of emotional censorship that are being employed to regulate these memories.

---

<sup>52</sup> In 2012, when I first arrived in Takuapa, alcohol consumption was largely restricted to men. However, observations made in 2015, suggest that the rigidity of this division is beginning to fade. Many more of my female colleagues drank at work events in 2015 than they did in 2012, though the type of alcohol consumed was still divided along gender lines. Men typically drank beer or whiskey, women usually consumed wine coolers.

“It was after the tsunami. There was this noodle stand that was close to the temple in Bang Muang. The one where they did all the cremations. The stand was right down the street from the temple, not far. And the stand had stayed open that whole time. Really, most all other shops were closed. But that noodle stand stayed open every day until ten at night. It was the only shop open. And one night, all these people came to eat at the stand late. Like, when it was almost closing. Those people walked there, on foot. It was weird. Because they should have driven on motorbikes, no? So they walked up to the stand and ordered bowls of noodle soup. Those people ate quickly. Very quickly, like they were starving. Then the cook went to wash dishes in the back. After a while, the cook went to collect money for the dinners. But when she walked to the tables, no one was there. Everyone was gone. There was no money, nothing. And that cook, she said that they came from the temple. They were ghosts. We think like this. They were hungry because they didn’t have anything to eat in the temple.”

\* \* \* \*

This story was relayed to me by a colleague, Phi Jen, on a rainy afternoon in our office. The anecdote, which resembles in part a common ghost story that children may share on the way to summer camp, takes place at a small restaurant not far from *Wat Ratniramit* in Bang Muang, where I had encountered the monk from the narrative above in 2012. In that conversation, the monk had detailed the Bang Muang temple’s role in providing shelter for tsunami survivors, which anthropologist Monica Falk similarly documents in her work *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand: Socio-cultural Responses*. However, as my colleague noted, *Wat Ratniramit* also served as a body identification and cremation center. Falk states that *Wat Ratniramit* received more than 1,400 bodies for identification after the wave and that “from 6 or 7 a.m. until

midnight, the monks were conducting cremation ceremonies.”<sup>53</sup> One of her interlocutors, a young monk who had lived at the temple for many years, relayed that the monks “had sore throats from all the chanting.”<sup>54</sup> It was a difficult, emotional time when cremation ceremonies occurred at all hours, sometimes being conducted in the open-air for lack of formal facilities.

Phi Jen’s tsunami ghost story was not the first time I encountered ghosts in conversations. For example, my boss, Khun Lak, left a festival early one night, explaining that she was afraid to drive home alone after eleven because a ghost might plop down on the back of her motorbike. When I expressed some fear, she added, “but don’t you worry, there are two of you on the bike. No room for a ghost!” Khun Lak was also the one who informed me that the barking of stray dogs after midnight indicated that some spirit or ghost was close by. While a fear of ghosts preceded the tsunami, as notions of ghosts in Thailand find roots in a theory of good and bad death, bad death meaning one that is unnatural, unexpected, or accidental, which is “not to say that it had no antecedents or causes, but only that it could have been otherwise,” the fear intensified after the wave struck.<sup>55</sup> One of my interlocutors, a young man who works as a translator in the tourist hotspot Khao Lak, explained that Thais commonly abandoned their land on the coast in the wake of the disaster for fear of ghosts. Others presented stories of tsunami ghosts flagging down truck drivers traveling late at night, asking for a ride. The truck drivers would accept the passengers, but when they went to drop off the hitchhikers at their destinations, the trucks were, invariably, empty. A similar pattern has been observed by taxi drivers in Japan

---

<sup>53</sup> Monica Lindberg Falk, *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand: Socio-cultural Responses* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 66 & 73.

<sup>54</sup> Falk, *Post-Tsunami Recovery*, 72.

<sup>55</sup> Rosalind C. Morris, “Giving Up Ghosts: Notes on Trauma and the Possibility of the Political from Southeast Asia,” *positions* 16 (2008): 252.

after the 2011 tsunami occurred; many drivers recorded having to pay the cab fare themselves after their passengers disappeared.<sup>56</sup>

This focus on tsunami ghosts that my colleagues and students maintained has been studied widely by psychologists and social scientists, the focus of these studies most often on the barriers ghosts have posed to tourism recovery in Phang Nga and on the existence of ghosts as indicators of psychological stress.<sup>57</sup> However, ghosts should not be solely understood in these terms. Anthropologist Jean M. Langford, in her work with emigrants from Cambodia and Laos in the United States, asks “how might we make sense of the ghostly figures in emigrants’ memories without either “anthropologizing” or psychologizing them, that is, without reducing them to signs of cultural beliefs or psychic symbols of trauma?”<sup>58</sup> While tsunami ghosts should be viewed within the frame of Thailand’s religious-cultural context and the trauma generated by the wave itself, these ghosts must also be analyzed as real, agentic entities that have meaning outside of the metaphoric realm. For many residents of Takuapa, these ghosts exist as bodies that traverse the boundaries between the living and the dead. They engage with the people of Takuapa, continually reminding the community, through their actual presence and through stories of their encounters, of the wave. In this way, the body of the tsunami ghost, like other objects and places found throughout Takuapa, becomes a site of vernacular remembrance.

Memories and experiences of the tsunami are projected onto and transmitted through its ghostly

---

<sup>56</sup> Hideaki Ishibashi, “Taxi drivers report ‘ghost passengers’ in area devastated in 2011 tsunami,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, January 21, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life\\_and\\_death/AJ201601210001](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201601210001).

<sup>57</sup> Example articles include: Emma Varley, Wanrudee Isaranuwachai, and Peter C. Coyte, “Ocean waves and roadside spirits: Thai health service providers’ post-tsunami psychosocial health,” *Disasters* 36 (2012): 656 – 675; Bongkosh Rittichainuwat, “Ghosts: A travel barrier to tourism recovery,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38 (2011): 437 – 459.

<sup>58</sup> Jean M. Langford, *Consoling Ghosts: Stories of Medicine and Mourning from Southeast Asians in Exile* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2013), 15.

body, a body that is itself made up of the wave; the ghost's haunting recalling and evoking the disastrous event through its ongoing interactions with the community.

#### *V. Vernacular Objects and Spaces*



Fig. 13: Remnants of a hotel found along Bangsak Beach

“They are clearing the land down by the shrimp processing plant, for a new resort. They finally took down the Bangsak Hotel. You know where I’m talking about? That old building in the jungle? It’s been abandoned since the tsunami.”

“Teacher, this Buddha was at the old Bangsak School. It survived the tsunami.”

“Chinese volunteers helped rebuild this roof. The water destroyed everything. It flooded the whole house.”

“That’s the old school’s canteen. Don’t go wandering around there. The grass is too high. You won’t be able to see the snakes.”

“This was the old pier.”

“We had to make a new shrine. The first one for *Jao Pho Bun Thale* was destroyed in the wave.”

\* \* \* \*

As evidenced by the above examples, the tsunami’s positioning within the everyday is not restricted to vernacular language. Objects and places scattered throughout Takuapa are also intimately linked to the disaster. The wave exists in everyday physical spaces, such as houses, hotels, and canteens. It is found in material objects, in shells that students claim contain spirits, in blue and white evacuation route signs, in the gold-coated image of *jao pho bun thale*. These material remnants embody, carry, and transmit memories of the wave, functioning as what scholars Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer deem “testimonial objects.” In their work on Holocaust memory, Hirsch and Spitzer write that material objects “carry memory traces from the past and embody the process of its transmission.”<sup>59</sup> They further suggest that objects of the past are “points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall.”<sup>60</sup>

This notion of “testimonial objects” provides a helpful lens through which to make sense of the tsunami remnants found throughout the Takuapa district. For instance, the old canteen, the foundations of which are still standing along the outer edge of the current Bangsak School, recalls past memories about both the earlier Bangsak School and the destruction of that school by

---

<sup>59</sup>Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission,” *Poetics Today* 27 (Summer 2006): 353.

<sup>60</sup> Hirsch and Spitzer, “Testimonial Objects,” 358.

the wave. Contained within the canteen's crumbling cement are traces of the tsunami. In fact, the canteen's structure can never be fully defined outside of the disaster's context, its continuous state of decay forever interwoven with the giant wave.

The various testimonial objects currently found within Takuapa can be broken down into two main types of objects: those, like the old canteen, that are preserved in states of ongoing deterioration and those, such as the temples employed for body identification after the wave, that continue to be used in practical ways not directly tied to the tsunami. However, it is important to note that existing objects are not the only materials that are marked with the imprint of the tsunami. Objects and spaces that are no longer there, having been washed away with the wave, also transmit memories and stories, testimonies, of the 2004 disaster. Family photographs, motorbikes previously utilized to go to work, items from the family altar that were carried away by the tsunami's fierce current all embody, through their absence, narratives of the wave.

The first set of objects noted above includes places such as the hotel and its pool, now twisted and warped, found along the edge of Bangsak Beach. Significantly, these types of material spaces relate paradoxically to the Buddhist concept of impermanence. While more research needs to be done to assess community perception of these spaces and motivations for leaving the concrete foundations and hotel structures in place, it seems like one possible explanation for the ruins is that the community is not concerned with their presence anymore. Leaving the spaces alone, allowing them to crumble and decay on their own time, is one way of letting go of the tsunami. However, these objects and places, through their ongoing presence, continue to evoke images and memories of the wave. The deteriorating materials, thus, complicate the earlier discussion of the active cultivation of acceptance and letting go, suggesting that Takuapa community members relate to the concepts of impermanence and

suffering differentially depending upon the social and physical contexts. The relationship between these tsunami ruins, impermanence, and persisting memories must be examined in greater depth in any future manifestations of this project.

Materials belonging to the second set of objects, which include items like the Buddha statue on the school's campus and places like the temple in Takuapa, continue to be used for ritual or social purposes in the present. These spaces are both maintained and highly functional, unlike the tsunami ruins mentioned above, and they do not, by themselves, evoke memories of the wave. Rather, it is the process of actively labeling these objects or spaces as being connected to the tsunami that recalls the tsunami memories contained within the physical places and objects.

This pattern of directly remembering the tsunami in relation to these spaces suggests that, for some, holding onto tsunami memories is important. The wish to recall specific memories that several of my interlocutors maintained complicates notions about the ostensible desirability of acceptance and letting go within a rural Thai Buddhist context and highlights how the dichotomy of attachment and impermanence is being negotiated, made sense of, and challenged by lay Thai Buddhists in daily life. For many in Takuapa, wanting to remember those lost in the tsunami is not viewed as a contradiction to Buddhist teachings about impermanence. Rather, they see continued attachment to lost loved ones and the wave as one of part of the larger recovery process and movement towards accepting the tsunami's regional devastation. Acceptance, letting go, and attachment, in this instance, not pitched as opposing or contrasting ideas.

## Chapter Five

### **Tsunami Museums: Education and Tourism as Means of Remembrance**

The preceding chapters explore tsunami memorialization through the analysis of official memorial sites, community organized rituals, and vernacular language and spaces. This chapter examines a different side of tsunami memorialization, zeroing in on the genre of the tsunami museum. But what exactly is a tsunami museum? And in what ways, if any, does a tsunami museum participate in the commemoration of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami?

I first stumbled upon a tsunami museum by accident. One day in 2014, a friend and I were heading to the Wednesday market in Bang Niang to pick up afternoon snacks when we spontaneously decided to stop for a cup of Western-styled iced coffee at a small shop on the way. The coffee shop sat along a narrow lane that ran parallel to the main road and eventually led to the turn off for the market. On our way to the shop, we drove past a large blue sign for an international tsunami museum that I had up until that point never noticed. The sign hung down from the porch roof of a two-story building and, from the road, I could make out a group of foreigners exiting the museum through a set of glass doors. Though curious about what a tsunami museum entailed, my friend and I did not stop at the museum that day. Nor did I enter any tsunami museum before I started conducting research for this project, originally finding the idea of the tsunami museum, with its location in the heart of a tourist hub and its ostensible dependency on tourism for sustainment, deeply problematic.

The current chapter attempts to disrupt or complicate these assumptions. Through an analysis of two museum sites located within the Takuapa district – the International Tsunami Museum in Bang Niang and the Tsunami Museum Khao Lak, also located in Bang Niang – this section works to make sense of how tsunami museums fit into the community and the role that

these museums play in Takuapa.<sup>61</sup> It asks whether the founding and maintenance of tsunami museums can only be understood through the lens of tourism, especially as how international tourism connects to local economies, or if the tsunami museums can be seen as participating in something more. That is, this chapter explores how museums contribute to the production and preservation of tsunami memories and how these spaces can be understood as sites of commemoration.

In order to assess the relationship between the tsunami museums and tsunami memorialization more fully, it is important to first understand the missions behind each of the museum's founding. In her book on race and anthropology in France's Museum of Man, historian Alice L. Conklin paraphrases Georges Henri Rivière, the assistant director for France's Museum of Man in the late 1920's, as stating that there are "four roles of an ethnographic museum: a scientific role, an educational role, an artistic one, and a national one."<sup>62</sup> The first two roles of science and education are especially pertinent in the case of the tsunami museums. For example, oceanographer Tony Elliott states, in a discussion of tsunami warning systems, that:

When there is a disaster, there is a lot of interest. That tends to tail off as the memory fades... we need to find ways to maintain the interest and the commitment of the member states to maintain this system in the future.<sup>63</sup>

Elliott's concern of memory fading and, with it, the understanding of safety is significant in relation to the Indian Ocean tsunami. In Thailand, there was no tsunami warning system before 2004. Many people had never heard of a tsunami and did not know how to identify the various

---

<sup>61</sup> Bang Niang is a town situated just north of the popular tourist destination Khao Lak and is roughly thirty kilometers south of Takuapa town's center.

<sup>62</sup> Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850 – 1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 112.

<sup>63</sup> Chris McCall, "Remember the Indian Ocean Tsunami," *The Lancet* 384 (2014): 2097.

signs of the approaching wave, such as the recession of the sea. A young employee at a hotel in Bang Niang once told me that he had been at the beach with his friends when the tsunami came. “Someone told me to run, I think that guy worked at the hotel,” Nik said, “so I ran. But my friends, they thought the water going out wasn’t a big deal. So they stayed. I got on my motorbike with my brother and we drove to pick up my parents at home, so my family was okay. But all six of my friends died.” As Nik’s poignant story demonstrates, knowledge about tsunamis in Takuapa was not widespread in 2004. It is no surprise, then, that both tsunami museums include information about how to identify a tsunami and what steps to take to ensure one’s own safety should another tsunami occur.

However, the tsunami museums’ links to education and science has a significance that extends beyond the perpetuation of this knowledge. Through presenting facts about tsunamis framed within the lens of the 2004 Indian Ocean disaster, tsunami museums can be understood as participating in a form of tsunami commemoration. But how is this relationship engendered? And what type of memorialization do these museums cultivate?

### *I. The International Tsunami Museum, Bang Niang*

The International Tsunami Museum was built with sponsorship from Western Washington University (WWU), receiving \$5,000 USD from the Center for Cross-Cultural Research and \$4,000 USD from the Dean’s Fund for Excellence.<sup>64</sup> According to the museum’s founder, WWU professor of psychology Dr. David N. Sattler, the museum was created in 2006 to educate local community members about tsunamis.<sup>65</sup> Dr. Sattler had conducted research on post-traumatic stress in Khao Lak immediately following the tsunami and, through extensive

---

<sup>64</sup> Jillian Sherwin, “Tsunami Researchers Help Rebuild a Community,” *Observer* 20 (2007): 14.

<sup>65</sup> “International Tsunami Museum,” David N. Sattler, last modified 2014, <http://faculty.wvu.edu/sattled/tsunamimuseum1.htm>.

interviews, he had discovered that a lack of public information and education about tsunamis perpetuated community fears of disaster.<sup>66</sup> The museum was built in an effort to address this informational gap. On his own website for the International Tsunami Museum, Dr. Sattler explains the museum's mission as follows:

In March 2006, I came up with an idea to build an educational museum in an area especially hard hit by the tsunami. A museum could help people understand the event that changed so many lives by showing how the Indian Ocean tsunami formed, showing how the tsunami affected the environment, and how foundations, organizations, businesses, and individuals around the world rallied to help. Exhibits in the museum also could discuss the warning signs of a tsunami and how to evacuate, and the new tsunami warning system being built in the Indian Ocean. And, the museum could show hope, resilience, and the human spirit, and help people move forward with their lives.<sup>67</sup>

The International Tsunami Museum set out with the ambitious mission to not only educate community members about tsunamis but to generate a sense of hope and to enable emotional healing. This mission is supported and maintained by the exhibits, sample titles of which include "Earthquakes, Tectonic Plates, and Tsunamis," "Rebuilding Communities and Livelihoods," and "The World Becomes One." Written in both English and Thai, these exhibits work to foster an education on tsunamis and to promote an understanding of the world as a mutually dependent transnational community.

Significantly, Dr. Sattler expressed in an email communication that "the museums in Takuapa district/Bang Niang have evolved over the years; the current museum is NOT the same as the museum I established."<sup>68</sup> Though the museum exhibits have not been altered since the museum's founding in 2006, the management of the museum has changed hands. The museum is currently funded by the Institute for Education and Culture, defined loosely on the museum's Facebook page as a nonprofit organization. However, the museum provides no further

---

<sup>66</sup> Sherwin, "Tsunami Researchers," 13.

<sup>67</sup> "International Tsunami Museum."

<sup>68</sup> In a personal email correspondence with Dr. Sattler, December 2015. Emphasis in the original.

information about its sponsor and the museum's official website is inaccessible due to viruses. The museum's Facebook page does make an announcement in Thai about scholarships awarded to local students and a Phang Nga radio station listed a job posting for the museum in-person manager in February 2013.<sup>69</sup> Outside of these tidbits, not much is made public about the museum or its projects, though the museum is actively collecting entrance donations.

The current International Tsunami Museum is found in a two-story building, sandwiched between restaurants and souvenir shops, located in a busy market section of Bang Niang town. The front of the museum is crowded with various trinkets and souvenirs, such as small glittery elephants, wooden dolls, and key chains that visitors can purchase on their way out. There is a ticket counter that sits outside of large glass doors. Donations are required for entrance to the museum – 100 baht for adult visitors, 50 baht for children. Photos and notes are strictly forbidden in the museum, as an exasperated employee informed me on my first visit to the site, for copyright reasons.

On a later visit to the museum, equipped with a letter from Cornell University about research intent, I tried to gain formal permission to take photos and notes in the museum. I presented the letter to the new museum curator, a middle-aged woman from Bangsak whose young son knew me as a teacher in the region. The curator let me speak to her boss on the phone, who curtly relayed to me in Thai that I would need to wait several days before hearing the results of her decision and that it was unlikely I would be permitted to conduct my research at all. I returned to the museum several times over the following two weeks, only to be told that the curator had not heard back from her boss yet. Finally, after multiple visits, the curator called her

---

<sup>69</sup> "International Tsunami Museum," Facebook, accessed February 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/International-Tsunami-Museum-822001387828897/timeline>; "รอบวันทันข่าว," Public Relations Department Phang Nga, accessed February 25, 2016, [http://radio.prd.go.th/phangnga/ewt\\_news.php?nid=1008](http://radio.prd.go.th/phangnga/ewt_news.php?nid=1008).

boss for me to ask about my research request. Wary of the boss' strict demeanor, I spoke extra politely, using the pronoun “หนู” or “mouse” to appear less threatening. The boss explained to me that it was uncommon for museums in Thailand to give research permission and that she was still waiting to hear from her supervisors. After our conversation, I told the curator that I would like to visit the museum without taking photographs. I paid the 100 baht donation and slid through the two glass doors. I could hear the curator call her boss back after I entered the museum, whispering that “yes, she went inside. Yes, she paid. No photos, yes.”

My experience at the museum made me suspicious. The careful monitoring of my visits to the museum, the refusal to grant research permission, and the lack of information about the organization that funds the museum was reminiscent of something a group of local Nam Khem authors documented in their book *Tsunami: Waves of Reform* – corruption in post-tsunami aid.<sup>70</sup> Though I do not want to be cynical about what was happening at the museum, as it is entirely possible that the museum is legitimately funding aid projects in the region, Dr. Sattler's firm declaration that he was not in any way involved in the current museum and the mystique around the museum's ownership raise questions about the museum's fiscal management and educational purpose.

The details about the following exhibits are as a consequence incomplete. The information comes from my efforts to memorize the exhibits and, on one afternoon, notes furtively taken in the museum's bathroom after feigning recurrent stomach pains caused from eating sour green mangos. The first floor of the museum contains several different exhibits that

---

<sup>70</sup> ปรีดา คงแป้น, ปิยานาถ ประยูร, หนูเพ็ชร แสนอินทร์, มณีรัตน์ มิตรปราสาท, ตร. นฤมล อรุโณทัย, และ นิคานาถ รัตนนาคินทร์, *สึนามิ คลื่นแห่งการปฏิรูป*. *Tsunami: Waves of Reform* (Bangkok: มูลนิธิชุมชนไท, 2015).

are written in both Thai and English.<sup>71</sup> When walking clockwise around the long, rectangular room, the first exhibit provides information on earthquakes and tsunamis. This poster compares photographs of the Andaman Sea coast, Banda Aceh, and Sri Lanka's eastern coast before and after the tsunami. It is followed by an exhibit on the environmental consequences of the wave, which displays photos of the region's beautiful coral reef system. The poster discussed coral reefs, mangrove plants, and sea animals in the wake of the tsunami. According to the exhibit, a significant amount of dead coral washed up onto the beach after the tsunami, though the coral's demise was actually caused by humans and not the wave itself. The poster also noted the changes in water salinity post-tsunami, which affected farms, freshwater ponds, and drinking wells.

Next to the exhibit on environmental consequences stood a TV that played a series of three short videos on repeat. The first video showed a cartoon classroom of young crabs. The crab teacher was delivering a lesson on tsunamis in English and the student crabs asked helpful questions such as "how long after an earthquake does it take for a tsunami to reach the shore" and "how can we tell if a tsunami is coming?" A cute cartoon, intended to educate younger English-speaking museum visitors about tsunamis. The second video, which was only two minutes long, relayed the same information but in a more adult-focused style. This video was much darker than the previous cartoon, the images all in gray and the narrator's voice holding an edge of doomsday. The third and final film was a music video for Carabao's heartrending song "Soaking up the Andaman's tears."<sup>72</sup> In this video, footage of the tsunami's devastation played as the singer hauntingly called out:

ไม่เคยคิด ไม่เคยฝัน ไม่ทันตั้งตัว I never thought, I never dreamed, I wasn't prepared

---

<sup>71</sup> According to the International Tsunami Museum's website, exhibits were originally written in English and later translated to Thai with the help of four University of Washington students.

<sup>72</sup> แอ๊ด คาราบาว, "ซับน้ำตาอันดามัน."

ท้องฟ้ามืดมัว แผ่นดินเลื่อนลั่นสั่นไหว The sky is gloomy, the earth shook  
ไม่เคยพบ ทั้งไม่เคยเห็น ไม่เคยสนใจ I never met, I never saw, I never paid attention  
ซุนามิคืออะไร รู้จักแต่ซาซิมิ What is a tsunami? I only know of sashimi  
มันมาดั่งมัจจุราช มันโถมท่วมไล่ชายหาด It came like Lord of Death, it rushed down the beach  
มันกวาดทุกสิ่งพินาศ ซุนามิ It swept everything into ruin, tsunami.<sup>73</sup>

The song's melody gave me goosebumps, the lyrics poetic and powerful. Carabao's ballad captured the loss and devastation that Takuapa locals felt in the tsunami's aftermath as well as linked back in significant ways to the museum's original mission. The song highlighted exactly what Dr. Sattler had observed in his interviews in 2005 and had placed at the center of the museum's mission – that many people in the region did not know about tsunamis before the 2004 event.

The exhibit just past the television presented information about rebuilding livelihoods and communities. This board contained facts about the tsunami's effects on the fishing and tourism industries, as well as a special section on women and children. The poster explained that women tended to suffer more than men because in the wake of the tsunami many women became the head of their household. It was difficult for these women to find work to support their family, adding an additional burden to their lives. This board also contained statistics about those who died or were lost in the tsunami by country. The list was arranged in alphabetical order and, according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, 8212 people died in Thailand. These statistics vary greatly from the ones previously cited in the paper, which demonstrates that body identification and counts in Thailand were inconsistent.

---

<sup>73</sup> Lyrics from: “ซึบ... น้ำตาอันดามัน,” YouTube, accessed February 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTcONJIFwBA>. Translation own.

On the back wall of the museum was a large poster about the Institute for Education and Culture's various projects. Next to the poster was a large donation box with a small sign that explained money donated would "go directly to help orphans whose parents had died or abandoned them." There were several smaller donation boxes located nearby for other Institute projects.

The next exhibit, entitled "The World Becomes One," incorporated a poster lined with a border of international flags that displayed lists of sponsors, organized by type of aid. Sample lists were "Rehabilitation and Rebuilding," "Disease Prevention," and "Helping Animals." The final two posters talked about the tsunami warning signs and the development of tsunami warning systems. These posters were highly educational in focus, presenting important information in clear and accessible ways. Nestled below these posters was a second television that played tsunami science videos on repeat.

The second floor of the museum did not have exhibits, in the traditional sense of the word, meaning that there were no informational signboards, pictures, or tsunami artifacts. Instead, the upper floor consisted of three separate video screening rooms. Video Viewing Room One played a series of videos, entitled "Children of the Tsunami: No More Tears." The series followed the story of a young Sri Lankan boy whose mother and sister had been killed in the tsunami. The documentary relayed that the boy's father was a fisherman before the tsunami, but had stopped fishing after the disaster, taking up drinking alcohol instead. According to the film, the young boy dropped out of school at fourteen to help his family by working all kinds of odd jobs. The narrator of the documentary stressed this fact throughout the video; access to educational opportunity clearly a key concern of the documentary makers.

Other stories included in this film collection were about a Dalit community in India that was overlooked by aid organizations, an Indonesian village that dealt with increasing doubts about God post-tsunami, and a Sri Lankan family that had to relocate in the wave's wake. The video also presented a story about a Moken sea gypsy boy who left the sea after the tsunami, though this point was muddled with information about Moken sea gypsies entering mainstream Thai culture, which made it difficult to ascertain the true motivations behind this boy's departure from his home community, and a young Thai girl who was living in a refugee camp. The girl's mother also gave an interview in the film, discussing Christian conversion efforts in the area after the tsunami. She passionately explained that she "would never convert, ever." A monk additionally commented on Christian missionaries in this section, stating that "the government is slow with aid delivery, but the Christians move fast," sentiments echoed by several of my interlocutors.

For a fifteen-minute film, this video contained a great deal of complicated information. It raised questions about the adequacy of aid in the post-tsunami context, which the authors of *Tsunami: Waves of Reform* also address. The Nam Khem authors describe a situation in which rice grown during the rainy season was distributed to villagers during the dry season.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the film documents an instance when donated boats were too big to navigate the shallow waters of a village's estuaries. The video also lightly touched upon issues of gender, class, political aid distribution, religious conversion in post-disaster contexts, and post-tsunami trauma. The video made too many points much too quickly, without enough information or facts to support them. Furthermore, the documentary had the disturbing habit of increasing music volume when non-

---

<sup>74</sup> ปรีดา คงแป้น, *สึนามิ คดีแห่งการปฏิรูป*. *Tsunami: Waves of Reform*, 255.

English speakers were talking. This made it difficult to actually hear what the interviewees were saying, forcing video watchers to rely on the documentary makers' subtitle translations.

Video Viewing Room Two showed the film "Tsunami Caught on Camera," which was, coincidentally, also playing at the Tsunami Museum Khao Lak the previous week. This film was entirely in English and followed several different stories: tourists on Similan Islands, who were swept out to sea, a family that had been diving when the tsunami struck, a dive trainer looking for his pupils, a hotel owner searching for his staff members, an Indonesian woman who was rescued from the water hours after the wave crashed into the coast, and a couple in Sri Lanka who lost their daughter in the disaster.

The most salient feature of this video was the fact that many of those interviewed expressed tremendous feelings of guilt. They continually asked why they had survived when others, people they had been traveling with or had tried to help or had seen just moments before, had not. In instances of loss, feelings of guilt appear to be common. I know that in 2013, a close friend relayed that he felt stressed about not having been able to get back to his home sooner after the tsunami struck Nam Khem. My friend's story raises the question about what guilt means or exists as in Thai Buddhist culture. The Thai language does not have a word that can be directly translated to guilt, as how it is understood by most English speaking nations. In my experiences, I found that the word most commonly used to express guilt was *ผิด* or "phit," which is more closely linked to notions of being wrong or mistaken. The absence of a clear word for guilt in Thai is significant. Is guilt expressed or experienced differently by Thais? How is guilt understood in a system of Buddhist emotions? What is the relationship between guilt and acceptance?

The final video screening room showed a film documenting interviews, all in German, of tsunami survivors. This film included less tsunami footage than the other videos, tending to repeat the same clip of water rushing onto a beach over and over again. It is important to note that in January 2016, I observed that most foreign visitors in the viewing rooms tried to be respectful to the memories included within the clips. They would sit and watch the films, at least for a few minutes, before moving on, their bodies poised in a kind of solemn silence. Majority of these high season tourists were from Western Europe.

The question of tourism to the International Tsunami Museum is important. On the day of my first visit in July 2015, the museum was empty save for two men working at the front desk. Posts on tourist websites suggested that many prefer to visit the new Tsunami Museum Khao Lak as opposed to the educational International Tsunami Museum. One writer, having visited in November 2015, went so far as to explain that the International Tsunami Museum was not the “real museum.”<sup>75</sup> The criticism over the museum’s ostensible inauthenticity reflects certain biases maintained by visitors about what should constitute a tsunami museum. It seems that tourists in Phang Nga, according to entries posted on Trip Advisor, visit tsunami memorials and museums in order to see the trauma of the event. Take the following comments, written about the other tsunami memorials and museums in the region, for example:

“The footage that they had collected was very upsetting to see those poor people that were caught up in it... we left with tears in our eyes. Let’s hope it never happens again.”

“The area is a little odd as this is the memorial and I couldn’t help thinking it just seems unfinished and poorly kept which is a real shame.”

---

<sup>75</sup> “International Tsunami Museum,” Trip Advisor, accessed December 7, 2015, [http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g297914-d4040356-Reviews-International\\_Tsunami\\_MuseumKhao\\_Lak\\_Phang\\_Nga\\_Province.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g297914-d4040356-Reviews-International_Tsunami_MuseumKhao_Lak_Phang_Nga_Province.html#REVIEWS).

“If you’re in Khao Lak, I would pay a visit. It’s nothing flashy, but really brings it all home how devastating the tsunami was. Amazing to see.”<sup>76</sup>

These tourist testimonies, amongst others, indicate that for many the “best” part about visiting the tsunami memorial spaces was seeing the destruction caused by the wave. These trips often caused an intense affective response, which led the tourists to reflect upon the disaster and its significance. For those who expressed disappointment with the memorial sites, the criticism was usually framed within the context of wanting the memorial to commemorate the dead in a more beautiful, elaborate, and complete way, which stands in stark contrast with what many local Thais might be looking for. As previously mentioned, many Takuapa locals work to embody the notion of Buddhist impermanence through the practices of letting go and accepting. However, the tsunami memorials and museums, function as a barrier to these practices. My colleague Khru Dang’s narrative, outlined in full in the second chapter, highlights these tensions between tourist expectations of memorial spaces and local Thai desires to let the tsunami go.

However, tourist engagement with the International Tsunami Museum seemed to be different on my later visits to the space, which occurred between December 2015 and January 2016. Though never crowded, the museum had, unsurprisingly, a greater volume of foot traffic during the high season. Based on my observations, it seemed that there were about five to six tourists in the museum at any given time. A review of a guest list found on the first floor revealed that most visitors to the museum were from Europe, especially Germany. Significantly, I came across no Thai names on any one of the guest list’s thirty pages. A discussion with the former curator in August 2015 directly addressed this trend in museum attendance. On my way out of the museum, I had asked him who visited the site more frequently.

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

“Farang,” he said quickly, using the Thai word for white people.

“Why?”

“I can’t really explain,” he replied. “Thai people... they don’t like museums. They like to travel. They don’t like things like this.”

The young curator’s explanation is important as it confirms a trend that I had noticed in my research – Thai people were generally not visiting the official tsunami museums. The reasons, as the museum employee suggests, are complicated. It could be that Thais find being inside a dimly lit, dusty museum boring, though I had noticed that my students on a trip to central Thailand had very much enjoyed their museum experiences. They had a lot of fun taking photos by the exhibits and learning new information. So what makes a tsunami museum different? Why are Thais visiting other museums but not these local tsunami museums?

The explanation might be linked to the ways tsunami museums participate in the memorialization of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Though the International Tsunami Museum placed education at the heart of its mission, the museum’s factual exhibits worked to commemorate the event. Photos of the coast before and after the wave, no matter how scientific they may be, recall memories of the tsunami. Discussion of coral reef destruction, changes in water salinity, and signs of future tsunamis all memorialize the event in different ways.

Paragraphs about a fishing industry destroyed by the wave might generate traumatic memories of lost livelihoods, missing loved ones, and donated ships too large to navigate the area’s shallow channels. Comments about empty hotels might unwillingly remind visitors about hotel ruins still found along the beach, skeletons of structures left untouched, swimming pools left twisted and mauled. As socio-cultural anthropologist Fuyubi Nakamura writes, in an article about post-tsunami photo recovery in Japan, states “surviving photographs as objects trigger memories,

emotions, and imaginations.”<sup>77</sup> So too, do the educational exhibits found at the International Tsunami Museum. The exhibits’ content recalls memories that some in Takuapa want to, or perhaps feel that they need to, let go of, as well as create new memories for those visiting the region for the first time. In this way, education serves as a means of memorialization. It preserves memories at the same time as it engages in a process of continual memory production.

## *II. The Tsunami Museum Khao Lak*

The Tsunami Museum Khao Lak is the most recent addition to tsunami museums in the area. It was opened in 2014, at the start of the high season and just in time for the ten-year anniversary of the event. According to one of the museum’s curators, the museum is sponsored by a private Thai company, though details of this company were not relayed despite my requests for information. This museum is located along the entrance road to the Patrol Boat 813 memorial site in Bang Niang.<sup>78</sup>

The Tsunami Museum Khao Lak consisted of an indoor and outdoor gallery. The outdoor gallery contained eight informational posters that hung by thin wires from the roof. The posters were organized in such a way as to create a barrier between the museum and the neighboring shop. The first two posters, arranged vertically, were titled “The History of Khao Lak – 25 Years of Friendship.” These signboards relayed the history of tourism in Khao Lak, with a special emphasis on German-owned bungalows and resorts. Significantly, these posters framed Khao Lak as an untouched, tropical respite. For example, one sign stated that “German speaking travelers soon discovered the hidden treasure of Khao Lak Bungalows and the perfect beaches

---

<sup>77</sup> Fuyubi Nakamura, “Memory in the Debris: The 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami,” *Anthropology Today* 28 (2012), 23.

<sup>78</sup> The Patrol Boat 813 memorial commemorates the marine patrol boat that had washed ashore during the tsunami, the wave carrying the boat more than two kilometers inland. According to a placard located next to the memorial, the Patrol Boat had been stationed in Khao Lak to guard Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya and her children when the 2004 Indian Ocean struck the Andaman Sea coast.

that extended to the north. Khao Lak became a heaven for German speaking tourists.” The orientalist language within the exhibit was further emphasized by the ways that the poster utilizes names. The German resort-owners were referred to by their given name, whereas many of the Thai owners were merely called “wife.”

The next exhibit was entitled “Destruction Overview.” Three photos, taken from a great distance, depicted the tsunami’s effects on the coastline. This exhibit critiqued the Thai government for its exclusion of undocumented Burmese workers in the official tsunami body count and highlighted the long-term consequences of the tsunami, including physical ailments and a suffering tourist industry. Following this exhibit came a poster on the science behind tsunamis, which included educational information on plate tectonics, earthquakes, and the 2004 tsunami’s anatomy.

The fifth exhibit depicted the aftermath of the tsunami; it detailed the post-tsunami chaos, the widespread looting, and the deeply problematic tourism at body identification centers. However, significantly, this exhibit participated in the same tsunami tourism that it condemned. For example, this poster stated that at the body identification centers “most faces are unidentifiable black swollen masses,” the tsunami victims further described as “half skeleton, half mummy.” The question of tsunami tourism is especially relevant in regards to a fifteen minute video played on repeat in the museum’s indoor gallery. This video began with a short description of what constitutes a tsunami, which was followed by a stream of tsunami footage. The footage was primarily of the wave crashing into the coast and was accompanied by heavy metal music reminiscent of tunes played during extreme sporting events. The video showed tourists being struck down and presumably killed by the wave as well as images of corpses left on the beach. The most graphic image was that of a bloated, bruised hand sticking out of the

sand. The video, coupled with the aftermath exhibit, generates questions about ethics in the representation of disaster and about dark tourism in the context of the tsunami.

Dark tourism is defined by Institute for Dark Tourism Research executive director Philip Stone as the “act of travel to sites of death, disaster or the seemingly macabre.”<sup>79</sup> Stone writes that:

Dark tourism is concerned with tourist encounters with spaces of death or calamity that have perturbed the public consciousness, whereby actual and recreated places of the deceased, horror, atrocity, or depravity, are consumed through visitor experiences.<sup>80</sup>

Within this framework, tourism to tsunami museums can be understood as a form of dark tourism. The museum spaces confront visitors, in myriad ways, with the immense consequences of the tsunami. Films about the wave and graphic photos of the aftermath all participate in an economy of dark tourism.

The Tsunami Museum Khao Lak is challenging precisely because it raises questions over representations of death in museum spaces and those representations’ links to tourism. Originally, I took issue with the exhibits included in the museum because it insensitively depicted the tsunami and its extreme consequences. Many of my colleagues and students had lost family members in the tsunami. Their lives had been completely changed by the disaster and I felt that the museum failed to adequately represent their experiences. The video, especially, seemed to make a spectacle out of the disaster.

However, as scholar Bongkosh Ngamsom Rittichainuwat documents, tourism to tsunami commemorative sites, including museums such as the Tsunami Museum Khao Lak, cannot be

---

<sup>79</sup> Philip Stone, “Dark tourism scholarship: a critical review,” *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7 (2013): 307.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

solely made sense of in terms of thanatourism.<sup>81</sup> Rittichainuwat explains that in his research at a memorial site in Phuket, “most tourists were relatives of the victims who had come to the monument during the first two years after the disaster to the tsunami memorial ceremonies.”<sup>82</sup>

Whereas the museum owners participate in dark tourism through their presentation style, Rittichainuwat’s example as well as tourist comments left on travel websites suggest that there is a commemorative aspect to these spaces. At the very least, visitors to the museums feel like they are participating in some form of memorialization. One woman, who had visited the Tsunami Museum Khao Lak in January 2016, relayed her experience at the museum on Trip Advisor. She wrote:

The museum is not so big and there is not very much to see but it’s enough. You can’t take more, it’s so extremely sad and it is hard to understand it really happened here, in paradise... it gives you a perspective on life that is very important.<sup>83</sup>

Her deep affective response to the tsunami museum is echoed by many other visitors. A tourist from Ireland stated that the “museum was a very sobering experience. I watched the video of the tsunami... such a very sad time for the people.” Another exclaimed that the museum was “a must see, but like anything commemorating a disaster; it is very sobering. Well done and informative... good to never forget.”<sup>84</sup> As these comments demonstrate, tourists typically understood their time at the museums as participating in a form of memorialization. Though they also, often inadvertently, engaged in an economy of darker tourism, they relayed that they visited

---

<sup>81</sup> Bongkosh Ngamsom Rittichainuwat, “Responding to Disaster: Thai and Scandinavian Tourists’ Motivation to Visit Phuket, Thailand,” *Journal of Travel Research* 46 (2008): 422 – 432.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>83</sup> “International Tsunami Museum,” Trip Advisor.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

the sites with the intention to learn about the disaster and pay their respects to the local community.

The tourist responses to both the Tsunami Museum Khao Lak and the International Tsunami Museum highlight the power of tsunami museums to generate rich affective responses. Though structured as sites of education and tourism, for non-Thai visitors the tsunami museums can also function as a space for tsunami memorialization and remembrance. The museum sites enable foreign tourists to participate in tsunami commemoration through education about the wave and its devastating consequences. By visiting the museums, tourists contribute to the maintenance of tsunami memory, perpetuate tsunami narratives upheld by the museums, and produce, through their engagement with the space, their own memories and stories of the wave. In this way, the tsunami museums function similarly to the area's tsunami memorials for foreign visitors.

However, Thais, besides from the very few local museum employees at the sites, do not seem to engage with the tsunami museums at all. Most responses to tsunami memorialization that I encountered throughout my research centered on either the Ban Nam Khem Tsunami Memorial Park or the Patrol Boat 813 memorial site. I never heard anyone talk about tsunami museums, except for my former boss, Khun Lak, who had offered to accompany me to the International Tsunami Museum. Though the tsunami museums can be understood as participating in a form of tsunami commemoration similar to the tsunami memorials, it seems clear that local Thais view these two types of spaces very differently. The disinterest in the museum sites cannot, therefore, be solely made sense of through the lenses of appropriate displays of affect, proper religious practice, or Buddhist publics.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

“Phi Dong, *kha*,” I said as we sat on the floor of his mother’s kitchen, munching on salty fried fish and spicy chicken curry. “Do you have any photos of you from when you were a kid?”

He gave me a puzzled look as he placed a piece of chicken on my plate. “Why?”

“Just wondering.”

“I don’t have any pictures. The tsunami... when it came, it took everything away.” He pointed to a spot high up on the wall. “The water came up to there.”

I nodded and turned my gaze back to the food, unsure of how to continue. We were silent for a moment. “My grandmother was home.” I looked up at him. “She couldn’t run. She was too old and no one else was home.”

“I’m sorry *kha*.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said, as he stood up to get some water. “It was a long time ago now.”

A long time ago now. The words echoed in my head for several days, the contradiction between their casual deliverance and the seriousness of Phi Dong’s face catching me off guard. A long time ago. What did it mean that the tsunami was a long time ago? Did it mean that the wave was no longer so tender and raw? That time’s relentless movement forward, its steady and reliable increments of one minute, one hour, one day, one year, assuaged the experiences of pain and trauma generated by the disaster? Or did a long time ago mean that talking about the wave was suddenly more okay because some necessary amount of time, ten years, had passed? Or that discussing the negative feelings created by the wave, which had been so often censored out of

conversations and perceptions, no longer suggested the inability to accept suffering and to let go of attachments? A long time ago. What did that mean?

Over eleven years have passed since the tsunami ravaged the coast of Phang Nga. And yet, as the anecdotes and stories contain within these pages demonstrate, the devastation caused by the wave, coupled with the constant threat of another tsunami forming within the Andaman Sea's turquoise waters, continues to weigh on the hearts and minds of many in the Takuapa community. The conversation above that unfolded in Mae Da's kitchen is one of many moments that exemplifies the tsunami's place within Takuapa's temporal present. Through his dismissal of the tsunami as something no longer serious, Phi Dong highlighted the wave's ongoing significance in his life. His comments brought the tsunami to the forefront of our conversation and reminded both of us of the wave's effects on him and his family. The absent photographs were intimately linked to the symbolic line of the water's height drawn onto the cement wall, to Phi Dong's grandmother, to the wave and its immense consequences. In this way, the tsunami past colored and defined the present.

This thesis project has functioned as an investigation into the tsunami's positioning within Takuapa's present. Through the analysis of various tsunami-related spaces, such as tsunami memorial parks and tsunami museums, this thesis sought to make sense of the ways in which the tsunami is remembered, forgotten, and later recalled within the Takuapa community. The research and observations included in this project highlight the nuances and complexities contained within tsunami commemoration in the Phang Nga province and raise questions concerning the relationship of official and vernacular tsunami remembrance to emotional and social propriety, proper Buddhist religious practice, and the context-dependent definitions of letting go and acceptance.

Most importantly, as the narratives and commemorative events documented in the preceding chapters show, the place that the tsunami occupies within the temporal present is not uniform across Takuapa. In fact, there is considerable variation in how the tsunami is remembered and talked about, in the ways in which the wave is memorialized, forgotten, called to mind, addressed, and engaged with. Individuals, communities, memorial parks, tsunami museums, and Buddhist temples all frame, interpret, and relate to the wave differently. These various spaces – the official and vernacular, discursive and material – contain within their loose, often flexible, borders their own tsunami. In this way, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami takes on multiple, sometimes overlapping, forms. The tsunami is rarely ever one event or wave, but rather a vast, ever-shifting collection of meanings and memories.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AP News. “Thai fortune teller accused of insulting monarchy dies in military prison.” *Asian Correspondent*. November 9, 2015. Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/11/thai-fortuneteller-accused-of-insulting-monarchy-dies-in-military-prison/>.
- AP News. “Thai police probe US envoy over comments about monarchy defamation law.” *Asian Correspondent*. December 10, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/12/thai-police-probe-us-envoy-over-comments-about-monarchy-defamation-law/>.
- “Baan Nam Khem: A resilient fishing community in Thailand.” *UNDP*. December 22, 2014. Accessed December 14, 2015. <http://www.th.undp.org/content/thailand/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/12/22/baan-nam-khem-a-resilient-community-in-thailand.html>.
- ปรีดา คงแป้น, ปิยานาถ ประะยูร, หนูเพียร แสนอินทร์, มณีรัตน์ มิตรปราสาท, ดร. นฤมล อรุโณทัย, และ นิสานาถ รัตนนาคินทร์. *คลื่นแห่งการปฏิรูป. Tsunami: Waves of Reform*. Bangkok: มูลนิธิชุมชนไท, 2015.
- Caruth, Cathy. “Mad Witnesses: A Conversation with Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière.” In *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Cassaniti, Julia. *Living Buddhism: Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Conklin, Alice L. *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850 – 1950*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Denness, Alistair. “Buddhist extremism in Thailand fits neatly into junta’s plans.” *Asian Correspondent*. December 1, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://asiancorrespondent.com/2015/12/buddhist-extremism-in-thailand-fits-neatly-into-juntas-plans/>.
- Falk, Monica. *Post-Tsunami Recovery in Thailand: Socio-Cultural Responses*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Falk, Monica “Recovery and Buddhist practices in the aftermath of the Tsunami in Southern Thailand.” *Religion* 40 (2010): 96 – 103.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer. “Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission.” *Poetics Today* 27 (Summer 2006): 353 – 383.
- “International Tsunami Museum.” David N. Sattler. Last modified 2014. <http://faculty.wvu.edu/sattled/tsunamimuseum1.htm>.
- “International Tsunami Museum.” Facebook. Accessed February 25, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalTsunamiMuseum/>

- ook.com/International-Tsunami-Museum-822001387828897/timeline.
- “International Tsunami Museum.” Trip Advisor. Accessed December 7, 2015, [http://www.tripadvisor.com /Attraction\\_Review-g297914-d4040356- Reviews-Internati onal\\_Tsunami\\_MuseumKhao\\_Lak\\_Phang\\_Nga\\_Provinc e.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.com /Attraction_Review-g297914-d4040356-Reviews-International_Tsunami_MuseumKhao_Lak_Phang_Nga_Provinc e.html#REVIEWS).
- Ishibashi, Hideaki. “Taxi drivers report ‘ghost passengers’ in area devastated in 2011 tsunami.” *The Asahi Shimbun*. January 21, 2016. Accessed February 1, 2016. [http://ajw.asahi.com/a rticle/0311disaster/life\\_and\\_death/AJ201601210001](http://ajw.asahi.com/a rticle/0311disaster/life_and_death/AJ201601210001).
- “อิทธิปาฏิหาริย์กรรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์.” Accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.amuletcenter.com/ product-th-534821-กรรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์,กรรมหลวงชุมพร,เสด็จเดี่ยว.html>.
- Jerryson, Michael K. *Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Jikkham, Mongkol BangprapaPatsara. “Public Constitution Vote Likely.” *Bangkok Post*. November 7, 2014. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resource s/doc/nb/news/1517544F0424CE68 ?p=AWN B>.
- “กรรมหลวงชุมพรเขตอุดมศักดิ์ สิ้นพระชนม์ / *krom luang chumphon khetudomsak sin pra chon*.” Accessed December 1, 2015, <http://guru.sanook.com/26225/>.
- Ladwig, Patrice. “Feeding the dead: ghosts, materiality, and merit in a Lao Buddhist festival for the deceased.” In *Buddhist Funeral Cults of Southeast Asia and China*. Eds. Paul Williams and Patrice Ladwig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Lambek, Michael. “The Past Imperfect: Remembering as Moral Practice.” In *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. Eds. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Langford, Jean M. *Consoling Ghosts: Stories of Medicine and Mourning from Southeast Asians in Exile*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, (2013).
- Lefevre, Amy Sawitta. “Thai Junta Appoints Panel to Draft New Charter.” *Reuters*. November 4, 2014. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-politics-idUSKBN0IOOOS20141104#ZV49IpDht QmtIMkd.97>
- Lewis, Glen. “The Politics of Memory in Thailand and Australia: national identity, the media and the military.” *Media History* 8 (2002): 77 – 88.
- McCall, Chris. “Remember the Indian Ocean Tsunami.” *The Lancet* 384 (2014): 2095 – 2098.
- McDaniel, Justin Thomas. *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

- Morris, Rosalind C. "Giving Up Ghosts: Notes on Trauma and the Possibility of the Political from Southeast Asia." *Positions* 16 (2008): 229 – 258.
- Nakamura, Fuyubi . "Memory in the Debris: The 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami." *Anthropology Today* 28 (2012): 20 – 23.
- Profile: Thailand's reds and yellows." *BBC News*. July 13, 2012. Accessed December 12, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13294268>.
- Rittichainuwat, Bongkosh. "Ghosts: A travel barrier to tourism recovery." *Annals of Tourism Research* 38 (2011): 437 – 459.
- Rittichainuwat, Bongkosh Ngamsom. "Responding to Disaster: Thai and Scandinavian Tourists' Motivation to Visit Phuket, Thailand." *Journal of Travel Research* 46 (2008): 422 – 432.
- Romanization Guide for Thai Script*. Bangkok: Royal Institute, 1982.
- "รอบวันทันข่าว." Public Relations Department Phang Nga. Accessed February 25, 2016. [http://radio.prd.go.th/phangnga/ewt\\_news.php?nid=1008](http://radio.prd.go.th/phangnga/ewt_news.php?nid=1008).
- Schwenkel, Christina. *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Sherwin, Jillian. "Tsunami Researchers Help Rebuild a Community." *Observer* 20 (2007): 13 – 17.
- Simpson, Edward and Malathi de Alwis. "Remembering natural disaster: Politics and culture of memorials in Gujarat and Sri Lanka." *Anthropology Today* 24 (2008): 6 – 12.
- Sinnott, Megan. "Dormitories and Other Queer Spaces: An Anthropology of Space, Gender, and the Visibility of Female Homoeroticism in Thailand." *Feminist Studies* 39 (2013): 333 – 356.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Stone, Philip. "Dark tourism scholarship: a critical review." *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7 (2013): 307 – 318.
- "สี่มอวลชนบ้านเรา กาลละและเทศะ อยู่ที่ไหนหนอรอ." *Pantip*. August 2, 2015. Accessed March 2016. <http://pantip.com/topic/34002067>.
- Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Tanabe, Shigeharu and Charles F. Keyes. "Introduction," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*.

- Eds. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.
- Tannenbaum, Nicola. "Monuments and Memory: Phaya Sihanatraja and the Founding of Maehongson." In *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*. Eds. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.
- Taussig, Michael. *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- "Thailand police investigate US envoy for lese majeste." *BBC News*. December 9, 2015. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35048293>.
- "Thailand printers refuse to print New York Times cover story." *BBC News*. December 1, 2015. Accessed December 5, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34977045>.
- "Thailand Profile – Timeline." *BBC News*. August 15, 2015. Accessed December 12, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15641745>.
- Van Esterik, Penny. *Materializing Thailand*. New York: Berg, 2000.
- Varley, Emma, Wanrudee Isaranuwatchai, and Peter C. Coyte. "Ocean waves and roadside spirits: Thai health service providers' post-tsunami psychosocial health." *Disasters* 36 (2012): 656 – 675.
- Vorng, Sophorntavy. "Beyond the Urban-Rural Divide: Complexities of Class, Status and Hierarchy in Bangkok." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39 (2011): 674 – 701.
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2005.
- Westervelt, Eric. "Stumbling Upon Mini Memorials to Holocaust Victims." *National Public Radio (NPR)*. May 31, 2012. Accessed February 20, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2012/05/31/153943491/stumbling-upon-miniature-memorials-to-nazi-victims>.