

THE AESTHETICS OF EVIDENCE
CRIME AND CONSPIRACY IN THAILAND'S POPULAR PRESS

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THE AESTHETICS OF EVIDENCE

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This dissertation argues that aesthetic conventions ensure the ‘factness’ of legal evidence as much as the ontological reality of that evidence and, moreover, these conventions developed as part of a joint project between agents of the law and the mass media. To make this case, the dissertation does two things. First, it shows how certain objects widely considered facts in the criminal justice system in Thailand are actually artifacts, or products of human craft, that had to be introduced and then taught to the Thai police over a period of decades beginning in the late nineteenth century. It then shows how in the process of this transplantation actors and objects in fields outside of what is typically considered ‘the law’ including newspaper reporters and detective novels played a role in determining what legal facts looked like. To help demonstrate this, the dissertation borrows two concepts from literature studies, narrative and device, which here includes visual diagrams. By focusing on these two categories of analysis, the dissertation shows how form shapes content in real and fictional worlds. The intention is to build a framework for understanding the interaction between popular and legal knowledge through an examination of the formal aspects of non-fictional and fictional narratives. The dissertation argues further that the rise of conspiracy theory as a prominent way of understanding power and agency in modern Thai society can be traced in part to modern representational practices.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Samson was born in Oakland, California. He is the youngest of four children. Prior to studying history at Cornell, Samson received a Master's degree in City and Regional Planning, also at Cornell. After that, he worked for eight years in the areas of city planning, urban development, and property management. He has participated in the planning of large development projects in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Beijing, Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket, and Singapore. Samson has also completed a Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the University of California at Los Angeles and received a certificate in Thai Studies at Thammasat University in Bangkok. In the past, Samson enjoyed film-making and writing short stories. In the future, he hopes to continue his research on the history of literature, technology, and law in Southeast Asia and beyond.

For my father, mother, and sister.

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INTRODUCTION

EVIDENCE AND INFORMATION

“...the motor of meaning production is form, not content.”¹

Murder, Re-enacted

Sherry Ann Duncan, a 16-year-old Thai-American girl, did not return home from school on 22 July 1986. Three days later a man out clearing weeds found her body in a forest just east of Bangkok. Working from a tip given by a trishaw peddler named Pramoen Photphalat, the police moved quickly to arrest five men. The day after the arrests, the police took four of the suspects to the scene of the crime to demonstrate Pramoen’s story, which stated that four men had dragged a girl with ‘golden hair’ out the back of a building on Suan Phlu Lane at 11:30pm the night Sherry Ann disappeared. The police took photos of the re-enactment and included them in their case files (Figure 1). Eventually, they sent the four men to trial at which, in the absence of any ‘smoking gun,’ Pramoen became a key witness and his testimony, acted out and recorded, critical evidence linking the four suspects to the scene of the crime. In July 1990 the provincial court in Samut Prakan province found all four defendants guilty and sentenced them to death.²

¹ Stanley Fish, “What Should Colleges Teach,” *Think Again* (blog), *New York Times*, 7 September 2009, <http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/07/what-should-colleges-teach-part-3/?ref=global-home>.

² This account assembled from information in trial documents for *Khadi choeri aen dancaen fong kao* [The case of Sherry Ann Duncan, first trial] at the Library and Museum of the Office of the Attorney General of Thailand (LMAG), news reports from *Thai rat* and *Daily News*, and the following secondary sources: Criminal Law Institute, *Raingan kan sewana thang wichakan ruang khadi choeri-aen ... krabuan kan yuttitham ja kbum kbrong sitthi seriphap khong phu borisut dai yang rai* [Report from seminar on the case of Sherry Ann ... How will the justice system project the rights and freedoms of the innocent?] (Bangkok: Office of the Attorney General, 1996); Jarun Wathanasin, *Choeri-an* [Sherry Ann] (Bangkok: Nechan Manti Midia Krup, 2001); and Rut Manthira, *Jap phae buchayan kbayao wongkan yuttitham sathuan wai* [Arresting a scapegoat, shaking-up the circles of justice] (Bangkok: Namfon, 1996).



Figure 1 – Re-enactment of Sherry Ann Murder. This photo shows four suspects dragging a stand-in for a girl with “golden hair” out the back of an office building on Suan Phlu Lane in Bangkok. From the Library and Museum of the Attorney General’s Office (LMAG), Bangkok.

The attorneys for the four defendants immediately appealed the provincial court’s guilty verdict, arguing that the prosecution’s evidence did not prove the men’s involvement. In 1993, the case reached the Supreme Court of Thailand (*san dika*), which declared the four suspects innocent for lack of sufficient, direct evidence linking them to the murder and ordered their release. In the time between the initial verdict and the Supreme Court’s decision, one defendant died, another contracted a disease that would eventually kill him and a third became crippled – all while in prison.

A second trial for the same crime, this time with a new set of defendants, took place in 1996 in which the trial court found three new suspects guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced each to life in prison. The key evidence? A re-enactment, again by Pramoen, of the night he met with police officers at a shabby love motel in eastern Bangkok to discuss

what he had ‘seen’ the night of Sherry Ann’s death (Figure 2). The proof that helped the provincial court in Samut Prakan order four men to death, a simulation of the night of 22 July 1986, referred to nothing that ever actually ‘happened.’



Figure 2 – Re-enactment from Second Sherry Ann Trial. Pramoen showing the police where he met with officers from Samut Prakan police station to discuss what he had ‘seen’ on the night of Sherry Ann’s murder. From LMAG.

In part, this is a story about a specific criminal investigation practice popularly known as the re-enactment (*phaen pratutsakam*) like the one that helped put the four men in the first Sherry Ann case in jail and then helped vindicate them in the second trial. The result of the procedure is an object of evidence that the police materialize, the press makes public, and the courts accept as evidence of a voluntary confession in the adjudication of criminal cases in Thailand. More broadly, however, this is a history of evidence and information about violent crime as generated by police officers, reporters, fiction writers, and photographers in Thailand. It is a tale of how forms of evidence and the techniques for producing them help determine what information is open and what is secret, what is true and what is false. This history is not, however, an abstract discussion about ‘knowledge’ or

‘discourse,’ dominant or otherwise. Rather, it is a cultural and epistemological history about how people, as actors in separate but overlapping social, political, and legal institutions, make material a specific category of action called violence.³ Through historical examples, this study will provide an analysis of how information about criminal violence is generated, verified, organized, and kept by people working in the press and the police force. There is ‘real-world’ relevance, then, to this academic story: Innocence or guilt, justice and outrage are, in part, effects of simulations of the past generated by police officers, newspaper reporters, and fiction writers in a joint project of knowledge production. The objects of information these actors produce on a daily basis become, in turn, the forms through which what is known about violence takes shape.

The main argument I make has two parts and is admittedly quite simple. First, various objects of evidence used in the criminal justice system such as fingerprints, maps, and photographs, derive their ‘factness’ from aesthetic rules – proper lighting in a crime scene photo, black ink fingerprints on white paper, and standard markings on maps and diagrams. By aesthetic rules I mean a set of criteria for judging the merits of a product of human craft (with the product being one meant to convey a meaning symbolically), especially if the judgment is of the relative sensory or intellectual ‘pleasing-ness’ of the product. Second, these rules or conventions emerged over time through the interaction of a range of actors working inside and outside what might conventionally be seen as the legal system. Here I refer primarily to people working in the mass media. So aside from police officers and lawyers, those most often associated with ‘the law,’ people like fiction writers,

³ By framing this study as an epistemological history, I follow Lorraine Daston, who defines the term as a “history of the categories that structure our thought, pattern our arguments and proofs, and certify our standards for explanation” that attempts to “discover the preconditions for making a thing or idea possible.” Lorraine Daston, “Historical Epistemology,” in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, eds. James Chandler, Arnold Davidson, and Harry Harootunian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 282.

news reporters, and photographers are also involved in determining what facts used in the criminal justice system look like. In short, aesthetic conventions ensure the ‘factness’ of legal evidence as much as the ontological reality of that evidence and, moreover, these conventions developed as part of on-going interactions between agents of the law and the popular media.

To demonstrate how this is the case, I adopt two related strategies. First, I illustrate through historical analysis how facts about crime used in criminal investigation are not things that exist out there in the world just waiting to be found. Fingerprints and crime scenes are things that people produce by engaging in specific routines, using specialized techniques. By going through old police training manuals and related documents concerning the police reforms that took place in Siam during the early twentieth century, I show how objects typically considered fixed and inert, i.e. facts, are really artifacts, products of human activity, which had to be introduced and taught to the police and to lay persons. The status of certain objects commonly found in the criminal justice system as real objects developed through a deliberate program of training as well as through trial and error.

Once the artifactual nature of various objects of material evidence is established, the second part of the argument, that non-law agents and objects play a role in their determination, becomes easier to demonstrate. In the early decades of the twentieth century, for example, the idea of the crime scene did not exist in Siam (or in many European countries for that matter).⁴ What one was and how it looked was not clear, not so much

⁴ Douglass Starr, in *The Killer of Little Shepherds: A True Crime Story and the Birth of Forensic Science* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), notes that the police in many parts of France during the late nineteenth century did not investigate crimes at the location where they happened but relied instead on “denunciations, rumor, and innuendo, even when physical evidence pointed to the contrary. They would round up suspects on the merest suspicion and hold them in jail until, police hoped, one of them cracked” (p. 33). He also notes that criminal investigation practices in England lagged “years behind” those of the Continent (p. 39) and that that Dr. Jean Alexandre Eugene Lacassagne, a pioneer in forensic medicine in France, published several articles on how to conduct crime scene investigations, something that had yet to become common practice (p. 17).

because the Thai police were incompetent, but because it had not yet fully developed as a real thing in the world. This is where fictional stories like the detective novels popular beginning in the late nineteenth century played a role in the development of the factuality of evidence. The detective stories that were translated from England, the US, and France included descriptions and examples of what a crime scene was and how one might investigate it. One of the first crime scene maps in Siam, for example, can be found in a detective story written by King Vajiravudh (then still crown prince) from 1904. These helped the police and the public imagine what the geography of crime might look and how to produce and use it to solve crimes. The drawing of crime scene maps eventually became standard practice for the police force, who introduced the practice into their training program during the early decades of the twentieth century. It is therefore no surprise that objects of evidence, from photos of criminals to crime scene re-enactments, show up today in trials as proof and in the press and on television as news and entertainment. That non-law agents and fictional forms like detective novels interact with the actors and objects of the criminal justice system should thus be relatively clear, though the manner in which they do remains less so. The second strategy, then, is to show concretely how non-law agents, practices, and objects relate to one another, to understand the connections between fact and fiction and popular and professional culture. To do this, I employ two concepts taken from literature studies: narrative and device.

Narrative

By narrative, I mean a story with a beginning, middle, and end. In his indispensable text on ‘narratology,’ or the study of narratives in fiction, Shlomith Rimmon-Kennon writes that

narrative fiction is “the narration of a succession of fictional events.”⁵ In other words, narrative involves the relation of a series of events temporally.⁶ And while Rimmon-Kennon limited his discussion to fiction, it has also long been recognized that narratives may be found in fields outside literature, including criminal investigation and ‘the law’ more broadly.⁷

To begin to understand how this is the case, it is important, and not difficult, to see that the violence presented in the mass media does not simply show up on the printed page, on television, or on a website without some explanatory narrative. A dead man, shot in a small flat in the Din Daeng district of Bangkok, for example, appears in the news connected to a story about police officers dusting for prints in the dead man’s apartment. A woman, whose body is discovered in a field far from the city, is made known to the public with images of police wading through the forest looking for footprints or other telltale items left behind. Death is associated with detection to form the skeleton of a story, one that explains violence while providing comfort that it is being investigated. In some cases, when the police do arrest a suspect, another image is presented, one of a suspect pointing out his dastardly deed to the police and the public. This image brings a particular story to a close, completing the narrative for the newspaper, the reader, and in some cases the law. Information – dead people, bullet casings, blood stains, rumors, and other ephemera – are drawn together into a narrative by which people can understand violence and the law.

In other words, narrative in the criminal justice system performs a similar organizational function as narrative in literature. Well-known legal scholar Robert Cover, for example, describes the law as a “normative universe” in which “law and narrative are

⁵ Shlomith Rimmon-Kennon, *Narrative Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁶ Events can be defined for now as things that happen, particularly those that cause a change from one state to another. I discuss the idea of event in relation to criminal investigation in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁷ Since the 1960s, post-structuralism, new historicism, deconstruction, and other movements in literary studies have made it clear that narrative is everywhere. For a good overview of the study of narrative in literature see Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

inseparably related. Every prescription is insistent in its demand to be located in discourse – to be supplied with history and destiny, beginning and end, explanation and purpose.”⁸ He adds, “Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live.”⁹ Similarly, James Boyd White, the originator of the field of law and literature, notes in *Heracles’ Bow* that: “From the outside it [the law] can of course be described as a structure of rules or a set of institutions, as a tool for policy implementation, and so on, but if it is looked at from the inside, as an activity in which individual minds engage, I think, as the reader well knows, that it is better talked about in other terms – as an art of language, as a way of creating versions of experience in cooperation or competition with others. From this point of view the law always begins in story: usually in the story the client tells, whether he or she comes in off the street for the first time or adds in a phone call another piece of information to a narrative with which the lawyer has been long, perhaps too long, familiar. It ends in a story too, with a decision by a court or jury, or an agreement between the parties, about what happened and what it means.”¹⁰

Alexander Welsh, a professor of English, traces the development of narrative, or the use of ‘strong representations’ he calls it, in the criminal trial process back to the early nineteenth century. That century saw the development of counsel, attorneys, and laws of evidence in criminal trials. Many began to see the use of material evidence and experts as a process that differed from, and was more just than, torture, challenges, combat, ordeals and

⁸ Robert Cover, “Nomos and Narrative,” in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, eds. Martha Minow, Michael Ryan, and Austin Sarat, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992): 95-6.

⁹ Cover, 1992, 102.

¹⁰ James Boyd White, *Heracles’ Bow: Essays on the Rhetoric and Poetics of the Law* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 168.

other tests common in earlier times.¹¹ This idea stemmed from the fact that people were beginning to view material evidence as free of human agency. Forensics is prominent now in part because of this belief, even though more recent studies show that police science is in many instances based on the intuition of officers and medical doctors.¹² Moreover, some would argue, convincingly, that the notion of value-free facts is itself an effect of the ‘modernity’ narrative, which tells a story about how humans can objectively study the material world that exists independent of any knowledge system.¹³

Upon closer examination, however, facts can be seen as part and parcel of narrative. Quoting Boyd White again: “Even the reader of history who says that he or she is interested only in the accuracy of representation cannot test that accuracy merely by looking from the text to the real world and back again, checking for correspondences; the text ‘represents’ what can be ‘seen’ only by one who engages in an act of creation of his or her own, who becomes for the moment an historian interested in meaning, as well as fact.”¹⁴ More forcibly put: “facts are not facts – they have no meaning – until they have been made into history; that they will make no sense until the historian makes sense of them.”¹⁵ Or to paraphrase Welsh, evidence is not evidence by itself. It has to be read or interpreted as such. For this to happen, people use narratives.¹⁶ A historian, therefore, is not merely reporting evidence, “he is creating, or recreating, a world, telling us what to think and what to feel about the events he speaks of, for he tells us not merely what happened, but what it means. He knows that for history to be true, it must be a fiction.”¹⁷

¹¹ Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 10-1.

¹² Mariana Valverde, *Law's Dream of a Common Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 223.

¹³ Welsh, 1992, 7.

¹⁴ Boyd White, 1985, 160.

¹⁵ Ibid, 161.

¹⁶ Welsh, 1992, 7.

¹⁷ Boyd White, 1985, 161.

The preceding discussion begins to answer the questions ‘What is narrative?’, ‘What do they do?’, and ‘Why are they employed by actors in the field of law?’ To sum up, narratives are stories with beginnings, middles, and ends that provide a framework for people to organize information. Cover writes: “Narratives are models through which we study and experience transformations that result when a given simplified state of affairs is made to pass through the force field of a similarly simplified set of norms.”¹⁸ But in addition to organizing existing information, they are also generative of new knowledge, factual and emotional. Because of this, actors in the legal system use narrative to convince people of a specific point or elicit a desired emotion such as sympathy, indignation, or anger and thus gain a desired outcome (e.g. a guilty verdict). In history as well, narratives evoke an emotional response. Thongchai’s notion of a master plot for Thai history in which the protagonist is the geo-body of Siam, or the territory of the nation, which came into being through painful struggle and loss, means that nationhood is “experienced by the people of Thailand as love – and nostalgia – for a bounded chunk of territory on the earth’s surface.”¹⁹

That narrative has an instrumental function does not take away from the simple definition I provided at the outset of this introduction. People use narrative for a variety of purposes. This is part and parcel of what they are. But to accomplish what I want to do here, which is the development of a method with which to understand the relationships between legal and popular knowledge, it is necessary to focus first on narrative’s formal aspects. The detective novel, for example, opens with a mystery and the solving of that mystery drives the plot. When the mystery is solved, the story ends. There is closure. The detective narrative moves backwards from the discovery of a crime to the point of its occurrence rather than in

¹⁸ Cover, 1992, 102.

¹⁹ Craig Reynolds, “The Plot of Thai History: Theory and Practice,” in *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), 326.

a straight line from beginning to end the way a romance novel might be told. Not long after the detective narrative came to Siam, ‘indigenous,’ or pre-existing in any case, ways of telling stories about crime, both fictional and factual, adopted this narrative form, at least in some instances. News reports about real crimes were sometimes framed as mysteries to be solved while similar morphological changes took place in the popular verse form called the *lamtat*, which often featured fictionalized crime stories from the news. In narratives about crimes, then, one can see a convergence of form across the fact-fiction divide. Only after the commonalities across social, cultural, and professional fields are made apparent can the effects of narrative on readers be understood.

I also use this admittedly functionalist definition of narrative because it is the best way to understand what police officers, reporters, and others actually do when they investigate and report crime. Reporters tell stories with beginnings, middles, and ends. So do the police when they compile information for their investigation reports. Both groups of agents use narrative to help them generate information and then to organize and give it meaning: narrative is a “basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change – a strategy that contrasts with, but is in no way inferior to, ‘scientific’ modes of explanation that characterize phenomena as instances of general covering laws.”²⁰ It makes sense, then, to understand the ways in which the police and the press produce and use narratives, as materialized in texts.

Despite their shared forms, the association between narratives in different fields of cultural production has not been examined in its detail: “Although literary theory has long concerned itself with narrative as a pervasive feature of imaginative literature, legal narratologists do not much discuss the literary techniques that make narratives different

²⁰ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 2.

from each other and from other expressive devices. The business of legal narratology is telling stories rather than reflecting on storytelling techniques.”²¹ So while it is commonly noted that narratives are everywhere or that fiction describes real events and real people or that the news involves fictive elements, the comparison usually stops there. The next step is to look at the specific techniques used in narrative production.

Device

This brings me to device. The idea of a device in literature was first developed by literary critics now known as the Russian Formalists between the 1910s and the 1930s.²² It is a technique, sometimes embodied in an (fictional) object, which acts on a narrative’s form, for example to speed up or slow down the flow of events. In detective fiction, typical devices include red herrings and temporal transpositions (e.g. the withholding of information or foreshadowing), which help create suspense or structure reader expectations. Another example is the clue, the proper interpretation of which pushes a story along so that a reader and the literary detective may solve the mystery at hand.²³ Devices are also used in the production of non-fictional narratives about crime. As alluded to above and as will be shown in subsequent chapters, police officers, reporters, and others are all motivated to some extent by the need to generate texts that materialize narrative.²⁴ When they do, they make formal

²¹ Richard Posner, *Law and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 348.

²² The Russian Formalists were less a single, unified group than a number of independent scholars with a diverse set of ideas about literary form. See Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981) for an overview of the movement.

²³ On devices in detective fiction, see Viktor Shklovsky, “Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story” and “Dickens and the Mystery Novel” in *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990); Tzvetan Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction” and “The Grammar of Narrative” in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 207-227; and Franco Moretti, “Clues” in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁴ Along these same lines, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, notes in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995) that historical production is not limited to academic or professional

choices, use devices. The police use guns, cameras, and batons, but also fingerprint impressions, maps, and charts to help them solve crime and complete their reports. So do reporters when writing crime stories. Some crime news reports from the 1920s, for example, began to use clues as a means to create suspense and thus boost newspaper sales. The common link between historical, non-fiction source documents and literary texts, both as manifestations of social narratives, is therefore the device. In other words, narratives themselves are not objects of knowledge. It is the device that does actual epistemological work.²⁵ When employed by fiction writers, literary devices like clues, red herrings, and false solutions generate mystery or steer the movement of a narrative. In the hands of police, judges, and newspaper reporters, similar devices infuse ordinary documents with epistemological power as true or false, open or closed. Indeed, the functioning of modern justice and knowledge production depends on the ‘magical’ powers of an assortment of technical devices – red ‘secret/urgent’ stamps on letterhead, royal insignia on scaled maps, and proper signatures on standard forms.

I want here to stop and discuss briefly a specific category of device that might not be immediately or obviously related to narrative. Diagrams, such as crime scene maps are like their textual counterparts, devices that work on time and space. Frederik Stjernfelt, a sociologist, explains that diagrams are a “special sort of icon which represents the internal structure of those objects [that they represent] in terms of interrelated parts, facilitating reasoning possibilities.”²⁶ Stjernfelt is heavily influenced by Charles Peirce, the nineteenth century philosopher who wrote that the “great distinguishing property of the icon is that by

historians. Politicians, journalists, religious leaders, and others are all people that make history by narrating events (p. 19).

²⁵ Moretti, 2000, 217.

²⁶ Frederik Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007), ix. Another, more recent, text on the device function of diagrams is John Bender and Michael Marrinen, *Culture of Diagram* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

the direct observation of it other truths concerning its object can be discovered than those which suffice to determine its construction.”²⁷ Maps are an archetypical example because they are “rule bound depictions of aspects of the shape of phenomena” that people use to find out new information such as distance, routes and locations. They reveal “truths not stated in the construction of the diagram [here a map].”²⁸

This talk of diagram may seem tangential to a historical project, but it is vitally important because the documents that the police and the press produce about violence very often contain visualizations. The images of re-enactments used in the two Sherry Ann trials are examples. Though most people, including the police and legal actors that generate and use them, may think of re-enactments as straightforward representations of something real, e.g. a crime scene or a criminal in action, understanding them as devices allows for a different sort of evaluation, one that highlights the mechanisms through which people produce what they know about the world. In other words, a formal analysis reveals that re-enactment photos and other images of crime are more than representations meant to promote the status of the police (and by proxy the state) in society or foster docility in the population at large. Critical observers can and should do more than simply condemn them as a violation of suspect’s (and victims’) rights; these types of images have ideological and epistemological power for formal reasons.

So in the framework of criminal investigation as narrative production, the re-enactment becomes a revelation of ‘whodunit,’ exposing to the public the identity of perpetrators of violence and their methods. It is how facts about violence are made known. At once official and popular, the re-enactment acts as an investigative tool, a type of proof, and a vehicle for entertainment. The multiplicity of social and epistemological roles it plays

²⁷ Stjernfelt, 2007, 90.

²⁸ Ibid, 105.

demonstrates how form drives the meaning of information and how, if one were interested in exposing the contours of power that hide in knowledge, a historical analysis of information's aesthetics would be a good way to achieve that goal. Crime and violence are things generated by the narratives of people across the entire spectrum of a society, not just of the state; crime news and detective fiction can be neither completely subversive nor conservative. These are observations about the practice that a historical analysis of aesthetics brings to light.

Focusing on formal devices also crystallizes the key differences (in addition to the similarities discussed so far) between narratives in novels, news, court proceedings, and other realms. Drawing on Roland Barthes' work on literary studies, Craig Reynolds, writes that the difference between historical narrative and literary narrative is the "scholarly paraphernalia of references, footnotes and linguistic terms called shifters merely create the illusion of a reality in the past" and that the "real past remains forever beyond the reach of words." All historians can claim is to have created a 'reality effect.'²⁹ Indeed, objects have a sort of agency, though not a consciousness, as I indicated above, in that they do things – they act on time and space, though in ways much less physically violent than torture. The difference between a primitive ordeal and a modern trial resides in the devices used to extract truth. This is an insight that diagrammatology makes possible that other ways of looking at images fails to recognize.

Analyses of violent images that do not look specifically at form tend to produce conclusions that, however intriguing or clever, are primarily abstract musings on an individual image or group of images. Rosalind Morris, for example, suggests that pictures of violence committed during the 1992 military crackdown on civilian protesters provide a

²⁹ Craig Reynolds, "The Plot of Thai History: Theory and Practice," in *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), 315.

sense of pleasure (of having survived violence) to their viewers and that this pleasure enables political agency.³⁰ Alan Klima, also writing about the 1992 protests, theorizes that images of violence heighten the experience of reality (of state violence), which, in line with Morris' argument, allows for political action.³¹ In a similar manner, James Siegel, in *A New Criminal Type*, looks at images of criminals in the Indonesian tabloid *Pos Kota*.³² He claims that the idea of criminality is an effect of this media coverage. This observation is hard to disagree with, but what is the mechanism for establishing the effect of criminality (or pleasure or outrage), other than the fact that pictures of crime and criminals simply appear in the papers? One might say that the flag of the United States represents freedom and liberty (as opposed to neo-colonial expansionism or something else). One can agree or disagree, but the discussion ends there.

Critiques of Form

Critics of formalist approaches to the study of humanities might say that social phenomenon cannot really be characterized as concrete forms: “shapes are not themselves the forms but representations of them, just as the algebraic version [of some natural phenomenon] is not itself the form but an expression of it in written notation.”³³ Form is created by the human mind and imposed on the world – they don't exist as real things in the world. The problem arises when one starts to think that the forms being studied (e.g. a genre of narrative or social group) themselves as existing “somewhere else, in some ‘place’ which is not a place, in

³⁰ Rosalind Morris, “Surviving Pleasure at the Periphery: Chiang Mai and the Photographies of Political Trauma in Thailand,” *Public Culture* 10.2 (1998): 341-370.

³¹ Alan Klima, *Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

³² James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter-Revolution Today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

³³ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Diagrammatology,” *Critical Inquiry* 7.3 (Spring 1981): 628.

some form which has no shape or qualities.”³⁴ As this study of re-enactments photos, fingerprints, and crime scene maps shows, however, this is exactly what is happening in real life. Diagrammatic representations are evaluated as representations of something real. When they are, there is confusion as to what they actually do. To draw fiction and history together, to focus on narrative, device, and diagram, is not a first step to deconstruct historical fact, deny the past, or give up on history as a discipline, but to understand the mechanisms that make historical narrative a powerful, acceptable mode of academic, legal, and popular representation. It is an attempt to see how form is imposed and then taken as real. The problem lies not in the attention to form, but in the way the history of form disappears from view.

The root of this criticism can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s, when a broad shift away from the assumption that the study of narrative could be an objective science, as formalists were accused of viewing their enterprise, occurred. The idea that one could discover “inherent formal and structural properties in its object narratives” was dismissed. Like the diagram, narrative form, critics said, is not ‘real.’ Reading constructs its object and form is projected into narrative by people, i.e. readers. Post-structuralism in literature studies was about the “construction, slippage, and difference” that this realization meant.³⁵ Signs were (and are) seen as part of a larger context, with the implication being that the relationships between the elements of a sentence are always in motion, or that the meaning of a sign is always qualifying those that precede it in a sequence or is waiting to be qualified by something after it. This is what Derrida referred to as the “trace structure” of a sign: “any sign is embedded in a context and its meaning bears the trace of the signs which surround

³⁴ Ibid, 628.

³⁵ Currie, 2011, 7.

it.”³⁶ In other words, the meaning of a sign is not complete in itself or present within itself, but linked to all other signs (e.g. a device’s effect is not ‘immanent’). A study of form was therefore a wrong-headed way of analyzing literature.

New historicism, a movement closely associated with the work of Michel Foucault, also criticized formalist approaches to the study of literary texts. They saw it as apolitical and thus counter to a responsible academic’s duty to engage in political critique. New historicists did not focus on individuals or subjects as explanatory categories. Rather, the individual was seen as part of larger social system, just as a sign was part of a large network of signs. For them, the production of literature was the unknowing reproduction of ideology (values and norms), not a free and creative act. Both post-structuralists and new historicists saw their task as the unmasking of this fact.³⁷

Literary critics, for example, have linked fictional narrative with a number of important real world phenomena, including policing, to great effect. D.A. Miller’s *The Police and the Novel* was perhaps one of the earliest works to do so.³⁸ In that book, Miller argues forcefully that the policing function of the state is embedded in the structure of the Victorian novel. Through a Foucault-inspired reading of various texts, Miller shows how this is the case, with the state disguising its influence over individual bodies and subjectivities in the seemingly subversive art form of the novel. The modern novel is for Miller an example of the use of narrative (and discourse) by elites as a tool for control. Narrative and discipline also flow through Jonathan Bender’s *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth Century England*.³⁹ He writes that the contemporary penitentiary conceives of the

³⁶ Ibid, 83.

³⁷ Ibid, 9.

³⁸ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

³⁹ Jonathan Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth Century England* (Chicago: 1987). Another study on narrative and the law is Jonathon Grossman, *The Art of the Alibi: English Law*

human (criminal) subject as story or a plot. The history of human consciousness is something that must be told to be visible and available for reform. The penitentiary becomes the novel's narrative structure in physical form and prisoners are stories that can be revised and rewritten. This conception of a person's life as a narrative, in turn, resulted from the popularity of novels by Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding in the early seventeenth century, which told stories from the first person point of view, describing the evolution of individual subjectivity of the narrators. In another study, the inspirational *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, Ronald Thomas shows how the development of the detective narrative was part of an impulse to bring the potentially anarchic forces of democratic reform, urban growth, national expansion, and imperialism of the late nineteenth century under control. The detective novel, in his view, reflected the growing power of the modern police and the bureaucratic state, which was intent on fixing the identities of the threatening criminal masses.⁴⁰

Studies of Thailand often invoke the term narrative in a similar manner. Annette Hamilton, for example, argues that stories and photographs of violence in the mass media in Thailand can be read as a "counter discourse" opposed to the state's "narrative of harmony and order."⁴¹ Thongchai Winichakul argues in "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past" that the 6 October 1976 massacre of student protesters at Thammasat University in Bangkok by royally backed military, para-military, police, and civilian groups does not 'fit' the

Courts and the Novel (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). He shows how the novel's narrative impulse carries over into courts through the testimonies of suspects.

⁴⁰ Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*. Cambridge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Annette Hamilton, "Rumors, Foul Calumnies, and the Safety of the State: Mass Media and National Identity in Thailand," in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today*, ed. Craig Reynolds (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002).

dominant national narrative, which assigns Thailand the role of victim.⁴² The importance of what story a narrative tells lies in its effect on historical memory: because a massacre perpetrated by state agents is difficult to place into a story of victimization, society suffers from a sort of erasure.

In these examples, the term narrative (and its close relative ‘discourse’) is used in a way that is more akin to ideology, what Alexander Gerschenkron defines as “a specific set of ideas designed to vindicate or disguise class interest,” than as a story or narration of events in a temporal sequence.⁴³ When narrative is seen either as ideology or its lapdog, there immediately surface official or dominant ones that the state or elites impose on citizens. The critical scholar’s job is to identify and expose them for what they are: tools of domination. But how does this happen at the level of practice? Why doesn’t the state’s narrative change in the face of overwhelming evidence that it is wrong? It remains unclear in many studies how either dominant or counter narratives come about, get disseminated, or gain a single, stable meaning in the public imagination. After all, the mass media outlets in Thailand that deal in stories and images of violence and crime are owned in many instances by institutions of the state such as the army and the police or by elites with close ties to those institutions. The study of narrative and form provides a vocabulary and a systematic method with which to answer these questions.⁴⁴

The critique that a story can be interpreted many ways (i.e. that there is ‘slippage’) is difficult to dispute (and it is not something I mean to do here). Someone from one cultural

⁴² Thongchai Winichakul, “Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past,” in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*, eds. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

⁴³ Douglas Hay, “Property, Authority and Criminal Law,” in *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, Douglas Hay, et al., eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 26, fn. 2.

⁴⁴ Trouillot comes closest to providing some insight as to how the production of historical narratives leaves out certain details while promoting others. He points to four ‘moments’ in the process of making narratives where power enters and silences come to be: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources), the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives), the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance). Trouillot, 1995, 26.

background or class may interpret the meaning of a story differently from those not of the same reading culture. Yet, a text, as part of a complex of agents, objects, practices, and rules created socially over time does limit how readers of the same broad community can interpret it. Documents, whether textual or diagrammatic, have effects on a reader (a construct as much as a real person) the same way a reader brings mental baggage (like cultural rules for engaging a story) to their reading. To this effect, there has been in the past decade or so a convergence between the study of form and of broader social contexts.⁴⁵ I have no intention of taking devices out of their contexts and do not claim their meanings remain stable across time and space. In fact, I show how they are fundamentally historical phenomena, but ones that, after being forged in the crucible of history, are often removed from their contexts and reused by agents of the law and the media in unforeseen ways. The reuse, adaptation, and misreadings that the intellectual movements of the past three decades have brought attention to can lead to social change and cultural innovation or to unwanted transformations on the way the world is understood.

Conspiracy Theory as Historical Narrative

The second argument I make is therefore this: Conspiracy theory has emerged since the end of the Second World War in Thailand as one prominent narrative form for the conceptualization of history and as a legitimate way of understanding power and agency. What began as a way to materialize ordinary crime and violence, and thus actionable in courts of law, has given rise to a society of radical skeptics unable to determine with any finality what is true. This is the case among state and society, elites and subalterns, Thai and non-Thai. The problem is in part due to the different interpretations, or the instability of

⁴⁵ Currie, 2011, 8. See also the work of Mieke Bal, including “The Point of Narratology,” *Poetics Today* 11.4 (Winter, 1990): 727-753.

signs, of events that have taken place over the course of the past sixty years, in part to the actions of the police with relation to the media, and in part to the effects of the ways people represent the events themselves.

Let me take a step back and explain why this might be the case. In Thailand today, there exists what might be called a state of radical skepticism. Between 2008 and 2010, military force was used against both pro- and anti-Thaksin Shinawatra (the former prime minister) protestors. In the chaos of the crackdowns, confusion reigned. There were conflicting reports as to the number of casualties, if any, and who was behind them. Rumors, tall tales, and innuendo filled the air. One might say that the prevalence of conspiracy theories in recent times is an aberration traceable to political uncertainty and anxiety from the looming death of the current king. But a look at the past fifty to sixty years shows that conspiracy theory, or at least the elements that make it possible, developed over time. ‘Third hands’ (*mu thi sam*), ‘dark hands’ (*mu mut*), and unnamed ‘people with influence’ (*phu mi itbiphon*) have become key agents of history, driving events, criminal or otherwise.

Thailand, of course, is not the only society in which conspiracy theories abound. America has its fair share, from the one about the current president being a foreign-born Muslim (and therefore un-American) to the ones about the moon landing and 9/11 being hoaxes perpetrated by the government. One writer in the *New York Times* recently noted: “It is no secret, especially here in America, that we live in a post-Enlightenment age in which rationality, science, evidence, logical argument and debate have lost the battle in many sectors, and perhaps even in society generally, to superstition, faith, opinion and orthodoxy. While we continue to make giant technological advances, we may be the first generation to

have turned back the epochal clock – to have gone backward intellectually from advanced modes of thinking into old modes of belief.”⁴⁶

Looking to narrative and device provides a way to come to terms with this seeming irrationality in the modern era, not as a vestige of the past but as an effect of the indeterminacy of our sign systems. The objects that constitute fact in the criminal investigation process also give form to fiction in the mass media, leaving people to engage in a game of constant detection and interpretation, a state of ‘guerilla ontology,’ to determine what is real and what is fabricated in daily life.⁴⁷ The transplantation of scientific policing into Siam in the early twentieth century did not completely replace one system of signs and practices with another. Instead, the new police and media practices privileged some methods of generating knowledge over others, made some forms of information acceptable in courts of law, and turned some data into new facts while others became new fictions. Recourse to whispering ghosts (*phi krasip*), (whose existence is a fact, not a fantasy, for some) that tell their caretakers (*phu liang phi*) the location of stolen goods or reveal the identities of culprits, for example, has declined in favor of scientific investigation practices such as autopsies and chemical analyses. In other instances, people have shown a tendency to rely *more* on explanations involving supernatural beings, objects, and forces.⁴⁸ And as subsequent chapters will show, charts, images, talismans, and other ‘traditional’ forms used for divination and protection remain popular alongside the more ‘modern’ diagrams of the police. So although

⁴⁶ Neal Gabler, “The Elusive Big Idea,” in Opinion, *New York Times*, 13 August 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/14/opinion/sunday/the-elusive-big-idea.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss.

⁴⁷ The term guerrilla ontology is from Robert Wilson, who defines it as a literary device that mixes fact and fiction so that “the reader must decide on each page ‘How much of this is real and how much is put-on?’” Robert Anton Wilson, *Illuminati Papers* (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1997), 2.

⁴⁸ On the whispering ghost and its decline (as well as the relative decline of certain other supernatural objects) see Robert B. Textor, *Roster of the Gods: An Ethnography of the Supernatural in a Thai Village* (New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, Inc., 1973). On the increase in the belief in spirits and other supernatural causes in accidents and misfortunes see David Engel, “Landscapes of the Law: Injury, Remedy, and Social Change in Thailand,” *Law and Society Review* 43.1 (2009): 61-94.

parts of this dissertation are about the development of scientific forms of knowledge, especially by the police, it is not a tale of how science or some other branch of Enlightenment or ‘Western’ rationality has come to supplant local epistemologies, even if that was in many instances the intention of royals, their foreign advisors, and other elites.

This phenomenon, of the rise of conspiracy theory in the post-war period, is something that old ‘Thai hands’ have failed to engage critically while partaking happily in their perpetuation by working hard to debunk them, belittling the people that believe in them, or attempting to discover grains of truth in them. A look at the blogs and websites about current events shows that the internet has become a location for people to engage with conspiracy theories and with each other, armed with charts and statistical tables as well as insider information, fighting like for like, form with form. Non-Thai academics are drawn into the interpretive game that conspiracy theory induces just as Thais are. A key insight of an approach focused on form is therefore that the universal human practice of employing tools of representation, from maps and photos to diagrams and charts, have produced varying experiences of time and space. Some are called modern, others traditional. The divide between the two epochs, if epochs are what tradition and modern are, is an effect of the tools used to materialize them.⁴⁹

Conspiracy theory can be seen as part of a broad regression into the epistemological abyss, as a pathology, a weapon of the weak, the refuge of the marginalized, a style of

⁴⁹ The notion that forms of representation might be linked to broader epistemological transitions is made in several studies about Europe in the seventeenth century. Martin Jay describes the shift between the modern period and that which came before it as one in which space “was robbed of its substantive meaningfulness to become an ordered, uniformed system of abstract linear coordinates. As such, it was less the stage for a narrative to develop over time than the eternal container of objective processes. It was not until the time of Darwin that narrative regained a significant place in the self-understanding of science.” In other words, the ‘discovery’ of single-point perspective meant “perspective was free to follow its own course” independent of religion, which allowed people for the first time to think of the world as “observable but meaningless object,” thus allowing for the scientific revolution. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 51-3.

politics, a critical part of what governments do, or as a means of control and a strategy of power. It is, in all these cases, a narrative form. Conspiracy resides in the modes, practices, and objects of knowledge that a society employs. What I do here, then, is ultimately about shedding light on what we, as moderns, are: our forms. The distinction of difference that exists between them and us, traditional and modern is less a temporal phenomenon, a product of varying developmental states or traditional versus modern, than it is something our narrative forms tell us.

I should spell out a few assumptions and define some recurring terms, including history (as opposed to narrative), now before moving on. First, history is a way of representing (and creating) the past. Greg Denning writes, “History is all the ways we encode the past in symbol form to make a present.”⁵⁰ Today, narrative is the primary way in which this encoding takes place, but it is just one of the many ways to do so. There are chronologies, statistical series, and diagrams such as timelines.⁵¹ What distinguish historical narratives from fictional ones are formal rules – the use of footnotes and the reliance on primary sources. These provide historical narrative its claim to truth and authenticity. They assume the past, the thing being represented, is something out there and real, despite studies that indicate this might not be the case.

Second, historical actors share information across social fields and institutional settings as well as between formal and informal contexts. This means that the validity of a specific piece of information stems in part from the form, literally, that information takes. In

⁵⁰ Greg Denning, *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 14. He includes in this encoding ritual and common conversation, when one person relates an incident to another. But then he later writes that history is a “texted” past. Rituals and conversations may or may not leave behind artifacts for historians (or anyone else) to interpret. The definition comes close to the way many in literature studies see narrative as consisting of a story (events or things that happen), text (or the way events are represented), and narration (the process of putting together a text).

⁵¹ On visual representations of the past, see Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).

other words, the credibility of information as evidence in a court of law and its believability to the general public depend as much on form and fit within a network of narratives as it does on specific content. Furthermore, actors in various settings understand this formalism, even if they do not state so directly. This is evident when people attempt to transform information across different fields, as when a victim of a crime tries to turn hearsay or rumor into documented truth to communicate with government officials, when journalists turn public sentiment into paper-based facts (the news), and when police make their own assumptions and hunches material in police reports and legal affidavits. It will be the burden of this history to show just how these forms and the rules for evaluating them came to be.

And finally, I use in this study the terms ordinary and everyday as adjectives to modify the noun violence, itself a reference to actions that occur regularly between individuals – a mugging, an assault, armed robbery, rape. These acts are sometimes seen as a sort of social phenomena distinct from more spectacular and overtly political events such as mass riots or state-initiated crack-downs on protestors or specific groups. The former do not typically make history. They are treated as context for other events and fade away into the background. Sometimes, if the ordinary becomes sensational as with serial murders, then historical memory will retain them as cases of particularly egregious transgressions of the moral order. Spectacular and overtly political acts of violence are more often considered events of historical significance, the type that give many histories structure – wars, rebellions, and the like are what school children are taught to remember as their nation's past. By calling violence ordinary, I do not mean to belittle it or make it seem unimportant, especially to those it affects on a personal level. Rather the opposite, I do so to bring it to the fore. As this story will show, this everyday violence is the engine for political and social transformation, not simply white noise or neutral social context.

Towards a History of Form

From the preceding discussion, it can be said that what this dissertation contributes to the discipline of history and to Thai studies is more methodological than historiographical. By this I mean that my work is not an overt challenge to existing conventions or accepted knowledge about Thai history. To be honest, what I do here might actually reinforce some conventions of current historiography, for example that the later part of the fifth reign, the 1890s, was a watershed for Thai society and politics. It was, in many ways. At most, my project extends this transformative period three decades to the sixth reign, or the 1920s. And while I offer for the first time in English a general history of the police and the press, this dissertation is not meant to be an institutional history of either. People looking for one or the other will be disappointed.

What I do provide, however, is an example of a historical analysis of form, which has the potential for multiple applications not only for Thai history but for the study of systems of representation in societies everywhere. One thing that distinguishes humans from most other animals and from each other is the use of devices, especially of the diagrammatic type, abstract forms of representation and symbolization. People interested in the history of knowledge production in Southeast Asia and elsewhere might take away from this dissertation an alternative way of thinking about sources. By this I mean that historians should not be limited to mining old documents for data with which to put in a preexisting story about the past or describe the transition to modernity as if this transition, or modernity itself, were a historical fact. Instead of saying something like ‘This epic poem from the sixteenth century mentions that people stopped at a market in what is now northern Thailand, therefore regional trade likely existed, a sign that people did not engage only in subsistence farming,’ a historian can look at what that poem, as a material object, can tell us

about how people generated their reality through narrative or visual means. Thus, documents become things that historians can use to discern patterns of thought or logical frameworks that shape everyday experience. This isn't to say that looking to old documents for data is wrong. That process remains an important, perhaps the most important, part of what historians do. But it is not and should not be the only thing that they do.

In looking at how different actors generate and use forms, I do not focus on just elites. Instead, I provide a vocabulary alternative to that of monarchy, modernization, and nation in the analysis of history and politics in Thailand. Discussions of the reform period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries typically move between tales about the role of an enlightened monarchy and the rise of a new middle class in the sputtering emergence of a modern nation-state. Analyses of contemporary politics then fall back on the tropes intrinsic to these storylines: republicanism versus monarchism, modernity versus tradition, charismatic men of prowess versus rational bureaucratic apparatus. By recasting the past century in terms of secrecy, conspiracy, and detection, I shift the historical unit of analysis to narrative and make its main characters the foot soldiers of modernity – police officers, news reporters, and coroners. It may be possible, then, to think of Thai history in terms of regimes of knowledge production rather than kingly reigns and society in terms of information and communication rather than just as class or ethnicity.⁵² The result is a history that puts elite agents on the same plain as commoners and generates insight into often overlooked but widespread social phenomena (e.g. the prevalence of sensational crime news in the media).

This dissertation also offers a framework for understanding how popular and professional knowledge interact to produce cultural and legal change and thus contributes to

⁵² In a way, the history of the Europe or the 'West' is already thought of in terms of knowledge with the past divided into eras like the 'dark ages,' the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modernity.

broader discussions about law, society, and knowledge production taking place in fields like media studies, legal anthropology, and sociology. By focusing on the formal devices and the materiality of the media, my research provides a way to conceptualize the process.

Analogous to the gene in biology or the ‘meme’ in studies of cultural evolution, the formal device is a unit of knowledge and the technical mechanism that travels from one narrative to another, creating or facilitating change. When the detective novel arrived in Thailand, for example, writers began employing plot devices like the clue and temporal inversion to generate suspense and draw readers into their work. The outcome was a form of crime fiction that mixed the mystery novel with a monologic confessional mode of storytelling that became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The devices of fiction also travelled across the epistemological divide to the factual narrative forms being developed by criminal investigators, resulting in the crime scene re-enactment. Social, cultural, and professional innovation may therefore be analyzed through formal considerations as much as economic, political, or other factors.

Organization

Though this historical narrative unfolds roughly in chronological order, it is really organized by the concepts discussed above – narrative, device, and diagram. Each chapter, outlined below, covers one or more of these ideas.

Chapter 1 – The Detective and Disorder: The dissertation proper begins by describing the introduction of detective fiction into Siam, as Thailand was called until 1939, in the late nineteenth century and explores, in the conventional manner, the reasons why the detective narrative gained such purchase there. A sharp rise in violent crime, major administrative upheaval, the colonial threat from the British and French, and a massive wave

of Chinese immigration all conspired to instill in Siamese elites a sense of impending doom. The crisis required someone skilled and sure, like a detective, to assuage their fears. The detective narrative, then, found a situation in early twentieth century Siam ripe for its ordering effects.

Chapter 2 – Fiction and the Police: Continuing the argument from Chapter 1, this chapter argues that more than simply reflecting growing anxiety over rapid cultural and political change, detective fiction offered a way for state agents to deal with this change, one that focused on generating and organizing information. It does so by showing how the detective novel and specific reforms to the kingdom's police force including the creation of secret police unit and the adaptation of scientific methods of criminal investigation most often associated with New Scotland Yard shared a common narrative form that revolved around the idea of secrecy. That is, the literary innovations ushered in by crime fiction brought with them a new discourse of secrecy, the conceptual link that would connect fiction, the news, the state, and society in Thai political life for decades to come. Chapters 1 and 2 are meant to be read as a pair, linking fiction and the police at the level of narrative.

Chapter 3 – The Design of Legal Facts: This chapter digs deeper into the connection between detective fiction and the police practices transplanted during the early twentieth century. It describes in more detail the government's turn to science as a response to the messy and threatening world they found themselves at the turn of the nineteenth century. At a practical level, the shift to scientific police investigation meant the adoption of new routines and techniques, or more precisely, it meant the transplantation of a new set of artifacts (e.g. crime scene maps and photos) about crime. Through an examination of these new objects, I argue that modern facts about crime, such as the crime scene or the

fingerprint, could not be found ‘out there’ until they had become regularized through practice; information derives its veracity from standardized formal rules.

Chapter 4 – Visualizing the Past: This chapter begins to move from the early twentieth century to the period immediately following World War II by examining the re-enactment, a specific device used to materialize crime that the police and the press (and now the broadcast media) have has in common since the early 1950s. The practice entails police taking suspects out to a scene of a crime and having them demonstrate their actions while they and the media record the event, for evidence on the one hand and for news and entertainment on the other. The idea here is to examine critically the effects of the press’ and the police’s knowledge practices through a concrete example. Through the study of the practice, I demonstrate how crime maps, photos, and diagrams can be thought of as visual tools, not too dissimilar from divination diagrams and older, ‘indigenous’ forms, that help police and news reporters create and then manipulate time and space as much as they represent a reality out there. And as with Chapter 3, it continues to look at the aesthetic rules of knowledge to show how non-state, non-law agents, specifically those in the mass media, participate in the generation of legal knowledge.

Chapter 5 – Policing the Press: This chapter moves from a micro-level study of the police and fiction to a broader discussion of the relationship between the police and the mass media. It traces the rise of sensational crime news in the Cold War era, showing how it stemmed in part from increasingly violent police censorship of political news and in part from shared representational practices between the two institutions. The effect, I argue, has been the dissemination of the police’s new facts into the public sphere, thus spreading and legitimizing them in the public imagination. The other result has been the hardening of the

split between the emerging categories of fact and fiction that the advent of the print media in the nineteenth century had helped usher in.

Chapter 6 – A History of Conspiracy: This chapter, which, traces how the discourse of secrecy that materialized with the introduction of the detective novel, sensational crime news, and scientific police investigation in the early twentieth century transformed into an atmosphere of conspiracy after World War II, when a series of politically motivated murders, unsolved but hardly mysterious, shook the country. The aim of this chapter is to explain why it is that contemporary Thai society is marked by a culture of radical disbelief and how conspiracy theory has become the form of modern Thai history.

CHAPTER 1

THE DETECTIVE AND DISORDER

A Beginning

In the last decade of the nineteenth century a new form of fiction, the detective story, appeared in Thai language magazines for the first time. This was followed quickly by a related, but more general form, that of crime fiction. Detective fiction may be defined broadly as a story written in prose that begins with a crime, usually a murder, or some other puzzling occurrence that is solved gradually through the consideration of material clues. The protagonist, or the detective, who sifts through these clues is, in turn, someone that typically possesses special knowledge or ability and is able to use his or her talents to solve the crime or mystery in question. The story ends, finally, when the crime or mystery has been solved. A detective story stops, as Kate Summerscale has put it, when it returns to its beginning.⁵³ If part of what this dissertation argues is that the narrative structure, vocabulary, and tropes of the murder mystery guide the practices of the police and the press in their representations of criminal violence today and that this narrative can be traced to parallel innovations in the practices of the police, press, and law at around the turn of the nineteenth century, then it makes sense to begin telling the story of the detective narrative's emergence in Siam. Accordingly, I start by describing briefly the first appearance of the literary detective in the kingdom and show how his positive reception stemmed in part from the anxiety produced by a rapidly changing society. I also make the case in this chapter that the administrative and legal reforms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may be thought of as a

⁵³ Kate Summerscale, *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher or The Murder at Road Hill House* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 70. See also *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008), 86, which defines a detective novel as a “story in which the principle action and focus of interest is the investigation of a crime or apparently criminal enigma by a detective figure, either professional or amateur.”

knowledge project. The changes that the government initiated in the late nineteenth century were meant to alter the kingdom's information order, or social organization of knowledge.

A New Form of Fiction

In the US, the detective novel captured the reading public's imagination in 1841 with the publication of Edgar Allen Poe's *Murder at the Rue Morgue*. In England, the form took off with Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and Willkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868). Before these foundational works appeared, sensationalized crime stories in semi-fictional form were popular. These had been around since the eighteenth century, notably in the *Newgate Calendar*, which told hair-raising tales about the exploits of prisoners at Newgate Prison in England. In France, Eugene Vidocq's *Memoires* (1828), ostensibly an autobiography describing his career as a criminal investigator, was another widely read precursor to the modern detective novel. Vidocq himself was a former criminal, a fact that lent notoriety to his writings. It was, however, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories that really pushed the form to international success and that remain archetypal examples of the genre today. The first Holmes story, "*A Study in Scarlet*," appeared in 1887. It was not an overwhelming hit when it first came out, but by the 1890s the Holmes stories were appearing regularly in the *Strand* and helped double that magazine's circulation from 200,000 to 400,000.⁵⁴

In Siam, the form blazed a similar, if more limited, trail in the emerging world of vernacular fiction around the turn of the twentieth century. The first "Thai" detective stories, "*Sup ru dai doi laiat*" (Investigating the details) and "*Sup sapphakan*" (Investigating it all),

⁵⁴ Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 61.

appeared in the weekly journal *Wachirayan wiset* in 1892.⁵⁵ Subsequently, that journal's monthly cousin, *Wachirayan*, published several more stories under the same two titles. The last story, “*Roem ja pen than sup*” (The origins of Mr. Detective), appeared in 1897. The series, following the genre's form, ended appropriately with a beginning. The main character of these detective stories was nameless, referred to simply as ‘Than Sup’ or ‘Mr. Detective.’ These tales were adaptations of Sherlock Holmes stories set largely in Bangkok with Siamese characters. One took place in the province of Ayutthaya, a one-hour drive north from Bangkok today.⁵⁶ References to other examples of early Siamese detective fiction also exist, including stories that appeared in *Darunawat*, one of the kingdom's first general interest newspapers published in Thai. Rachel Harrison notes, for example, that Thai literary critic Suchat Sawatsi has “referred to a short story entitled ‘*Mae sup*’ (Lady detective) by the author Khru Liam written under the pseudonym Nai Thalok,” which “was written to parody an earlier work – ‘*Nai sup*’ (Mr. Detective), first published in *Lak witthaya*.”⁵⁷ While simple, even amateurish, by today's standards, these early attempts were at the time pioneering examples of the new form.

About ten years after these stories first appeared, a more well-known series of detective stories was published. This was crown prince Vajiravudh's Nai Thong-in (Mr. Thong-in) stories. Despite the existence of earlier detective stories, Thong-in is usually hailed as the Siam's first detective and Vajiravudh's short stories the country's first detective

⁵⁵ The stories were written by a number of different authors. The “*Sup sapphakan*” stories were written by Phraya Samosonsapphakan, who was evidently a student of or an aid to Henry Alabaster, a translator for the British Consulate General in Siam during the late nineteenth century. Thanaphol Limaphichat, personal correspondence.

⁵⁶ For a complete list of these stories and the Sherlock Holmes stories on which they are based, see Panida Lorlertratra, *Patthanakan kan plae atchayaninyai chut choelok bom tangtae samai ro. 5 jon thung batjuban* [The development of the translation of Sherlock Holmes stories from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to the present] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2005), 64-65.

⁵⁷ Rachel Harrison, “Elementary My Dear Wat: Influence and Imitation in the Early Crime Fiction of ‘Late-Victorian’ Siam,” in *Chewing Over the West: Occidental Narratives in Non-Western Readings*, ed. Doris Jedamski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 322.

fiction.⁵⁸ They were published in Vajiravudh's journal *Thawi panya* between 1904 and 1905 and republished, slightly modified, in his *Dusit samit* in 1922. In addition to the Thong-in stories, Vajiravudh also translated the detective fiction of other authors including William LeCoeur (*Mysteries of a Great City*), Sax Rohmer (*The Golden Scorpion*), and Agatha Christie (the Poirot series). Vajiravudh himself studied in England during the height of Sherlock Holmes' popularity, suggesting perhaps that he had discovered the genre while a student. The Thong-in stories, though more complex than the *Than sup* and *Sup ru dai doi laiat* stories that came before, were still somewhat predictable by today's standards. The clues in the story "*Raden landa?*" (a reference to a Javanese tale), for example, leave little room to guess that anyone other than the one, and only, suspect could be the villain. What really separated Vajiravudh's stories from their predecessors was their ideological tenor. Citing Harrison again, the Thong-in stories "circulated among an exclusive readership with a multiple purpose and effect" related to "consolidating elites behind monarchy."⁵⁹ To this end, non-Thai characters are painted as potentially dangerous and as a source of disorder while the police are depicted as incompetent. Thong-in, as a stand-in for the royal elite, could see through the machinations of these 'others' much better than the police, thus offering a not-so-subtle critique of the kingdom's new civilian government and its foreign advisors.

Not long after this initial wave of detective stories, Luang Saranupraphan (Nuan Pachinphayat), who would go on to become one of Prime Minister Phibun Songkram's right-hand men in the 1930s and 1940s and write Thailand's original national anthem, published the country's first 'indigenous' crime fiction, a genre closely related to detective

⁵⁸ For example, see the preface by Ratanachai Luangwongngam in Ramajit (pseudo.), *Prapruthikan khong nai thong-in rathanet* [The adventures of Thong-in] (Bangkok: Samoson Nangsu Rahatsakhadi, 2006), 7. Wipha Senanan Kongkanan and Suphani Warathon, authors of two classic texts on the history of the Thai novel, also cite King Vajiravudh's Thong-in stories as Siam's first detective fiction. From Panida, 2005, 2-3.

⁵⁹ Harrison, 2009, 317 and 319.

fiction. As with detective fiction, crime fiction refers to stories whose plots revolve around criminal acts. In crime fiction, however, there need not be a central detective figure. The binding element of these stories is often the crime itself or sometimes the criminal. So while Luang Saranupraphan's popular crime stories *Phrae dam* (Black satin) (1922) and *Na phi* (The ghostly face) (1924) do include detective figures, both policemen, they are not the stories' central characters.⁶⁰ And unlike the police in Vajiravudh's Thong-in stories, the police in Luang Saranupraphan's stories are trustworthy, clever, brave, and effective, reflecting the divergent ideological positions taken by the two authors on the modern state. Instead, ambiguously villainous masked men play the central role in each of Luang Saranupraphan's novels and their secret identities act as the central mystery of the stories. Revealing their identities, in turn, drives the stories' plots. In fact, the phrase "Who is Phrae Dam?" (*Phrae dam kbu khrai?*) appears at the end of each installment of the serialized novels urging people to read on. And as opposed to the tales of Thong-in and Than Sup, Luang Saranupraphan's novels involved more action and adventure, not to mention long and sometime tedious confessions, than cerebral puzzle-solving. Thus, the detective, while integral, is put on the back burner by an anthropomorphized secret (the masked villain) and the truth behind criminal mysteries in Luang Saranupraphan's stories is revealed by a mix of detection, violence, and confession, not unlike the form in which newspapers in Thailand present crime news today.⁶¹

This new crime-based fiction (both the detective novel and general crime fiction) proved immensely popular, if apparent only through anecdotal evidence. In an introduction

⁶⁰ For a discussion on the inspiration behind the story *Phrae dam*, see David Symth, "Ban Maha Phai and Phrae Dam: From Silent Movie to Novel," *Journal of Siam Society* 91 (2003): 223-239.

⁶¹ Perhaps not coincidentally, Luang Saranupraphan would go on to become editor of *Krungthep Daily Mail* in the late 1920s, one of the first newspapers in Thailand to feature sensational crime news on its front page. See Chapter 5.

to one of the *Sup sapphakan* stories, the author, Phraya Samosonsapphakan (That Sirisamphan), noted a high demand for detective fiction while complaining that few people could actually contribute these types of stories to the journal.⁶² Similarly, Luang Saranupraphan often boasted that the monthly magazines he edited, *Senasuksa lae phae witthayasat* and later *Saranukun*, had higher circulation rates than any other periodical in Siam, no doubt because of their crime-based fiction. He notes this proudly on the title page of several issues of *Senasuksa lae phae witthayasat* in 1921. In one issue he claimed to have a circulation of 1,000 copies, a relatively high number for the time. It has also been noted that the more well-known and well-regarded authors of the time such as Kulap Saipradit read *Senasuksa lae phae witthayasat*, an army journal, for its detective stories.⁶³ Other stories about crime, though not all fictional, were also popular. Crime stories adopted from contemporary news stories were published for reading in *lamtat* form and performed by theatre troupes throughout the mid-1910s and 1920s.⁶⁴ Though not in the form of a detective story, these ballads did sometimes describe investigative work and proved to be extremely popular. Many of these *lamtat* about crime would go through at least four or five printings at 3,000 copies per printing. The more popular ones went through as many as ten printings, also at about 3,000 copies each.⁶⁵

The popularity of the crime-based mystery may have stemmed simply from its novelty or that it created interesting mental puzzles that readers found entertaining. A

⁶² Phraya Samosonsapphakan, “*Sup sapphakan*,” *Wachirayan* 35 (July 1897): 3500.

⁶³ Wipha Senanan Kongkanan, *Kamnoet nawaniyai nai prathet thai* [The genesis of the novel in Thailand] (Bangkok: Dok Ya, 1997), 161. Kulap Saipradit (pen name Siburapha, 1905-1974) is generally considered one of Thailand’s greatest writers. His novels include *Luk phuchai* [Son] (1928), *Songkram chiwit* [War of life] (1932), and *Khanglang phap* [Behind the painting] (1937). Kulap was jailed in 1952 for being an ‘agitator’ against Phibun Songkham’s military government and would later live in exile in China until his death in 1974.

⁶⁴ *Lamtat* are ballads written in verse and sung as repartée between two actors, usually a man and a woman. The *lamtat* was a popular form of entertainment in the 1910s and 1920s in Bangkok. Some surmise the form was originally adapted from a Javanese style of performance and entered the kingdom via the south.

⁶⁵ Anek Nawigamune, *Khatakon yuk khun pu* [Murderers in the olden days] (Bangkok: Saeng Thong, 2003), 37.

historian, however, is prone to contextualize, asking what conditions facilitated the form's positive reception, why their social cachet? The rest of this chapter does just this, making the conventional move of putting text in context, by describing the social and political conditions in Siam at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an effort to understand what historical factors may have contributed to the literary detective's popularity.

A Messy Place

From descriptions made by foreign visitors, one gets the impression that Siam's capital during the late nineteenth century was a bit disorderly, both physically and epistemologically.⁶⁶ Public spaces like streets were "nearly all very narrow and crooked, and only adapted to the Siamese, who until lately never pretended to use carriages... They [streets] are also very uneven, with here and there great holes, crossed by rough stepping stones, and during the highest tides are overflowed with water, sometimes knee-deep, for several hours each day... The back lanes and bypaths... are in a chronic state of filth, wet or dry."⁶⁷ Semi-public spaces including commercial ones built for entertainment and pleasure were similarly disorganized. Gambling houses, for example, were simply "large bamboo sheds, with an attap roof, devoid of furniture, and many of them without even a floor, only the bare earth, over which are laid mats for the players to sit on..." These make-shift casinos were, in turn, frequented by "[m]en, women, and little children," who when tired of gambling could "adjourn to the neighboring theatre" where they could "spend an hour or

⁶⁶ Following Richard Kitchener, I use the term epistemology to mean a theory about knowledge as opposed to information, which requires an epistemology to become apparent. See Kitchener, "Folk Epistemology: An Introduction," *New Ideas in Psychology* 20.2-3 (August-December 2002): 89-105.

⁶⁷ From a compilation of accounts by foreigners in Siam during the late nineteenth century in Larry Sternstein's "Krungthep at One Hundred: Scape and Grid," *Journal of the Siam Society* 67.2 (July 1979): 2.

two watching the... performances [of *lakhon*, a type of Siamese stage drama].”⁶⁸ The ‘sacred’ spaces of the city often did not look very different from these ‘profane’ ones: “Next to gambling-hells, theatres, and perhaps dram-shops, the structures which are most numerous... [were] the temples,” which held fairs, hawker stalls, beggars, and all manner of activity.⁶⁹ In this vein, a report from 1911 showed an illegal gambling ring had made its base at a *wat* (a Buddhist temple) in Petchabun province.⁷⁰ As late as 1932, one American in Bangkok concluded, “The temple is not sacred. It is a town hall.”⁷¹

That people did not maintain the structures of their city only added to the experience of being in a ramshackle, transient place in the eyes of foreigners: “It is a curious fact that the Siamese, though ever building, seem seldom, if ever, to take steps to keep their edifices, sacred or secular, in repair. And more often than not what they do build they leave uncompleted. It is quite an exception to see any building which has been completed ‘out of hand’, and still more exceptional to find repairs going on.”⁷² One visitor in the early 1880s summed up his impression of the city with these words: “As the reality of the interior of the city, in its filth, its foetid odours, and the poverty of its buildings, is very different from the idea which the view from the river conveys to the mind, so a close acquaintance with the temples which look the most magnificent from a distance shows them in a very different light from that in which they reflected the brilliant rays of the midday or the setting sun.”⁷³ Another, similar, account of Bangkok from the mid-nineteenth century went like this: “The

⁶⁸ Carl Bock, from Sternstein, 1979, 5-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁰ National Archives (NA) R6 Y 13/19, *Krasuang yuttitham, san tang jangwat, khadi len kan phanan thi wat* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Justice, provincial courts, case of gambling in a *wat*], 1911. *Wats* are typically thought of today as a religious center, though in the past they functioned more like multi-purpose community centers, as the next quote indicates.

⁷¹ Andrew Freeman, *A Journalist in Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2007, 1932), 48.

⁷² Carl Bock, *Temples and Elephants: The Narrative of a Journey of Exploration through Upper Siam and Lao* (Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1985, 1884), 82.

⁷³ Ibid, 50.

town looked as a supper-room does the morning after a ball; there was nothing left of the feast save the odds and ends; jellies had melted to nauseous looking water, and gaily-ornamented cakes crumbled into indescribable pieces of nastiness. So it was with Bangkok...”⁷⁴

The impression of messiness extended to the private spaces of the family home, which like the gambling parlor and the public thoroughfare was often seen as unkempt or makeshift: “The middle class dwell in houses built of wood, usually unpainted teak, and roofed with earthen tiles. They are small and illy ventilated, and here the people huddle together, from the parents to the children of the third and fourth generation... They have very little furniture... The lower class dwellings are built on posts... which elevate them five or six feet from the ground, and are reached by ladders, which at night are drawn up to prevent dogs or thieves coming into the house. But the very poor have... huts made of palm leaves tied to a bamboo frame, and with... the bare earth for a floor.”⁷⁵ The slapdash, sometimes shoddy character of these homes was further complicated by their seemingly unhindered mobility: “Owners can also move at will, letting their dwellings float up- or downstream with the incoming or outgoing tide, where they can tie them up at a new mooring place.”⁷⁶ Nothing was stable. Expectations for an intimate space of the home, perhaps guided by a Victorian sensibility, were thus disappointed.⁷⁷ Instead the house was the location of conflicting, jumbled noises to foreign ears and this racket only got louder when one considers the things that went on in them. Cruising along the muddy waters of the

⁷⁴ Frederick Arthur Neale, *Narrative of a Residence in Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996, 1852), 26-7.

⁷⁵ Sternstein, 1979, 3.

⁷⁶ Adolf Bastian, *A Journey in Siam*, trans. Walter E.J. Tips (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005, 1863), 50. Many people at the time lived in houses located along the rivers or canals that crisscrossed the city.

⁷⁷ Rachel Harrison, among others, has described the early twentieth century in Siam as its ‘Victorian period’ because of the influence of Victorian English culture on the Siamese royal family. Rachel Harrison, “The Allure of Ambiguity: The ‘West’ and the Making of Thai Identities,” in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

“Menam” (Chao Phraya River), one could “look inside open houses and observe the inhabitants going about their daily business... [and] see them cooking, eating, sleeping, sitting together around a teapot with their friends, listening to a priest sermonizing, or playing with their children. A craftsman can be seen industriously pursuing his profession, an idler smoking, and a woman, whose legs are bound because she has run away or committed some other misdemeanor, meekly washing and knocking about some kitchen utensils. Then one can find buyers and sellers involved in lengthy negotiations, can hear the shrieking voices of bickering women, or find oneself stuck in a jam of boats, which one can only escape unscathed from if one’s pilot is giving his undivided attention to the matter.”⁷⁸ All manner of activity, it seemed, could take place in the home just as anything could happen at the temple or on the street.

To this already disorderly place a series of rapid physical changes were brought to bear. The changes involved a range of projects, either initiated by the royal government or by private companies or individuals through the market including technological adaptations in communications and information technology such as the introduction of paved streets, trains, electric trams, automobiles, the telegraph, telephones, typewriters (for Thai language), printing presses, filing systems, and a postal service. In Bangkok “... during the first decade of this century [the twentieth] modern construction proceeded with a certain rapidity, and by the end of his [King Chulalongkorn’s] reign a discernable change had been wrought in the appearance of the capital... Great sections of the massive crenellated wall had been demolished to provide road metal for some of the hundred and twenty miles of carriage ways that crossed the network of canals on substantial bridges of iron and marble; including the 200-foot-wide, two mile long, tree-lined boulevard [Ratchadamnoen] connecting the

⁷⁸ Ibid, 51-2.

recently built Grand Palace with the complex of ornamental gardens, princely villas and the summer palace [Dusit] which had been laid out immediately north of Khlong Padung Krung Kasem, and the Samsen Road – New Road’s complement to the northeast.”⁷⁹ In 1890, Prince Naritsaranuwatiwang proposed building eighteen roads in the Samphaeng area to facilitate commerce and increase land value in the area. In 1899, as part of the Suan Dusit palace construction, several more roads were built. Before this building spree, there were few paved roads and those that did exist did so mostly because of canal digging. They were made from dirt dredged up from canals.⁸⁰

With the roads came new technology – tramways, electricity, the telegraph, and the telephone. In 1888, a group of Danes introduced the horse-tramway. This was electrified and extended in 1893. In 1903, the tram system carried about 10 million passengers annually. The major routes at the time were along Charoenkrung, Bangkoalam, Samsen, Ausdand, and Rachawong roads. The system totaled 17.3 km of line with “receipts on the routes from Charoenkrung to Bangkoalam and Samsen between 1899 and 1907 show[ing] increasing demand for trams.”⁸¹ The trams, while first serving the commercial areas, were eventually extended into the suburbs and helped generate a move from canals and rivers. More roadways also meant more cars, which grew in number from 401 in 1910 to 3,361 in 1929.⁸² In addition, many modern services were established: “Banking facilities, hotels, a hospital and a nursing home, a university and several secondary schools, a library and a museum, one of the finest race-courses in the East and a number of social-cultural-athletic clubs were provided among the other of the amenities necessary for modern living. Water was piped

⁷⁹ Larry Sternstein, “Bangkok at the Turn of the Century: Mongkut and Chulalongkorn Entertain the West,” *Journal of Siam Society* 54.1 (1966): 64.

⁸⁰ Phorphant Ouyyanont, “Physical and Economic Change in Bangkok, 1851-1925,” *Southeast Asian Studies* 36.4 (March 1999): 443, 448-9.

⁸¹ Ibid, 465.

⁸² Ibid, 460.

into the city and available from a number of artesian bores, and electricity lit street lamps and moved the trams that shared the clogged roadways with a never-ending stream of jinrikishas, horse-drawn carriages, bullock carts, bicycles, small omnibuses and an increasing number of motor cars.”⁸³ In monetary terms, by the beginning of 1926, 202 million ticals had been spent on “works of development: Railway construction, 172,435,797, Irrigation Construction, 22,709,703, Bangkok Waterworks, 4,922,129, Samsen Power Station, 2,044,339.”⁸⁴

The provision of paved roads also spurred other changes, such as the gradual introduction of row housing development and new palaces for nobles. From 1880s onwards, “settlements gradually moved from the banks of waterways to along major roads, at that time mainly Chareonkrung and Bumrungmuang.”⁸⁵ By the early 1910s, the city had taken on a whole new look: “A revision of the 1910 census undertaken in 1913 shows that by the early 1910s, settlements had already moved away from the river and canals. Bangkok’s population (excluding Thonburi) clustered around the districts of Chakkrawat, Prarajawang, Samphuntawong, Pomprab, Bangrak, and Pahurad, where roads were concentrated.”⁸⁶ So by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, not more than seven to eight percent of the city’s population lived in floating houses. By 1910, “the map of Bangkok had changed remarkably from its appearance of the 1880s. Many industrial, residential, and commercial areas developed along the arterial roads: Sampeng, Dusit, Sarapratum, Bangrak, Bangkoalam, Banglumpoo Lang, the part of Bangsue west of Klong Prem Prachakorn, and the district within the city wall.” Southern Bangkok as especially active area for development: “Roads

⁸³ Sternstein, 1966, 69-70.

⁸⁴ Executive Committee of the Eighth Congress of the Far Eastern Association of Tropical Medicine, *Siam in 1930: General and Medical Features* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000), 17. Eleven ticals were about one English pound at the time of the Congress in 1930.

⁸⁵ Phorphant, 1999, 444.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 458.

had significant effects on the growth of this [Bangrak] district. Consulates, the residences of foreigners, the port, rice mills, and saw mills were located in this area. Charoenkrung Road became the hub of commercial Bangkok and remained so until the 1950s, the headquarters of many of the principle trading houses, banks, and other enterprises, and containing most of the leading hotels. Also, Sampeng district became the center of trade and business in Bangkok and remained so until the 1950s. It was the headquarters of many of principle trading houses, banks, warehouses, and leading hotels.”⁸⁷ The landscape in and around Bangkok was thus changing along with and as dramatically as the kingdom’s system of administration (discussed below).

The countryside, meanwhile, remained plunged in darkness and mystery, moving slowly on rivers and canals, with difficulty over muddy roads by ox-cart or foot: “Though the Public Works Department was fast providing Bangkok’s half million inhabitants with a semi-Europeanized ‘city of bricks,’ the communications system linking the capital with the more densely populated portions of a sparsely settled country was being extended at a snail’s pace, and, to judge from what are, at best, unenthusiastic descriptions, even larger provincial capitals manifested not a single concrete item in evidence of the great reform.”⁸⁸ As late as 1934, for example, it took seventeen days by boat to get to Chiang Mai, the closest large town, from the northwestern province of Tak. The trip today can be made in a matter of hours by automobile. And because the roads were not all paved, transport by motor car during the rainy season was out of the question.⁸⁹ Much closer to Bangkok, Nakhon Nayok province in the central plains, was described as being mostly jungle and mountains, through

⁸⁷ Ibid, 458.

⁸⁸ Sternstein, 1966, 70.

⁸⁹ Phra Natkarani, Representative in Parliament from Tak Province in a radio address given on 19 December 1934, in *Patakata khong phu thaen ratsadon ruang saphap khong jangwat tang-tang* [Speeches given by representatives of parliament about conditions in various provinces] (Bangkok: Thai Club of Japan, 1996 (1935)), 51-52.

which there were few roads. Those that existed were narrow and made of dirt. Of the two main roads in the province, cars could use only one to travel during the dry season. The other was broken up into sections and cars generally could not pass. These two roads were built about 1900, but hadn't been maintained. Land transport was still mostly conducted by animal-drawn carts. There was of course the new train service from Pak Phli station to Bangkok, but this option was not convenient because there were so few roads getting to the station. This left boat transport, run by a private company, as the most reliable form of transportation.⁹⁰ In Trat, a more affluent province in the south with a large population of Chinese, there was only one road that is that was serviceable, about seventeen kilometers long, but this was not paved.⁹¹ In Buriram, to the east of Bangkok, travel to adjacent provinces was described as "not convenient" due to a lack of good roads. There were only paths for horse or bull carts and even these could not make it through the rainy season. Worse yet, there was still no telegraph service, almost fifty years after its introduction to Siam.⁹²

It did not help, if this is the correct way of phrasing it, that the people who inhabited these seemingly cluttered, mixed-up spaces comprised many ethnicities, most of whom did not speak central Thai. There were, in addition to the Siamese, hundreds of thousands of Chinese of many different dialect groups. William Skinner, in his encyclopedic book on the Chinese noted that about 185,000 Chinese, overwhelmingly male, lived in Bangkok in 1904.⁹³ The relatively small total number of people in the capital, which was an estimated 120,000 in

⁹⁰ Phraya Wisetsinghanat, Representative of Parliament from Nakhon Nayok Province in radio address given on 30 December 1934, in *Patakata*, 1996, 67-8.

⁹¹ Kimatha Niranthan, Representative of Parliament from Trat in radio address given on 3 January 1935, in *Patakata*, 1996, 71-3.

⁹² Major General Luang Sakranakan, Representative of Parliament from Buriram in radio address given on 8 January 1935, in *Patakata*, 1996, 74-5, 77.

⁹³ G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 74.

1883 and was no more than about 360,000 by World War I, meant these Chinese men comprised about half (or more) of the city's population at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹⁴ More than their sheer numbers, it was the speed of the increase that contributed to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Skinner writes that the total number of net arrivals of Chinese to Siam between 1882 and 1892 was 78,000. This jumped to 193,200 between 1893 and 1905 and remained high at 180,200 between 1906 and 1917.⁹⁵ The Chinese, in addition to having a 'Chinatown' in Samphaeng, were located in large numbers throughout the city. Constance Wilson, from a detailed analysis of Siam's first postal census, notes "Chinese were well distributed throughout the city where they could be found in every neighborhood..."⁹⁶ They could also be found in almost all sectors of the economy, controlling trade activities and tax collection duties and providing a source of labor for the expanding city and provincial capitals from Nakhon Sawan to Phuket. Add to this significant numbers of Laotians, Malays, Annamites, Mons, Khmers, and South Asians in addition to a handful of vocal, influential Europeans in the capital. Though mostly spread throughout Bangkok, some groups did have their own streets or districts – Samsen, Tanao, Bangrak, Phahurat. The capital and select townships including Phuket, Chiang Mai, and places along what are now the kingdom's borders were as diverse ethnically as they were seemingly messy, at least in terms of being organized in distinct, ordered zones of land uses. Rather than cosmopolitan or simply pluralistic, however, local elites imagined this mix, for many reasons, as problematic.

⁹⁴ Porphant, 1999, 445.

⁹⁵ Skinner, 1957, 61 (table two).

⁹⁶ Constance Wilson, "Bangkok in 1883," *Journal of Siam Society* 77.2 (1989): 54.

Kingdom of Crime

Chief among the problems posed by the kingdom's messiness for the administrations of Kings Chulalongkorn, Vajiravudh, and Prajadiphok was crime, which, according to government statistics and anecdotal evidence from newspaper reports, increased dramatically throughout the country between the end of the fifth reign (1868-1910) and the early part of the sixth (1910-1925).⁹⁷ It is for this reason that Siam in the fifth reign was sometimes called the 'kingdom of crime' (*anajak haeng jon*).⁹⁸

A brief scan of the daily papers published in Bangkok shows incidents of banditry, very often accompanied by physical assault and murder, were commonplace across the kingdom. On 19 May 1902, someone picking up a copy of the *Bangkok Times* would have come across an article entitled, "Gang Robbery at Paklat." The report describes a group of forty men raiding a gambling house in southern Bangkok. Eleven were killed and many injured during that incident.⁹⁹ Another report tells of an official in charge of an area just north of the city requesting permission to organize a posse of men to control the rampant crime there.¹⁰⁰ Things were so out of hand during the turn of the twentieth century that even monks were kidnapped.¹⁰¹ One British police officer serving in the Metropolitan Constabulary in Bangkok in 1906 recounts this story that A.J.A. Jardine, another British national, head of the Metropolitan Constabulary from 1897 to 1902, was fond of relating: "One evening, not long after his [Jardine's] arrival in Siam, he had occasion to call at a large

⁹⁷ As with most 'crime waves' in the era of mass media, it is difficult to say whether the rise in crime associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was 'real' or a something that can be attributed to the increased reporting of violence around the kingdom. The statistics that exist for the period do indicate a large number of violent crimes and that these increased in certain areas over the period. But this can also be attributed to steady improvements in gathering data. I address this more in the next two chapters.

⁹⁸ This term comes up occasionally in stories about late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries written later, such as in stories about famous historical bandits in newspapers like *Phim thai* in the 1950s.

⁹⁹ No author, "Gang Robbery at Paklat," *Bangkok Times*, 19 May 1902 from David Bruce Johnston, "Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1977), 178.

¹⁰⁰ Johnston, 1977, 178.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 179.

[police] station on the way from the club to dinner. He found the shutters down and the place closed. On ascertaining the reason from an old inspector who resided above the station, he was informed that they usually barred the station for the night to prevent theft of the rifles and other Government property.”¹⁰² The officer went on to describe Bangkok by saying: “Rarely a night passed in which we [the police] had not to turn out to keep order. The floor of the Bangkok [police] Station was often covered with blood. People carried knives and swords as a matter of course until the ‘Arms Act’ was put into force, when things became more peaceable.”¹⁰³

Almost two decades later, however, things had not gotten ‘more peaceable.’ An article from the newspaper *Jinodayam warasap* dated 4 June 1921 says that incidents of banditry in Samut Prakan and Phrapradeng provinces adjacent to Bangkok were common, causing citizens to feel extremely frightened (*wat wan kae lao ratsadon ying nak*). A few days before the report, on 24 May, a group of bandits robbed a house in Phra Khanong district, in what is now eastern Bangkok, taking property and a woman. Later that same night, the bandits robbed a local notable in Bangna district not far from Phra Khanong. The police eventually found the woman but they never arrested the bandits. The report goes on to say that these incidents point clearly to the fact that citizens in the provinces adjacent to Bangkok did not live in peace (*sangop sabai suk*) and called on local officials and the Ministry of Local Government (*krasuang nakhonban*) to deal with situation swiftly.¹⁰⁴ It also suggested a special police unit be put together to quash the bandits hunkered down in Phrapradaeng, just

¹⁰² Cecil H. Forty, *Cremation Volume for Police Lieutenant Colonel C.H. Forty* (Bangkok: n.p. 1967), 32.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰⁴ I translate *Krasuang nakhonban* as Ministry of Local Government following the name they used on their letterhead. Other studies have translated the name as Ministry of the Capital because its function was to administer Bangkok, not the provinces.

southwest of Bangkok.¹⁰⁵ A report dated 24 April 1923 describes a funeral-turned-gambling-den in Samut Prakan, east of the capital, at which a dead man with several assault wounds was found. Another report, from 13 March 1923, says that on 11 March police and a local resident went to arrest Nai (Mr.) Waek, a suspected criminal, at his residence, also in Samut Prakan. A shootout ensued in which Nai Waek was shot in the chest and captured. His associates fled the scene.¹⁰⁶

It is common today to link the city in general and rapid urbanization in particular, which Bangkok arguably was experiencing at the time, with increased rates of crime. The violence, however, was not limited to urban Bangkok and its suburbs. The situation throughout the central plains, for example, was especially dire. Chulalongkorn in 1882, reportedly told Jao Phraya Surasakmontri (Joem Saengchuto), the commander of the *thaban na* ('front' army), that "At this time, incidents of serious crime including murder and armed robbery occur every evening [in Suphanburi in the central plains]. Many people have lost their lives and have been physically assaulted as a result of these robberies."¹⁰⁷ Surasakmontri claimed that at least two to three cases of murder or robbery occurred there each day.¹⁰⁸ A *Bangkok Times* correspondent wrote in 1892 that in *monthon* Ayuthaya "not a week passes without some fresh act of violence and bloodshed."¹⁰⁹ In another news story on the central region, this one from 1913, a reporter bemoaned the cheapness of life in Siam saying that while murder was a crime according to law, a simple payment from the perpetrator, say 300-

¹⁰⁵ NA R6 N 20.5/36, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak phrapradaeng* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Phrapradaeng].

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Jao Phraya Surasakmontri, *Prawat khong jom phon jao phraya surasakmontri* [The biography of Jao Phraya Surasakmontri] (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1951), 164.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 170.

¹⁰⁹ No author, "Ayutthia," *Daily Mail*, 14 December 1892, from Johnston, 1977, 169. *Monthon* is the name for the geographical unit of administration established in 1892. It is sometimes translated as circle.

400 baht, to a victim's relatives was enough to keep things quiet.¹¹⁰ In Nakhon Nayok, a province just north of Bangkok, reports indicated that talk of various criminals (*phu rai*) were commonly heard in villages there.¹¹¹ As if on cue, a story from 22 February 1917 tells of four or five men entering a house and beating up its owner before robbing him of his possessions. A few weeks before that, reports from the same province came in about a man shooting a soldier to death just across from the home of the provincial governor.¹¹²

Banditry and assaults were also common in the province of Sawankhalok in *monthon* Phitsanulok, about six hours drive from Bangkok in today's terms. A news report dated 24 February 1917 stated that it was difficult to determine the cause for all the crime taking place there, but the situation was simply frightful (*na wat siaw mak*). For example, a report from 26 May 1917 tells of a shooting at the house of Nai Won during the evening. Fortunately, no one was injured.¹¹³ A few weeks earlier, On 24 April 1917, Nai Yok was shot near Wat Bong in *tambon* (sub-district) Wang Phanit while taking his pigs to sell at market. The paper called the situation in the area extremely grave. A report from 24 March of the same year says that someone robbed the house of Amdaeng Su in Amphoe Muang, Sawankhalok.¹¹⁴ Shots were fired but no one was hit. The bandit then set fire to the victim's house after locking the owners, a couple and their child, inside. The woman and her husband could not escape the blaze and died. Their child fell from the house in a flaming heap. It was not clear whether he survived the fall. On 16 February 1917, the governor of Sawankhalok was having an event at

¹¹⁰ NA R6 N 20.5/4, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak ratburi* [Sixth Reign, Ministry of Local Government, Newspapers, Provincial News, News from Ratburi].

¹¹¹ NA R6 N 20.5/5, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak nakhon nayok* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Nakhon Nayok].

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Unless otherwise noted, the examples in the rest of this paragraph are all from NA R6 N20.5/15, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak sawankhalok, phitsanulok monthon* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Sawankhalok, Phitsanulok Circle].

¹¹⁴ Amdaeng is a prefix used during the fifth reign to designate a commoner woman, similar to either Miss or Mrs., who is not either a slave or an aristocrat.

his compound (*juan*) in the evening when someone shot into the party. Luckily no one was hurt. On the night of 1 March 1917, someone beat an Indian snake charmer over the head while he was performing. On 13 March 1917, someone slashed the head of Nai Yuan with a knife near the governor's house. That same night, someone shot and seriously hurt Amdaeng Loi while she sat in her house at *tambon* Bonwang and someone else shot and injured Nai Wang, also while he was in his own house.

Even royalty was not spared. Prince Damrong, King Chulalongkorn's brother and Minister of Interior at the time, visited Sawankhalok on 23 January 1917 despite being warned of the violence there. The night he arrived, the sound of five gunshots was heard. A paper reporting the incident sarcastically suggested that this may have been a five-gun salute to the prince. The next morning the chatter of women merchants (*mae kha jot kan*) at the local market claimed one bullet hit Amdaeng Liam at her house. Another hit a woman who had come out to see what was going on. The third bullet hit a woman in *tambon* Yan Khao Thong. They did not know if the fourth and fifth bullets hit anyone. The year before, Police Inspector J. Jarmer, one of several Danish nationals serving in the provincial police in the 1910s and 1920s, reported that that the area was awash in guns and that gunfire could be heard nightly. There were 2,103 registered guns in the province, he wrote, adding that many more were not registered. He claimed that the crime problem there was exacerbated by unspecified "problems" between a *Daily Mail* reporter, the provincial governor, and the local judge.¹¹⁵

The areas along the eastern seaboard were perhaps even more beleaguered. From reports coming out of Chonburi, incidents of crime were on the rise in the early part of the

¹¹⁵ NA R6 N 4.1/91, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, raingan wa duai jon phu rai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, the metropolitan and provincial police, general duties, report on bandits by police inspector Jarmer], 25 October 1916.

twentieth century and as with the monks in the Bangkok area, no one was safe. Several *palat amphoe* (deputy district chief) in the province were shot to death in the 1910s.¹¹⁶ One report dated 12 March 1917 tells a story of how villains slashed and killed a 60-year-old man in his own home. In the same month, another man was knifed and killed behind his house. On 1 April 1917, in middle of day, someone hacked a woman to death in public. Two days later, several men attacked and cut a Chinese man to death while he walked outside. The perpetrators took 700 baht from the man's body. The south too, was crime ridden. A report from 13 January 1917 reported that late in December the previous year, someone set fire to the house of a well known local in *tambon* Chung in Surat Thani province. Fortunately, the damage sustained was minimal.¹¹⁷ A few weeks earlier, on 18 December 1916, a Nai Choi and a Nai Daeng went hunting in a forest in Amphoe Muang, Surat Thani. Nai Choi shot Nai Daeng during that trip and he died two days later. Police investigated the case but were not sure if the shooting was intentional or accidental.¹¹⁸ The situation did not appear qualitatively better in the northeast. In Nakhon Ratchasima, for example, a report from 4 February 1924 claimed that people there were living in a state of unease because criminals had gathered *en masse* and that at least two to three incidents of crime took place each night. Bandits there had no fear and they preyed particularly on homes headed by old people and women. The police, it was reported, were not doing anything to stop the crime wave. According to the paper, they just sat around collecting their salaries.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the examples in this paragraph are all from NA R6 N 20.5/9, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak chonburi* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Chonburi].

¹¹⁷ NA R6 N 20.5/14 *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak surat thani* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Surat Thani].

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ NA R6 N 20.5/7 *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak nakhon ratchasima* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Nakhon Ratchasima].

Even the north, seen today as an idyllic getaway from chaotic Bangkok, did not escape the violence. A report from Police Colonel Jao Ratchabut, Police Inspector (*jare*) for Lampang (summarized in a letter from the acting Chief Inspector (*jare yai*) Luang Phraya Phetinthara (P.L.E. Warming, a Danish national) to Mom Jao Khamrop, the Director-General of Police) stated that incidents of banditry, some that included murder, were on the increase in Lampang. The cause, he wrote, was the lack of police officers, which was due in turn to the police department's small budget and poor pay.¹²⁰ In Nakhon Sawan, the 'gateway to the north,' reports show a similar situation. A news story dated 29 April 1917 says gambling was prevalent and often led to arguments and theft.¹²¹ On 21 May 1917 someone stabbed Nai Nuam in *tambon* Yan Matri. He died seven days later. The same day, Amdaeng Phae was shot in the arm while on her boat. Two days later, a Chinese merchant named Lee was walking at the local market in Paknam Pho when someone struck him on the head with wooden object. His head was split open, but he did not die. The perpetrator escaped. A report dated 6 April 1917 says someone shot to death Amdaeng Chua, the wife of Chinaman (*jek*) Daeng, while she was at her house in *tambon* Pho. The local officials and the police went to investigate the same night but Amdaeng Chua had already lost consciousness and thus could not identify the shooter to the police or other local officials. Another report says that a shootout erupted in *amphoe* Phaya Hakhin, resulting in one death.

¹²⁰ NA R6 N 4.5/2, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, jare krom tamruat, nai phan tamruat aek jao ratchabut jare raingan wa nai borinwaen jangwat lampang mi jon phu rai chuk chum thawi mak khun kho phoem nai sip phon tamruat lae kho yup ngoen bia liang thi tat ok nan on ma thua jai samrap phoem khon khun hai phiang pho kae kan raksa thong thi to pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, Metropolitan and Provincial Police, inspector of police department, increase in the number of bandits in Lampang], 1916. Jare (pronounced ja-ray) were officers of the provincial police's 'internal investigation division' (*jare tamruat*) set up in 1914 (disbanded in 1923) to monitor the performance of the provincial gendarmerie. Most of the inspectors were Danish. Mom Jao Khamrop was the uncle of well-known writer and newspaper publisher Kukrit Pramot.

¹²¹ Unless otherwise noted, the examples for the rest of this paragraph are from NA R6 N20.5/13, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak nakhon sawan* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Nakhon Sawan].

Fortunately, the police put in great effort to find the perpetrators in that case and were able to discover their perpetrators' identities.

Of course, actual levels of violent crime varied from location to location and over time. It was higher in certain places for some periods and lower in others. One newspaper reported in October 1916 that crime was down for the whole of *monthon* Ayuthaya, mostly because it had been a particularly cold few weeks and this discouraged would-be bandits. The decline may have stemmed from more than just cold weather though, as news from Thanaburi province in *monthon* Ayuthaya for the same year showed that the crime there was down due in large part, according to the newspaper, to the hard work of the police. Bangkok papers reported on 22 January 1918 that the police in the city of Ayuthaya had captured two murderers in short time, one hour to be exact, and praised them for their quick work.¹²² Lopburi, to the east of Ayuthaya, too, was reportedly doing relatively well towards the end of 1916 despite reports of the murder of two government officials there. One report noted that the situation had improved because of the good work of the new governor. As such, the province experienced only "crime as usual," but nothing of epic proportions. Their main problem was illegal gambling.¹²³

There is also data, after the government began to keep such things, from that the number of crimes reported fell significantly during the first few years of the 1920s in the north and northeast. One foreign visitor noted: "It is generally accepted that Siam was visited by a wave of crime which followed in the wake of the war [World War I], and this probably does account for a good proportion of the cases reported in the Southern and Central portions of the country, but it seems this wave did not reach as far as the North (or,

¹²² NA R6 N20.5/3, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak krung kao* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Krung Kao (Ayuthaya)].

¹²³ NA R6 N20.5/17, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang nangwat, khao jak lopburi* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Lopburi].

at most, only its back-eddies), for the figures show nothing but a normal amount of crime among a people who are still no less subject to the frailties of the human race than any other agricultural population.”¹²⁴ He added “nothing is so remarkable or augurs so well for the future as the absence of serious crime, when compared with some of the central and southern Provinces of Siam.”¹²⁵ For twelve months between 1923 and 1924, “the number of criminal cases reported as arising in the whole Kingdom was 42,800 in a population of 9,200,000 or an average of one in every 215 persons. In Bangkok Circle, the Capital, the average was naturally the highest and works out at one in 60, with 11,069 cases in a population of 667,000. Ayudhya [Ayuthaya] had 4,300 cases, or one in 164; Phitsanulok, a notorious Circle, 3,280 cases, or one in 121; Rajaburi [Ratburi], already mentioned, 3,300 cases, or one in 143; while in Bayap [Phayap, in the north], with 2,235 cases, the average fell to one in 357; and in Maharat [in the northeast], with only 1,137 cases, it was as low as one in 480. The *monthon* of Ubon Ratchathani [also in the northeast] had even less crime than Maharat, with a total of 78 cases of serious offences. Udon’s total was as low as 41, while Roi Et had least of all with 38.”¹²⁶

Despite the temporal and geographical variation, what is clear was that people were noticing a rise in crime since the 1890s and this increase was common to both city and country. An article entitled “Ayutthia” in the *Bangkok Times* from 1892, for example, indicates that as early as 1892, people (or at least the English reporters of the *Bangkok Times* and its foreign and elite readership) were beginning to recognize that the number of incidents of crime were increasing and had been since around 1890.¹²⁷ As the preceding

¹²⁴ Reginald le May, *An Asian Arcady: The Land and Peoples of Northern Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999 (1926)), 93.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 91.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 91-2.

¹²⁷ No author, “Ayutthia,” *Daily Mail*, 14 December 1892, in Johnston, 1977, 171.

sampling of news reports indicates, this violent crime exerted a strong, destabilizing force on the lives of people throughout the kingdom at one point or another between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the end of the third decade of the twentieth century. The constant refrains in the vernacular press that people were not living in peace as well as the regular calls for the central government to act quickly and decisively or to send people with “ability” (*khwan samat*) to administer townships outside Bangkok attests to this. The press was in essence amplifying the effects of crime and bringing it to ‘national’ attention in Bangkok. It is also clear that the government, which kept the newspaper clippings from which much of the information above is obtained, was quite aware of the problem and was looking for ways to make sense of the disorder.¹²⁸ And herein lay the conundrum.

The Information Out There

During the reform years, which I take here to mean the period between the 1890s and the 1920s, information about crime did exist. People often knew who was doing what, or thought they did, especially in the smaller towns in the provinces. In a report from the *Bangkok Times* about crime from 1907, the writer states, “No one would be surprised...when as often happened, bandits killed during raids were found to be people living in the immediate neighborhood.”¹²⁹ Another newspaper report dated 14 February 1917 indicated that on the seventh day the month, Amdaeng Saeng, who was pregnant, was shot to death near the local market during the evening. The next day the governor went to investigate the incident along with the deputy governor and local police only to discover that the shooter

¹²⁸ In a sense, this indicates that the government in Bangkok during the early days of the reform period relied in part on intelligence gathered through the emerging popular press. While the Bangkok government did send officials out to administer the provinces beginning in the 1890s, the press seemed often to have more up to date information about local conditions.

¹²⁹ No author, “How to Deal with Dacoits,” *Bangkok Times*, 14 January, in Johnston, 1977, 151.

lived nearby and was quite well known. The provincial ‘prosecutor,’ or magistrate (*ayakan jangwat*), however, investigated the case and found that the person named by the police was not the shooter. Rather the policeman himself was the culprit. Witnesses later confirmed that the shooter was the police officer, who subsequently confessed, saying the cause was a failed marriage.¹³⁰ The point is locals knew the identity of the shooter. English residents in Siam at the time reported a similar situation. A Mr. Fitzmaurice wrote: “...there have been recent cases of murders and other serious crimes in which the perpetrators have not been brought to justice; amongst others a case in which two traders were murdered in Palao, on the road between Phe [Phrae] and Pong. After shooting and robbing the men, the assailants fled, but left behind a hat bearing one of their names and a poll tax paper belonging to another of their number. It appears that it was generally known who these assailants were, but that, although the men and the fact of their return to Phe are said to have been known to the Mung [Muang] Song authorities (fifteen miles from Palao) no steps were then taken to arrest either of the men whose names were betrayed by what they had left behind them in their flight.”¹³¹

Another report claimed that anyone that went to the Nongkhai city market could hear every day that people in the area knew full well that local toughs made a living from questionable means (*nakleng thuk khon yom sap wa ha kin duai mai borisut*) but local leaders including sub-district and village chiefs weren’t able to do anything and could never find evidence against these troublemakers.¹³² A report from 17 April 1917 says that a reporter in

¹³⁰ NA R6 N 20.5/5, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak nakbon nayok* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Nakhon Nayok], 1916.

¹³¹ NA R6 N4.2/21, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, prakat lae ph. ro. bo., khwam hen ruang rabiap kan tamruat phuthon 2460-2464* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan and provincial police, announcements and royal decrees, opinion on the system of provincial police, 1917-1921], 1918.

¹³² Letter from Police Major Sisao, Inspector for Region Four, Nongkhai, to Police Major Phraya Khathathonabodi Siratchaban Muang, Chief Inspector in NA R6 N4.5n/4, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat*

Sawankhalok supports what the paper had been saying for the past year, namely that several bandits had made their base in Sawankhalok and regularly committed crimes against the locals and merchants. It said that the local officials in charge of administering the area knew about the situation but did not take action and arrest these criminals. The article then urged the government to assign people with ability to suppress the criminals.¹³³ In several cases in *tambon* Wat Bung, victims of shootings said they knew and could identify perpetrators and often told the local authorities. But when cases went to court, defendants would be freed because suspects were able to produce dozens of witnesses on their own behalf. After a shooting, it was alleged the perpetrator would go to people's houses and convince them to be a witness on their behalf by offering material rewards (*sombat*). Meanwhile, plaintiffs could rarely produce enough evidence because many witnesses were afraid of the suspects. This was reported to be the case in several other provinces as well.¹³⁴ Prince Damrong, in a famous tract in which he interviewed a captured bandit named Chan, active in Phathumthani, Ayutthaya, and Suphanburi around 1903, asked "How does the *sai* (informer, here for the bandit not the state) know who the *nakleng* (local tough) is?" Chan replied that in the circle of *nakleng*, identities are not kept secret.¹³⁵ In many cases, then, locals knew full well the identities of perpetrators of crimes, violent or otherwise. And in many cases, local officials knew as well. In fact, locals, local officials, and bandits were often in cahoots. For example, in 1885 in Muang Phichit, locals in five *tambon* (sub-district) provided food for a

phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, not enough police in Nakhon Phanom, Monthon Udon], 30 June 1916

¹³³ NA R6 N20.5/15, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak sawankhalok monthon phitsanulok* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Sawankhalok, *monthon* Phitsanulok].

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Krom Phraya Damrong Ratchanuphap, "Ruang sonthana kap phu rai plon" [Interview with a bandit], in *Prachum phraniphon betalet* [Collected miscellaneous writings] (Bangkok: Khrusapha, 1951 (1903)), 276.

group of bandits and in 1890 it was said that people were giving food to bandits in Nakhon Nayok.¹³⁶

Despite the wealth of information ‘out there,’ central government officials (and reporters from Bangkok) were stymied in its efforts against crime. The following examples presented almost verbatim from press clippings shows this. On 1 May 1917 in the evening, Nai Phan, a coolie for the railroad was attacked and had his head slashed open two times and his arm gashed once. This occurred at the railroad station. No arrests were made.¹³⁷ On the night of 27 March 1917, someone shot Nai Phin while he was sitting and chatting at the house of Nai Ort in *amphoe* (district) Muang. Nai Phin died immediately. Officials said they could not find any clues in case. A few nights later, on 31 March 1917, someone shot at the provincial administrative center (*sala klang*) of Sawankhalok province. No one was hurt. It was unclear whether person was aiming for the police officer on duty or at someone in the treasury (*khlang*). A report from 13 April 1917 says that on the night of 25 March 1917 that Nai Man was shot but not killed as he was walking outside. The reason was not known. A report from 31 January 1917 in the *Bangkok Daily Mail* said that on 3 December, someone beat Nai At to death and dumped his body in the forest. The identity of the perpetrator was not known. On 24 December 1916, someone shot Nai Thong to death in *tambon* Wang Phinphat in the middle of the night. There were no suspects. On 27 December the same year, Amdaeng Pe was shot to death during the early morning as she was preparing to make treats (*kebanom*) to sell on roadside. No arrests were made as it was not clear who the suspect was. On 1 Jan 2459, a shootout occurred at *tambon* Paknam. No arrests were made. On 30 January 2459, Amdaeng Thom at *tambon* Bonwang was shot at. She was carrying a dog, likely

¹³⁶ Phirasak Chaidaisuk, *Chat sua nai lai* [Once a tiger, always a tiger], (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2008), 117.

¹³⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the examples from this paragraph are from NA R6 N20.5/15, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangvat, khao jak sawankhalok monthon phitsanulok* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Sawankhalok, Monthon Phitsanulok].

her pet, at the time. The dog was hit and died. Thom was seriously injured. No arrests were made.

On 7 September 1916, a woman's house in Chonburi was robbed of 40 baht and the woman sustained several knife wounds. No arrests were made.¹³⁸ On 29 September, a man shot Nai Yaem to death in his house. No arrests were made. On 27 September, a woman taking her cattle out was slashed in the throat and killed. The cattle were not stolen, so it was assumed that the crime was motivated by (unrequited) love. The woman was the daughter of the local *kamnan* (sub-district chief). No arrests were made. On 14 October, a Chinese man was slashed with a knife but not killed. The identity of the assailant was not known. In the same month, a woman was shot. A report from 21 August 1916 says that on 28 October, Amdaeng Lao had her head slashed open and died in *tambon* Talat Klang. A Nai Ploy was arrested and was being tried, but it was not clear if he was perpetrator. On 29 October, Nai Chiang in Bang Sai was shot in the chest but did not die. No arrests were made. In October, during the night, Nai Nguan was slashed in the face and disfigured in *tambon* Kham Yong. No clues were available as to the identity of the perpetrator or the motive. Many crimes, then, or at least the stories about crime that appeared in the papers, were never 'solved' – no one was arrested and police and reporters had no idea who the perpetrators were. As such, crimes reported in the press read as unexplained acts of violence lacking clues, suspects, and motivations, real life mysteries for the emerging state's various agents.

In part because locals already 'knew' who the bad guys were, the solution to crime that newspapers put forth was that the government should simply assign people with ability or send out military expeditions to suppress criminals, which the government did do

¹³⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the examples in this paragraph are from NA R6 N 20.5/9, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangvat, khao jak chonburi* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Chonburi].

regularly. Jao Phraya Surasakmontri, for instance, made his name in part from successfully quashing bandits in the central region.¹³⁹ In one expedition to Suphanburi in 1882, he claimed to have captured 300 criminals.¹⁴⁰ The problem with military solutions was that their results were short-lived. One newspaper article writes about the decrease in crime in Chonburi after a military expedition in 1916, but that by early 1917, crime was once again on the rise.¹⁴¹ Neither did military raids address the basic problem for the government that crime exposed: The government under Chulalongkorn was faced with an increasing number of crimes for which vital information such as the identity of the culprit existed. Unfortunately, the government could not access this data. The problem, therefore, was not simply the violence of the crimes being committed but their seeming inexplicability and the government's inability to act, an impression the papers in Bangkok reinforced with their style of reporting – short, simple, contextless blurbs teasing readers with violence without any closure. The practices of modern police investigation, as described in the detective fiction that was beginning to enter the country, had yet to take hold, but the beginnings of a social mystery were being put into place by the press and agents of the state.

Making matters worse, the government's ability to act against crime was constrained by extraterritoriality rights enjoyed by foreign subjects in Siam. As is well documented, Siam agreed to a treaty of “friendship and commerce” with the British in 1855. The agreement, known today as the Bowring Treaty, contained a number of provisions, of which three are most often cited as being critical. First, export duties were capped at three percent on all products except opium and bullion, which were to be traded without any duty. Second, British merchants were granted the right to trade with individual Siamese merchants without

¹³⁹ Phirasak, 2008, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Jao Phraya Surasakmontri, 1951, 176.

¹⁴¹ NA R6 N 20.5/9, *Krasuang nakhonban, nangsuphim, khao tang jangwat, khao jak chonburi* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, provincial news, news from Chonburi].

the interference of any third party. This meant the effective end of monopoly trade. Third, and most important with respect to criminal investigation, British subjects were placed under consular jurisdiction, meaning that charges against them would be processed by judges in the British consulate rather than in a Siamese court.¹⁴² The Bowring Treaty was followed by several other, similar treaties with countries including France and the US. So in cases where a British or other foreign national was arrested on suspicion of a crime, that suspect would have to be handed over to foreign officials to be tried. This meant that the large number of Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Lao living in Siam but who were foreign subjects could effectively escape Siamese law. Many claimed upon arrest that they were not Siamese subjects, something that took time to verify. Extraterritoriality therefore posed yet another hurdle for the reforming government to have to clear.¹⁴³

Considered in this manner, crime may be seen as a sort of information gap. When a crime is committed, a split appears that makes evident the limits of the state and its subject. This gap is where information produced locally by non-state agents or those nominally associated with the state including provincial governors, district heads, and village chiefs meets the intelligence gathering apparatus of central government and where networks of local knowledge production come into potential conflict with those of the central government. In short, crime is one point where agents and institutions competing for power meet and where the contours of Siam's information order become visible. Information order, a term Christopher Bayly adapts from Manuel Castells' *Informational City*, conceptualizes information as a "social formation" the same way class or ethnicity are. In

¹⁴² "The Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between the Kingdom of Siam and the British Empire," signed 18 April 1855. For a summary of the treaty's provisions see James Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand, 1850-1970* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971), 34-5.

¹⁴³ Extraterritoriality ended gradually with the signing of a revised bi-lateral treaty in 1920 with the US. Between 1920 and 1926, revised treaties with other countries followed so that by the end of that decade, extraterritoriality had technically been eliminated.

this framework, the units of analysis include the “generators of knowledge, the institutions of information collection and diffusion and the discourses to which they give rise.” In a way, the concept is only a “heuristic device used to examine the organization and values of a past society” more than a thing out there.¹⁴⁴ I employ the term here to focus the analysis of the social, administrative, legal, and physical changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on how shifts in knowledge practices and new artifacts of information helped create an epistemological divide between an emerging state and its nascent subject, something the next section discusses.

The Social Organization of Information

The administration of Thai society before 1892 is often described as “dispersed” and “decentralized,” especially further away from Bangkok.¹⁴⁵ Prior to King Chulalongkorn’s reforms, many towns and villages outside the capital were run locally, with minimal central administration. A *krom*, which was the basic unit of central government before the 1890s, was not a ministry or a department as it is thought of now. It was “more like its own fiefdom in a larger kingdom” that “evinced a tendency towards autarchy, and powerful political factions focused on them. Because each *krom* essentially reproduced the larger political structure on a smaller scale, functional division of labor and differentiation with regard to other *krom* were discouraged.”¹⁴⁶ Bangkok, too, was administered through various *krom* with overlapping jurisdictions until the *krasuang nakbonban* was created in 1892 to consolidate control of the capital. Even then, extraterritoriality, as explained earlier, imposed limitations on the ability of the government to control the people living in the kingdom.

¹⁴⁴ Bayly, 1996, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Hong, 1984, 16.

¹⁴⁶ Han Ten Brummelhuis, *King of the Waters: Horman Van Der Heide and the Origin of Modern Irrigation in Siam* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005), 23.

Other descriptions put it more clearly. Before the central government established the *thesaphiban* system of provincial administration, a system sometimes called *rabop kin muang* (eating the town/land) prevailed in which local lords, or *jao muang*, administered an area.¹⁴⁷ One of the primary administrative functions of the *jao muang* was to ensure the common safety and peace of an area. In return, the inhabitants of an area, its *ratsadon*, were expected to return the favor by way of labor, services, or goods. The *jao muang* then paid a tax and provided labor to the king.¹⁴⁸ When a crime occurred, the village head or other local leader would gather village residents to hunt down suspected perpetrators. This was accomplished either through conscription or with volunteers.¹⁴⁹ If village leaders were not able to maintain peace and order, they would sometimes turn to *nakleng* or bandits, often one and the same person, for protection.¹⁵⁰ The close relationship between local leaders and local toughs, in turn, was detrimental to the plans of the central government. There are examples, such as in Suphanburi, which show that bandits were protected by local *jao muang* and other officials. And in Kanchanaburi, there were examples of local leaders actually taking part in banditry.¹⁵¹ Even after the Provincial Gendarmerie was established in 1897, local civilian leaders maintained much of their power and refused to cooperate with police officers. In some cases local leaders kept documents including autopsy reports, contracts, and other important evidence from the police. The police did not therefore have access to necessary details about suspects.¹⁵² The arrangement of information production and gathering resulted in a situation where bandits were able to escape the law and engage in their activities as usual (*yang pakati*

¹⁴⁷ The formal name for the *kin muang* system was *na ratchakan muang* but according to Prince Damrong, people called it *kin muang* out of habit. See Damrong, 2002, 49.

¹⁴⁸ Phirasak, 2008, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 109.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 106.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 111.

¹⁵² Rotsukhon Jaratsi, *Botbat khong kharatchakan chao tang prathet nai krom tamruat nai samai somburanananasithirat* [The role of foreign civil servants in the police department under the absolute monarchy] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1977), 47-8.

saman). The government saw this as corruption (*thujarit*) and even issued an order calling for the end of the practice of using thieves to catch thieves (*jon jap jon*).¹⁵³

Several years after the start of the reforms, the state's presence outside the capital remained limited: "In actual practice... [the] Mahatthai [Ministry of Interior] was the sole government agency physically present in most provinces with both office and staff."¹⁵⁴ Hong Lysa, in her description of the Siamese economy in the nineteenth century, notes that the Chinese tax collector was often the central government's only real presence in towns outside the capital.¹⁵⁵ Even after the government put *monthon* system in place and assigned administrators from Bangkok, locals protected bandits from arrest by central government officials. There are even instances when the representatives of the central government including members of the Provincial Gendarmerie, would go out with *nakleng* on raids.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the expanding presence of the central government in some cases led to collusion between governors and tax farmers to keep wealth (and information) from flowing to Bangkok. In other cases, local governors and local nobles would protect those under their patronage from tax farmers or work together to revolt against tax farmers for overly oppressive taxes.¹⁵⁷ *Phrai* (commoners) also got favors in exchange for gifts such as exemptions from corvée, lighter work assignments, or favorable hearings in courts of law. Evasion of state exactions by villagers was thus of "special concern" to the central government. In other words, when *phrai* sought protection, it was "protection against the

¹⁵³ Damrong, 2002, 53-4.

¹⁵⁴ Brummelhuis, 2005, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Hong Lysa, *Thailand in the Nineteenth Century: Evolution of the Economy and Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 85, 90-92.

¹⁵⁶ Damrong, 1951, 311.

¹⁵⁷ Hong, 1984, 94.

state itself.”¹⁵⁸ There was, in essence, an organizational disincentive for information to be communicated with the state.

Any attempt to centralize administration (and information) was hindered by a host of factors including poor communications infrastructure, legal constraints, and social barriers. As such, information up until the early twentieth century was generated in and communicated largely through informal networks, which only exacerbated the disparities in the distribution of information and problematic gaps described above. The ‘open secret’ status of crime and criminals that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was therefore an effect of the social organization of information. By the turn of the century, this had become apparent to the government and its foreign advisors. People kept information, there was collusion between local notables and the people they policed, and there was general confusion as to who was watching who. For the government ‘traditional’ or ‘pre-modern’ methods of dealing with crime and organizing information were becoming ineffective and even embarrassing for an elite eager to show its modern face to the world. Crime went on, people knew about it, and no one would provide information to the state.

Information Flow

To gain intelligence under these conditions, the Siamese state tried a number of things. Well into the early decades of the twentieth century, the government encouraged entire villages to become veritable panopticons, with everyone a potential informer: “Nothing is more simple, under an irresponsible government, than to create an uncompromising, merciless, and keenly scrutinizing system of espionage and to derive from the passive subject that aid towards its efficiency which alike contributes to his personal exemption from danger and loss, and to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 27.

rivet his own political chains... Such is the case in Siam where the *Saan* or Department of Police may be considered sufficiently coercive, where every man is commanded to be a spy on his neighbour, and where he is punished if he is known to have concealed what he ought by the laws to have disclosed... Informers are rewarded, and severe punishments inflicted on those who do not give information of consequence.”¹⁵⁹ Another description of Siam gives a similar account: “According to old-time law everyone living within five *sen* (one-eighth of a mile) of the place where a crime was committed had to take up the search. Anyone successful in catching a robber was rewarded with a third of the value of the property stolen, the rest being refunded to the victim, but failure was punished with a fine to be used as compensation. However a portion of the compensation went to the local government because the victim of the robbery had not taken sufficient care. Naturally the system was reinforced by spying, everyone being expected to inform on his neighbour, while heavy punishment was the lot of anyone who failed to report if he knew of any person planning to steal or pillage.”¹⁶⁰ Along these lines, in 1903 a district head in Phasi Charoen, near Bangkok, told sub-district chiefs and village leaders there in 1907 to keep tabs on the behavior of the people in their areas. Should they find anyone with a history of unethical behavior, their name and address should be recorded.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ James Low, “On the Laws of Mu’ung Thai or Siam,” in *Nitipratya thai: Prakat phrarachaprarot lak inthaphat phrathammasat lae* On the Laws of Mu’ung Thai or Siam [Thai legal theory: Royal Announcements, the Lak Inthapat, and On the Laws of Muang Thai or Siam] (Bangkok: Samnakngan Kong Thun Sanapsanun Kan Wichai, 2005), 420. Low uses the term ‘police’ in his descriptions of the laws of Siam. Yet in the mid-1820s, when the tract was first published, no formal unit of administration called the police existed. He may have been referring to the *nai amphoe* (a district chief who acted as magistrate and sheriff) and his deputies. These were not uniformed, organized police as one might understand police today, though they performed ‘policing’ duties in local communities. Chapter 2 deals with the history of the police in more detail.

¹⁶⁰ H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Divination in Thailand: The Hopes and Fears of a Southeast Asian People* (London: Curzon Press, 1983), 105. These rules for village security are outlined in several sections of the Law of the Three Seals.

¹⁶¹ Phirasak, 2008, 145. Suggestions like these in the Law of the Three Seals were prescriptive. It is not clear that these rules were actually followed.

The government had also employed a vast army of informers, or *sai lap*, since at least the Ayutthaya period to gather information. However, the use of secret informers, though employed for decades, was not standardized and depended on the prowess and cooperation of local leaders such as sub-district chiefs and village leaders. These local leaders in turn relied on their connections with people living in their areas of responsibility including merchants, patrons of bars and opium dens, bandits, and *nakleng*. Unfortunately, the use of civilian informers was not always reliable and local leaders, often cooperating with gangsters, could become a threat to central power if their following, and thus information base, grew too large. The kingdom's police, including both the Metropolitan Constabulary in the capital, and the Provincial Gendarmerie in the provinces also relied on civilian informers including *nakleng* and known criminals. Since the time of King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) civilian informers and quasi-professional *tamruat mut* (secret police) were employed in Bangkok and some key provincial towns to gather information about Chinese secret societies and to infiltrate the numerous bandit gangs roaming the countryside, both of which were growing in number and in ambition.¹⁶²

Another method used by the central government to gather information during the mid to late nineteenth century was the use of a unit of government informers called the *kong mon* (Mon division). The primary purpose was to monitor the activities of the Burmese army in the border regions between the two countries. The *kong mon* consisted of Mon people, hence its name. The Mon, whose population was relatively large in border areas with what is now Burma, were enlisted specifically because they could travel to and from Burma and tap into existing networks of information there without attracting undue attention from the

¹⁶² Phongnakhon Nakhonsantiphap, *Kanmuang kap krom tamruat thai, ph. so. 2475-2500* [Politics and the Thai Police, 1932-1957] (MA thesis, Thammasat University, 1996), 39.

British Burmese authorities.¹⁶³ The *kong mon* was eventually disbanded under King Chulalongkorn because by the 1880s, the threat of war with the Burmese was relatively low. In addition, the costs of keeping the unit operational became too expensive. Mon informers were transferred to regular police posts in the Metropolitan Constabulary after 1892.¹⁶⁴ The use of a particular ethnic group, such as the Cham or Karen, as informers began as early as the reign of King Narai (r. 1656-1688), but these like the use of the Mon were to gain intelligence about foreign governments rather about Siamese subjects.

Official channels for subjects to communicate information to the state that did not require spying existed as well. People could give feedback formally by lodging grievances through a patron (*a nai*) and there is evidence that people often did use this mechanism.¹⁶⁵ Unofficially, people also expressed their dissatisfaction with local officials by “clandestinely posting a sarcastic poem or complaint in a public place so that it would attract public recognition.”¹⁶⁶ This was called *kan thing nangsu*, or ‘document dumping.’¹⁶⁷ Although this practice “did not produce any practical or legal result, it might damage the reputation of the abusive authorities.”¹⁶⁸ The practice was illegal and subject to severe punishment. Kings of the Chakkri dynasty also received official dispatches from travelling government officials. One such official in the third reign (r. 1824-1851) was Luang Udomsombat. He was sent along with Phraya Siphiphat (That Bunnag) to put down disturbances in Kedah, Kelantan, and Trengganu in what is now Malaysia. While in the south, Luang Udomsombat sent

¹⁶³ Thawisak Suphasa, *Kan jat kan lae bot bat khong tamruat nai krungthep ratchasamai phrabat somdet phrajulajomklao jao yu hua* [The establishment and role of the police in Bangkok during the reign of King Chulalongkorn] (MA thesis, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, 1978), 26.

¹⁶⁴ NA R5-6 PL, *Banchi samruat ekkasan yep lem chut samnao phraratchabattlekkha, muat thi 1 trawaen* [Collected royal correspondences from the fifth and sixth reigns, section 1, the constabulary], 1892, 20-21.

¹⁶⁵ Hong, 1984, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Thanaphol Limaphichat, “The Prescription of Good Books: The Formation of the Discourse and Cultural Authority of Literature in Modern Thailand (1860s-1950s)” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2007), 24.

¹⁶⁷ The modern day equivalent to this might be to distribute ‘*bai bliw thuan*,’ or ‘illicit fliers.’

¹⁶⁸ Thanaphol, 2007, 24.

correspondences to the royal court in Bangkok: “News, reports, and letters that came from the southern provinces were sent to the Ministers in council who studied them and interrogated their bearers for further details. The Council [of the king], in this case headed by Dit Bunnag, the acting Kalahom [one of the king’s chief aids before the reforms] who was responsible for the southern provinces, briefed the king on the reports at daily audiences and answered queries that the king had.”¹⁶⁹ The tax farm system also provided the central government an army of Chinese tax collectors who in the absence of an “elaborate administrative organization” were a key source of intelligence for the areas they covered.¹⁷⁰ As with the *kong mon*, state surveillance before the reforms was conducted by foreigners, here Chinese entrepreneurs.

Communication in the opposite direction, from state to subject, occurred regularly as well, usually through decrees and announcements. In some instances, this was simply to provide information about a new regulation such as a restriction on opium use or a new tax. In other cases, the government issued decrees in an effort to control the unauthorized information floating around the kingdom. Historian Chalong Soontravanich notes that a number of royal decrees were issued under King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) that urged people to disregard unverified stories circulating the kingdom about issues as varied as impending natural disasters, revolts, and wars with neighboring countries.¹⁷¹ In 1866, Mongkut issued two proclamations telling his subjects not to believe complaints about the judicial system published in the *Bangkok Recorder*, a paper put out by the American missionary Dr. Dan ‘Beach’ Bradley.¹⁷² Hong notes, “... the king [Mongkut] was also vexed by rumours

¹⁶⁹ Hong, 1984, 24.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 90.

¹⁷¹ Chalong Soontravanich, “*Khao lue nai prawatisai*” [Rumors in history], *Sarakhadi* [Documentary magazine], 4.2 (March 1988): 49-50.

¹⁷² Thanaphol, 2007, 23.

circulating in Bangkok in the early years of his reign among both the local and foreign communities that everything in the kingdom was under the absolute command of the king, and his every wish was carried out. It was also rumored that the royal treasury was full, for the amount of money that that state expended was less than its revenue.”¹⁷³ The king was then forced to denounce the rumors in a public statement. Decrees, denials, and official announcements though, were not always effective, as rumors continued to threaten Bangkok’s rule.

When all else failed, there was always violence, which the government used regularly for extracting information. For example, when suspects (or witnesses) for crimes were apprehended but did not cooperate by providing testimony, government officials could resort to the practice known colloquially as the *jarit nakbonban*, which permitted the use of force to extract a confession or other testimony. Jao Phraya Surasakmontri describes the practice as one where criminals (*phu rai*) would be caned (*khian*) five times, questioned, and then beaten again to get a statement. This practice, the institutionalized use of violence, ended officially in 1895, though some critical observers might say that the police continue to use force today. Jao Phraya Surasakmontri described trials he ran for suspected criminals he arrested in Suphanburi in 1882 by boasting only two people were whipped – the first defendant as an example for giving false testimony and an official (*krommakan*) for attempting to frame a third party for a crime he did not commit.¹⁷⁴ These were beatings meted out as punishment rather than as a way of extracting information.

¹⁷³ Hong, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Surasakmontri, 1961, 176-7.

The End of Knowledge

If the government's first problem in dealing with disorder was the uncongenial social organization of information, the second was who in this organization was producing the information and the methods they employed to create it. In addition to government officials and local leaders, the people creating and passing on information, both civilian and state, many were 'ordinary' people including traders and merchants, fortunetellers, wandering ascetics, laborers, prostitutes, and gangsters. It materialized in places like markets, temple fairs, drinking houses, gambling parlors, pawnshops, and brothels. Moreover, many of the people creating information were illiterate and "teachers were few."¹⁷⁵ This implies that information was generated and transmitted orally, and in a plethora of languages to boot: Siamese, Chaozhou, Malay, Hindi, English, and Lao. Knowledge was, then, often built up through a base of informal, unsanctioned, and unpublished chatter. It was, in both the city and the countryside, generated and circulated in piecemeal fashion along incomplete, impromptu, casual networks of face-to-face transmission that were in many instances not standardized or controlled by the government. The emerging state enjoyed no monopoly on information or knowledge, though it and its competitors employed similar, sometimes the same, methods for producing it.

It might be tempting to see the problem as one of folk versus official knowledge and in some ways this was the case. The nature of the information being produced was not formal or orderly, at least to the government under Chulalongkorn. Antonio Gramsci, for one, has noted that the characteristics of folklore or popular belief (i.e. local knowledge) include contradictoriness, fragmentation, dispersal, multiplicity, unsystematicness, and

¹⁷⁵ Sternstein, 1966, 70.

difference.¹⁷⁶ Information existed, but it was produced and organized by knowledge systems, or by ‘folk epistemologies,’ that were not always useful for the reforming central government.¹⁷⁷ Arun Agrawal, however, has shown the differentiation between things like indigenous and western or modern knowledge to be less clear than most take for granted.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, the distinction between local and central government knowledge in the period before the reforms in Siam are not completely clear in that government agents from Bangkok, local officials, bandits, and others typically relied on similar methods, from divination to rumor and hearsay (as they do today). The key difference being introduced was how information was being materialized, represented on paper, and it was used by government.

In the case of crime, for example, when people did not know the identity of a perpetrator, they had recourse to codified systems of specialized knowledge such as divination. These, as Craig Reynolds has discussed, might be called ‘manual knowledge’: “knowledge that is self-consciously organized for preservation, retrieval, transmission, and consumption. Grammars, cosmologies, medical and astrological manuals, manuals on the art and science of warfare, and manuals on how to behave properly and how to be modern are all examples of formatted knowledge, but the list, of course, is not exhaustive. In pre-modern Siam, much of this knowledge was transmitted orally, and much of it was accessible

¹⁷⁶ Cited in Andrew Turton, “Invulnerability and Local Knowledge,” in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, eds. Manas Chitkasem and Andrew Turton (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 157.

¹⁷⁷ See Kitchener, 2002, who writes: “Folk epistemology may be defined to be the ordinary (‘folk’), common sense theory of knowledge present in the average person. Like its earlier counterparts – folk psychology, folk physics, folk biology, etc. – folk epistemology may be considered to be our “untutored” views about the nature of knowledge. Just as folk psychology is our ordinary, common sense theory of the mind, so folk epistemology is our ordinary, common sense theory of knowledge.”

¹⁷⁸ Arun Agrawal, “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge,” *Development and Change* 26 (1995): 413-439.

to people of all classes.”¹⁷⁹ Of particular relevance were manuals used by local leaders to help investigate crime. Quaritch Wales writes that in a case of a theft or missing property, which was “surely a matter for skilled divination,” villagers could consult a manual to determine “...in which direction to begin a search.”¹⁸⁰ In one example, he describes a method of detection called the “three watch system,” with each watch corresponding to a specific bit of information about a crime. One might ask “Will the [stolen] goods be found or not?” The answers might include: “A. Cannot be found. B. With difficulty. C. Quickly.” Another question that could be posed to the manual was “What kind of person is the thief?” The answers could include: “A. An ex-monk who lives in the house has taken it to somewhere near the river bank. B. A woman is the thief and she took the things to a place where there is a bush near the house; or she hid it in the roots of a big tree near the well and covered it with a heavy object. C. A big dark man took the things and he hid them near a big tree, covering them with a heavy object.”¹⁸¹ As Reynolds explains, manual knowledge required a specialist interpreter to enable them. They were not for general use. In the case of crime fighting, manuals acted as oracles that could describe the past via formulas and calculations comparable to modern instruments for discovery like a telescope or compass but only for those that were trained in their use.

In the new courts being set up by the government a new problem was surfacing: information produced by folk methods led to problems of proof. The problem with these

¹⁷⁹ Craig Reynolds, “Manual Knowledge,” in *Seditious Histories* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 214. In this dissertation, I take ‘knowledge’ to be a system of organizing data into a coherent whole. Knowledge takes raw data and turns it into meaningful information. It creates what people know about their world. Information is simpler. It comprises the facts that are produced by knowledge. See Bayly, fn 9, 3-4, who states “no information can be perceived and ordered unless the observer has conceptual paradigms within which to comprehend it (according to Manuel Castells). He adds, “Our use of the word ‘information’... implies observations perceived at a relatively low level of conceptual definition, on the validity of whose claims to truth people from different regions, cultures, and linguistic groups might broadly agree. ‘Knowledge’ implies socially organized and taxonomised information, about which such agreement would be less sure.”

¹⁸⁰ Wales, 1983, 109.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 110-11.

‘folk’ technologies was that they did not produce independent and replicable forms of information that could be used in the land’s new courts, something that posed a problem for the central government. How to prove divine truth? The trial by ordeal, which is cited now as an example of traditional (and backwards) thinking was one way. Carl Bock, a Norwegian natural scientist, gives this account of an ordeal he witnessed in 1882: “On the morning of the 14th of January [1882] my friend Phra Udon informed me that an appeal in a law-suit of some importance was about to be tried between two Phyas [local elites], who both claimed the ownership of a number of slaves. The defendant in the case said he had lost the ‘title deed’ to the ‘property’ in question, the document having, according to his statement, been burnt during an attack on his house by Ngiou [Thai Yai, an ethnic group in the north] raiders. The judges before whom the case was first tried had been unable to agree upon the evidence brought before them, and ‘granted a case’ for a superior court, in which the Water-Spirit, was the presiding genius! In other words the disputants were ordered to settle their case by what in former times in this country would have been called the ‘ordeal of water’; that is to say, they were to dive into the river, and whoever remained under water the longest would be adjudged the winner of the cause.”¹⁸² In another instance, this one described in an old legal manual for magistrates from the Sukhothai period (c. 1240-1438), a dispute between two wives of the same man about the death of the minor wife’s young child is decided by hanging a cloth wrap at an equal distance between the two, who are stripped naked and asked to run to the cloth. The first woman to reach the cloth was deemed innocent.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Bock, 1985, 240.

¹⁸³ From Kamthorn Liangsattham, *Lak chai: tamra kotmai krang krung si ayuthaya* [The *lak chai*: A legal manual from Ayuthaya] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2003).

Crimes, therefore, exposed the limits of the state's knowledge (here meaning a system for generating and ordering data). These endpoints, in turn, are locations where knowledge and violence met. On one hand, information existed in society, but government officials needed to use violence, as with the case of the *jarit nakbonban* (judicial torture), to access it and even when obtained, it is unclear how 'true' the information is. On the other hand, a society that was not organized properly led to violence. The government, for example, made a clear connection between the disorganization of information (and knowledge) and crime. King Rama III urged all *nai* (patrons) to register their *phrai* (beneficiaries) because he "alleged that those who were not registered were a menace to society. They robbed, plundered, fought with others, and killed with impunity as the state did not have records identifying their *nai*, and did not know which officials would be familiar enough with the lawbreakers to be able to apprehend them."¹⁸⁴ Criminals that were arrested would sometimes admit to being shielded from registration by their *nai* and were thus "emboldened" to lead a life of crime. David Engel, a historian of Thai law, notes similarly that as mobility for people in rural areas has increased, the effectiveness of 'folk' legal systems, or mediation at the village level, has decreased, at least in terms of gaining any sort of compensation for injured parties.¹⁸⁵ In other words, the ability of law to manage conflict was tied to the organization of a community. Crime control and legal reform, therefore, had to be achieved through action at the level of social organization. This implied that for the modern state to take shape a new information order was needed, especially as more and more groups of knowledge communities sprouted up in the kingdom, escaping formal control and leading to a rise in violent crime.

¹⁸⁴ Hong, 1984, 31.

¹⁸⁵ David Engel, "Landscapes of the Law: Injury, Remedy, and Social Change in Thailand," *Law and Society Review* 43.1 (2009): 61-94.

Summary

Returning to the detective novel, with which I began this chapter, what was the reason for its popularity in Siam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? As I've show, the kingdom was undergoing a series of well-documented changes that included significant physical development, especially in Bangkok. The government under King Chulalongkorn was in the process of imposing a new system of administrative control that would in theory consolidate the royal family's power over the emerging "geo-body" of the kingdom.¹⁸⁶ A *monthon*, or provincial administrative area, system was drawn up and placed over this geo-body to give it structure. Governors appointed from Bangkok were then sent to administer each region, upsetting the distribution of power and information that had existed before between the royal palace in Bangkok and local leaders in various townships. Along with this physical transformation, the city's population and its relationship with the royal government began to change as well. Systems of indentured servitude and corvée labor were being phased out as large numbers of Chinese immigrated into the kingdom. As this was happening, the capital city was being built up and expanded. New roads, trams, bridges, and other communications technologies including a telegraph system and piped water were being introduced. Developers, including members of the royal family, raced to pave over the capital and construct new concrete, row-house developments. One might rightly describe Thai society around the turn of the nineteenth century, then, as a bit unruly; enough was going on to have created a worried royal elite and an anxious reading class receptive to detective fiction, a narrative form that not only reflected the new unknown but also assuaged the disquiet it caused through the solving of mysteries by a skilled detective. The chapter has

¹⁸⁶ On the term geo-body, see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). Thongchai argues that before the modern map was introduced to Siam, the shape, or 'geo-body,' of the Thai nation did not exist.

described the context in which the detective novel made its first appearance in Siam as an attempt to explain the form's positive reception and subsequent popularity. What I argue in this dissertation, however, is that fiction, as well as 'factual' crime stories in the news, have an effect as well – they shape context as much as they are a window into historical moment. How this was so is the story of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

FICTION AND THE POLICE

A Literary Model

From the previous chapter, one sees that the literary detective and his fiction emerged in Siam at an appropriate time.¹⁸⁷ In this chapter, I move from an analysis of text in context to text producing context, from the messy and crime-ridden world of ‘real’ Siam of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the very things that make detective fiction (and thus real world Siam) distinctive as its own genre – the notions of secrecy and mystery, themselves generated by very specific literary devices. I begin with a brief description of the development of the uniformed police in Siam before moving on to show how secrecy and mystery guided its evolution into an investigative force. I end with an examination of the literary devices that create mystery and secrecy in fiction as a way to set the stage for the subsequent chapters’ discussions of real world police devices. The point of flipping the directionality of analysis, from context to text, is to show how secrecy and mystery are in some ways effects of form.

The State’s Detective

If fiction reflects social conditions, then Crown Prince Vajiravudh’s Thong-in detective stories can be read as a fantasy of clarity for an otherwise murky social reality. Many of the tales take place in a multi-cultural milieu where danger lurked within enclaves of foreigners filled with conmen, frauds, and petty crooks. In the story “*Nak phra kbanong thi song*” (The

¹⁸⁷ Similar explanations for the rise of detective fiction in late nineteenth century England and France exist. People have noted that the period was one of industrialization, urbanization, and political and economic fluctuation, leading to increased levels of anxiety, especially among elites.

second coming of Nak of Phra Khanong) there is reference to illegal liquor production at *ban yuan*, the Vietnamese section of Bangkok along Samsen Road. In another instance, there is mention of a clandestine meeting of an *ang yi* (Chinese secret society) in Samphaeng, or Chinatown.¹⁸⁸ In the story “*Khwan lap phaen din*” (The country’s secret), the villain, a man named Plian, is a convert to Christianity and a subject of a foreign country. Worse, he keeps company with foreigners and even has some of their tastes – he lives in a two-story house, decorated fancily, with a living room, dining room, and a study.¹⁸⁹

In the first two instances, Thong-in is able to penetrate the foreign cabals by disguising himself as a Vietnamese and a Chinese. In the case of Nai Plian, the man of ambiguous nationality, Thong-in unravels an elaborate code and cracks the case in which Plian was smuggling guns through Phahurat, the Indian community in Bangkok, for use against the British.¹⁹⁰ For the literary detective like Than Sup and Thong-in, then, Bangkok’s (and all of Siam’s) changing social scene was not a problem. These detectives could tap effortlessly into the informal networks of the city at will through their mastery of disguise. And where disguise was not an option, the literary detective employed an army of informers in all the streets and alleyways, gambling halls, pawnshops, brothels, and opium dens of Bangkok. Thong-in boasted, “You must understand that in every important place, I have my people, at least one person, near at all times.”¹⁹¹ The literary detective, in short, was what the state (or at least the police) wished itself to be – a vast complex of information supplied by moles, spies, and locals either part of a local network or able to blend in as such.

¹⁸⁸ Ramajit (pseudo.), *Prapruthikan khong nai thong-in rathanet* [The adventures of Thong-in Rathanaet] (Bangkok: Samoson Nangsu Rahatsakhadi, 2006), 27.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 73.

¹⁹⁰ In the first version of the story published 1904, the arms were being smuggled to help a revolt of ‘Ngiew’ (the Thai Yai ethnic group) in northern Siam against the Bangkok government. The versions of the Thong-in stories I am working from are the versions that appeared in King Vajiravudh’s magazine *Dusit samit* beginning in 1921.

¹⁹¹ Ramajit, 2006, 56.

Unlike the fictional Thong-in, the agents of the emerging state under Kings Chulalongkorn, and then Vajiravudh were uniformed, obtrusive, and often not well-liked. The archives, in addition to being full of crime reports, are filled with anecdotes expressing disdain for the police, who were regularly reported to have misused their power or were painted simply as untrained, bumbling fools. King Chulalongkorn once wrote to Prince Naretworarit, then head of the Ministry of Local Government, about an odd encounter while on a train from Bangkok to Bang Pa-in. As the train passed through the northern section of the capital, it came to a grinding halt. Annoyed, King Chulalongkorn stepped out to investigate. To his surprise, he found a man asleep in the train's path. The man turned out to be a metropolitan police constable who had gotten so drunk that he had passed out on the tracks. Even the screeching of the oncoming locomotive did not wake him.¹⁹² In newspapers, accounts of the police were often not much better. On 1 May 1898, the *Bangkok Times* reported that an Indian constable in Bangrak district returned to the police station after his shift *sans* turban. Noticing this, the station's chief inspector questioned the constable, only to discover that someone had stolen the turban from the constable's head after he had fallen asleep on duty.¹⁹³ Vajiravudh, in his Nithan Thong-in stories, also ridiculed the police. In several, he included police characters that were alternately arrogant and incompetent. The police in “*Nak phra kbanong thi song*” are reported as having been uninterested in investigating a case because they felt it wasn't worth the time.¹⁹⁴ In “*Nai suwan thuk khamoi*” (Mr. Suwan is robbed), the *farang* (Caucasian) head of the metropolitan constabulary is described as asking all the wrong questions during a criminal investigation. In fact, he had already decided on the

¹⁹² NA R5-6 PL, *Banchi samruat ekkasan yep lem chut samnao phraratchabattlekkha, muat thi 1 trawaen* [Collected royal correspondences from the fifth and sixth reigns, section 1, the constabulary], 1896, 30.

¹⁹³ Piyakanit Hongthong, *Nang su chu sayam sanuk khao* [A book called fun news of Siam] (Bangkok: Kanya Publishing, 1988), 83.

¹⁹⁴ Ramajit, 2006, 29.

identity of the story's culprit based on misleading circumstantial evidence, prompting 'Thong-in to accuse the police of basing their work on surface appearances rather than on real investigation.¹⁹⁵ In light of the restrictions placed on the criminal justice system by extraterritoriality, Vajirvudh's disparaging remarks about the British-led Metropolitan Police might be interpreted as a critique of the ability of British and other foreign advisors, many of whom enjoyed significant influence on the Siamese legal system, to affect any real change. As alluded to in the last chapter, it was the monarchy, represented by 'Thong-in, that was skilled enough to deal with the social and legal problems facing the country.

When Vajiravudh took the throne in 1910, there were two separate police units, the Metropolitan Constabulary (then known as the *kong trawaen*), which operated primarily in Bangkok, and the Provincial Gendarmerie (*tamruat phuthon*), which functioned outside the capital. The Metropolitan Constabulary date back to 1860, when King Mongkut established the Police Constabulary Division. Before this, "Bangkok's nearest approach to police officers consisted of a body of men clad in civilian clothing who carried bundles of canes and whose functions in assisting magistrates were somewhat akin to those of the Bow Street Runners."¹⁹⁶ Their headquarters flanked a frying pan factory (now the Siam Commercial Bank head office) and fronted a fortress and the residence of a district officer in what is now the Samphanthawong area of Bangkok. The unit was headed by an Englishman living in Siam named Samuel Bird Ames. Ames is described as a merchant, a trader, and a wanderer who in 1860 was running a construction company in Bangkok. He is said to have built a bridge near the government's Custom House. The police in Ames' force were mostly Indians

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 51.

¹⁹⁶ Cecil H. Forty, *Cremation Volume for Police Lieutenant Colonel C.H. Forty* (Bangkok: n.p., 1967), 30. The Bow Street Runners were the famous forerunners to the London Metropolitan Police (established in 1829). The Runners operated in the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries helping magistrates at the Bow Street magistrates' court to serve warrants and arrest criminals.

(Sikhs) and Malays. Cecil H. Forty, an English officer serving in Siam during the first three decades of the twentieth century wrote in 1906 that, the force “consisted of Malays whom he [Ames] had himself recruited from the ranks of men who had served in the army of police in Singapore. These were augmented, and in time replaced, by Siamese and Indians, though a few individuals remained on in the capacity of detectives [a rank more than a function] long after the original circumstances of their enlistment had been forgotten by the public.”¹⁹⁷ According to Forty, the new policeman “must indeed have been a droll figure. It soon became a familiar sight for the neighborhood to behold burly turbaned Indians walking their beats. Practical jokes were frequently played upon them; but, due to the strict enforcement of discipline, the men were able to keep their composure under all circumstances.”¹⁹⁸ One of their first tasks was dealing with “rampaging Chinese secret societies.”¹⁹⁹ Their first patrol was of Samphaeng, or the Chinese sector, of Bangkok.²⁰⁰ Based on newspaper and archival accounts, these police constables walked a beat and responded to disturbances or calls for help. They also were tasked with keeping an eye on public sanitation conditions, beggars, and loiterers. In other words, their work comprised keeping order and making arrests more than investigative work.

This began to change in 1890, when the government, faced with the serious rise in crime described in Chapter 1, sought to reform the police. Prince Naretworarit, fresh from a stint in England and duly impressed by the London Police, returned to Siam and proposed that the metropolitan constabulary be reorganized with the English model as a guide.²⁰¹

Chulalongkorn is also said to have been impressed with the British colonial police in

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 30.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 55.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 56.

²⁰⁰ Samphaeng is known as the Chinese area of the city, but as Constance Wilson’s meticulous analysis of the 1883 Postal Census for Bangkok shows, Chinese were spread throughout the capital. Constance Wilson, “Bangkok in 1883: An Economic and Social Profile,” *Journal of Siam Society* 77.2 (1989): 49-58.

²⁰¹ Forty, 1967, 31.

Singapore after his trip there in 1890.²⁰² The same year, he approved the reorganization of the Metropolitan Constabulary. The new Metropolitan Constabulary had two primary units, the *kong trawaen fai kong tai suan thot luang* (Criminal investigation department) and the *kong trawaen fai kong raksa* (Operations department). The investigation department combined the old *kong trawaen sai* and *kong trawaen khwa* (or the ‘left’ and ‘right’ constabulary), which were under the control of the *nai amphoe* (district head) and the *kamnan* (sub-district head).²⁰³ A *kong trawaen sot naem* (detective unit) was part of this department. Officers in the investigation department had the power to inspect dead bodies, question witnesses, investigate individual criminals, and send cases for minor offenses cases to court. The operations department was in charge of keeping the peace in assigned districts in the capital and carrying out orders of the court such as arresting suspects for trial. Part of this unit was tasked to peace-keeping in areas outside the capital proper (or outside *phranakhon*).²⁰⁴ The 1890 reform was accompanied by the establishment of magistrates’ courts, or *politsapha*, which tried minor offences.²⁰⁵ Chulalongkorn also issued a new set of regulations called the ‘Fifty-three rules that the police should follow’ to guide the work of the capital’s new police.²⁰⁶

In practice, however, the situation was more complicated, as legally the *krommakan amphoe*, or local civilian officials, still retained the power to investigate crimes outside

²⁰² Rotsukhon Jaratsi, *Botbat khong kharatchakan chao tang prathet nai krom tamruat nai samai somburnananasithirat* [The role of foreign civil servants in the police department under the absolute monarchy] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1977), 34. The government also sent officers to study the operations of the colonial police force in British Burma in the early 1890s. Reports from one such study mission were published in the journal *Wachirayan* in 1896. See *Wachirayan* 15 (1896): 1526-1550, *Wachirayan* 16 (1896): 1608-1641, *Wachirayan* 17 (1896): 1733-1752, *Wachirayan* 18 (1896): 1824-1837.

²⁰³ Government agencies were organized into groups ‘right’ and ‘left,’ each with similar powers over a different areas of the kingdom, prior to the reform period.

²⁰⁴ Rotsukhon, 1977, 48-9.

²⁰⁵ NA R7 MT 11/1, *Krasuang mabathai, plian nam krom lae nam tamnaeng athibodi krom tamruat phranakhonban lae tamruat phuthon* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, provincial, metropolitan, and investigative police, changing the department and title of the head of the Metropolitan and Provincial Police], 1926.

²⁰⁶ Khrun Khamphaeng, ed., *Kotmai polis sung ja raksa na thi nai phra nakhon nok phranakhon 53 kho* [Fifty-three rules of the police], in *Kotmai polit 53 kho lae kotmai polit hua muang fai nua* [Fifty-three rules of the police and the laws of the northern provincial police] (Bangkok: Sombun Kanphim, 1971).

Bangkok proper. The constabulary outside the city limits generally only aided civilian administrative authorities, accompanying *amphoe* officials in investigating an incident.²⁰⁷ The police helped with the initial inspection of a crime scene, looked for clues, and rounded up witnesses to compile case reports. These reports were then given over to the *amphoe*. The *amphoe* would review the file and question witnesses (*tai suan khadi*) to decide whether to take case to trial. This arrangement lasted well into the sixth reign.²⁰⁸ In many cases, though, the *krommakam amphoe* were too busy or were uninterested in going out to conduct investigations. Instead, some would use the opportunity to enrich themselves by taking bribes.²⁰⁹ In other instances, they left it up to the police or hired an underling to do their work.²¹⁰ The problem with this was that police officers and flunkies were not trained to solve crime. As such they used force to extract confessions, a practice that though outlawed by the end of the nineteenth century was used with regularity well into the seventh reign (and some would say still is today).

Despite the overlapping and sometimes unclear responsibilities and powers of the civilian administration and the police, the Metropolitan Constabulary by 1908 had become well-established in Bangkok's landscape, appearing regularly in newspaper reports and even in the kingdom's early fiction. Eric St. John Lawson, head of the Metropolitan Constabulary between 1902 and 1915, wrote that the *monthon* of Bangkok was "policed by a force consisting of 3,398 men, of whom 2,679 are employed in the town of Bangkok and the remainder in the outlying districts."²¹¹ He described the unit as follows: "The force is divided

²⁰⁷ Wiwana Thewachala-angkun, "Naiyobai khong rathaban kap kan tamruat phuthon, ph. so. 2440-2465" [Government Policy and the Gendarmerie, 1897-1922] (MA thesis, Silapakon University, Bangkok, 1984), 64-5.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 65.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 69.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 65.

²¹¹ Eric St. John Lawson, "Police and Provincial Gendarmerie," in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Siam: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources*, eds. Arnold Wright and Oliver T. Breakspear (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994 (1908)), 107.

into seven divisions, five of which were in the town proper and two outside the town. One of these is the Chinese branch, whose duties are connected with all matters appertaining to the large Chinese community, and in addition there is the Special Branch...²¹² The largest station had 120 men and the smallest had twenty-four. Outposts were set up where the population was thin. The total number of stations and outposts was eighty-eight. The force at that point consisted of several nationalities, mostly Siamese, but also many Lao. These men were recruited by examination after they had gone through a period of training.²¹³ Gradually, it was these men who would take over the investigation of crime in the capital.

The Provincial Gendarmerie was not established until almost forty years after their metropolitan counterparts. Uncontrolled crime in the border areas was a convenient excuse that the French could use to expand their presence into 'Siamese territory' and because the Siamese government could not deploy their army within twenty-five kilometers of the Mekhong River according to a treaty signed after the Gunboat Crisis of 1893, the number of incidents of banditry increased.²¹⁴ The creation of the Provincial Gendarmerie in 1897 was a way to circumvent the prohibition on the presence of Siamese military near the Mekhong.²¹⁵ The model for the Provincial Gendarmerie was the French gendarmerie, a uniformed and armed police force similar to a military cavalry unit. Once established, the Provincial Gendarmerie was put under the command of Gustav Schau, a Danish national, and within the Ministry of Interior headed by Prince Damrong. Schau and other Danish officers were enlisted to run the Provincial Gendarmerie in part because it was thought their presence in sensitive territories would be less likely to provoke the French than would that of British

²¹² Ibid, 107.

²¹³ Ibid, 107. I discuss the training and recruitment of police officers in Chapter 3.

²¹⁴ In 1893, French and Siamese forces engaged in a gun battle at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. The Siamese lost the fight and were forced to 'cede' territory along the eastern bank of the Mekhong River to the French.

²¹⁵ Wiwana, 1984, 17-9.

officers. The first unit was set up in Prachinburi, not far from the Siamese 'border' with French Indo-China. By 1908, the Provincial Gendarmerie had officers in every *monthon*, the last being Phuket. In 1918, the provincial police force numbered 9,651 men.²¹⁶ While there are no accurate statistics for the period, some estimates show that the kingdom had a population of approximately nine million, or one officer for every 100 subjects.²¹⁷

As with their French prototype, the Provincial Gendarmerie conducted patrols and operated like a military unit more than a police force despite being tasked with police-like responsibilities such as suppressing banditry and gathering information from local district and sub-district heads on incidents of crime, illegal weapons, suspicious people, and sources of corruption. To do this they were assigned patrols of the countryside, which were to last no more than fifteen days, and to report their findings. The Gendarmerie, however, was undermanned and ill-trained. Records show they did not often go on their reconnaissance missions. Sometimes they did not leave their base camp more than once every four or five months.²¹⁸ Neither did they get much cooperation from local authorities or residents, as described in the previous chapter. Even if they had gone out regularly, it is unclear they would have made much difference in crime busting. Lawson wrote, for example, that gendarmes "undergo the usual military discipline, following the rules and regulations of the Siamese Army, and are armed with the Mannlicher magazine carbine, each man being allowed eighty cartridges a year for practice. The force is recruited by conscription from the army recruiting list, and the men, after serving for two years in the gendarmerie, are transferred to the army reserve."²¹⁹ In other words, they were not trained in criminal investigation. Furthermore, the Provincial Gendarmerie did not have the same legal powers

²¹⁶ Ibid, 53.

²¹⁷ Estimate from <http://www.populstat.info/Asia/thailanc.htm>, accessed 25 December 2008.

²¹⁸ Wiwana, 1984, 61-2.

²¹⁹ Lawson, 1994, 111.

as their metropolitan counterparts. According to successive laws on local administration, one in 1897 and another in 1914, local civilian officials were in charge of keeping peace and order as well as gathering evidence for trials in the provinces. The Provincial Gendarmerie was, in many cases, simply the local officials' 'muscle' (*kamlang*) sent out to make arrests.²²⁰ If there was ever a situation that could not be handled locally, a special force from Bangkok could be sent to deal with it.

The Metropolitan Constabulary and the Provincial Gendarmerie were merged in 1915 and put under the Ministry of Local Government, then headed by Jao Phraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), before being shifted to the Ministry of Interior, to which Yommarat also moved, in 1922.²²¹ After the consolidation, officers outside the capital still did not have the power to investigate cases or bring a case to court. In fact, the combined police force was envisioned along functional as well as geographical lines. In a Ministry of Interior document dated 28 April 1926, the unified force was described in terms of legal power. The police that could arrest criminals, question them, and compile a report for trial in the *politsapha* (magistrate's courts in Bangkok) were called the *tamruat nakbonban* (Metropolitan Police). The *tamruat phuthon* (Provincial Police), on the other hand, could arrest criminals but had to send them to the district head for questioning. And it was the district head, not the police, who compiled case reports for the public prosecutor to use in trials in provincial courts.²²² The power to gather evidence and question witnesses (*sop suan*) was only gradually shifted to the Provincial Police. On 1 October 1935, the new Criminal Procedure

²²⁰ Wiwana, 1984, 10-2.

²²¹ Announcement in Royal Gazette, No. 32, 17 October 1915, 314, "Royal Announcement on the Consolidation of the Provincial Gendarmerie and the Metropolitan Constabulary," in Wiwana, 1984, 81. The name of the department was changed to *krom tamruat* (or simply 'police department') after 1932.

²²² NA R7 M 11/1, *Krasuang mahatbai, tamruat phuthon nakbonban phuban, plian nam krom lae nam tamnaeng atthibodi krom tamruat phranakbonban lae tamruat phuthon* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, provincial, metropolitan, and investigative police, changing the department and title of the head of the Metropolitan and Provincial Police], 1926.

Code was promulgated via Royal Decree. It held that in the provinces outside Bangkok and Thonburi that local civilian administrators (*phanakngan fai pokkhrong*) or high-ranking police officers, deputy district heads, and police with the rank of Police Sub-Lieutenant or above had the power to gather and compile evidence within their jurisdictions. In 1938, the Ministry of Interior under Rear Admiral Thawan Thamrongnawasat finally transferred the power to compile evidence and question witnesses from district level administration officials to the police.²²³ The long road to becoming a full investigative police stemmed from several factors including lack of experienced trainers, resistance from local authorities who traditionally dealt with crime, infighting among ministries, and the fear of placing too much power in a police force quickly earning itself a bad reputation.

Prophesies

At the same time the government set out to establish a national, uniformed standing police force to handle ordinary crime, high-ranking police and civilian government officials began to talk about the increasing deviousness of crooks. How much of this was real versus imagined is hard to tell. There is no clear indication in the archives, for example, that criminals were becoming any cleverer than they had been in the past; ordinary crimes continued to include things like buffalo theft, assaults stemming from personal arguments, and robbery, all staples of Siamese life for decades before the turn of the nineteenth century. In fact, government officials at the time generally saw bandits and other criminals as being more brutish than clever. Prince Buripatra, for example, described as late as 1929 the criminal methods of the Siamese as relying more on “force than on ingenuity as was the case

²²³ Ministry of Interior document number 349/2480 dated 3 February 1938 in “*Prawat kiam kap kan sop suan khadi aya khong phanakngan sop suan fai pokkhrong nai phumiphak* [History related to investigating criminal cases of the local administrative officers in the provinces], in *Krom kan pokkhrong* [Civil administration], no author (Bangkok: Krommakan Pokkhrong, 1984), 4-5. This power was lost and regained several times afterwards.

in Europe.”²²⁴ Along similar lines, Lawson said flippantly in 1919 that Siam was in the “happy position of having no politics” and was “probably the only country in the world that has not.”²²⁵

There were, however, an increasing number of cases involving activities such as illegal opium and alcohol manufacturing, in direct competition with the state’s monopoly on these items, and many of these involved the collaboration of Chinese producers and local officials. There were also new crimes that were facilitated by technological advances including the counterfeiting of coin and paper money, which like alcohol and opium, were preserves of the state. In Luang Saranupraphan’s *Phrae dam* (Black satin), the villain of the story, Phraya Khamnunthanasak (or Prasoet Sethiwong, a fictional character), is involved in a scheme to produce counterfeit paper money using photographic equipment in a secret darkroom in his house.²²⁶ Meanwhile reports in newspapers also indicated that government documents were being leaked to journalists and others for personal profit in real life as well as in fiction. In one example, a lawsuit involving the newspaper *Wayamo* showed that confidential government intelligence was being sold to local papers by lawmakers and civil servants.²²⁷ The sale of government secrets was part of the plot in Vajiravudh’s Thong-in story “*Khvam lap phaen din*” (The country’s secret). Other fictional accounts also included stories about people attempting to capitalize on new technologies for personal gain. So

²²⁴ NA R7 M 11/7, *Krasuang mahathai, tamruat phuthon nakbonban phuban, tang tamruat phuban* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, provincial, metropolitan, and detective police, establishing the detective police], 22 October 1929.

²²⁵ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan and provincial police, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

²²⁶ Luang Saranupraphan, “*Phrae dam*,” *Senasuksa lae phae witthayarat* 7.1 (January 1922): 102. Luang Saranupraphan was an important figure in the 1920s and 1930s. He was close to Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram and edited not only his own journal but also the newspaper *Krungthep Daily Mail*. See chapters 1 and 5 for more on Luang Saranupraphan.

²²⁷ NA R6 N 20.2/100, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim pratat lae pho. ro. bo.* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, announcements, and decrees], circa 1923.

behind the cavalier front the government had up with respect to the nature of ordinary crime, there was in the back of many officials' minds the suspicion that the disorder *was* increasingly of a political bent. That is, government officials began to see crime as a direct threat to their control of the kingdom as opposed to a general inconvenience arising from personal disputes or bad characters that had to be dealt with from time to time.

In the years leading up to the revolution of 1932, the kingdom was awash with news of potential coups and other disasters. This generated much ominous chatter, which heightened anxieties that crime was increasingly aimed at the government.²²⁸ In 1912, for example, a series of rumors surfaced that indicated a coup against the government was imminent. In the aftermath of the successful republican revolution in China in 1911 these rumors took on a very menacing tone. The rumored coup almost materialized, but details about the plot were discovered by government informers. On 29 February 1912, a chartered train carrying Prince Chakrabongse arrived in Nakhon Pathom, where King Vajiravudh was conducting Wild Tiger military maneuvers, to inform the king of the plan.²²⁹ Over the next two days, ninety-two men were arrested for complicity in the planned coup. Almost all the men arrested were in their early twenties and were lieutenants in the army. At least some were of Sino-Siamese ancestry.²³⁰ Another, lesser known, plot was thwarted in 1917 after a series of arrests. Little information exists on this attempted coup. Perhaps the best known rumor going around in the late 1920s was an old prophecy dating back to before 1827 that historian David Wyatt credits to Princess Narinthewi, King Rama I's younger sister. The rumor which stated the Chakkri reign would last for 150 years. According to the prophecy,

²²⁸ Somphong Jaengrew, "*Kamnoet tamruat santiban nai prawatsat kanmuang thai samai 2475*" (The origins of the special branch of the police in the political history of Thailand in 1932)," *Silapa wattthanatham* (November 2008): 124.

²²⁹ The Wild Tiger Corps (*kong sua pa*) were a military unit established by King Vajiravudh in 1910 and put under his direct authority.

²³⁰ Somphong, 2008, 122.

the dynasty would end on 6 April 1932.²³¹ In a country where people take astrological forecasts quite seriously, this prediction, given credibility through its connection to the first king of the dynasty, gave government elites at the turn of the century a lot to worry about. In retrospect, rumors about the end of the dynasty might seem trivial, but at the time they (along with the attempted coups) represented “the beginning of a new kind of politics” that involved, even if vaguely, the idea of radical political change.²³²

The tense political climate in which the attempted coups took place was amplified by the press. The local papers, which had mushroomed in number over the 1920s, were filled with editorials and news reports critical of the government on several counts, from its poor handling of crime to the financial irresponsibility of the Vajiravudh reign.²³³ Matthew Copeland’s well-known doctoral dissertation, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy,” for example, describes how critical the press was of the government during the period. Using numerous political cartoons and acerbic opinion pieces in the papers as evidence, Copeland argues that an “urban intelligentsia” developed in the 1920s to contest the history of the emerging Thai nation through the press.²³⁴ Scot Barmé, in *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, also features many of these political cartoons, which lambast the king and his government, social inequality, and rapacious civil servants.²³⁵ Some of these cartoons and the editorials that accompanied them called for a republican form of

²³¹ David Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 229. In most accounts, the prophecy is attributed to King Rama I himself, who was reputed to be a skilled astrologer.

²³² Wyatt, 2003, 214.

²³³ Data from the National Library of Thailand show a total of seven serials were started during the reigns of Rama III (r. 1824-1851) and Rama IV (r. 1851-1868), forty-seven under Rama V (r. 1868-1910), 127 under Rama VI (r. 1910-1925), and 160 under Rama VII (r. 1925-1935) (148 were started prior to 1932). While these often lasted only a year or two, the trend is clear that a print-media boom occurred under Rama VI and VII leading up to the 1932 revolution.

²³⁴ Matthew Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy” (PhD dissertation, National University of Australia, 1993).

²³⁵ Scot Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex and Popular Culture in Thailand* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

government and the abolition of the monarchy. News like this certainly did not reduce the suspicions of the government that something was amiss in the kingdom. The political nature of crime, both real and perceived, rumors, plots and alleged plots against the government, and a vocal, critical press coupled with the social changes described in the previous chapter combined with a global economic crisis, which saw the price of rice fall by over two-thirds between 1930 and 1932 and land values drop to as little as one-sixth of their value in the same period, to create a real sense of crisis. The reaction of the government to this situation was fairly swift, and as hinted at above, it involved detection.

Plainclothes

In response to their fears, the government began to experiment with establishing a special unit of plain-clothes detectives, first for the capital but then also one for the countryside. That is, the police were going incognito, as literary detectives like Thong-in had already done. The first attempt at establishing a plainclothes unit, excluding previous spy units such as the *kong mon* (Mon division), took place in 1890, when a formal police detective department for the capital and its suburbs called the *kong sot naem* (detective division) was established.²³⁶ This unit was proposed by A.J.A. Jardine, the British Inspector General of Police on loan to Siam from British Burma between 1890 and 1902, as part of the general restructuring of the Metropolitan Constabulary in the later part of the nineteenth century. The purpose of establishing a *kong sot naem* was to create a more reliable source of information than district level officials, who were often in cahoots with local bandits.²³⁷ In addition, the government regularly used criminals to catch criminals, a policy called “bandit

²³⁶ On the *kong mon*, see Chapter 1.

²³⁷ See Chapter 1. Phirasak Chaidaisuk provides a good discussion on bandits and local officials in the fifth reign. See Phirasak Chaidaisuk, *Chat sua wai lai* [Once a tiger, always a tiger] (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2008).

catch bandit” (*jon jap jon*), which caused much confusion. If the uniformed police’s initial duties had more to do with keeping the peace – making arrests, breaking up fights, picking up litter – than with investigation, then these new detective units were its opposite.

Unlike their uniformed counterparts in the metropolitan constabulary, the primary job of officers in the *kong sot naem* was detection – to find out the identities and whereabouts of wanted criminals and solve mysterious crimes. The initial proposal was for one or two officers from the *kong sot naem* to be located in each district of the capital to act as a local informant. For this unit, officers who showed a good understanding of the rules and regulations of the police and who were believed to be trustworthy and reliable were chosen from the Metropolitan Constabulary. In the field, the detective officer would report to either the local *nai amphoe* (district chief) or *phon trawaen* (local constable). The unit started off small, as Jardine’s plan was implemented only on a trial basis and in a few sub-districts (*tambon*) in Bangkok. Over time, the program was expanded to other *tambon* and the group eventually became its own department, or *kong*.²³⁸ Because it was difficult to tell who was an authorized informant of the government and who was a criminal, the officers carrying out undercover duties were issued a document with a state seal and the signature of the chief officer of the *kong trawaen* to prove their identity.²³⁹ In 1899, Jardine asked for permission to expand the *kong sot naem* and have it placed under his direct control. His request was not approved

²³⁸ NA R5 N 8.1/1, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom kong trawaen, ratchakan thua pai, khwam hen thi ja jat kan krom kong trawaen* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan constabulary, general duties, opinion regarding the establishing a police department], 1892.

²³⁹ NA R5 N 8.1/47, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom kong trawaen, ruang senabodi mi khamsang thung phraya inthara phra thephaphon luang wisetthani luang wiphatpranun wa kong raksa tai taeng khon ok sot naem jap phu rai tha amphoe kamnan ben nangsu samkhan khu mi phranam senabodi lae tra sing laew ko hai amphoe kamnan pen thura chuai jap phu rai duay* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan constabulary, general duties, correspondence from Minister of Local Government to Phra Inthara, Phra Thephaphon, Luang Wisetthani, and Luang Wiphatpranun regarding the sending-out of secret investigators to catch criminals: If local official is presented Document with Official Seal that Local Official Should Assist in Arrest of Criminals], 1892.

because it was felt that the unit was not showing any positive results.²⁴⁰ The main problem was the difficulty in finding trustworthy and capable men to fill the unit's ranks. As the years passed, the unit did less and less investigative work; their duties shifted to include the registration of Chinese secret society members, prostitutes, and pawnshops.²⁴¹

In 1902, the *kong sot naem* was dissolved when Eric St. John Lawson, another English officer from British Burma, took over as the head of the Metropolitan Constabulary. Lawson held the post for twelve years, during which time it was said "many improvements, extensions, and changes were made. Among the more important of them was founding of the Special Branch, an institution very much of the nature of the London Criminal Investigation Department."²⁴² Lawson also credits himself for the introduction of the system of identification by fingerprints, the opening of schools for the training of officers, and publishing a police manual in Siamese and English.²⁴³ Lawson's proposal for the Special Branch, or *kong phiset*, was approved on 10 May 1902. By 1903, Lawson reported that the Special Branch consisted of one assistant superintendent of police, one chief inspector, six inspectors, four head constables, eighteen sergeants, and ninety-one constables. The unit's responsibilities included investigation, especially in complex or mysterious cases beyond the ability of local civil officials (e.g. the *nai amphoe*) or police to solve. The unit could also investigate and compile reports for sending a case to trial and like its predecessor the *kong sot*

²⁴⁰ NA R5 N 8.2n/6, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom kong trawaen, kharachakan chao tang prathet, phra ong jao chanthatchuthathan keo hai mom chao mahamad mura pen kong trawaen* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan constabulary, foreign nationals in government service, Phra Ong Jao Chanthatchuthathan requesting Mom Jao Mohammed Mura be allowed to serve as a police constable], 1899.

²⁴¹ Thawisak, 2008, 267.

²⁴² Forty, 1967, 34.

²⁴³ On each of these innovations, see Chapter 3.

naem, the Special Branch supervised the operations of the pawn-shops, the enforcement of the Pawnbrokers law, registering prostitutes, and the arrest of professional criminals.²⁴⁴

Other detective units followed the Special Branch. These included the short lived *tamruat phuban* (detective police), which was supposed to operate as a plain-clothes detective unit for the provinces. The unit, initiated by Prince Damrong in 1913, actually grew out of calls for an undercover police force for areas outside Bangkok as early as 1904. In that year, at a meeting of superintendent commissioners (*khaluang thesaphiban*) under the Ministry of Interior, a proposal to create a secret police throughout the provinces was suggested that “would strengthen the commune and village elders efforts to maintain law and order in the countryside.”²⁴⁵ This suggestion was rejected on the grounds that men recruited to be secret police would themselves likely become criminals. Two years later, Prince Damrong, then Minister of Interior, authorized plainclothes policemen that he called *yokerabat tamruat phubon* to secretly collect information on “thugs, bandits, and receivers of stolen goods” in *monthon* Nakhon Chaisi.²⁴⁶ This group evidently proved something of a success, prompting Prince Damrong to set up the aforementioned *tamruat phuban* as a sort of criminal investigative unit he called a *krom nak sup*, literally ‘the detective unit,’ in September 1913.²⁴⁷ The *tamruat phuban* operated for just two years before being disbanded. Damrong noted that the failure was due in part to a lack of qualified teachers. The unit’s demise may have also had to do with the integration of the Ministry of Local Government, which controlled the Metropolitan Police,

²⁴⁴ NA R5 N102, Fifth reign, Ministry of Local Government, report on the police administration of Bangkok town, northern and southern suburbs and railway district (in English) (1903), 19.

²⁴⁵ Tej Bunnag, “The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892 to 1915: A Study of the Creation, the Growth, the Achievements, and the Implications for Modern Siam, of the Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rachanuphap” (PhD dissertation, Oxford, 1968), 224.

²⁴⁶ No Author, “*Raingan prachum thesaphiban ro. so. 126*” [Report for provincial administration meeting, 1907], *Thesaphiban* [Provincial Administration Journal] 4.22 (1908): 143.

²⁴⁷ The change in the terms used for the detective police, *kong sot naem* to *krom nak sup*, may indicate also the change in ideas about what it was the unit was supposed to do. *Sot naem* means to spy or infiltrate and gather information whereas *nak sup* refers to the more modern figure of the private detective who relies on logic and evidence.

and the Ministry of Interior, which controlled the Provincial Gendarmerie, in 1915. After the restructuring, the police became a single unit under the Ministry of Interior with Jao Phraya Yommarat acting as Minister and Prince Damrong resigning.

Despite being disbanded, talk of setting up a permanent undercover police unit continued. In 1918, for example, the idea of setting up a secret police within the Provincial Gendarmerie and procedures for reforming the police investigation unit was mooted in the department and within the Ministry of Local Government. In a letter to the Minister of Local Government dated 13 February 1919, Lawson described the workings of the British secret police as a possible model.²⁴⁸ Nothing happened immediately and the old *kong phiset* continued to operate. Then, in the late 1920s, talk of setting up a new secret police unit gained steam. On 16 May 1928, a letter from Prince Buripatra, the Minister of Interior after Jao Phraya Yommarat, to King Prajadiphok asked for approval to set up a *kong tamruat phuthon klang* (central investigation division) to help catch bandits in locations throughout the country.²⁴⁹ The reason put forth was that crime during the period was extremely high and was not limited by district boundaries. A report dated 15 May 1928 by Luang Phraya Phetinthara (P.L.E. Warming), a Danish officer in the Provincial Police Department, showed that the number of murders and armed robberies in the five years before 1928 was 6,734 or 1,347 per year. The total population at that time, he noted, was about 10 million, making the murder and robbery rate 134 per one million persons. By comparison, Burma in 1924 had a population of 13 million and only 817 cases of murder and armed robbery, or about fifty-six

²⁴⁸ NA R6 N 4.1/2, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, khwam ben phraya athikonprakat lae nai lawson thi pruksa nai ruang tamruat lap* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan and provincial police, general duties, opinion of Phraya Athikonprakat and Mr. Lawson, advisor on secret police], 1918.

²⁴⁹ NA R7 M 11/5 *Krasuang mabathai, krom tamruat phuthon nakhonban phuban, tang tamruat phuthon klang* [Seventh reign, provincial gendarmerie, metropolitan police, and detective police, establishing a central investigation division], 1928.

cases per one million persons. The prince thus asked for a special unit, a sort of Siamese ‘FBI,’ to be established to tackle these high crime rates.²⁵⁰

Between Fiction and the State

That the literary and the real detective appeared in Siam at roughly the same time is not enough to make any claims as to the effects to detective fiction on the practices of the police or vice versa. Indeed any sort of causality is difficult to determine: Did the literary detective lead directly to the establishment of a secret police? Was the establishment of a secret police reflected in detective fiction? The typical police constable, for example, may not have been an avid reader of detective fiction. By some accounts, he probably couldn’t even read. A letter from a British medical officer in 1915 regarding the operation of the police hospital, for example, states that the “police officers that volunteer to work at the hospital can’t even read or write their own language.”²⁵¹ Granted, the new journals and books were meant largely for a newly emerging literate class living in Bangkok, so it is not too surprising if beat cops did not read them. They may have, however, been to one of the several new movie houses to see a film about police and crime investigation. And notes from high ranking police officers and newspaper articles indicate that some cross-fertilization did occur. Phra Phinitchonkhadi, one time deputy director-general of police, head of the political intelligence unit in the *santiban* (the post-1932 revolution Special Branch) in the 1930s, and key player in the investigation of the death of King Ananda in 1946, wrote that police informers, or *sai*, employed clandestine methods – passing scraps of paper to each other in darkened movie theatres and using code numbers and nicknames – often associated with detective novels

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ NA R6 N 4.1/56, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua phai, raingan jak kong phaet sukhaphiban* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan and provincial police, general duties, report from the Office of the Medical Officer of the Department of Local Sanitation], 1915.

and spy movies.²⁵² Luang Phisitwithayakan, one of Siam's first forensic police officers and head of the *santiban*'s science section, wrote "People may be surprised to hear via books or general talk that police in foreign countries are skilled in solving mysteries (*khadi luk lap*) and ask whether they have some special magic (*waetmon*)."²⁵³ A lengthy opinion piece about Siam's secret police in *Krungthep Daily Mail* serialized over several days in 1912 notes "the detective and his prey adjust to each other and they become a pair, just as we have seen in the foreign movies."²⁵⁴ If nothing else, it is clear that the police and the public were both quite aware of the popular portrayals of detectives in fiction (both in print and in film).

If one steps back, however, a more fundamental connection appears to join the literary and the real detective – the notions of secrecy and mystery. There is, theoretically, no need for either, the fictional or state detective, in a world in which information is transparent. As described in the previous chapter, information (about crime and criminals) in Siam before the late nineteenth century was in some instances quite available, though perhaps not quite transparent. The changes described in this and the previous chapter managed in part to unsettle the information order that had existed up until the end of the nineteenth century, especially in Bangkok. Chinese communities, a source of much crime, vice, and disorder, were not as easily penetrable as King Vajiravudh made it seem in his 'Thong-in stories and the threat they posed could no longer be brushed aside as their numbers swelled and their importance in all manner of industry grew around the turn of the twentieth century. Neither could that of people living other ethnic enclaves, especially in an

²⁵² Phra Phinitchonkhadi, *Nithan tamruat* [The story of the police] (Bangkok: Thai Watthana Phanit, 1963), 39.

²⁵³ Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Sup khadi luk lap* [Investigating mysterious cases], in cremation volume for the soldiers and police officers that lost their lives fighting the revolt of 1933, printed on 18 February 1933, Bangkok, 17.

²⁵⁴ Op. ed. in *Krungthep Daily Mail* from 22-31 December 1912, from NA R6 N 20.6/4, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, botkhvam nai nangsuphim* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, articles in newspapers].

era defined by the limited jurisdiction of the Siamese legal apparatus that resulted from the extraterritorial rights enjoyed by Britain, France, and others. With crime and disorder seeming to spill out of every nook and cranny of the city (and from the countryside), it was more important than ever to be able to get at the information that the diverse population of the kingdom contained. For this, the administrative technology called the detective police appeared as a more efficient and more modern solution than the man-hunts and ad-hoc military campaigns commonly used to fight crime and the torture used to extract information from suspects and witnesses in the nineteenth century. Tellingly, the practice of flogging a suspect or witness to gain testimony was officially abolished in 1895 while military campaigns were slowly phased out in the early twentieth century, though they were periodically employed to put down Chinese labor strikes or other disturbances throughout the kingdom well into the 1920s.²⁵⁵

It was because of the perception of the increasingly political nature of crime that Prince Buripatra urged in 1928 that a secret police unit be set up immediately, why in 1929 Prince Wongnirachon Thewakun was sent to study the secret police in England and France, and why the *tamruat phuban* was resurrected that same year with a political intelligence section. It was also the reason, years earlier, that kings Vajiravudh and Prajadiphok set up less formal detective groups built around the concept of secrecy such as the *Chitlada samoson* (Chitlada society). Ostensibly a social club that met weekly to watch movies, *lakhon* (theatrical dramas), and *khon* (plays performed with masks), the group's real goal was to secretly keep tabs on political currents and specific groups in Thailand. Modeling themselves after the Free Masons of England, they even wore special shirts with 'fringes,' which came adorned with a top button decorated with a triangle symbol that helped members identify

²⁵⁵ See Jao Phraya Surasakmontri, *Prawat khong jom phon jao phraya surasakmontri* (The biography of Jao Phraya Surasakmontri) (Bangkok: Khurusapha, 1961), 176 and Phirasak, 2008, 195.

each other. Prajadiphok set up a similar society called the *Samakhom naep dam* (Society of the black pin), also to secretly gather intelligence.²⁵⁶ In the *Bangkok Daily Mail* editorial from 1912 about the secret police cited earlier, the author notes that while ‘*polit mut*’ or ‘*polit lap*’ (secret police) have existed for some time to help arrest criminals, there was for the first time in the kingdom’s history a new kind of detective whose job was solely to sniff out political crimes or threats to government.²⁵⁷ By the late 1920s, then, notions of secrecy (as in secret information to detect and to protect) disseminated in large part through fiction were giving shape to various state and quasi-state projects aimed at reforming the kingdom’s information order.

The government’s push into the world of modern detection thus produced over the course of the first three decades of the twentieth century new police units (the *kong sot naem*, the *kong phiset*, the *tamruat phuban*, the *santiban*) staffed by a new kind of officer (a plainclothes detective) employing new types of practices (e.g. fingerprint identification, photography, chemical analyses). It was through this process of reform that the government began to conceptualize social disorder as ‘secret’ or ‘mysterious,’ which the state detective was to investigate. That the government was thinking in terms of secrecy and detection is clear, from the calls for a secret police mentioned earlier to correspondence between government elites and their foreign advisors. Sir Basil Thomson, well-known inspector with New Scotland Yard and personal teacher to Vajiravudh while he was in England, noted in a letter to Prince Buripatra, “It is important that no unnecessary stress should be laid on secrecy” in the establishment of an undercover police. He added, “The public should never be allowed to suspect that any *secret* [emphasis his] political intelligence exists. In Siam it would probably

²⁵⁶ Somphong, 2008, 122-3.

²⁵⁷ Op. ed. in *Krungthep Daily Mail* from 22-31 December 1912, from NA R6 N 20.6/4, *Krasuang nakbonban, nangsuphim, botkhvam nai nangsuphim* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, newspapers, articles in newspapers].

be very difficult to keep such activities [intelligence gathering] secret and great harm might result from trying to invest them with a veil of secrecy. The public would grow suspicious and imagine that it was a kind of Russian Cheka.”²⁵⁸ Thomson thus recommended a semi-secret branch of officers to act as a cover for a real secret service. As such, the *tamruat phuban* was resuscitated by Prince Damrong, this time under King Prajadiphok, so that in 1928 two new investigative units of police, the aforementioned *tamruat phuthon klang* (central investigation division) and a new *tamruat phuban* (detective police), were created. While the former was to tackle ordinary crime, the latter’s mandate extended beyond everyday banditry.²⁵⁹ It was a unit designed especially to gather and keep information with political import for the government, as its organizational structure shows. The new *tamruat phuban* was arranged into six divisions: the *kong withayakan* or the science section, the *phanaek prathutsakam* or criminal records division, the *kong prap pram* or the crime suppression division, the *kong ekasan kan muang* or the political documents section, the *kong ekasan nangsuphim* or newspaper section, and the *kong thabian phim lai niu mu* or fingerprint division.²⁶⁰ The *kong ekasan kan muang*, which investigated political matters and communists, and the *kong ekasan nangsuphim*, which sifted through newspapers and other documents for political news, were the first divisions of the police dedicated solely to the detection of political crimes, signaling a clear change in the mission of the state’s new detectives and the thinking of the government elite.

From an examination of the development of the detective story and the detective police, then, it’s fair to say that the central government saw crime, disorder, and social

²⁵⁸ Letter from Basil Thomson to Prince Buripatra, 11 January 1929 in NA R7 M 11/7, *Krasuang mahathai, tamruat phuthon nakhonban phuban, tang tamruat phuban* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, provincial, metropolitan, and detective police, establishing the detective police].

²⁵⁹ On ordinary versus political crime, see the Introduction.

²⁶⁰ Somphong, 2008, 125.

change in terms of information, which as the years passed became increasingly mysterious (because people were secreting it away) and thus dangerous. This notion of secrecy reflects, in part, the way government officials began to conceptualize of their world as a detective story, a narrative form organized around a central mystery that requires solving. Tellingly, the government's response to the emerging problem of mysterious knowledge was to establish a unit of undercover police, one that found its inspiration in the detective agencies *and* the detective fiction of England, France, and the US. And while the government was busy making a secret police to police secrets, the budding writers and journalists of the Siamese press were just as occupied filling up pages of newspapers and journals with crime-based mysteries to feed a growing demand. In these fictional stories, crime was being phrased in terms like secrecy or mystery (e.g. *khadi luk lap* or 'mysterious case') and being spread through the popular press just as it was through the police force and the community of educated elites.

That secrecy came to be a dominant motif in early twentieth century Siam and that the detective narrative was a key way of organizing information are broad claims to make, based on observed thematic commonalities or conceptual similarities between news, fiction, and the police. At the level of practice, there were (and continue to be) more concrete mechanisms that linked, and continue to link, the fictional and the real detective. Here I refer to specific devices employed by both writers of fiction and legal professionals (and their mass media counterparts). To see what I mean requires a turn now to an exploration of the characteristics of the detective story's narrative form.

Devices of Mystery

Literary critics have noted several basic elements, or literary devices, that make the detective novel distinct from other kinds of stories. A literary device is a technique that writers employ to shape the form of a narrative of a specific text, to control its effects.²⁶¹ One example is temporal transposition or inversion, which folds linear, historical time back on itself within a text. French literary critic Tzvetan Todorov explains this device by citing a Michel Butor novel, *Passing Time*, in which a character who happens to be a detective novelist named George Burton tells the narrator of the book that “all detective fiction” has a narrative that “superimposes two temporal series: the days of the investigation which begin with the crime, and the days of the drama which lead up to it.” Thus, the detective novel “contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these two stories have no point in common.” The first story, that of the crime, “tells ‘what really happened,’ whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains how the reader [or narrator] has come to know about it.” This conceptualization of the detective narrative follows the distinction made by Russian Formalists between ‘*fibula*’ (story) and ‘*syuzhet*’ (plot): “The story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us...The two are aspects of one thing.”²⁶² Or as Viktor Shklovsky, one of the first ‘formalists,’ notes, a story can be told in a way that the reader sees the unfolding of events, how one event follows another in a temporally linear sequence. A story can also be told in such a way that the reader does not know what exactly is happening until some point later in the unfolding of the plot. This second way of telling stories involves a “temporal

²⁶¹ Literary historian Franco Moretti explains that while texts themselves are real objects they are not objects of knowledge. A scholar that focuses on a single text may produce a clever interpretation of that text, but this interpretation tells nothing society doesn’t already know. Instead, devices and genres, which are a group of formally similar texts, should be what literary historians analyze. See Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 217.

²⁶² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 44-5.

transposition such as an omission of a particular incident.” In other words, a mystery or detective story begins after the consequences or effects of a specific cause are seen by the reader. This is often enough by itself to create sense of mystery.²⁶³

In material form, the temporal transposition is often accomplished by a reader’s and the literary detective’s discovery of a dead body or the announcement of a missing person or object that triggers an investigation. So in “*Sup sapphakan*” from the July 1895 issue of *Wachirayan*, the story begins when a woman seeks the help of ‘Mr. Detective’ to clear her husband for the murder of a man whose body could not be located.²⁶⁴ Once the details of the charges are made clear, an investigation begins to discover what happened to the man in question. In the July 1897 issue, Mr. Detective begins his investigation after being approached by another woman whose fiancé had disappeared without explanation.²⁶⁵ In “*Ru doi laiat*” from the September 1897 issue, the story begins with a local noble requesting the aid of the police to find his missing daughter.²⁶⁶ And in “*Sup ru dai doi laiat*” from the October 1896 issue, the tale begins with an unexplained murder in Ayuthaya.²⁶⁷ King Vajiravudh, then crown prince, also used the device in his Nithan Thong-in stories. In “*Nai suwan thuk khamot*” (Mr. Suwan is robbed), the story begins with the discovery that goods have been mysteriously taken from a safe. In “*Khwan lap phaen din*” (The country’s secret), the story begins with a stolen state document. In a slight twist to the theme, “*Nak phrakhanong thi song*” begins with the telling of the appearance (rather than a disappearance or a death) of a ghost in Phrakhanong in what is now eastern Bangkok. In this story, that which requires investigation is the presence of a ghost, something that many Thais may not have

²⁶³ Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 110.

²⁶⁴ “*Ruang sup sapphakan*,” *Wachirayan* 10 (July 1895): 1155-74.

²⁶⁵ “*Ruang sup sapphakan*,” *Wachirayan* 35 (July 1897): 3500-34.

²⁶⁶ “*Ruang ru doi laiat*,” *Wachirayan* 36 (September 1897): 3591-625.

²⁶⁷ “*Sup ru dai doi laiat*,” *Wachirayan* 25 (October 1896): 2551-78.

found mysterious (however frightening) at all. In all these cases, the absence of knowledge, about a dead body, something missing, or a ghost, provides an opportunity for knowledge production, for the generation and organization of information. It is only after mystery is established that the narrative of a detective novel may unfold, backwards into time.

Contrast this inverted narrative structure with the plots of conventional adventure stories, in which a story's events unfold in a straight forward linear sequence from beginning to end. The 'thriller' and noir fiction, which became popular in the US during the 1940s, exhibit such linear plot structures. They fuse the adventure story and the detective novel in that the lead character is often a detective involved in the investigation of a crime. Unlike the 'pure' detective novel, however the investigation itself (as opposed to the events leading up to a crime) becomes a story to be told. There is no mystery in these types of stories, but there is suspense. The thriller and noir fiction are thus "constituted not around a method of presentation but around the milieu represented, around specific characters and behavior." A thriller is more concerned with thematic issues like violence and immorality.²⁶⁸

A look at some of the crime stories popular in Siam in the early twentieth century shows a similarly straightforward narrative structure. The popular form known as *lamtat*, for example, that featured crime stories from the sixth reign (r. 1910-1925) show little use of temporal inversion.²⁶⁹ Indeed, mystery is not a critical element in these texts even though they sometimes have terms like '*luk lap*' (mysterious) in their titles. Instead, *lamtat*, like the longer crime reports that appeared in newspapers in the fifth reign, were often moral tales.

²⁶⁸ Todorov, 1977, 48.

²⁶⁹ *Lamtat* are plays in verse form performed as 'repartée' between two people. The content for many of these *lamtat* were taken from vernacular dailies and ended up being a way in which current events, news, and information was disseminated to a broad population. One opinion piece in *Senasuksa* claimed that the first *lamtat* was performed in Siam in 1913 by a troupe that had adapted the form from a Javanese drama style. The piece went on to say that these *likae-lamtat* were detrimental to the education of the population and those that agreed should encourage the government to ban them. Nai Roi Tho Pawinphayak, *Senasuksa* 3.12 (December 1918): 858-866.

The story of Bunpheng Hip Lek (Iron trunk Bunpheng), which was the topic of popular *lamtat* in the late 1910s, tells the story of an orphaned boy from the countryside moving to Bangkok, becoming a monk, and then meeting his downfall after being tempted by vice (gambling and drinking) and the wiles of a treacherous, older woman. Bunpheng finally commits murder to gain material wealth, which he uses to pay the hefty bride price for the female object of his desire. The story ends with a recounting of his trial, in which he is sentenced to death and then executed in public.²⁷⁰ The themes the story communicates include proper behavior between men and women, laity and monks, children and parents and the laws of cause and effect. This type of story, written in rhyming verse (*klon*), might therefore be interpreted as a text that reinforces the status quo and is thus inherently conservative.

Other *lamtat* do similar ideological work. Stories about a son killing his father, an adulterous wife killing her husband, and the exploits and subsequent capture by the police of famous bandits express in story a moral order related to proper domestic, religious, and social relations.²⁷¹ In the Hayi Khiat (pseudo.) version of the Bunpheng story, Bunpheng is described from the beginning as a particularly unethical or dishonest (*kang chin*) man who flouts the monkhood's code of conduct (*moha muthalu fajuan winai*) and who quickly realizes that he can use his good looks to his advantage with female devotees. As the plot unfolds, the narrator and his partner describe and comment on Bunpheng's desires, which lead him finally to murder. They reveal the plot in a sort of conversation. Secrecy and mystery only come into play when the narrator speaks to the audience-reader, telling them that he is about to let them in on privileged information: "Don't tell anyone, okay? Once you know, keep it

²⁷⁰ Hayi Khiat (pseudo.), *Ai bunpheng phurai samkhan hip lek* [Bunpheng, the villain of the iron trunk] (Bangkok: Bangkok Press, 1919). The subtitle of this *lamtat* reads "Pen ruang luk lap sap son" [A mysterious, complex story].

²⁷¹ For a description of several *lamtat* from the 1920s, see Anek Nawigamune, *Khatbakon yuk khun pu* [Murderers in the olden days] (Bangkok: Saeng Dao, 2003).

to yourself...”²⁷² In fact, the narrators-performers often tell the reader-audience what to make of the characters in the story and how to interpret events. After the main narrator describes the way Miss Prik, an older woman who is also Bunpheng’s second victim, dresses inappropriately for her age, the supporting singer opines sarcastically about how “coquettish” she is.²⁷³ The conversation mimics the form of village gossip, not the detective novel. Though investigations conducted by both civilian officials and police officers are described about halfway through the story, it is not the key element on which the plot depends, mostly because there is no missing (transposed) past that needs to be revealed.

This discussion of literary devices so far may seem abstract, far removed from the story of the real detective that this chapter began with, but in many ways the detective narrative’s form is more true to real life than the *lamtat* or any chronologically ‘correct’ telling of a crime story. In Bangkok in 1918, the mystery of the dead bodies in the iron trunks that floated into the public consciousness in the Bunpheng case effectively inverted time for the police, the press, and the public, having the same effect a temporal transposition would in a novel. The police, readers of newspaper articles, or people gossiping about the two murders did not know the identities of the victims or of their murderer. After the first victim was found, Hayi Khiat notes that the news spread rapidly and people of all stripes flocked to see the body. The police then put out a notice in the vernacular press to help identify the body. One ad, entitled “Whose Child, Whose Wife?” (*Luk kbrai mia kbrai*), was printed in the 14 January 1919 edition of the *Krungthep Daily Mail* giving a physical description of Miss Prik and asked for relatives to come forward to identify the body.²⁷⁴ The narrative rearrangement

²⁷² Hayi Khiat (pseudo.), *Ai bunpheng phurai samkhan hip lek* [Iron trunk Bunpheng] (Bangkok: Bangkok Press: 1918), 7.

²⁷³ Ibid, 6.

²⁷⁴ *Krungthep Daily Mail*, 14 January 1919, from Winai Sirisiwan, “Bunpheng hip lek,” *Silapa watthanatham* 5.4 (February 1984): 86.

of this social reality into a linear, chronological sequence in the *lamtat* allowed the tale to serve the didactic purposes of that form. It did not reflect the narrative order that guided the way information about the mystery was discovered and made into a story in ‘real time’ by the police and the public (via news stories). The case of the murder of Sherry Ann Duncan is another example. A missing, then dead, girl made public by the mass media, set the stage for a mystery that the police and the media ‘solved’ together as the story unfolded daily in the papers. The narrative form of the detective narrative met the growing demands for providing ‘real time’ information and for the increased realism that the news, with its emphasis on being up-to-date, was beginning to produce.

As the focus on form shows, the crime story, as a genre, is interesting for reasons outside what it might reflect about the moral atmosphere of an era. It sheds light on how artistic innovation, and technical change in the case of police practice, occurs. The tale of Bunpheng and the others mentioned above were published after the initial wave of detective stories came out in *Wachirayan* (1890s) and *Thawi punya* (1904-6). The advent of the detective novel, then, did not completely eliminate other forms of telling crime stories nor did it prevent new ones from being introduced. *Lamtat* had their own audience, arguably a larger and more diverse one than early detective stories. This did not mean, however, that change did not occur in the *lamtat* or in the detective novel. In the prose crime fiction being written in Siam in the 1920s, revelation through dialogue (a sort of confessional mode of narration) was retained while authors added the devices of the detective novel. The result was a mixture of techniques as seen in Luang Saranupraphan’s *Phrae dam*, considered the first indigenous Thai crime novel (*atchayaniyai*). The main character and central mystery of this novel is a masked man whose identity needs to be revealed. This is what pushes the plot along. At the end of each installment of the serialized version of this story is the question, “Who is Phrae

Dam” along with a large question mark and an illustrated representation of the character. The revelation of this mystery is accomplished in part through the interpretation of clues and in part through ‘dialogic’ revelation.²⁷⁵ Detection occurs in various scenes, such as after a car chase sequence (perhaps Siam’s first ever), when Jarun Prapphai, a police officer from Phaya Thai station, loses the masked man on Krung Kasem road. He gets out of his car to survey the road before him. He checks out the tire tracks on the road and deduces from them the speed and direction of the villain’s car. He also discovers a scrap of paper and a black scarf on the roadside which becomes clues in the investigation. Here the investigation of material clues moves the narrative forward.²⁷⁶ In other instances, the mystery is revealed in dialogue, or rather, in a long confession that acts as a flashback to explain the origins of *Phrae dam*, the masked villain. In *Na phi*, Luang Saranupraphan’s follow-up novel, a similar masked villain/hero character is the center of the action and similar narrative devices are employed to move the story along.

Before writing these fictional tales, Luang Saranupraphan penned four short pieces describing a train trip he took to Chiang Mai in 1921, which he says are based on fact but have been embellished to entertain. In these stories, Luang Saranupraphan experiments with the devices of the detective story that he would later use in *Phrae dam* and *Na phi*. In “*Phachon phai chiang mai: ruang thi nung – jin luk lap*” (Chiang Mai adventures: Story one – The mysterious Chinese), Luang Saranupraphan describes an encounter with a suspicious

²⁷⁵ Dialogism refers to the idea that a novel, or any speech, is in constant dialogue with other novels, speech, or ideas and does not stand alone and cannot be considered separate from its context. Here I am using the term in a more limited sense in that the truth behind events in Luang Saranupraphan’s fiction emerged through the interaction (through speech) of characters in his stories. That is, mysteries must be solved through interaction and dialogue, not through pure detection, ala Sherlock Holmes. See Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

²⁷⁶ In addition to being proficient in reading clues, police officers in Luang Saranupraphan’s stories were young, disciplined, well-mannered, and professional. They were, in other words, heroes rather than the loathed figure the police officer later became. This portrayal was often at odds with their portrayal in reports in the popular press.

Chinese man on his northbound train from Bangkok, who may or may not have been involved in an unsolved murder in Ban Mi, Phitsanulok province.²⁷⁷ In this, Luang puts himself in the position of detective, trying to decipher the dress and suspicious behavior of the Chinese man sitting in his train car (e.g. the Chinese goes to the restroom several times for extended periods and switches seats often).

After Luang Saranupraphan left *Senasuksa*, others attempted to mimic his style. A story entitled *Prisana lap* (Puzzling secret) began appearing in the journal. It, like *Phrae dam*, featured a masked action villain/hero. Meanwhile, Luang Saranupraphan was working on an extended sequel to *Phrae dam*, which helped his *Saranukun* journal sell in an increasingly competitive market. The themes outlined in Luang Saranupraphan's stories were less about social mores, per the *lamtat*, than about the anxieties generated by various new technologies, especially those that reproduced reality or altered its properties, flooding into Siam. Counterfeit money, alchemic transformations, and criminals in disguises created difficulties for the police and the general public to know what was real or a copy. In the stories, ghost-like entities like the mysterious masked character in *Na phi* are humans in disguise while formulas that turn copper to bronze are real, as are death-rays and reports of the dead in newspapers are false, and villains turn out to be heroes.²⁷⁸ In fiction, writers depicted a society that was increasingly complex and one that required the state (via police detectives) to arbitrate between the legitimate and the illicit.

The *lamtat* also underwent morphological change. Hayi Khiat incorporates in "*Pisat bunsī: Phra khaṇong ikē laen?*" (The ghost of Bunsī: Another Phra Khaṇong?) a temporal inversion of sorts and some odd clue-like elements. In this story, Khiat plays on the legend

²⁷⁷ Captain (*Nai Roi Aek*) Nuan Pachinphayak (Luang Saranupraphan), "*Phachon phai chiang mai: Ruang thi nung – Jin Luk Lap*" [Chiang Mai adventures: Story one – The mysterious Chinese], *Senasuksa lae phae withayasat* 5.5 (May): 506-514.

²⁷⁸ The character's identity is never revealed because Luang Saranupraphan did not finish the series.

of the ghost of Phra Khanong just as King Vajiravudh did earlier in his “*Nak phra khanong thi song*.” In Vajiravudh’s version, Thong-in demonstrates how the ghost of Phanchot’s wife is no ghost, just an illusion arising from the shenanigans of Phanchot’s two sons, who do not want Phanchot to remarry. Unlike that tale, Hayi Khiat’s *lamtat* version suggests that the spirit of a murdered woman named Bunsu haunts the neighborhood, coming out at night to ask “Who murdered me?” Khiat, as the narrator and detective, decides to visit *wat Khlong Toei* (a temple), where the dead woman’s body is kept (mysteriously it has not deteriorated, he says). He stays over night to hear for himself the cries of Bunsu and attempt to either prove or disprove its existence. But in the end the now cliché ploy of having the narrator wake up from a dream is used so that the puzzle is never solved. The question that remains is not ‘Is there a ghost in Phra Khanong,’ but ‘Was the story just told real or a dream?’ The mystery is an ontological one. The murdered woman and her ghost were only red herrings for the real mystery, which is the relationship between fiction, history, and reality.

The examples above show that when people in Siam began to write fictional stories about crime in the 1920s, what travelled halfway across the globe was not just the content of a genre (neither the ghost of Phra Khanong nor murder and duplicity arrived from England), but the form and the devices that marked the genre as unique. Moretti, himself trained as a Marxist literary critic, writes that meaning in crime fiction doesn’t just exist in some substructure, but in “the syntax of the detective story – even in its most abstract aspect, that is, in the relationship between *sjuzet* [plot/form] and *fibula* [story/content].”²⁷⁹ The point here is that the mystery or secret of the detective novel is in its form, in the literary devices employed by its author. When the devices of the detective novel came to Siam, writers gained new tools with which to tell stories, including temporal inversion, dialogic revelation,

²⁷⁹ Moretti, 1983, 133.

and action sequences, thus materially altering the kingdom's narrative fabric. In real-life, the government and its new detectives, as well as the press, were also given a new form, one that fit well with the task of detecting secrets and solving mysteries. This was the plainclothes detective and his mission to gather information. With real people, whether agents or subjects of the state, however, the distinction between content and form is not made as often or as clearly as in fiction. Often, the forms (like the detective narrative) that guide meaning-making practices of the police fade from view so that the notion of content seems self-evident and untroubled. The police reforms that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not take place in a vacuum. They were part of a larger effort to change the way people could make sense of crime and the unknown and essential to creating a milieu of secrecy that pervaded the capital in the early twentieth century.

Summary

What does this all mean for the study of Thai history? Historians can treat literature as a document in which details about a time period may be found, the same as any other document in an archive, albeit with greater caution or with more caveats.²⁸⁰ Detective and crime-based fiction can therefore be read as a text including social change leading to unease and anxiety requiring detection. A historian may also, in some instances, step back and look at the form of a certain type of literature, asking how it came to be and what effects it has had on the way history can be imagined. Along these lines, one might rightly say that the detective novel, a narrative form which begins with a dead body or similar mystery and ends with a revelation, has affected the shape of history at two-levels. At a broad level, the

²⁸⁰ In a way this approach to fiction, or folktales and myths more broadly, as a source of data erases the epistemological distinction between fiction and non-fiction as both become forms from which content is drawn, a distinction that the final product of a historical analysis (a historical narrative) wants to maintain.

detective novel was a key instrument (along with crime news and film) that established and spread the idea that behind the reality of everyday crime lay a simple explanation that could be gleaned by human agents acting carefully, sifting for clues and documenting their finds. At a more practical level, Siam's new detectives were being trained to think and act on this notion of history, as if crime were a mystery that could be solved by specific practices transplanted from Europe. The overall effect of both the literary and real detective was thus to transform, or at least add a new wrinkle to, the nature of information, making secrecy the glue that bound early Siamese fiction to a changing social reality.

Going beyond the development of the police, one sees that the government was thinking about reforms in terms of information and knowledge. This idea can be drawn out further to help think about the reforms and modernization projects in general. That is, the government under King Chulalongkorn and then King Vajiravudh began to address the problems posed by crime by transplanting new types of information produced by new systems of knowledge. Cecil H. Forty wrote in his history of the police that even the unit's "first commandant Captain Ames" was "innocent probably of any knowledge of police work..."²⁸¹ The police reforms were about gaining this knowledge. The idea that reform was a knowledge project can be applied to other areas of life as well. In finance: "As Chulalongkorn stated, for all practical purposes, the position of the Minister of the Treasury did not exist, as no one knew the amount of state revenue that was collected or paid out annually. The functions of the treasury were dispersed among the various *krom*."²⁸² In the area of agriculture, there was an initiative for the establishment of a government-run experimental farm that failed: "... nothing had come of these initiatives for, according to the King, the government did not possess the specialist knowledge that would enable it to

²⁸¹ Forty, 1967, 39. Emphasis added.

²⁸² Hong, 1984, 16.

proceed confidently with such a project.”²⁸³ On the tin mining industry, the government set up a department of mines in 1892 under Ministry of Agriculture with Walter de Muller, a German, as head and H. Warrington Smyth, an Englishman, as his deputy: “An important early concern of the Department was to secure detailed knowledge of the mining concessions then being worked into the peninsula, and to this end inspection tours were undertaken in the south, notably Phuket, in this period.”²⁸⁴ These inspections sometimes failed, however, because “the local administrative and commercial elite withheld assistance from the Bangkok officials,” reinforcing the need for an autonomous, independent knowledge generating apparatus and a body of information that the state could access without the aid of fickle local officials.²⁸⁵ This view is reinforced in one successful case of knowledge transfer in the area of finance. The British in the late nineteenth century were opposed to the Siamese setting up their own bank, so Prince Mahit poured over “textbooks on bank administration and on bookkeeping to develop his knowledge of banking practices.”²⁸⁶ Mahit was able to open a Siamese owned and run bank in 1904 with this newly acquired knowledge, gained from published, non-human, mass produced sources.

Traditionally, the reforms have been seen alternatively, and correctly, as the government’s attempt to modernize, efforts to fend off the threat posed by the colonial ambitions of the British and the French, and a way of consolidating power for the Chakkri family. But in light of the discussion here on crime, one might be better served considering the government’s initiatives instead as an attempt to impose new ways of generating, organizing, and employing information in ways that could help them make sense of and deal with the noise and debris left by the violence of a rapidly changing society. To modernize

²⁸³ Ian Brown, *The Elite and the Economy in Siam, c. 1890-1920* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988), 61.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 99.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 99.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 129.

meant introducing a fundamentally different system of knowing things. Because crime was such an immediate problem, it became a primary site of contestation in the struggle to impose a new system of knowledge production. Taking this view point as the base from which to study the reform period allows one to see that what the government was doing was more than surveying the kingdom. It had been doing that for centuries in various ways. Surveillance assumes that there is something out there for the state to gaze upon. In most cases this was true. Information was out there. But in some instances, as with crime, that information was kept secret from government officials or took shape in forms that did not conform to Chulalongkorn's (and his European advisors') notions of what modern knowledge ought to look like. Therefore, the things that were to be surveyed were just as much a part of the transformation as the methods with which the government had to look. It is to these 'things,' or objects of knowledge, that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE DESIGN OF LEGAL FACTS

“They will drive their bodies out of the city... They will turn their bodies into ash out among the trees... They will drive back into the city with the morning light. They will hose down the backs of their trucks. They will set fire to their arrest sheets. They will destroy the custody records. Then they will rewrite history...”²⁸⁷

The Idea of Content

What distinguishes a detective novel, makes it a genre of its own? Perhaps it is the content, what the stories are about. This would include things like murder, assault, theft, and other crimes. But then other genres of fiction and other institutions of government also deal with these kinds of human activities, which have been around well before the advent of the detective novel. What makes the detective narrative distinct include various literary devices such as temporal inversion, which operates on the form of a narrative (see Chapter 2).

Another key device is the clue, those objects or bits of information that provide literary detectives and readers alike the potential solution to a mystery. Examples include a rope found at a crime scene, muddy tracks on a floorboard, or perhaps a missing button on a man’s jacket. The literary detective, whether Thong-in or Sherlock Holmes, interprets these clues for what they reveal about events of the past, in essence the content of a detective novel. Clues, then, might be seen as what makes up a detective novel’s content. Clues are interesting because they also operate at the level of form to alter the flow of a narrative.

Over the past hundred years, the content of a crime report (itself a new form) has come to rely on the same set of clues as those found in detective fiction (and vice versa), from fingerprints and crime scene maps to photos of suspects, and from statistics to visual

²⁸⁷ David Peace, *Tokyo Year Zero* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 179.

diagrams. These are things either taken as facts themselves, i.e. tangible things that exist in the world (such as a gun or a knife) and that were part of a crime, or representations of facts. When put together in a narrative, these facts appear as connected, meaningful objects giving an investigation life. Clues are, in other words, what help people make sense of their messy worlds by making the past material and thus subject to the scrutiny of external actors. This chapter looks at these artifacts, alternatively thought of as clues or content, and argues that standards guiding the appearance of these artifacts, or their aesthetic rules, imbue them with their ‘factness.’²⁸⁸ The content, as well as the form, of crime in fiction and in real life are guided by design considerations.

Clues in the Noise

On 23 January 1986, at about one o’clock in the morning, Ms. Phrimphrao Wongjinda, or ‘Daeng,’ whose house was located near Khlong Chonlaprathan (a canal) in Samut Prakan province, just east of Bangkok, heard the hum from an engine of a car during an otherwise quiet night. It is unclear whether Phrimphrao made anything of the noise. At 6:20am that same day, Ms. Buakhao Kingkaew found a pink school bag in the same canal, off of Sukhumvit Road kilometer 30, not too far from Phrimphrao’s house. In the bag were eight books, six notebooks, one pair of glasses, one small purse, one pencil box, and a book-belt without a buckle. Buakhao kept the bag thinking that she would later look for its owner.²⁸⁹ In a field, a forest, or a crowded city, people hear countless sounds every day, every minute, including sometimes that of a car engine idling during the middle of the night. They are likely also to find miscellaneous objects associated with human activity – a soda can, a cigarette butt, a

²⁸⁸ By factness, I mean a thing that is seen as inert, fixed, real, and therefore true.

²⁸⁹ *Khadi khwam 7516/2529 dam - 1712/2533 daeng* [Case number 7516/2529 black - 1712/2533 red], 22 October 1986, in *Khadi choeri-aen dankhaen fong kao* [The Sherry Ann Duncan case, first trial], Library and Museum of the Office of the Attorney General of Thailand (LMAG).

school bag – lying on the ground almost anywhere they look. Most of the time, people ignore or forget the sounds they hear, the white noise of life, and pass over the things they see on the street, the debris of everyday existence. In a place like Bangkok during the mid-1980s, noise and trash were certainly common. And mostly meaningless. Bangkok was, after all, a big, sprawling, messy city. Sometimes, though, the things left behind and the sounds in the air mean something. They just need to be connected.

On 26 January that same year, *Thai rat*, the kingdom's number one selling daily, ran a short story appearing with a small headline on the bottom of its front page, buried under the other, more important noise of the day: "School girl disappears: Mysterious taxi takes her away after school."²⁹⁰ The last paragraph of the story reports that the missing girl's caretaker, Winai Chaiphanit, was offering a 20,000 baht reward for the return of the girl or for information leading to her return. The story also provided his phone number. At 8:00am the next day, Prasit Kingkaew, Buakhao's husband, called Winai to tell him that one of the notebooks in the school bag his wife found had "Sherry Ann" written in it. Whether motivated by the reward or not, Prasit had recognized the name from reading the newspaper and made the call.²⁹¹ Connected to a story about a missing girl, a school bag and the sound of a car engine became clues, information that gave form to and could perhaps help solve a mystery unfolding in 'real time' in Bangkok in 1986.

Thais had, by the time Sherry Ann Duncan was murdered in 1986, a relatively clear conceptual framework with which they could recognize, order, and act on signs of violence. A missing child, a dead body – these triggered specific, routine actions by men employed by

²⁹⁰ No author, "*Nakrian sao hai tua taeksi luk lap pha choet khana rongrian loek klap ban*" [School girl disappears: Mysterious taxi takes her away after school], *Thai Rat*, 27 July 1986, front page. Note that the late edition of Thai newspapers is published with the next day's date. The late edition of *Thai Rat* dated 27 July 1986 actually came out on the afternoon of 26 July 1986.

²⁹¹ Testimony of Winai Chaiphanit to police, given 31 July 1986, in *Khadi choeri-aen dankhaen fong kao*, LMAG.

the state as police and those working on behalf of the public as reporters. The police went to inspect the dead body, look for clues, and question potential witnesses. The press made the investigation public, updating the readers of new developments on a daily basis and bringing otherwise unconnected individuals together. The predictability of the process, if not its specific outcome, indicates the high level of familiarity Thai society has for the investigation ritual, for the detective narrative. One hundred years earlier, the institution of the police was in its infancy, having a presence only in Bangkok. The provinces, not yet having been created as such, boasted no police from the capital.²⁹² The press too was only just getting off the ground, with a few newspapers published by missionaries and a handful of journals read by the educated elite. A community was in the process of being imagined. The murder mystery and the detective figure were just about to be introduced. When they were, they helped define, as shown in Chapters 1 and 2, the police and the violent crime that the police were supposed to investigate. The detective novel also helped popularize the idea of the clue, a thing found in the world that helps people make sense of the unknown.

In literature, clues are important because they link together the two stories of a detective novel, one about the crime as it happened and the other about the detection of that crime.²⁹³ Like temporal inversion, clues generate mystery because readers “see effects, but do not know the causes. It is precisely this situation that generates suspense.” What these effects, or clues, are varies though their function in a narrative remains the same. Franco Moretti writes, “I speak of clues as a formal device because their narrative function (the encrypted reference to the criminal) remains constant, although their concrete embodiment changes from story to story (they can be words, cigarette butts, footprints, smells, noises,

²⁹² The Provincial Gendarmerie was established in 1897.

²⁹³ Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 218.

and so on).²⁹⁴ Clues function to connect the past to the present through an act of interpretation. They are the visible artifacts that the past leaves behind to travel into the present and the future. Clues also act simply as details: “The mystery novel allows us to interpolate into the work large chunks of everyday life, which, while serving the purpose of impeding the action, feel the pressure of the plot and are therefore perceived as part of the artistic whole.”²⁹⁵ That is, some clues have meaning. Others are there simply for ‘reality effect’ or to throw the detective off the trail of the crime.²⁹⁶ It is the clue that draws readers into an interpretive game with the text and leads to their identification with it so that there is no distance between reader and protagonist.²⁹⁷ It is this joining function of the clue, connecting past and present and reader with text, which Moretti argues allowed the detective stories of Sherlock Holmes to survive the “slaughter house of literature.”²⁹⁸ The detective stories of other writers, and there were literally thousands, that did not contain this device or employed it with less skill did not survive the market of popular taste to become part of the canon.

In “*Ruang sup sapphakan*” from the July 1895 issue of *Wachirayan*, the key device, or clue, is a scrap of paper with a few words scribbled on it. A few letters, however, are missing, making the clue’s message unclear. In fact the clue is misleading and its misreading is partly what leads to the arrest and trial of an innocent man. Figuring out what the message actually

²⁹⁴ Ibid, fn. 7, 212.

²⁹⁵ Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 145.

²⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, “Reality Effect,” in *The Novel*, ed. Dorothy Hale (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 229-34. A reality effect is a literary device used to make a story seem realistic. Examples include a description of something in a room like a piano or a reference to real world events or places. These references do not necessarily advance the plot or contribute to character development.

²⁹⁷ Franco Moretti, “Dialectic of Fear,” in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, and David Miller (London: Verso, 1983), 107.

²⁹⁸ Moretti, 2000, 212. Moretti estimates that only approximately ten percent of all published fiction (of all genres) becomes incorporated as ‘canon,’ meaning that the vast majority of books disappear from history. Thus he likens literature to a slaughter house.

says is the key to arriving at the narrative's dénouement. In another installment, from the July 1897 issue of *Wachirayan*, four typewritten love letters to a forlorn young lady become clues, through the type face used in them, for discovering the whereabouts of her missing fiancé. In the Thong-in stories, clues also abound. In “*Nak phra kbanong thi song*,” a man named Phanchot, who is haunted by the ghost of his former wife, receives a letter stating that the ghost was there to help and that Phanchot and his two sons should not be afraid. Of course, the first thing Thong-in asks is whether or not Phanchot's dead wife could write. Literacy here becomes the key to discovering the truth behind the haunting. In “*Nai suwan thuk khamoi*,” muddy footprints at a crime scene help Thong-in uncover the identity of a thief. In the case of Iron Trunk Bunpheng, objects including a police photograph of one of the murdered victims and jewelry stolen from Bunpheng's victims serve as clues for the police investigating the case.²⁹⁹

That people, when faced with a mystery, spin the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life – school bags, odd noises, cigarette butts, and scraps of paper – into story is not new or modern. The process has been going on for centuries. Historian Carlo Ginzburg writes: “Man has been a hunter for thousands of years. In the course of countless chases he learned to reconstruct the shapes and movements of his invisible prey from tracks on the ground, broken branches, excrement, tufts of hair, entangled feathers, stagnating odors. He learned to sniff out, record, interpret, and classify such infinitesimal traces as trails of spittle. He learned how to execute complex mental operations with lightning speed, in the depth of a

²⁹⁹ However, these items do not act as such in the *lamtat* version of the Bunpheng story. In a detective narrative and in a real police investigation, the interpretation of these objects' meanings is critical for advancing the plot. In the *lamtat*, however, they require no analysis, no detective. Mystery is not inherent to its form; the audience or reader already knows how Bunpheng has come to possess the jewels and who the dead woman found floating in an iron trunk on the Chao Phraya river is. That these items have no effect on a linear retelling of the story shows how the form of the narrative itself determines meaning.

forest or in a prairie with its hidden dangers.”³⁰⁰ What this hunter was doing was deciphering clues and arranging them in a “narrative sequence” (e.g. “someone passed this way”).³⁰¹ In Siam, the case was no different. In the well-known Thai folk tale *Khun chang khun phaen* characters including the protagonist Khun Phaen “gather many different omens from nature. They look at the clouds, examine the breath through their nostrils, listen to the sounds of insects and animals, read meanings from the brightness of the stars and the halo of the moon, and tease predictions out of dreams.”³⁰² The change that came at the turn of the nineteenth century was therefore not the reading of clues *per se*, but what clues, particularly about crime and violence, were and the ways they could be put together in a new narrative structure with which to give violence meaning. When writers were busy adopting the detective fiction of the British (e.g. Doyle, Christie) and Americans (e.g. Poe), what they were bringing to Siam were specific formal devices – a new set of clues, or facts, about crime. This was the case for the police as well.

Problems of Proof

For the new police force and government officials, the on-going crime problem faced at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in large part a predicament of the legal system’s inability to convict suspects in criminal trials. A lengthy report in 1917 from Police Major General Eric St. John Lawson, Commissioner of Metropolitan Police and later an advisor to the Ministry of Interior, shows that between 1910 and 1916 the number of criminal cases in Siam recorded by the police increased sharply. Of these, the number of

³⁰⁰ Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 133.

³⁰¹ Ginzburg, 1986, 103.

³⁰² Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, trans., *The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen: Siam’s Folk Epic of Love, War, and Tragedy* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2010), 942.

murders increased twice as fast as other criminal cases. There were 496 murders in 1910 and 1,124 in 1916 for all of Bangkok. The total for the six-year period was 6,280.³⁰³ More disturbing for the government than the large number of crimes was the general inability for the police and local officials to bring their perpetrators to justice. The arrest rate over the six-year period was just 47 out of 100 murder cases. The conviction rate in these arrests was an abysmal 13 out of 100 cases. Of the total 6,280 murders, just 736 people were punished. In Siam, there were 51,314 criminal cases in all the *monthon* outside of Bangkok in 1916. A total of 40,415 arrests were made in these cases, but only 21,972 convictions were obtained. For murder cases in 1916, the conviction rate was just 15 out of 100 cases. For robberies, only 12 out of 100 cases resulted in a conviction.³⁰⁴ Perhaps even more embarrassing for the Siamese government, the number of murders in British Burma during the same period was not even half that of Siam and the conviction rate was an astounding 81 out of 100 for murder cases. For robberies, Burma managed a conviction for 74 out of every 100 cases. In cases of destruction of property, Burmese officials gained a conviction in 66 out of every 100 cases. For physical assaults, the conviction rate was 71 out of 100 cases.³⁰⁵ That the Siamese elite and their British police advisor were thinking in comparative terms points to how the government benchmarked its own performance against that of colonized neighbors as it went about its reform project.³⁰⁶

To get to the root of the problem, Lawson interviewed police officers and from their replies he generated a long list of contributing factors. First, officers claimed that local

³⁰³ NA R6 N 4.1/125, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, raingan wa duai kan prap jon phurai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan and provincial police, general duties, report on efforts against bandits], June 1917.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. Of course, having a high conviction rate doesn't necessarily mean the police and the justice system are particularly efficient. It could mean the system is skewed against the accused. But this does show the faith put in statistical measures of justice by some during the reform period.

³⁰⁶ For the *Wachirayan* articles on the Burmese police, see footnote 71 in Chapter 2.

officials including village leaders (*phuyaiiban*) and sub-district chiefs (*kamnan*) were not cooperating with them. They often reported crimes late, thus allowing time for suspects to flee and witnesses to leave a crime scene. In some situations, local officials did not just delay reporting crimes; they went as far as to obstruct criminal investigations.³⁰⁷ Obstruction usually occurred when local officials were protecting members of their entourage or the local toughs under their employ, something discussed in Chapter 1.

Second, people did not like being witnesses in criminal cases because they feared retribution from local hooligans. Lawson wrote: “Very often the villagers know perfectly well who has killed another. But if they speak and he is acquitted they know that probably they will be the next victim.”³⁰⁸ Many also felt the entire legal process was a waste of time, having sometimes to travel great distances to get to court. The police inspector (*jare*) of Nakhon Sawan wrote, for example, that cases from Mae Sot had to be tried in Tak and witnesses were loath to make the long trip.³⁰⁹

Third, provincial police officers lacked the legal power to conduct investigations and question witnesses (*tai suan*, later *sop suan*) in a criminal case and send that case to court. These powers belonged to district level administrators (*krommakam amphoe*) including the district head (*nai amphoe*), the deputy district administrator (*palat amphoe*), and the district secretary (*samubanchi*). Jao Phraya Yommarat (Pan Sukhum), Minister of Local Government from 1908 to 1922, noted the problem saying that in some cases the Provincial Police would

³⁰⁷ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ NA R6 N4.5n/11, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, Nai phan tamruat tho troloe jare prajam monthon nakbon sawan wa dai truat kan tamruat nai jangwat kamphaengphet jangwat tak lae amphoe mae sot mi jon phurai mak khun thang jangwat* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, the police inspector for Nakhon Sawan reports that crime is up in Khamphaengphet, Tak, and Mae Sot], 16 September 1916.

investigate a crime but could not send a suspect to court since the district head was the official that was legally allowed to do so.³¹⁰

Fourth, many police privates were conscripts who worried that after their two-year term the people they arrested would seek revenge on them and their families.³¹¹ Lawson wrote that most just wanted to “get away” after their term was over. Compounding the issue, many conscripts were not adequately trained for investigative work. Police Inspector Jarmer, a Danish officer in the Provincial Gendarmerie, stated in a meeting on the future of the police training school in 1923 that because conscripts were forced to be police they had no incentive to actually learn the orders and laws related to police work.³¹²

Fifth, local district officials had too many responsibilities outside of peace keeping to do police work. Thus, they often could not and did not investigate cases. Lawson explained: “The investigation of crime by *amphurs* [sic] is a failure” because they did not have the time, knowledge or subordinates to do the work properly.³¹³

Sixth, provincial prosecutors were not directly responsible for crime suppression and thus felt no compunction to sentence a defendant if the case was not properly investigated. In a case from 1916, for example, a suit against a criminal suspect was dropped after a

³¹⁰ NA R6 N4.1/160, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, khwam hen jat ratchakan krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, opinions on the establishment of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie], 1919.

³¹¹ Recruitment and training of police officers is discussed later in the chapter.

³¹² NA R6 N 4.1/224, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, raingan prachum krommakhan phijarana kbo ratchakan kiau duay krom tamruat phuthon lae tamruat phranakhon* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, meeting of officials to consider issues related to the provincial gendarmerie and the metropolitan police], 25 July 1923.

³¹³ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

mistrial when police officers and a village leader gave different accounts of who got to a scene of a crime first and what happened when they got there.³¹⁴

For the police, then, the crime problem was about evidence – the legal power to collect, compile, and record it and effective, convincing ways to display it in court. To wit the advisor to the Ministry of Justice, Stewart Black, noted in 1903 that “The difficulty of obtaining proper evidence appears to be the chief reason [for low conviction rates].”³¹⁵ In the absence of proper methods for recording and presenting evidence, criminals would continue, literally, to get away with murder.

Facts about Crime

Pridi Phanomyong, one of the leaders of the 1932 revolution against the absolute monarchy, noted in a lecture at the teachers union of Thailand (*Samakhom samakbayajan*) on 10 August 1928 that crime was a “problem of knowledge” because the reasons for people’s actions, legal or otherwise, could be discovered through various scientific disciplines such as economics, medicine, or psychology.³¹⁶ Although Pridi did not accept wholeheartedly the idea that criminals were simply born that way or that genetically determined criminal types even existed, he did not reject the notion that crime could be understood, and thus dealt with, by the methods of generating, organizing, and presenting information that emerged during the late nineteenth century in places like England, France, Italy, and the USA. In Siam

³¹⁴ NA R6 N 4.1/93, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, khwam hen phraya sunthonphiphit ruang nai roi tri yom boek khwam taek tang kap amphoe bangkapi ruang phurai plon ban phai nai amphoe bangkapi* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties, conflicting reports of investigation of a robbery in Bangkok], 24 November 1916.

³¹⁵ NA K 0301.1.21/2 (*lem* 1), *Krasuang kankhlang* [Ministry of finance], office of the financial advisor, law and justice, “Reports of Ministry of Justice for the Years R.S. 121 (1902-03), 122 (1903-04), 123 (1904-05), 124 (1905-06), 125 (1906-07), 126 (1907-08).”

³¹⁶ Pridi Phanomyong, *Pathakatha ruang panha kiam kae kan long atchaya phu kratham phit kotmai* [Problems related to punishing people that break the law], lecture given on 10 August 1928, published in cremation volume for Samunwinathoramontri Na Susanluang at Wat Thepsirinarat, 1931, 119.

in the 1920s and 1930s, Pridi's sentiment that science, or rational methods of investigation, was the key to solving the crime problem was shared by high-ranking police officers and government officials. Thus police reforms revolved around rationalizing the detective practices used in the legal system and ushered in a new way of understanding and representing crime that, unlike Europe and America, did not result in the creation of a new criminal type but in the introduction of new facts and a new way of telling stories about the past.³¹⁷

Statistics

Luang Phetinthara, acting chief inspector for internal affairs of the Provincial Gendarmerie, wrote to Jaophraya Yommarat on 25 August 1916 saying that the *banchi khadi*, or list of cases, is very important as it allows people to know whether there has been an increase or decrease in crime.³¹⁸ That is, to see crime as a unified entity (as opposed to unconnected stories in local papers) required the introduction of numbers, in this case the systematic use of statistics. In Europe, statistics had been applied to understanding crime since at least the 1820s. By the 1830s, they had helped turn crime from an “individual act of will to a social phenomenon.”³¹⁹ In Siam, comprehensive statistics on crime were not kept until the very last years of the Fifth Reign. Beginning in about 1908, the police began tabulating the number

³¹⁷ The idea of a natural born criminal became popular in the late nineteenth century. It was a notion popularized by criminologists of the ‘Italian School for Positivist Criminology’ and its founder, Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso and his followers believed that criminality was inherited and that a person’s physical features were signs of this innate criminality. On this topic, he wrote several books including his 1895 ‘classic’ *Criminal Man*. Also influential in advancing the idea of a criminal type was Alphonse Bertillon, inventor of Bertillonage, a system of identification of criminals based on the measurement of physical features.

³¹⁸ Letter from Luang Phraya Phetinthara to Jao Phraya Yommarat in NA R6 N 4.5n/9, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, jare prajam monthon chaing mai ok truat ratchakan mi khwam ben wa khuan yup loek rong phak* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, inspector of police for Chiang Mai recommends the closure of a police station], 25 August 1916.

³¹⁹ Simon Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 14-15.

and type of cases they processed in a systematic manner. So by the late 1910's, the police were able to assemble a table like the one below.³²⁰

Table 1 – Incidents of Serious Crimes in Siam, 1908-1918.

Year	Homicides	Gang Robberies	Robberies
1908/2451	429	281	310
1909/2452	658	598	347
1910/2553	661	709	303
1911/2454	859	707	346
1912/2455	1,052	610	296
1913/2456	1,218	701	345
1914/2457	1,201	691	448
1915/2458	1,222	612	365
1916/2459	1,139	668	404
1917/2460	1,299	653	405
1918/2461	1,493	963	559
Total	11,231	7,193	4,128

A complete list of crime statistics like this one could not be compiled prior to the 1910s because “the police simply did not keep any systematic records” before then.³²¹ David Johnston, writing about the rural economy during the Fifth Reign, added: “Archival materials provide no usable statistical series” about the crime situation in the time of Chulalongkorn; they simply did not exist.”³²² Before statistics, then, crime was the creation of newspaper reports (like those described in Chapter 1), gossip, and tall tales – interesting but not comprehensive and hardly usable as proof. Numbers and percentages linked rumors, folk tales, and news reports with lists and tables that could be copied, distributed, managed, and presented. They made conditions for entire districts, cities, regions, and indeed the entire

³²⁰ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919. I do not know how accurate this or other statistical tables created by the police in the 1910s and 1920s are. However, this table and others like it were new objects of information used by decision makers. Tables therefore had real world effects even if not accurate.

³²¹ Ibid. The police, however, began keeping statistics on crime in Bangkok systematically beginning in 1898, the first year they produced an annual report. Systematic data gathering and reporting for areas outside Bangkok came later.

³²² Johnston, 1977, 178.

‘geo-body’ of Siam visible to officials in Bangkok. More importantly, they provided a common idiom in which the police and the press could communicate. Statistics about crime were commonly reported in newspapers to demonstrate to the reading public the efficacy (or ineptitude) of the police. In time, the police would compile tables like the one above into yearbooks, which were then distributed to newspapers to disseminate. Statistics, then, constituted one new point of intersection between the police and the press, state and society.

Photographs

Perhaps the most celebrated form of evidence over the last 150 years has been the photograph. The Daguerreotype, the name for images made from a particular chemical process, was invented in 1839 in France. By the 1850s, it was used primarily to create portraits for the middle classes of Europe. By the 1860s, mass produced and portable photographs had become widespread throughout Europe, especially as people traveled the colonies.³²³ What made this popularity possible was the invention of the hand camera, fast drying development techniques, and rolled film.³²⁴ These advances also pushed the photograph into new realms like advertising, journalism, science, and the law.³²⁵ By 1852, French lawyers were using Daguerreotypes in court as evidence.³²⁶ By the end of the 1850s, paper photos printed from negatives were common and were used in American courts, mostly in land disputes and forgery cases. By the 1870s, photos were used for proving

³²³ Jennifer Mnookin, “The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy,” *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities* 10 (1998): 8.

³²⁴ The first handheld cameras were called detective cameras because they were designed to be hidden (e.g. under hats or in lapels) and the popularity of these machines coincided with the processing technology and mail-in services of Kodak Eastman. See Tom Gunning, “Embarrassing Evidence,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 47.

³²⁵ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, MA: University of Amherst Press, 1988), 60.

³²⁶ Mnookin, 1998, 8.

identity in criminal cases.³²⁷ The police were even quicker to use these technologies than the courts. As early as 1841, the French police began taking pictures of prisoners and the British were photographing criminals by roughly the same time.³²⁸ In 1858 in New York, the police began putting up rogues' galleries at local police stations, a practice that spread quickly to the continent. In 1886, the head of the New York Police Department detective bureau published a coffee table book filled with photographs of criminals.³²⁹ It should be noted that the photograph was not always accepted as proof, despite the police's quick move to adopt the technology. Judges and lawyers, for example, fought over the admissibility and the evidentiary legitimacy of the photograph early on and it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that photography's correspondence with reality was accepted as it is today. Skeptics held that photos were artifices – variables like the focal length of a lens or lighting changed the 'reality' of an image such that photos were as susceptible to human agency as oral testimony.³³⁰ Only over time and through trial, error, and contestation did the photograph gain its high status in the hierarchy of knowledge. The photograph therefore is evidence not because it represents some phenomenological reality out there but because of “historical, semiotic, social processes that have made it visible and acceptable as evidence.”³³¹

In Siam, the first camera was brought into the kingdom in July of 1845 by a French Roman Catholic priest named Jean-Baptist Francois Louis Larnaudie at the request of Bishop Pallegoix, another French missionary in Siam at the time.³³² During the reigns of Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) and Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910), photography spread as a hobby among the Royal family and among wealthier urbanites. Most early photographs were

³²⁷ Ibid, 11.

³²⁸ Cole, 2001, 20.

³²⁹ Ibid, 21-22.

³³⁰ Mnookin, 1998, 22-23.

³³¹ Tagg, 1998, 5.

³³² Anek Nawigamune, *Prawat kan thai rup yuk rae khong thai* [History of early photography in Thailand] (Bangkok: Sarakhadi Phap, 2005), 15.

portraits – primarily of the King, members of the Royal family, and scenes of Bangkok.

Unlike the Royals and urbanites, however, many Thais initially “were scared to have there [sic] picture taken, believing that doing so would shorten their life-span.”³³³ At first, the use of photographs was largely limited to commemorative purposes and for postcards.³³⁴ As with the case in Europe and the US, however, it did not take long for the camera’s usefulness in criminal investigation to be noticed. In 1904, photos were taken of prisoners being released from prison. These photos were put in a file with their fingerprints in an effort to deal with the high rates of recidivism at the time.³³⁵ As an investigative tool photography took a little while longer to develop. Lawson wrote in his police training manual from 1906, “Photography is used in police work for: 1. Preserving a record of habitual criminals. 1. Recording the appearance of an unknown person found dead. As a rule photography should not be used for showing the scene of a crime. A good plan is much better than photography for this purpose as a rule.”³³⁶ By 1917, however, Phraya Sisena, author of a manual on criminal investigation in Siam (published in 1917), recommended that local officials in charge of crime prevention bring with them to investigations someone capable of taking photographs as they might prove useful. He also stated that investigators should carry two “weapons” – a camera and a pencil and paper.³³⁷ A year later, a letter from Police Lieutenant General Phraya Athikonprakat, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police from 1923 to

³³³ Ibid, 15.

³³⁴ Ibid. King Mongkut, for example, had photos of himself and his queen taken and sent as postcards to various heads of state in Europe.

³³⁵ Thawisak Suphasa, *Kan jat kan lae bot bat khong tamruat nai krungthep ratchasamai phrabat somdet phrajulajom klao jao yu hua* [The establishment and role of the police in Bangkok during the rule of King Chulalongkorn] (MA thesis, Srinakharinwirot University, 1978), 271.

³³⁶ Eric Lawson, *Police Manual*, published by the American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1906 in NA K 0301.1.22/6 *Krasuang kankeblang*, office of the financial advisor, police and jails, police manual (in English).

³³⁷ Phraya Sisena (Kitkachachiwa), *Withi sup suan jon phurai lem 1* [Methods for investigating criminals, vol. 1] (Bangkok: Phraratchapantit, 1917), 339-340.

1929, cited the need for the police to have proper photographic equipment and recommended that they retain a fulltime photographer.³³⁸

This idea was reiterated in a letter dated 3 September 1920 from Eric St. John Lawson to Jao Phraya Yommarat, who recommended creating a new unit in the force that would include a photography section with adequate equipment and photographers. Lawson noted that suspects and prisoners were taken to privately owned shops and that photographic equipment had to be obtained and sent to crime scene investigations, a slow, inefficient process.³³⁹ To address the issue, the government sent a man named Jaroen Purananda to study photographic techniques for investigation in Paris in 1929.³⁴⁰ After the *santiban*, or the Thai FBI, was created in 1932, photographs and other records could finally be made and kept in-house. Manuals for police training after that invariably included sections on photographic techniques for criminal investigation.³⁴¹

Aside from putting faces to names, the Siamese police were beginning to employ photos to create what might be called ‘pictorial narratives.’ In the police documents for a murder investigation from 1929, for example, officers took eight photos of various locations, numbered them sequentially, and added symbols and short captions describing from beginning to end how the suspect began his crime at a nearby market, made his way to the house of the victim, and then attempted to escape.³⁴² This type of pictorial story board

³³⁸ Letter from Phraya Athikonprakat to Eric Lawson dated 27 June 1918 in NA R6 N 4.1/2, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, khwam ben phraya athikon lae nai lorsan thi pruksa nai ruang tamruat lap* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, opinion of Phraya Athikon and Mr. Lawson on the secret police].

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Letter from Basil Thomson to Prince Buripatra in NA R7 M 11/7, *Krasuang mahathai, tamruat phuthon nakhonban phuban, tang tamruat phuban* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, provincial, metropolitan, and detective police, establishing the detective police], 11 January 1929.

³⁴¹ See for example, Police Major Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Tamruat kap lak kan sup suan* [The police and the rules of investigation] (Bangkok: Police Department, 1935), 25.

³⁴² Phraya Manawaratchsewi, *Kan tai suan lae kan phijarana ruang kha nai puan aekaraphanit thi jangwat janburi* [The investigation and deliberation of the case of the murder of Mr. Puan Aekaraphanit in Janthaburi province] (Bangkok: n.p., 1930), photo pages not numbered.

developed to help judges in cases visualize a crime and facilitated conviction. Visual evidence was seen as something that “added weight” (*namnak phoem mak khun*) to witness testimony as they helped judges “see what was real just as you [the investigator] have seen it.”³⁴³

Fingerprints

To ensure that the right criminal was attached to right crime, a system of fingerprint identification was introduced. The two men generally credited for creating fingerprint identification are William Herschel and Henry Faulds.³⁴⁴ Herschel, an officer in the British Civil Service in India, claimed to have invented the practice in 1858, but it may have been an old Bengali practice imported from China which he simply borrowed. Faulds, while working as a medical missionary in Japan, noticed fingerprints on pottery and published an article about their potential uses in crime fighting in 1880. He later claimed to have solved a crime using fingerprints and went on to create a cataloguing system by assigning names for each print type. At the same time, Francis Galton, half-cousin to Charles Darwin, traveller, scientist, and thinker, and man who coined the term eugenics, was busy promoting the system in England with papers and books praising its merits. In France, too, fingerprint identification began to become standard procedure for the police. Back in India, two men, Azizul Haque and Chandra Bose, devised their own system of cataloguing prints, which was implemented in 1895.³⁴⁵

This same system from India made its way into Siam towards the end of the Fifth Reign. Lawson, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, claimed: “It was I who introduced the system to Siam. It was I who trained Johnson [the Deputy Chief of the

³⁴³ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 42.

³⁴⁴ The Chinese had been using finger prints since about AD 200 as signatures in contracts.

³⁴⁵ Cole, 2001, 61, 63-65, 73-74, 81, 87.

Special Branch] who showed the method to HRH Prince Ratburi [Prince Rabi]. It was I who drew up and submitted to HRH the original rules for the identification of criminals. Also it was I who have trained the Police.”³⁴⁶ Lawson may have been exaggerating his accomplishments, however, as Prince Rabi gave a different account: “About six years ago [about 1903], Lawson started the work from the system in use in India. He failed. I then with the assistance of a police officer started the work in Jail II and succeeded up to now. When it began the finger prints of those convicted in Bangkok, or rather those prisoners who were in Bangkok jails alone were taken. The head of the prisons wanted to extend the work, but he had not the where-with-all to start offices all over the Kingdom; so he sent some of his men to most jails in the provinces to teach them to take fingerprints. His men could not teach the provincial jails how to classify the prints as the whole work was then in experimental stage.”³⁴⁷

In either case, the Fingerprint Bureau had existed since the Fifth Reign, when it was under the supervision of the Prisons Department of the Ministry of Metropolitan Government. A report by Lawson in 1919 noted that the bureau was started “20 years ago” putting its inception sometime around the year 1899.³⁴⁸ He recommended moving the bureau to the Special Branch, which he helped establish in 1902.³⁴⁹ The first use of fingerprints in the investigation of a criminal case at the scene of a crime is said to have been

³⁴⁶ Letter from Eric Lawson to Stewart Black dated 10 February 1906 in NA R5 Y 4.1/39, *Krasuang yuttitham, fem thi pruksa kotmai* (Mr. Stewart Black), *khadi khwam* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, files of legal advisor Stewart Black, case files].

³⁴⁷ Letter from Prince Rabi to Henri Laurent in NA R5 Y 4/75, *Krasuang yuttitham, fem thi pruksa kotmai* (Mr. Stewart Black) [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, files of the legal advisor Stewart Black], no date, 1909.

³⁴⁸ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

³⁴⁹ Letter from Phraya Athikonprakat to Eric Lawson in NA R6 N 4.1/2, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, khwam ben phraya athikon lae nai lonsan thi pruksa nai ruang tamruat lap* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, opinion of Phraya Athikon and Mr. Lawson on the secret police], 27 June 1918.

by officers of this investigative unit, though no example is given.³⁵⁰ Later on, in the late 1920s Luang Phisitwithayakan, one of Siam's first and most prominent forensic police officers, claimed to have been the first to use a fingerprint produced at a crime scene investigation to apprehend a criminal.³⁵¹ The Bureau was still under the Prisons Department in 1910, when a notice was issued for officials there to use white colored paper to record fingerprints.³⁵² Of this bureau, Lawson wrote, "There is also a small finger-print bureau, containing the finger-prints of all men who have been dismissed or who have deserted the force, to which reference is made whenever a man is enlisted. The bureau for identification of criminals is kept up by the officials of the Ministry of Justice at the industrial prison."³⁵³ Basil Thomson, a well-known British police officer and consultant to the Siamese government, recommended again in 1929 that the Fingerprint Bureau be shifted to the investigative arm of the police once it was created. This finally happened in 1932, when the *santiban* was established. Division Three of the unit, the Police Science Section, was tasked with handling fingerprint identification, among other things.³⁵⁴

Before fingerprints were put into wide use, the police had no way of linking individuals with their crimes. In a letter dated 7 March 1909, Probationary Legal Advisor Henri Laurent wrote that in Ubon the examination of a defendant in an illegal gambling case

³⁵⁰ Rotsukhon Jaratsi, *Botbat khong kharatchakan chao tang prathet nai krom tamruat nai samai somburnananasithirat* [The role of foreign civil servants in the police department under the absolute monarchy] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1977), 145.

³⁵¹ Luang Phisitwithayakan, "*Lai niu mu phu rai nai thi koet bet*" [Fingerprints at the scene of a crime], *Tamruat* [Police magazine] 1.3 (February 1931): 236. Luang Phisitwithayakan would go on to become the head of the Science Section of the *santiban* after 1932. He was purged, however, when Phibun Songkhram came to power through a military coup in 1938.

³⁵² NA R5 Y 10/20, *Krasuang yuttitham, san dika, tang damnaeng kammakan 1 kammakan sawaengha lai mu 2 kammakan wat duang sang* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, supreme court, designating two officials: 1. Official to look for fingerprints and 2. official for the Duang Sang temple], no date, 1910.

³⁵³ Eric St. John Lawson, "Police and Provincial Gendarmerie," in *Twentieth Century Impressions of Siam: Its History, Peoples, Commerce, Industry, and Resources*, eds. Arnold Wright and Oliver Breakspeare (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), 109.

³⁵⁴ Somphong Jaengrew, "*Kamnoet tamruat santiban nai prawattisat kanmuang thai samai 2475*" [The origins of the *santiban* in the political history of Thailand in 1932], *Silapa wattthanatham* (November 2008): 127.

revealed that: “the Accused had been previously condemned to 4 years imprisonment for theft and had just been released from prison 6 months ago, without the Public Prosecutor saying anything about it.”³⁵⁵ Laurent then went on to note that this was due to the irregular use of fingerprint identification in the province. Thus, if criminals were not connected to their pasts, they would be free to repeat their offences over and over again. This only began to change in the late 1910s. In 1918, Lawson reported that 16,998 prints were sent for search. From these 4,691 identifications were made. Lawson wrote that while this showed good work, it also meant the recidivism rate was high, at least thirty percent.³⁵⁶ The fingerprint thus helped police link individuals to their criminal pasts.

Fingerprints were also used to keep tabs of the police themselves. Having quickly developed a reputation for shirking their duties, a fingerprint system was used to track their work routines. Lawson again, “The constables leave their stations every night and visit the houses of the *kamnan* (sub-district chief), putting their thumbprints in a book kept at the *kamnan*’s house as a proof of their visit.”³⁵⁷ The method was also to check that new recruits were not previously dismissed policemen from other stations or former criminals.³⁵⁸ In addition to checking up on its subjects, the state had to monitor its own agents by placing them under surveillance.

³⁵⁵ Letter Henri Laurent to Prince Rabi in NA R5 Y 4/75, *Krasuang yuttitham, fem thi pruksa kotmai* (Mr. Stewart Black) [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, files of the legal advisor Stewart Black], 7 March 1909.

³⁵⁶ NA R6 N4.1/164, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general duties], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

³⁵⁷ Eric Lawson, 1994, 108.

³⁵⁸ NA R5 N 8.6/26, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom kong trawaen (raingan tang-tang), raingan krom kong trawaen prajam pi so. ko. 122* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Local Government, police constabulary (miscellaneous reports), annual report for the police constabulary for 1902], 31 March 1901-20 May 1902.

Making Lists, Taking Notes

While statistics generated ‘crime’ as a broad, regional, and historical phenomenon, photographs captured the likenesses of criminals and crime scenes, and fingerprints helped police identify suspected criminals, these new facts needed to be ordered into a coherent system of knowledge to make sense and become usable. Accordingly, a key adaptation from the investigative techniques developed in Europe and the US was the practice of making detailed, standardized investigation reports. These were tangible, material objects that did not change from day to day or falter depending on the memory of a witness that could be used further down the investigative process. Prior to the turn of the century, police and other government officials tasked with crime prevention did not always make written reports as part of their investigation though they did make lists. In 1877, for example, King Chulalongkorn requested the heads of the ‘inner police’ (*samut jao kerom phra tamruat nai*) to compile a list of names of bandits that had yet to be arrested or that had escaped. This list, he stated, could then be distributed to local leaders to facilitate arrest.³⁵⁹ In the 1890s, Jao Phraya Surasakmontri made personal lists of suspected criminals to use in his manhunt campaigns in the central plains.³⁶⁰ Similarly, a district head in Phasi Charoen told sub-district chiefs and village leaders there in 1907 to keep tabs on the behavior of the people in their areas. Should they find anyone with a history of unethical behavior, their name and address should be recorded.³⁶¹ The making of lists was possible in rural communities that were small and stable and even in some urban neighborhoods where people knew one another as neighbors or from their interactions at markets or other public spaces.

³⁵⁹ Phirasak Chaidaisuk, *Chat sua nai lai* [Once a tiger, always a tiger] (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2008), 174.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 77.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, 145.

This convenient situation did not last, and it did not hold in non-Thai enclaves. Another reason lists were made rather than full reports was that when, or if, a police officer went to a crime scene that officer would have quite possibly been illiterate. In general, literacy rates were low in the early twentieth century and one of the first lessons at the school for police constables (*rong rian phon trawen*) included instruction in the Thai alphabet and Thai numbers.³⁶² In any case, the lists being made hardly informed anyone of what crime exactly had transpired, let alone how it unfolded. They referred to individuals in society thus allowing for their capture, but they did not produce convictions; the connection between a captured suspect, a name on a list, and a crime still had to be determined.

Beginning around 1902, when Lawson became Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, a system of recording criminal investigations was introduced. Describing how police should proceed in a case, Lawson wrote in 1909 that: “On receiving any report whether made by a Police Officer or by anyone else, a short entry briefly stating the facts is made in the General Diary. The entry in the diary shows the hour and minute at which the report was made. If the report was of any offence, not being one of those offences of which I attach a list, concerning which the Police have been forbidden to take action, a report is then entered in foil and counterfoil in the complaint book. This report is made as nearly as possible in the exact words of the informant and is signed by him and by the Police clerk or officer who recorded the report.”³⁶³ He explained further that: “The most important register kept in all police stations is the daily diary. In this register every occurrence of every sort that takes place within the station is entered, together with the movements on duty of every officer and

³⁶² NA R6 N 4.6/16, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, rong rian roi tamruat phon tamruat, lak sut kan fukhat song son rong rian phon trawaen* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, police academy, basic training and teachings at school for constabulary], 1916.

³⁶³ Letter from Eric Lawson to Stewart Black in NA R5 Y 4/89, *Krasuang yutitham, jem thi pruksa kotmai* (Mr. Stewart Black) [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, files of legal advisor Stewart Black], 11 January 1909. Note: Foil and counterfoil refer to the practice of entering complaints in duplicate with one copy or portion of the report retained as a record of a complaint having been made.

constable attached to the station. Great importance is attached to the immediate entry of every occurrence in this diary, which forms a minutely accurate record of everything connected with crime and police since the institution of the force in the year 1897. The next most important register is the complaint book, in which are entered all complaints of a criminal nature made by the public. These complaints form a basis of all subsequent proceedings in the criminal court. The absconded offenders' register and the register of property seized by the police are also important registers found in every station. In addition to these there is a police manual, which is a guide for the use of officers and men on their departmental duties, and also in their duties under the various laws."³⁶⁴ In complicated cases police were instructed to make a diary entry.³⁶⁵ Also, several training manuals for police and civilian officials from the time urged investigators to carry with them a pencil and paper to take notes of what they had uncovered.³⁶⁶ The practice of making crime scene investigation reports also had precedent in other parts of the region, particularly those administered by the British. Police officer Phra Wichai Prachaban, sent to Moulmein to study police methods in 1922, reported that the police there were required to keep records on bandits and daily events in a "Village Crime Book."³⁶⁷ Police investigations were thus becoming exercises in report writing.

In Siam, this need to put on paper, or 'entextualize,' oral accounts of the past stretches back for centuries. For example, instructions in the *Lak inthaphat* (instructions to

³⁶⁴ Lawson, 1994, 107.

³⁶⁵ Letter from Eric Lawson to Stewart Black in NA R5 Y 4/89, *Krasuang yuttitham, jem thi pruksa kotmai* (Mr. Stewart Black) [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, files of legal advisor Stewart Black], 11 January 1909.

³⁶⁶ See for example, Phraya Sisena (Kitkachachiwa), *Withi sup suan jon phurai lem 1* [Methods for investigating criminals, vol. 1] (Bangkok: n.p., 1917), 339-340 and also Eric Lawson, *Police Manual*, published by the American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1906 in NA K 0301.1.22/6 *Krasuang kankhlang*, office of the financial advisor, police and jails, police manual (in English), 166.

³⁶⁷ NA R6 N 4.1/197, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, thai here* [General news, documents related to sending a delegation to Moulmein and Penang to talk to the British about capturing bandits operating near the border], entry dated 13 March 1922.

magistrates for processing cases) that date to the kingdom of Sukhothai (c. 1240 to 1438) and which are referred to in the *Phra ayakān laksana tralakan* (rules for judges) in the Law of the Three Seals (1805 recension), both stress that when a disagreement takes place the first step is to attempt to reach a negotiated consensus that eliminates the need to initiate a full trial. It was in cases where no compromise could be reached that a case was put to trial. When this occurred, witnesses would need to be called and their testimonies recorded in writing.³⁶⁸ Sections in the *Phra ayakān laksana phayan* (laws related to witnesses) and *Phra ayakān laksana rap fong* (laws related to accepting cases) from the Three Seals Code also call for *tralakan* to write down the accounts of litigants and witnesses and compile them in a case summary (*samnuan*). It is this written case summary that judges then use as the basis of their deliberations.³⁶⁹ The practice of entextualizing oral testimony is thus a conscious demand placed on officials by the criminal justice system. In the case of the police in Siam, and societies around the world, the ability and power to document moved from local leaders and state agents to a broad range of actors from fiction writers to police officers and news reporters (as will be seen in the next two chapters).

Here an important point should be made. The police notebooks and the records of criminal methods they contained were not creating an archive of ‘criminal types’ *per se*. This view was one common in places like England and Italy during the end of the nineteenth century and one that Lawson might have concurred with: “The class of professional criminals in the Province of Bangkok is large. In the first place, the Chinese, who yearly enter the country in great numbers, contain amongst them a very considerable leavening of

³⁶⁸ *Lak inthaphat*, sections 30-31. The Law of the Three Seals is the name for the collected laws of the Siam that date back to the Ayutthaya period (c. 1350-1789). The version that exists today is one that was compiled and revised during the early Bangkok period (c. 1782-present).

³⁶⁹ Section 44 of the *Lakasana phayan* says that *tralakan* should write out a witness’ testimony and have the witness either to accept or reject the written account. Section 32 of the *Lak inthaphat* also refers to the writing down of testimony.

the professional criminal classes.”³⁷⁰ In Siam, however, anyone could break the law:

According to police and other officials, criminality depended on circumstance and criminals, including several famous ones like Sua Fai of Suphanburi, could always ‘return’ (*klap*) to being law abiding citizens.³⁷¹ So while the new forms the police were filling out did include blanks for name, age, address, and physical description, these details (left blank in some cases) were linked to other blanks that required police to describe what, when, and how something happened rather than to descriptions of other criminals to create generalized types. The police were making event logs, though not yet a full narrative, telling in as much detail as possible how a crime transpired. The content of these logs were clues – fingerprints, recorded testimonies, photographs – crafted by the police as artifacts of specific knowledge practices. Modern police work thus developed as a process of defining and recording the past, linking the processes of detection and the organization of evidence with the writing of micro-historical narratives (or narrative fragments).

So in the case of Sherry Ann, when the police at Samut Prakan City station received a call on 25 July 1986 that a body had been found in Samae Forest, the call and the subsequent visit to the scene were recorded and filed away. Captain Prayat Ngaongam, officer Thawisan Plaengkham, and Major Santi Phensut, were sent to the scene along with Wirawat Ditudomphot, the Samut Prakan City public health official. These men examined the body, a teenage girl’s. They did not find anything, such as an identification card, that would help them identify it at the scene, but they took photographs from several different angles before sending the body to the police hospital in Bangkok. When Captain Prayat got back to the police station, he recorded in some detail his work in the station’s daily blotter.

³⁷⁰ Lawson, 1994, 109.

³⁷¹ Nai Janthana (pseudo. Malai Chuphinit), *Sua fai sip thit* [Tiger Fai of the ten directions] (Bangkok: Samnakphim Krathom Po. Lo., 1998), 33.

The police followed this routine, of writing things in their logs, almost everyday of their investigation. They did the same when they questioned potential witnesses, putting words down on paper, filling out forms. The doctor at the police hospital, Captain Suphot Lakthong, conducted an autopsy and described his findings in writing: The deceased died because of a lack of oxygen and blood to the brain. She did not die from violent attack because there were no wounds or scars. There was evidence that the deceased had consumed more alcohol than she “should have.” The police investigation into the girl’s death and the subsequent trial of four men accused of her murder left behind an impressive collection of paperwork, some of which is now kept in several large boxes at the Library and Museum of the Attorney General’s Office in Bangkok. Michel Foucault once noted ‘to police’ and ‘to urbanize’ are one and the same.³⁷² It might be more accurate instead to say that ‘to police’ is ‘to document.’ Documentation is, after all, how the police’s new facts about violence are made material and what statistics, photographs, and fingerprints are all about. And it is with these facts that the police’s intimate role in determining what a society may know about its own past becomes apparent.

Teaching Police the Facts

The reality of criminal detection in Siam lagged behind the idealizations and the orders of higher-ups in government. The practice of making notes, filling out forms, taking pictures, and other investigative practices remained terribly uneven well into the 1930s. In a letter to Jaophraya Yommarat dated 26 March 1917, the Chief Inspector of Police wrote that not all police stations in Bangkok were keeping records. Some didn’t even have a criminal record

³⁷² Michel Foucault, *State, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Picador, 2009), 337.

book (*banchi khadi aya*).³⁷³ In another letter to Yommarat, this one dated 25 August 1916, Luang Phetinthara, a Danish national and acting Chief Inspector of Police, wrote that in Chiang Mai police stations did not record cases properly, or at all, in some instances.³⁷⁴ In the south, the Police Inspector of Phuket, F.T.E. Steiner, complained on 3 November 1916 that the police were not filling out their forms correctly. From April to August of 1916, he wrote, officers recorded 280 cases while district administration officials listed 339, or 59 more than the police.³⁷⁵ It was not until the late 1930s that it might safely be said that criminal records, statistics, forms, and other documents were being kept properly. By then, documentation had become so inculcated into the daily practices of the force that corruption and cover-ups comprised in large part the manufacture of ‘false’ documents or the alteration of ‘true’ ones (and thus the rewriting of history). Police officers as early as the mid-1910s, when the practice of documentation was just taking off, were already aware of its potentially damning evidentiary power and had begun to intentionally ‘mis-document’ events. Luang Phraya Phetinthara, for example, wrote that the provincial police were going out to inspect their assigned areas not to solve cases or prevent crime, but “only to make the record book

³⁷³ Letter from Luang Phraya Phetinthara to Jao Phraya Yommarat in NA R6 N 4.5 ๙/17, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, jare tamruat phuthon nakhon chiang mai raignan wa dai ok truat kan rong phak mu tamruat phuthon tambon muang naeng hen kan pho somkhuan thuk yang tae banchi khadi aya bang rong phak ko dai tham bang rong phak ko mai dai tham mi kham sang hai tham tham thuk rong phak* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, inspector of Chiang Mai city reports that the work of police stations is satisfactory but that not all stations have a record book and orders that all stations use one], 26 March 1917.

³⁷⁴ Letter from Luang Phraya Phetinthara to Jao Phraya Yommarat in NA R6 N 4.5 ๙/9, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, jare prajam monthon chaing mai ok truat ratchakan mi khwam hen wa khuan yup loek rong phak* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, inspector of police for Chiang Mai recommends the closure of a police station], 25 August 1916.

³⁷⁵ NA R6 N 4.5 ๙/10 *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, nai phan tamruat tho satainoe jare tamraut phak tai nai monthon surat thani lae jangwat songkhla jangwat Phuket monthon pattani hen wai kitjakan tang-tang bokphrong mak* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, the inspector of the south reports many deficiencies in police work], 3 November 1916.

look nice.”³⁷⁶ In another letter, this one from April 1916, the Chief Inspector of Police wrote to Jao Phraya Yommarat that a clerk from the Forestry Department, the deputy district head of Amphoe Pong, Nan Province, and a district office clerk went drinking and then started an argument at the local police station. This was not recorded in the station’s record book. Neither was the theft of a box of books from an English envoy in July 1916. Moreover, judging from the record books the police at Tha Pla, Amphoe Sa and Phak Bo Wa did not catch a single criminal between April and November.³⁷⁷ Before this, Lawson had also seen the potential for mischief and issued strict rules on changes in any record book: “Erasures are strictly prohibited in all Police documents of every kind. If an error in writing the document is made it should be neatly be crossed out and the correction written above it. All such corrections should be attested to by the writer’s initials.”³⁷⁸

There are many reasons for this mis-documentation. In part, police did not report incidents of crime to avoid having to go out to a crime scene and do work.³⁷⁹ In some cases, they did not record things because they feared criminals. In other cases, especially at the beginning of the shift to investigative activities, officers simply lacked the training to produce documents of any utility. It took great effort on the parts of people like Damrong, Yommarat, and Lawson to get their men in the habit of writing things down, of taking photos, and thinking in terms of modern crime solving. Once that happened, proving a

³⁷⁶ NA R6 N4.5n/11, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, Nai phan tamruat tho troloe jare prajam monthon nakhon sawan wa dai truat kan tamruat nai jangwat kamphaengphet jangwat tak lae amphoe mae sot mi jon phurai mak khun thang jangwat* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, the police inspector for Nakhon Sawan reports that crime is up in Khamphaengphet, Tak, and Mae Sot], 16 September 1916.

³⁷⁷ Letter from chief inspector of police to Jao Phraya Yommarat regarding the misconduct of the district administration in *amphoe* Pong in Nan province in NA R6 N 4.5 n/13, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work], 1916.

³⁷⁸ Eric Lawson, *Police Manual*, published by the American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1906 in NA K 0301.1.22/6 *Krasuang kankhlang*, office of the financial advisor, police and jails, police manual (in English), 54.

³⁷⁹ Wiwana, 1984, 172.

crime took place became synonymous with documenting it. Without proof on paper, courts have nothing to adjudicate. The contrary is also true. To prove that something did not happen, or happened in a way that differed from ‘reality’ also requires paperwork. The production of false evidence in the modern world of detection entails the creation of documents just as the production of ‘true’ evidence does.

As the slow and uneven introduction of fingerprint identification and the difficulty in getting officers to properly document their work indicate, the police, especially those in the provinces, were only learning the trade of modern detection in the early part of the twentieth century. Fingerprints, photographs, and statistical tables were new types of information, new facts, about crime produced by transplanted knowledge. They did not exist as discrete objects in Siam before and thus had to be taught to the kingdom’s new detectives. Prior to the 1890 reform of the Metropolitan Constabulary, there was no police academy. Recruits were trained by senior officers in standing at attention, reading and writing numbers, fast walking, marching in a group, using a sword, and shooting guns.³⁸⁰ Neither were many people being sent abroad to study the emerging field of criminology. One was sent before the turn of the nineteenth century. Another four were sent in 1912.³⁸¹ A.J.A. Jardine, Samuel Bird Ames’ successor at the Metropolitan Constabulary, proposed a training school for the constabulary’s new recruits and for old officers to train one month a year. This proposal was approved in December 1897.³⁸² The school, the *rong rian phon tamruat*, was finally started in 1900 at Wat Phayurong in Thonburi province, just across the Jao Phraya river from Bangkok. This facility would eventually be moved to a new location at Wat Saraphathum in

³⁸⁰ Rotsukhon Jaratsi, *Botbat khong kharatchakan chao tang prathet nai krom tamruat nai samai somburnananasitbirat* [The role of foreign civil servants in the police department under the absolute monarchy] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1977), 57-8.

³⁸¹ Ibid, 108.

³⁸² Ibid, 99-100.

Bangkok in 1908.³⁸³ Another school, the *rong rian fuk hat nai muat*, for higher ranking officers was located behind Captain Eric St. John Lawson's residence on Soi Sarasin, across from where Lumpini Park in Bangkok is today. There were ninety-five students in the first cohort, which lasted six months. Twenty-five people failed this first class.³⁸⁴ After training, successful cadets were assigned a station within the capital. Like the Metropolitan Constabulary, the Provincial Gendarmerie did not at first have a school. The men were drawn from soldiers from the army.³⁸⁵ They opened one in 1903, the *rong rian nai roi tamruat*. It was first located in Nakhon Ratchasima and then moved to Nakhon Phathom.³⁸⁶ As a result of the fractured nature of police training, cadets often lacked ability, basic skills, and knowledge in criminal investigation and relied excessively on force.³⁸⁷ Some police were themselves criminals.³⁸⁸ In fact, the Gendarmerie had difficulty filling their ranks at first because the "Thai people at the time did not feel well disposed to join the police service, being under the misconception that it was no better than a body of watchmen."³⁸⁹ It didn't help that officers received a very poor salary and risked being killed or injured on a daily basis. Conscription was a method to address this problem. The practice began in 1905 and ended for the Metropolitan Constabulary in 1914 and for the Gendarmerie in 1918.³⁹⁰ In 1915, the school for the gendarmerie was consolidated with the Metropolitan Police's

³⁸³ NA R6 N 4.1/224, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, raingan prachum krommakan phijarana kho ratchakan kiau duay krom tamruat phuthon lae tamruat phranakbon* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, meeting of officials to consider issues related to the provincial gendarmerie and the metropolitan police], 25 July 1923.

³⁸⁴ Rotsukhon, 1977, 152.

³⁸⁵ Wiwana, 1984, 112.

³⁸⁶ NA R6 N 4.1/261, *Krasuang nakbonban, krom tamruat phranakbonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, tamnan jat tang kong tamruat phuthon prajam kan* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, on the establishment of the Provincial Gendarmerie], circa 1923.

³⁸⁷ Wiwana, 1984, 134.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 136.

³⁸⁹ Forty, 1967, 58.

³⁹⁰ Wiwana, 1984, 87.

officer's school in Bangkok and was called the *rong rian nai roi tamruat*, or police academy. The school was moved to Nakhon Pathom northwest of Bangkok in 1921.³⁹¹

When the two police units and their schools were merged, there was also some rumbling for a change in the curriculum used to teach police recruits. It was thought that police training was too militaristic, as if followed the basic tenets of the army's training program which focused on combat and drilling rather than investigation. Frequent complaints about the police's reliance on force only reinforced this perception.³⁹² In a letter to Jao Phraya Yommarat, then the Minister of Local Government, Luang Phraya Phetinthara noted, "When the new *krom tamruat* is established, there will not be any suitable senior officers to be found. The *tamruat phuthon* have schools for *nai phan* (lieutenant) and *nai sip* (sergeant) and there is also school for *sawat* (inspector) at *nakhon pathom* but still, problems exist with police education. The basics of this education, the core classes, tests, teachers, etc. are still being revised. There is no clear system."³⁹³ In response dated 8 March 1917, the Director-General of Police, Mom Jao Khamrop noted that changes to the training system for the police were not practical because they would be too expensive and in any case, the *nai sip* already received training. Moreover, it was stated that officers of the *nai sip* rank did not need knowledge in investigation because that was the duty of the *amphoe* (district chief). The police were simply the 'muscle' (*kamlang*).³⁹⁴ Luang Phraya Phetinthara replied 5 March

³⁹¹ Rotsukhon, 1977, 181.

³⁹² NA R7 M 11/3, *Krasuang mahathai, krom tamruat phuthon nakhonban phuban, rong rian tamruat* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, metropolitan, provincial, and investigative police, police academy], 22 July 1927 and NA R6 N 4.1/253, *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phanakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai, prakat kong trawaen* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, metropolitan police and provincial gendarmerie, general duties, announcement on the Metropolitan Constabulary], circa 1923.

³⁹³ Letter from Luang Phraya Phetinthara to Jao Phraya Yommarat in NA R6 N 4.5/6, *Krasuang nakhonban, jare krom tamruat, rong rian nai tamruat* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, inspector of police, police academy], 6 September 1916.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

1917 that quite the opposite, investigation was the police's most important duty.³⁹⁵ If the police were not learning how to investigate crime, then what exactly were they doing in school?

At lecture to Metropolitan Constabulary cadets in 1914, topics included maintaining the confidentiality of issues brought to the police by the public, how to present work to ranking officers, how to explain orders, and how to set an example.³⁹⁶ The training program for the Constabulary took place over a year and was divided into three parts of four months each. The schedule of daily activities for students looked like this:

7am – Marching, drilling, weapons training
8am – Breakfast
10am to Noon – Study of regulations and laws
Noon to 1pm – Break
1pm to 3pm – Study of regulations and laws
3pm to 4pm – Break
4pm to 5pm – Marching, drilling, weapons training
5.30pm - Dinner
7pm to 8pm – Study of regulations and laws
8:30pm – Line-up and roll-call
9pm - Sleep
Saturday – Rest³⁹⁷

Another document shows that the metropolitan police included physical training according to the army's basic training program of 1912. This included unarmed combat, swimming, marching, and salutes. Physical training also included how to handle firearms, running long distances quickly for periods of not more than fifteen minutes, and basic exercise. Non-physical studies included reading and writing the Thai alphabet and Thai numbers to those that could not read and write, and improvement of reading and writing for those who were already literate, basic vocabulary and royal language, first aid and health,

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ NA R6 N 4.6/5 *Krasuang nakhonban, rong rian roi tamruat phon tamruat, hua kbo samrap pathakhatha rong rian phon trawaen* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, police school, subjects for lectures], 1 March 1914.

³⁹⁷ NA R6 N4.6/6 *Krasuang nakhonban, rong rian roi tamruat phon tamruat, kbo bangkhap rong rian fuk bat nai muat pi 130* [Ministry of Local Government, police school, regulations for officer training for 1911], 1911.

rules, regulations, and laws related to the Metropolitan Police of 1915, explanation of police disciplinary procedures, definitions of misdemeanors from the new criminal code (1908), *farang* (Caucasian) numbers, and methods to arrest people that make illegal liquor and opium.³⁹⁸ What this discussion on police training shows is that at the beginning of the twentieth century the Thai police had very little idea as to what modern detection called for; the fingerprints and other objects of evidence they were being asked to search for were new to them. The early police, in other words, hardly knew what a fingerprint was or how to take a picture, partly because these things did not exist in Siam before their introduction in the late nineteenth century.

This only began to change as the force began to emphasize investigative activities, first in Bangkok then in the provinces. Fingerprint identification, footprint casting, and the preservation of material clues from crime scenes were introduced into the police training curriculum. As changes moved forward, the police training curriculum began to include an increasing number of courses and topics like law, locations of important places, how to be observant and how to form hypotheses, basic reading and writing, math, and police rules. It was explained, for example, that fingerprints could be used to identify people because no two had ever been shown to be the same, they remained unchanged from the age of four months to death, and they regenerate unchanged after injury.³⁹⁹

In addition to courses in police school, training manuals for police investigation were also beginning to show up on the market. These manuals, written mostly by senior investigators, taught their readers what clues were, how to look for them, and stressed the

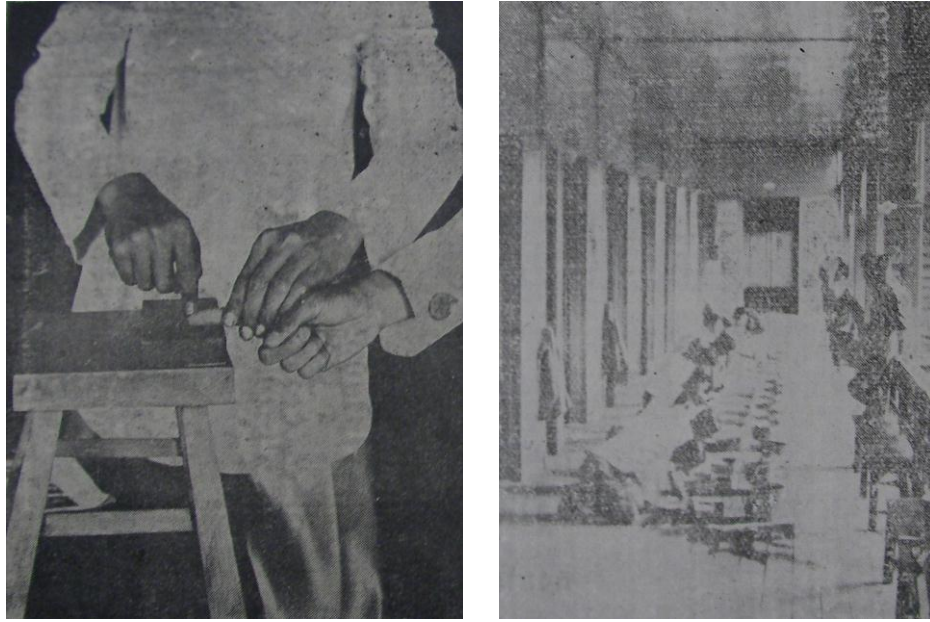
³⁹⁸ Letter from Mom Jao Khamrop, chief of police, to Luang Burethphathungkit, head of the police training academy in Bangkok in NA R6 N4.6/16 *Krasuang nakhonban, rong rian roi tamruat phon tamruat, lak sut kan phuk bat song son rong rian phon trawaen* [Sixth reign, police academy, the basic curriculum for the police academy], 25 May 1916.

³⁹⁹ Police Major Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Tamruat kap lak kan sup suan* [The police and rules for investigation] (Bangkok: n.p., 1935), 114.

importance of hard work and attention to detail. One such manual, from 1929, taught its readers that paper records including receipts, contracts, and letters as well as objects obtained from various locations such as foot prints, hand prints, bullet casings, and even objects left on bodies (including the body itself) such as scars or bruises were all useful information that could be used later as evidence.⁴⁰⁰ The police also put out their own magazine, *Tamruat* (Police), in an effort to spread information about modern police work to its officers. Articles in these magazines included instructions on how to interpret bloodstains, question witnesses, and conduct chemical analyses as well as crime fiction and summaries of cases in which detectives were able to solve complex cases by using physical clues left behind at a crime scene. That is, before the police could discover the facts ‘out there,’ they first had to be taught what these facts were.

More crucially, along with explaining what fingerprints, photographs, and other types of evidence were, training manuals and the police academy were teaching cadets something else: these new objects of evidence had a specific look to them and this look resulted from formalized techniques for production. Pictures of cadets learning to make fingerprints from *Tamruat* [Police] magazine, for example, show students lined-up at low wooden tables putting fingers to paper, in an almost assembly line manner (Figures 3 and 4). They are instructed how roll a fingertip from left to right with sufficient pressure and to fill the space allotted for each finger: “The proper way of taking finger-prints is as follows. A very thin layer of printer’s ink is spread on the tin plate provided for the purpose. The ink is spread on with a roller. The right thumb is then placed on the tin and the point is impressed on the form at the top left hand corner [a sample form is attached]. The fingers of right hand [sic]

⁴⁰⁰ Luang Bannasanprasit (Sithi Rojanawiphat), *Lak lae nitthi kan sup suan tai suan khadi aya* [Rules and techniques for investigating criminal cases] (Bangkok: Aksonniti, 1929), 142.



Figures 3 and 4 – Making Fingerprints at Police School, circa 1920.
From *Thesaphiban*.

are then printed in turn.”⁴⁰¹ And as mentioned earlier, they were also taught, after some trial and error the correct color of paper to use.⁴⁰² So in addition to learning about the unchanging lines on a fingertip, the police were learning how to make an aesthetically correct impression of them – one that could be analyzed by experts not present at a crime scene and thus useful as evidence in court. If a print did not conform to these formal rules, its status as proof was undermined.⁴⁰³

The photograph too, needed to conform to specific aesthetic rules to count in a court as evidence. When the photograph was first introduced into the criminal investigation process in Siam, it was seen as useful but still suspect. One instruction manual, from 1917, explicitly warned that the photograph was not direct evidence. Instead, it was one step

⁴⁰¹ Eric Lawson, *Police Manual*, published by the American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1906 in NA K 0301.1.22/6 *Krasuang kanekhleng*, office of the financial advisor, police and jails, police manual (in English). He goes on about the left hand as well.

⁴⁰² NA R5 Y 10/20, *Krasuang yuttitham, san dika, tang damnaeng kammakan 1 kammakan sawaengha lai mu 2 kammakan wat duang sang* [Fifth reign, Ministry of Justice, supreme court, designating two officials: 1. Official to look for fingerprints and 2. official for the Duang Sang temple], no date, 1910.

⁴⁰³ Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 126.

removed from being a ‘first level’ proof: “In some cases, photos of crime scenes are taken and presented to the court. These, like maps, are also second level objects of evidence. The purpose of photographs is to provide the court an understanding of the conditions of a crime scene, how the defendant committed the crime in question, and how witnesses knew of the crime. It acts in combination with other evidence to give that other evidence increased weight which is very beneficial to a case.... Photographs that may be considered direct evidence are those taken of the actual criminal event or of something directly related to the criminal event. But because it is difficult to know in advanced when a crime will occur it is not likely that one would be able to set up a camera in time to capture an actual criminal event.”⁴⁰⁴

The manual then noted that the photograph’s ‘second level’ status stemmed from its openness to manipulation since its look depended on many factors including weather conditions, lighting, and location, all of which made crime photography a difficult task. There were, the manual also warned, techniques for taking photographs that made subjects appear close to each other when they are actually quite far apart and vice versa.⁴⁰⁵ Perhaps in response, subsequent manuals invariably included a section on how to properly take photographs for criminal investigation. In cases of murder, for example, investigating officers in 1935 were instructed to prevent people from entering the crime scene so that valuable evidence was not destroyed. The investigator was told to clear a crime scene of people and then check the floor around the body for traces of blood and footprints. Once the scene was set, a professional photographer was to take photos of the scene as it was ‘discovered.’⁴⁰⁶ The manual instructed that the body in particular should be photographed in

⁴⁰⁴ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 161-2.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 172.

⁴⁰⁶ Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 77-8.

the original position that it was found. In other words, the photograph had to capture the crime scene as the criminal had left it. Yet, to achieve this ‘naturalism,’ lighting and camera angle were stressed. The same manual recommended the photographer take pictures from as many angles as possible to ensure a complete image of the scene was preserved for later viewing.⁴⁰⁷ These rules were part of the development of a set of aesthetic principles, a ‘grammar of murder,’ that emerged to help distinguish crime scene photography as its own genre distinct from portraiture or landscape photography.⁴⁰⁸ At a practical level, then, the scientific revolution that government officials attempted to bring to Siam had less to do with a sea change in the mentalité of the police than with the standardization of what facts were and the practices for capturing and presenting those facts.

There are two points to take from this discussion so far. First, the facts that the Thai police needed to solve a crime were not things that existed *a priori*, though they may seem that way today. The police are able now to search for and identify facts about crime and turn those facts into evidence recognizable in courts of law and the popular imagination, but this ability developed over time through a conscious program of education of what facts about crime actually included. Fingerprints, footprints, blood stains, who to question, what to ask them, what to look for at a crime scene, what a crime scene was in the first place, and what a criminal event and an investigation of that event were all introduced through practice and reinforced through routine. This means to be understood as facts today, they first had to go through a process of design. Second, instructions on how to make prints and take photos may therefore be understood as aesthetic considerations as much as epistemological ones. The training and practice required for producing proper representations of fingerprints and

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 82.

⁴⁰⁸ The phrase ‘grammar of murder’ comes from Karla Oeler, *A Grammar of Murder: Violent Scenes and Film Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), which tells a history of murder scenes and the development of tropes used to visualize murder in film.

photographs imply that making evidence, or capturing the likeness of a fact, is a craft, one with clear formal considerations. Requirements for color of ink and paper, camera angle, object (non)placement, and scale are all formal rules created to ensure the naturalism of a reproduction of a clue; aesthetic rules are needed to preserve an object's 'factness' as it goes through the reproduction and re-presentation process. Moreover, these formal considerations did not materialize instantaneously. They developed over time and thus it might be argued that so did the factness of evidence.

Lorraine Daston, a historian of science, has written that the common understanding today is that facts "are evidence *in potentia*," that when "mustered in an argument, deduced from a theory, or simply arranged in a pattern, they shed their proverbial obstinacy and help with the work of proof and disproof."⁴⁰⁹ It is exactly this obstinacy that gives facts value, freeing them from corrupt local officials and hesitant witnesses, from human interference. The validity of evidence, in other words, depends on the inertness of the objects called facts. What the description of police training above shows is that the inertness of a fact as it moves from crime scene to police station to court house stems from the formal rules of their production. This may all seem academic, since for the criminal justice system to work, police, lawyers, and judges must act, to some extent, as if what they produce as evidence were in fact factual. The larger point is that facts, clues, evidence, and content, like literary devices, do things to a narrative, help bring it closer to an ending, to a resolution. Both fictional and real world devices are designed artifacts. A writer uses them in his stories, a police officer in a case file.

⁴⁰⁹ Lorraine Daston, "Historical Epistemology," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, eds. James Chandler, Arnold Davidson, Harry Harootunian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 243.

Summary

People today generally think of material evidence as a category of fact, things that are neutral, 'out there' waiting to be discovered and placed into a narrative about a past crime. Once activated by a crime, then, facts about the world can be ordered, put in a space, and placed in a sequence. Crime forces people to make sense of their world, to make facts of noise and then turn those facts into something that makes sense within the society they live in. The discussion so far has show this to be the case, or rather that police investigators act as if this were the case, but also that facts themselves, as with fingerprints, crime scene maps, and photographs are produced through standardized procedure as much as they are found. They are made by police officers going through the routines taught to them in school and described to them in textbooks about how to engage with the material world. If anything, the line between facts out there and the simulation of those facts is difficult to make out. Does a location where a criminal action took place exist without its map, does a fingerprint exist without its impression, or does a crime exist without being narrated? The answer is yes, things happen, but as this chapter has shown, the parameters of their reality, as well as their meaning, depends on their formalization in different types of documents. The police have become over the past one hundred years a primary institution for this formalization process. The content of form is as much a matter of aesthetics as the form itself. What this begins to show is that with certain objects there is a collapse of the binaries form and content, text and context, *syjzet* and *fibula* that define fiction against history. The next chapter fleshes this point out in greater detail by looking more closely at crime scene maps and re-enactments.

CHAPTER 4

VISUALIZING THE PAST

“... the absence of knowledge provokes the presence of the narrative; once the mystery is disclosed, there is no longer anything to tell. The presence of the truth is possible, but it is incompatible with the narrative.”⁴¹⁰

Revelations

A curious thing began appearing the daily papers and weekly and monthly magazines of Thailand during the first years of the 1950s. In *Phim thai rai duan* (Thailand in print monthly) of April 1954, two photos of Liang Muangphrae appear in which he demonstrates to the police, at the scene of the crime, how he shot and killed his lover (Figures 5 and 6).⁴¹¹ Looming behind a stand-in for his lover, Liang holds a gun and is about to shoot. In another, he stands over his lover’s ‘dead body.’ Dozens of onlookers are at the scene of the crime. The police, the captions explain, are there to take photos for their records. In July 1956, Nin Saisa’at shows up on the pages of *Phim thai buang lang khao* (Thailand in print: Behind the news) showing how he cut a man named Phrom in the neck with a long machete as police officers take notes for their files (Figure 7).⁴¹² In April 1957, three men show up in *Phim thai rai pak* letting readers know how they derailed a train (Figure 8).⁴¹³

Since their first appearance, images like these – of criminal’s ‘in action’ – and the stories of crime and investigation that accompany them have dominated the Thai press,

⁴¹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov on the detective novel in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 147.

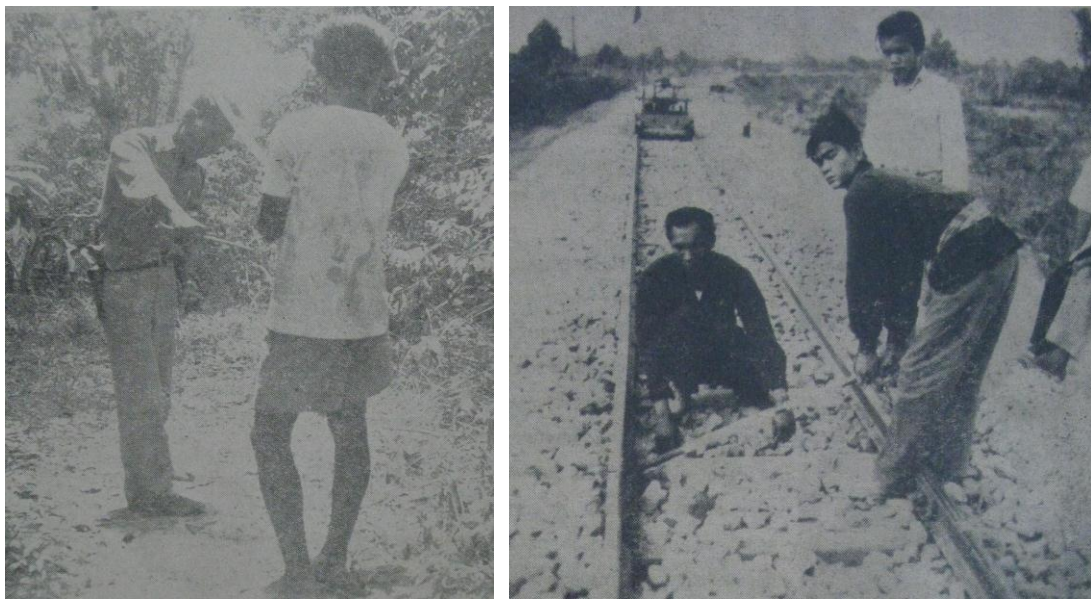
⁴¹¹ Suthep Muanprasitthiwet, “*Jot mai rak chok luat*” [Bloody love letter], *Phim thai rai duan* [Thailand in print monthly] (April 1954): 8.

⁴¹² S. Photiriang, “*Pit pak phayan aek*” [Silencing the star witness], *Phim thai buang lang khao* [Thailand in print: Behind the news] (July, 1st half, 1956): 10.

⁴¹³ Chalothon (pseudo.), “*Plon 617*” [Plundering 617], *Phim thai rai pak* [Thailand in print bi-monthly] (April, 2nd half, 1957): 21.



Figures 5 and 6 – Re-enactment photos from *Phim thai rai duan*.



Figures 7 and 8 – Re-enactment photos from *Phim thai buang lang khao* and *Phim thai rai pak*.

gaining popularity well before reality television shows like *Cops* and dramas like *CSI* became pop culture phenomena around the world.

This chapter examines the development of images like these, and of the re-enactment practice in general, as a continuation of the examination of the documentation practices of the police from the previous chapter. Here the discussion turns from narrative

forms of knowledge to visual ones, focusing on the way the police use diagrams to help them solve crimes. I argue that in Thailand, the re-enactment evolved from a scientific method for cataloguing criminal acts into a visual tool meant to provide the revelatory ending necessary for every good detective story. That is, re-enactments act as literary devices for the real world, similar to the way clues and temporal transpositions do for fiction in that they allow the police, reporters, and others to manipulate time and space to arrive at understandings about the past that would otherwise not be possible; to solve the narrative mysteries they construct through the investigation process, the police and the press employ visual tools.⁴¹⁴ I begin with a look at the crime scene investigation and its map, a device very much related to the re-enactment, to illustrate how a diagram of a crime scene functions as a mechanism to create and then impose an idealized space onto the real world. I then move to the re-enactment, showing how it helps the police generate new knowledge as much as represent existing (past) realities.

Traces on the Earth

The police stake out a plot of land, give it borders with cords and flags, and cover it again and again with their footsteps and their eyes, searching the grid they have given to it. By the time Sherry Ann Duncan was murdered in 1986, the practice of marking off territory and systematically surveying its expanse for clues to the past had become routine in most societies with a modern police force. To wit, at 12:10pm, 25 July 1986, Captain Prayat Ngao-ngam of the Samut Prakan City police station received a dispatch over the police radio system. A man had found a dead body in Samae Forrest, Samut Prakan province, just east of

⁴¹⁴ Like a computer-aided simulation or other diagrams used today in science meant ostensibly to represent things not visible to the naked eye (such as the structure of a molecule), diagrammatic devices like the re-enactment (and crime scene maps) produce new knowledge as much as they represent pre-existing facts. This is what is meant by a diagram being a 'device.' This idea will be expanded on later in the chapter and in Chapter 6.

Bangkok. At 12:40pm, Prayat, Chief Inspector Thawisan Plengkham, Inspector Santi Phensut, Constable Phongdet Phetcharoen, and a few other officers went to the location where the body was located, about fifty meters from Sukhumvit Road. The team noted various trees, some as high as 2.5 meters, and standing water on the ground. In the area near where the body lay, the water was about 70 cm deep. The body was that of a female. She was wearing a blue-grey skirt, a pink short-sleeve blouse tucked into the skirt. Her head faced east, her feet faced west. Prayat and a doctor performed an initial inspection of the body and found no scars or bruises. From the state of the body's decomposition, they estimate the woman had been dead for about five days and began inspecting the area. From a delineated space in the forest, the temporal limits (five days prior to the discovery of the body) of a crime, as a historical event, begin to become apparent.

While the actions described above, a crime scene investigation, is taken for granted today – images of yellow tape and uniformed police with latex gloves searching for bullet casings or other objects made common by fiction, news, and now television shows spring to mind – it was hardly an established practice in Siam in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1919, Eric St. John Lawson, British consultant to the Siamese Ministry of Interior and former head of the Metropolitan Police, for example, wrote a report on the general conditions of the Thai police in which he concluded that while ineptitude, corruption, and brutality plague the kingdom's police force, most officers have a "generally good character." They are, "as a whole... hard working, and able men, some of them pre-eminently so. But [the] *tools* with which they work, the rank and file, are bad...I have no hesitation in saying that the great bulk of the officers are good and have done as much with

the hopeless material that they have to work with as any men could.”⁴¹⁵ In another instance, he wrote, “It may be said that ‘It is a poor workman who finds fault with his tools.’ That is quite true, but the best of workmen cannot turn out good work without any tools at all. Yet this is what is expected of the police.”⁴¹⁶ He went on to note that in terms of actual criminal investigation, only about five percent of cases were examined where they occurred.⁴¹⁷ He wrote, “As a rule the *Amphur* [sic] does not visit the scene of a crime, and if he does, he goes away again immediately; nor has he, so far as I have seen, the faintest idea how to set about tracing an offender.”⁴¹⁸ Space, according to the good captain, had not yet been connected to the detection of crime.⁴¹⁹

Accordingly, the police reforms that the government enacted during the first decades of the twentieth century were in part about equipping the police with better tools. As described in Chapter 3, these included statistics, fingerprint identification, photography, and a range of standardized forms. And along with these new tools, the police began to revise the curriculum of their police schools to include more emphasis, however slight, on police investigation techniques. One of the first things the new police training had to teach to cadets was what a crime scene actually was. In perhaps the first manual ever published commercially, from 1917, in Siam on modern police investigation the author, a lawyer, one

⁴¹⁵ NA R6 N 4.1/164 *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general government work], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919. Emphasis added.

⁴¹⁶ NA K 0301.1.22/1 *Krasuang kankhlang* [Ministry of Finance], office of the financial advisor, police and jails (in English), report of violent crime of Bangkok, suburbs and railway divisions for the fourth quarter, year 120 (1901-1902), ending 31st March 1902.

⁴¹⁷ NA R6 N 4.1/164 *Krasuang nakhonban, krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon, ratchakan thua pai* [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie, general government work], a report on the work of the police and the gendarmerie and on criminal statistics of Siam for B.E. 2463 by police lieutenant general Lawson (in English), 1919.

⁴¹⁸ NA K 0301.1.22/1 *Krasuang kankhlang* [Ministry of Finance], office of the financial advisor, police and jails (in English), report of violent crime of Bangkok, suburbs and railway divisions for the fourth quarter, year 120 (1901-1902), ending 31st March 1902.

⁴¹⁹ One reason why might be in the the forms of representation in Siam had not yet allowed for space to be considered something abstract that could act as an object of investigation. See footnote 49 in the Introduction.

time provincial prosecutor, former teacher at the *rong rian nakrian nai roi* [school for military recruits], and civil servant in the Ministry of Interior named Phraya Sisena, defines a crime scene (*sathan thi*) as a location where a crime happens.⁴²⁰ Luang Phisitwithayakan, a prominent police officer in the 1920s and 1930s and head of the first police science section (housed within the *santiban* or Special Branch after the 1932 revolution), gives more or less the same definition of a crime scene (*sathan thi koet bet*) in his police investigation training manual published in 1935: It is the location where a crime or other event in question happens.⁴²¹ Subsequent manuals all provide similarly tautological definitions. In these understandings, the crime scene is a self-evident thing that exists *a priori*, a sort of geography that speaks for itself. All the police had to do was go there and inspect it. The crime scene, however, as with fingerprints and photographs, is an artifact that emerges through practice and is governed by formal rules, ones that help impose an idealized space onto the messy reality of the world.

Luang Phisitwithayakan notes in his manual, for example, that where an action considered a crime such as murder, a theft, or an assault occurs is the center of a crime scene. The first thing an investigator does, or is supposed to do, is to find the physical location of this space in the world. These spaces, in turn, can be anywhere: palaces, buildings rented to foreigners, houses of the middle-class (*ban khon chon chan klang*), floating houses, banks, shops, row houses, fancy restaurants, hostels or hotels, schools, places of

⁴²⁰ Phraya Sisena (Kitkachachiwa), *Withi sup suan jon phurai lem 1* [Methods for investigating criminals, vol. 1] (Bangkok: Phraratchapantit, 1917), 42. Lawson put together a police manual for the Metropolitan Police in 1906. This manual was based on one used by the English police and written in English and then translated into Thai. The manual was more a collection of definitions of terms and rules and regulations than a 'how-to' manual of how to investigate crime. Lawson does not give a definition of crime scene in the manual. The manual, both English and Thai, can be found in the National Archives in NA K 0301.1.22/6-7.

⁴²¹ Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Tamruat kap lak kan sup suan* [The police and the rules of investigation] (Bangkok: Police Department, 1935), 42.

entertainment, hospitals, government offices, and factories.⁴²² Once this general area of a criminal action is determined, the edges of that space need to be demarcated. Thus Luang Phisitwithayakan suggests that an investigating officer should look for things like possible entrances – where a perpetrator could have gotten into a space of crime. Things that the investigator should keep an eye out for include foot prints, traces of mud, or gaps in a fence or row of flowers. Signs like these indicate openings into a scene of a crime.⁴²³

A related and equally important aspect of the crime scene is determining how and where the criminal made his exit. Luang Phisitwithayakan thus instructs his readers to always examine the outside of a dwelling where a crime has occurred to see how the perpetrator left the area. This includes looking for footprints or whether the perpetrator left behind any telltale tools. Phraya Sisena gives very similar advice in his manual and stresses to his readers that going to a crime scene is not a waste of time.⁴²⁴

When a crime scene is located and its entrance and exit are established, the space must then be sealed off, kept from the disturbance of gawkers and, worse, criminals set on concealing signs of their culpability.⁴²⁵ In fact, the space of a crime is no place for amateurs. Luang Phisitwithayakan stated in a radio broadcast in 1934 that if a crime occurs, people should not meddle with the immediate area. Rather, they ought to report the incident to the police, whose job it was to go to the site to look for footprints and fingerprints. Leaving a crime scene alone was how to help the police, he informed his listeners.⁴²⁶ Through the process of a criminal investigation, then, an illegal act is given spatial dimensions – center, inside, outside, and borders.

⁴²² Ibid, 68.

⁴²³ Ibid, 77.

⁴²⁴ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 45.

⁴²⁵ Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 77-8.

⁴²⁶ Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Prachachon atja chuai ratchakan tamruat dai yangrai (thang withayu krajai siang)* [How citizens can help the police (a radio address)], in *Nangsu ngan napanakit khong nang phijarnwonlakit* [Commemorative volume for Miss Phijanwonlakit] (Bangkok: n.p., 1934), 35-6.

Within this delimited and sealed space of crime, previously meaningless objects become important. Phraya Sisena's manual notes that within a crime scene an investigator should look for things like footprints, especially those made in mud because they can be preserved. In addition, he tells investigators to look for blood stains or any other objects left behind.⁴²⁷ Luang Bannasanprasit (Sithi Rojanawiphat), a former *nai amphoe* (district chief) in Chonburi province, published a training manual in 1929 in which he includes a long section describing things to look for at crime scenes such as bullet casings, blood stains, weapons, documents, and other objects.⁴²⁸ Luang Phisitwitayakan tells his readers similarly that they ought keep an eye out for things like weapons or for other objects that may have been touched by a perpetrator (and thus have his fingerprints). He also tells them to check for things like lines of dust or other minute details that might indicated something has been moved or is out of place.⁴²⁹ A post-World War II manual from 1953 by Sa-nga Kittikachon, an officer with the police science section, also points to the importance of looking for objects in a crime scene.⁴³⁰ An investigation turns a place into a uniform, homogenous space in which objects of information, or clues, crucial to the police's mission are located, a process some scholars, including Foucault, have called "the emblem of the modern epistemological order"; 'epochal shifts' result from changes in representational practices.⁴³¹

The importance of these objects, in turn, is their ability to help the police identify tell-tale characteristics of a culprit. So for example, openings into crime scenes become ways of divining the skill level of a robber. Luang Phisitwithayakan teaches his readers that holes in doors, ceilings, floors or walls show the perpetrator has a relatively high level of skill or

⁴²⁷ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 44-5.

⁴²⁸ Luang Bannasanprasit (Sithi Rojanawiphat), *Lak lae withi kan sup suan tai suan khadi aya* [Basic methods for investigating criminal cases] (Bangkok: Rong Phim Aksonniti, 1929), 159-174.

⁴²⁹ Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 72-3.

⁴³⁰ Sa-nga Kittikachon, *Withikan tamruat kiam kan sup suan* [Police methods related to investigation] (Bangkok: Prasotakson, 1953).

⁴³¹ Jay, 1993, 51.

experience. Criminals with less ability tend to create awkward openings such as drilling a hole in a place too close to a bolt. If there are no traces of a forced entry, then the officer must check to see how that person got into house. Did he use a key? If so how he get it? More importantly, objects in a crime scene help investigators construct a narrative about the past. Things like blood stains or footprints help an investigator deduce the path taken by a perpetrator and whether he may have dragged a body or was injured during a struggle.⁴³² Bruises or other markings on dead bodies allow doctors to determine how a fight may have taken place while trajectories of bullets through a body tell the positioning of victim and assailant at the time of a shooting. Luang Phisitwithayakan, in a forward to a translation of a case report from England, says detailed reports that describe clues like these are a key aid in investigating crime because they help the police put together a picture of a crime scene as it looked during the time the crime took place.⁴³³

Early in the morning on 4 March 1949, for example, Police Major General Luang Samridh of the Royal Thai Police Department summoned Captain Yongyudh Damrongchai to Paruksawan Palace, temporary police headquarters during the state of emergency prevailing in the capital at the time.⁴³⁴ Samridh explained that a police escort transporting four former parliament ministers loyal to exiled Prime Minister Pridi Phanomyong had come under attack in a pre-dawn assault. His followers had hoped to spring the four former ministers from police captivity, he said. In the ensuing gun battle, the four ministers were killed. Samridh ordered Yongyudh to join the investigation at the Central Hospital, where

⁴³² Phraya Sisena, *Witthi sup suan*, 45.

⁴³³ Luang Phisitwithayakan, *Sup kbadi luk lap* [Investigating mysterious crimes], in cremation volume for the soldiers and police officers that died in the 1933 uprising, cremation at Sanam Luang, 18 February 1933.

⁴³⁴ A group of men led supposedly by Pridi Phanomyong attempted a coup on 26 February, about one week prior to the assassination of the four former ministers. The sitting Prime Minister, Major General Phibun Songkram, had instated a state of emergency just before the attempted coup and this gave the military and the police far ranging powers for arrest and detention.

the dead men's bodies had been taken. That was at about 5am.⁴³⁵ Perhaps because of his training in modern police investigation, when Yongyudh's work was done at the hospital he went to the scene of incident: Phrachathipat Highway (Phahonyothin Road), between kilometer posts 14 and 15, past the Saphan Khwai Bridge.

It was noon or so by the time he got there. There were no houses on either side of the road (in 1946) and the area was deserted. He saw patches of blood on the western side of road. The biggest were about six inches long, but there were not many of them.⁴³⁶ Some were thick, some thin, and some had flowed down the side of the road. He saw about forty bullet casings on the ground, an almost equal number were laying on each side of the road. The grass on the eastern side of the road, just off the asphalt surface, was disturbed as if it had been trampled by human feet, while the grass on the western side of the road was smeared with mud patches from the asphalt down to the bottom of the ditch. Certain parts of the grass bore impressions as if something heavy was placed on them. He noticed footprints in the half-dried mud bed of the ditch on the western side of the road. The footprints were few at some places, but at other spots huge patches could be found. There were altogether about ten such areas, which covered an area of about one square meter. No trace of footprints was present in the paddy field beyond the edge of the ditch. On the eastern side of the road there was also a paddy field, but the whole area was dry and bore no

⁴³⁵ Testimony of Captain Yongyudh Damrongchai (investigating officer in case in 1946) given on 8 November 1957 in *Khadi kha phu un dai doi jethana (4 rattamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], LMAG.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

traces.⁴³⁷ Yongyudh asked around with the people in the area. Some had heard gunshots. None dared come out to look.⁴³⁸

An investigation turned a stretch of ordinary highway into a crime scene: a flat, uniform, and homogenous space containing objects of information crucial to the police's mission. Within this idealized space, the temporal limits of a crime as a historical event began to become apparent. Through material clues, events long gone can take place again within the scene of a crime, like a nightly performance on a fixed stage. Michel Foucault, in writing about what he calls the primacy of space in the modern era notes: "Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space."⁴³⁹ The crime scene investigation certainly seems to support this observation as the police mark out a space and then look for clues to make the past apparent again.

The time aspect of a crime, which the police attempt to unfold within a crime scene, is reinforced through the structure of the investigative process (similar to the way mystery is generated in the form of a detective novel) as well. In the early part of the twentieth century, two similar terms existed for investigation, *sup suan* and *tai suan* (now *sop suan*). In Luang Bannasanprasit's manual on criminal investigation, for example, a detective's work is categorized into two parts, *sup suan* and *tai suan*. While he admitted that the two were difficult to separate, Luang Bannasanprasit told his readers that *sup suan* does not involve recording in writing any findings while *tai suan* involves recording the testimony of witnesses and

⁴³⁷ Judgment of the Criminal Court, 30 September 1962 in *Khadi kha phu un dai doi jethana (4 rattbamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], LMAG.

⁴³⁸ Testimony of Captain Yongyudh Damrongchai (investigating officer in case in 1946) given on 8 November 1957 in *Khadi kha phu un dai doi jethana (4 rattbamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], LMAG.

⁴³⁹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," accessed on 25 November 2010 at <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>.

suspects.⁴⁴⁰ Phraya Sisena, writing about ten years before Luang Bannasanprasit, was similarly stumped, saying simply that no law existed that defined what *sup suan* was.⁴⁴¹ Even today, there are some officers that do not agree with the separation of the two functions since they are closely related.⁴⁴²

As such, the writers of these manuals began to try to define the activities of *sup suan* and *sop suan* based on personal experience. Phra Sisena tells his readers that an investigation has two parts, a ‘beginning’ or pre-crime period and an ‘end’ or post crime period.⁴⁴³ A beginning for an investigator involves looking for evidence before a criminal actually commits a crime. This is important since many crimes require forethought, planning, and preparation. He describes a situation where before A kills B, A express dissatisfaction with B to C. A then borrows a knife from C and goes to stake out B’s house before actually stabbing B. Phra Sisena says that this shows that a crime begins before the criminal act itself (i.e. the putting of a knife into another person’s body). Therefore the temporal limits of an investigation should be set well before the act itself to be useful in court. Over time this pre-crime period has become linked to the term *sup suan*, which now emphasizes detection before crimes happen. The *sop suan* process has, on the other hand, become connected to the period after a criminal act occurs. Phra Sisena tells investigators that after a crime takes place, a criminal may attempt to cover up his deed. This means for the police that they must look for clues that will help uncover the identity of the culprit. So for example, A might have blood on his clothes or on his sword, act funny, run and hide, or tell someone about his

⁴⁴⁰ Luang Bannasanprasit (Sithi Rojanawiphat), *Lak lae nitthi kan sup suan tai suan khadi aya* [The rules and methods for investigating criminal cases] (Bangkok: Aksonniti, 1929), 107.

⁴⁴¹ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 3.

⁴⁴² Interview with former head of Central Investigation Department, 14 March 2011.

⁴⁴³ Ibid, 25.

action.⁴⁴⁴ Crimes were given temporal (before, during, after) and spatial (inside and outside, entrance and exit) dimensions through the conceptualization and process of an investigation even though police treated time, like they did space, as if it were self-evidently out there.

Criminal Mappings

Once the space of a crime and what transpired within that space are determined, both have to be preserved for trial. Objects like knives and guns left at the scene can be transported whole to a police station and a court room. Things like footprints and fingerprints are more difficult to move, but as the last chapter showed, techniques for their preservation (or simulation) have been developed. Similarly, what people see remains in the world only through memory, retold in the present. Human testimony, warns Luang Phisitwhithayakan, however, is often given in a manner that does not add up because witnesses see a crime from different angles. Testimony must therefore be considered carefully, he notes.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, a sequence of action (the crime as an event) cannot be moved at all since it ‘disappears’ from the world as soon it happens. Documenting a crime scene, making it material, is therefore one of the most critical operations in the investigation process. To have facts about crime become usable as proof of that crime requires making them material objects that can move from a place out in the world to the courthouse. The stress on standardized forms from the 1910s through the 1930s was part of this project of making facts universal (at least throughout the kingdom), mobile, and immutable and therefore less subject to the whims of local power.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, 26-8. Note also the split between *sup suan* and *sop suan* parallel the first and second stories in a detective narrative.

⁴⁴⁵ Luang Phisitwhithayakan, 1935, 42.

⁴⁴⁶ Archival documents, for example, indicate a serious concern with the police’s inability to document crimes properly and that standardized forms were required. See for example, NA R6 N 4.5 n/10, *Krasuang nakbonban*,

To transport a crime scene that the police ‘discovered’ in the world to the courthouse, the investigator was given a few new techniques. One key method was the map, an object now synonymous with criminal investigation. Lawson stressed, “In all cases of violent crime a map of the scene should be drawn and attached to the case papers. The map need not be drawn to scale but the distances between different points on the map should be carefully paced and recorded.”⁴⁴⁷ In 1917, Phraya Sisena suggested that “if a map or plan of site can be made, then that would be useful to the investigation or in the adjudication of the case in court because it would allow judges to see what was real as the investigator has seen them.”⁴⁴⁸ He does not, however, go on to talk in detail about what these maps might look like, though people familiar with the popular detective fiction of the time would have some idea (see below). Similarly, Luang Phisitwithayakan writes that after inspecting a crime scene, a plan of the area should be made.⁴⁴⁹ No details are provided as to what this might look like. Luang Bannasit stressed that maps be “properly drawn.”⁴⁵⁰ For him, this meant adhering to formal rules. That is, because maps and plans are generally thought of as representations of characteristics of the real world, they were initially considered ‘second level’ evidence, as were photographs of crime scenes. It was important, therefore, for the police and civil administrative officials to make them as accurate as possible through a series of standardized conventions like scale, north arrows, labels, and the signatures of the officers making them

krom tamruat phranakhonban lae phuthon (jare tamruat), truat ratchakan, nai phan tamruat tho satainoe jare tamruat phak tai nai monthon surat thani lae jangwat songkhla jangwat Phuket monthon pattani hen wai kitjakan tang-tang bokphrong mak [Sixth reign, Ministry of Local Government, department of the metropolitan police and the provincial gendarmerie (inspector of police), inspecting police work, the inspector of the south reports many deficiencies in police work], 3 November 1916. Prince Damrong, while Minister of Interior published examples of what he thought were good formats for police documents in the monthly Ministry of Interior journal *Thesaphiban*.

⁴⁴⁷ Eric Lawson, *Police Manual: The Police Manual for the Use of Members of the Bangkok Police Force* (Bangkok: The American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1906) in NA K 0301.1.22/6 *Krasuang kankehleng*, office of the financial advisor, police and jails, police manual (in English).

⁴⁴⁸ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 42.

⁴⁴⁹ Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 82.

⁴⁵⁰ Luang Bannasanprasit, 1929, 160-1.

and the suspects or witnesses that led investigators to the crime scene.⁴⁵¹ This was a change from the instructions given by Lawson in 1906, who stated that scale was not necessary.⁴⁵²

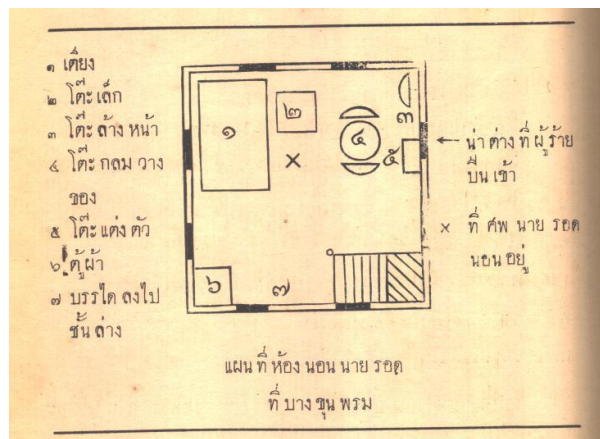
Over time and through training, the conventions of what a crime scene map should look like became normalized. Drawing maps, for example, was part of the training program proposed by Prince Buripatra in 1928 for officers of the soon to be established *tamruat phuthon klang* (central investigation division) and fairly standard maps of crime scenes began to appear in police case files with regularity by the early 1920s, thereby materializing and transporting the newly evolving space of crime to the courthouse.⁴⁵³ This standardization of the visual representation of the crime scene might be thought of as a way of allowing government officials to tap into the information that existed out there in the environment. The police, therefore, were becoming a primary institution for producing the material objects that would give violence shape in the legal system and the popular press for decades to come.

In one early example of a crime scene map, a fictional one from the story “*Phu rai kha khon thi bang khun phrom*” (Murder at Bang Khun Phrom) by Crown Prince Vajiravudh in 1904, there appears this plan of the house where a man named Rot is found dead:

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 162.

⁴⁵² Lawson, 1906, 149.

⁴⁵³ Letter from Prince Buripatra to King Prajadipok in NA R7 MT 11/5, *Krasuang mabathai, tamraut phuthon nakhonban phuban, tang tamruat phuthon klang* [Seventh reign, Ministry of Interior, the provincial, metropolitan, and investigative police, setting up a central investigation division], 16 May 1928.



In the map, the reader is presented an image of a room from an aerial perspective, something the crime map helped bring to Siam.⁴⁵⁴ The room is marked with symbols that indicate where Rot's bed, table, chairs, and closet are located. The map also shows the location of windows and doors, with indicators of where the culprit of the crime is likely to have entered (the window on the right side of the drawing indicated by an arrow) and the dead body (marked by an X). The idea of what a crime scene map might (or ought to) look like entered the kingdom through fiction before it did through professional training. Not long after this map of a fictional crime scene appeared, police training manuals began to recommend that investigators make plans of the area where a crime occurs.⁴⁵⁵

In 1946, after young King Ananda was found dead in his bed chambers, this map was produced:

⁴⁵⁴ I call this image and others like it a map, as most people would, though geographers may disagree, referring to it as only a diagram or schematic plan. A geographer's map is the relation of objects to a specific set of fixed coordinates whereas a diagram or a schematic plan like the ones presented here are more simplistic representations of a space or a set of relations between objects without reference to any external guideposts. For a more detailed discussion see Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007), 54-6.

⁴⁵⁵ See for example, Luang Phisitwithayakan, 1935, 82, in previous section.

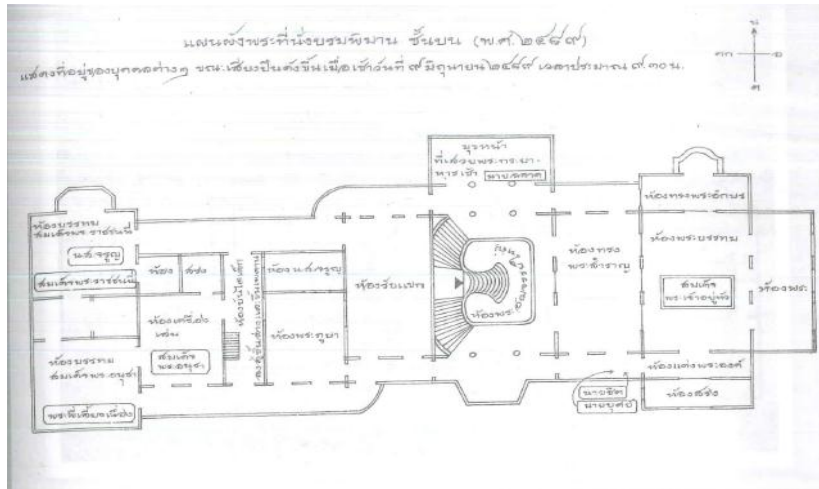


Figure 10 – Map of Boromphiman Hall. From Suphot Dantrakun, *Khothejting kieokap karani sawankhot chabap sombun* [Facts about the death of King Ananda, complete version] (Bangkok: Sathaban Witthayasat Sangkhom, 2001).

The image shows the plan of the second floor of Boromaphiman Hall, where King Ananda's bedchambers were located (on the right-hand side of the drawing). It also shows the access points to his bedroom and the other bedrooms sharing the floor, suggesting how a killer, if the indeed the king's death was murder, could have come into the room. Like the map of Nai Rot's bedroom, this map shows crime in an intimate domestic setting, indicating by its choice of boundaries that the criminal may have come from within the secure confines of the palace walls. Neither the fictional map nor real map depicts what lay outside the walls of the private home.

In 1953, when Ari Liwira, publisher of several popular dailies and weeklies, was murdered, the police came up with this map:

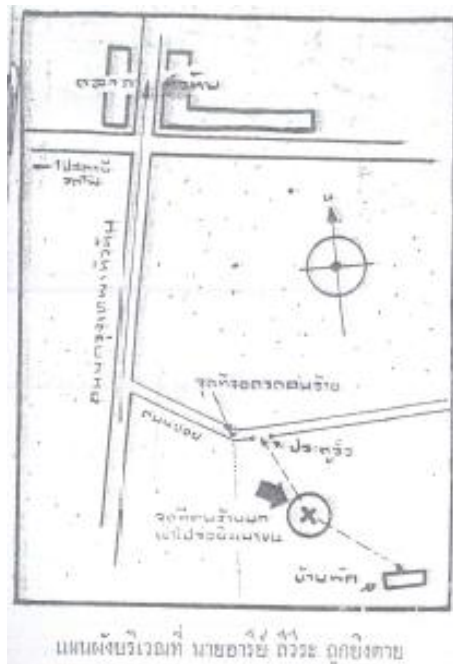


Figure 11 – Map of Area near Ari Liwira's House.

The map extends the crime scene to the area outside Ari's beachside bungalow, showing the road leading to his house, his fence, and the gate where the murderer entered the compound. The map connects private (home) and public (road) spaces, suggesting now that crime might also creep in from the outside spaces of the state to the inside spaces of the family.

In 1959, when Kangwan Wiranon, the kingdom's first 'godfather,' or *jao pho*, was put on trial for the murder of a Bangkok lawyer, the police put together this map:

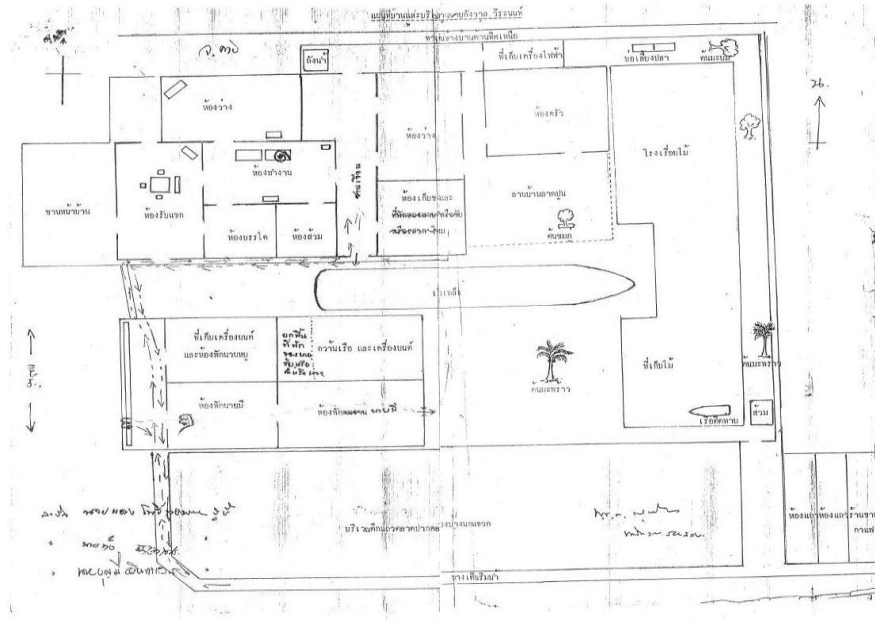


Figure 12 – Map of Bang Nok Khwaek. From court documents for the trial of Kangwon Wiranon, Thailand’s first ‘godfather.’

The map shows Kangwon’s house (top left corner of the drawing) as part of a larger setting of the town of Bang Nok Khwaek. It includes a local market, roads, shop houses, and other features typical of a small settlement outside Bangkok at the time. The space of crime here encompasses a wide swath of territory, in line with the extent of the godfather’s influence over the geography that he commanded.⁴⁵⁶

Today, when police statisticians think about the city of Bangkok, they produce maps like this:

⁴⁵⁶ In one news story, *Racha jon haeng lum nam meklong* (Bandit king of the Meklong basin), about Kangwon in the April 1954 edition of *Phim thai rai duan* (Phim thai monthly), the author notes comes up with the term ‘king of bandits’ (*racha jon* in the title of the article) to describe Kangwon, noting that he, unlike other bandits did not engage in the dirty work of robbing and killing himself. Rather, he had others do this for him. Because of his hands-off, behind the scenes approach would later be adopted by other new criminal bosses, he was known as the first godfather, or *jao pho*.

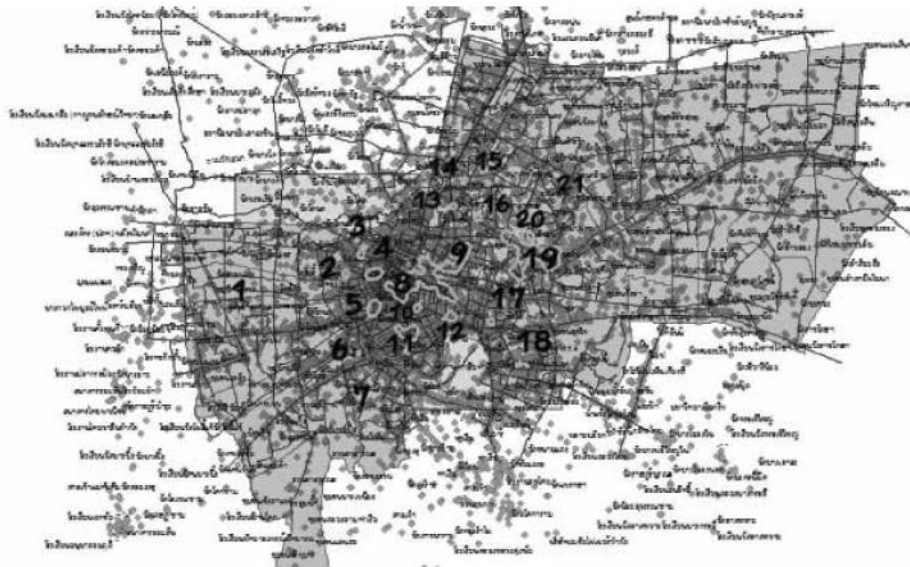


Figure 13 – Crime Map of Bangkok Metropolitan Area.

The map extends the crime scene to a much wider area, the entire Bangkok Metropolitan Area and shows how most crimes occur in the areas at the outskirts of the capital. Crime has become, in the satellite age, a phenomenon of vast geographical reach. The map, in other words, can take crime from the intimate settings of the bedroom to broader spaces of the town and the metropolis. When people make the oft repeated observation that crime and the city go hand-in-hand, they are really speaking about a phenomenon produced by the ‘culture of diagram’ more than any inherent connection between the two (city and crime).⁴⁵⁷

With respect to the changing information order of the early twentieth century, mapping may be thought of as a way of tapping the information that was out there in people

⁴⁵⁷ The phrase ‘culture of diagram’ comes from John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). It refers to the practice of people using abstract visual tools to operate on reality. On crime and the city, see Chapter 1, which shows that much of the crime in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth took place in rural areas. One anthropologist has suggested that many Thais feel that mystery or danger comes from the forest or the jungle, areas not yet urbanized. The city and crime link must therefore be rethought. See Phillip Stott, “Mu’ang and Pa,” in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, eds. Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 142-154. The non-connection between city and crime is echoed in a study by Arun Mukherjee about crime in Bengal in the late nineteenth century. His data shows that there was no increase in crime due to industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, he shows a long term decline in crime rates because industrialization and urbanization presented greater economic opportunities for people. He says that furthermore, a similar trend is noticeable for Victorian and Edwardian England. Arun Mukherjee, *Crime and Public Disorder in Colonial Bengal, 1861-1912* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1995), 205-7.

and in the environment in a systematic way with a coherent system of knowledge comprised of routine documentary practices that made sense to both police and judges. It may also be thought of as a way for government officials to materialize that which it could not access, to generate knowledge in tangible objects that they could control, mostly because the forms of the new objects and the rules for evaluating those forms were determined by the central government. The police, therefore, were becoming primary agents for detecting information (surveillance) and for producing it. In the process, they were coming up with a set of aesthetic rules and epistemological practices for their new artifacts of knowledge. In turn, these objects all had effects on the way the real world was conceived.

In each of the examples above, fictional and real, the spaces of crime represented by the maps are homogeneous and flat, an effect of perspective. They are treated as if they represent a real space in the world. But from the discussion above, when the police mark out a territory in the earth with their yellow tape, it is the preconceived notion of an idealized Cartesian space (one that is given dimensions through the investigation process) that is transferred to the real world, not the other way around. That is, the map that the police produce of a crime scene originates as a theoretical space, is transferred to the real world, and then recaptured and re-presented as a depiction of reality through the crime scene investigation. Spaces of violence therefore emerge today as the material objects, here a map, produced by the interaction between an epistemological practice (map making) and the real world (forests, homes, roads, offices, and so forth) in an effort to solve crime. The map becomes a working object, a tool that allows the police to operate on space the way an inversion or a clue allows a writer or police officer to operate on time.⁴⁵⁸ The problem

⁴⁵⁸ Frederik Stjernfelt provides an excellent treatment of the diagrammatic aspects of images (icons) in *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007). In the case of maps, people are able to determine distances, plot a route to a destination, and

remained, however, of apprehending the time that unfolded in the map's space. For this another device was needed.

The Enactment of Evidence

I now return to the re-enactment. The beginnings of the practice in Siam are not all together clear. The few sources that mention the topic indicate the procedure emerged in the late 1920s: "Crime re-enactment was first introduced in Thailand in 1929, based on the British system of criminal behavioral study and analysis. The Police Department at that time noted that criminals were basically cunning and would not confess unless there was solid evidence against them."⁴⁵⁹ The year 1929 is also given in a Thammasat University Master's of Law thesis from 2007 and is repeated in an interview of retired police officers conducted by a *Bangkok Post* reporter, in 2008.⁴⁶⁰ It is possible that a foreign police advisor or perhaps Siamese students studying criminology overseas during the late 1920s brought the technique to the kingdom. It was in that period that the practice was being promoted in England and the US and when the Thai prince Wongnirachon Thewakul completed his studies in criminal investigation in Paris under the direction of (in)famous British police officer Basil Thomson and Harry Soderman, the well-regarded Swedish criminologist. Wongnirachon returned to Siam in 1929 to head the new 'detective police' (*tamruat phuban*).⁴⁶¹

compare areas from lines on paper. The specific information generated through the use of the map is not foreseen in the production of the map itself.

⁴⁵⁹ From <http://chiangsan.chiangrai.police.go.th/detective%20lesson4.html>, accessed 19 Dec 2008.

⁴⁶⁰ Pattaravit Obsuwan, *Kan tham phaen prathutsakam prakop kham rap saraphap nai robop kotmai thai* [Crime science reconstruction by the accused to support confession of the accused in Thailand] (MA thesis, Thammasat University, 2007), 103. The *Bangkok Post* interview was conducted by Erika Fry, who generously provided me the text of the interview on 15 October 2008.

⁴⁶¹ Crime scene reconstructions, as a way of re-enacting the past to solve a crime but not as an enactment of a confession, were practiced in France, and likely other countries in western Europe, as early as the late nineteenth century. Douglass Starr refers to a couple that took place in the 1800s in his *The Killer of Little Shepards: A True Crime Story and the Birth of Forensic Science* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010).

The method itself was developed by Major General Sir Llewellyn W. Atcherley, an inspector with the Royal British Police in the first decades of the twentieth century. It was then refined by August Vollmer, Chief of Police of Berkeley, California, between 1909 and 1923. Vollmer wrote that no “orderly system of classifying the professional criminal’s methods of operation was used in any police department in this country or in England until the Modus Operandi System devised by Major L.W. Atcherley, N.V.O. West Riding of Yorkshire Constabulary, was adopted by some of the English police organizations.”⁴⁶² Vollmer would go on to become a key figure behind the push to professionalize the police in the US.⁴⁶³ Professionalization at that time meant organized training, a system of standard examinations, and routine investigative procedures based on scientific methods. Chief among these routines, Vollmer hoped, would be the Modus Operandi System. He justified the adoption of the practice by saying that “The large accumulations [of photos] almost destroyed the usefulness of photographic files, as it is a tiresome and often a confusing task for the victim of thieves to view all of the pictures [presented to them].”⁴⁶⁴ Some objected to the Modus Operandi procedure as being too “theoretical,” but others saw the system as “early evidence of Vollmer’s interest in the use of scientific techniques to solve crime problems.”⁴⁶⁵

What was ‘scientific’ about the system was the attempt to categorize criminal acts according to a standard set of variables such as location type, tools used, time of day, characteristics of victim, and so forth. It was a way of making a specific, historical event a general, repeatable type. Accordingly, Vollmer’s revised system consisted of the following

⁴⁶² August Vollmer, “Revision of the Atcherley Modus Operandi System,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 10.2 (August 1919): 229.

⁴⁶³ Gene E. Carte and Elaine H. Carte, *Police Reform in the United States: The Era of August Vollmer, 1905-1922* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 2.

⁴⁶⁴ August Vollmer, “The Bureau of Criminal Records,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 11.2 (August 1920): 171.

⁴⁶⁵ Carte and Carte, 1975, 23.

categories: A – Crime, B – Person or Property Attacked, C - How attacked, D – With What Attacked or Means of Attack, E – Time of Attack, F – Object of Attack, G – By Whom Attacked, H – Nationality of Attackers, I – Color and Number of Attackers, J – Individual Characteristics of Attack or Trademark. In the system, each category had subtypes which were numbered. Thus, a crime in Vollmer’s Modus Operandi System looked, literally, like this:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
3	152	10	9	49	4	61	60	15	5

This ‘formula,’ as Vollmer called it, translated to: “a robbery (A-3) was committed. The victim, a night watchman (B-152) was held up (C-10) at the point of a revolver (D-9) Saturday evening at 10:15 (E-49) and his watch (F-4) and money taken. The robber was dressed like a laborer (G-61) and had an Irish accent (H-60). He was alone (I-15) and was very deliberate and cool (J-5).”⁴⁶⁶ What Vollmer, and Atcherley before him, had in mind, then, was not visual representation of crime that the Thai police employ today, the one the press regularly splash on their front pages and that helped the provincial court in Samut Prakan link four men to the murder of Sherry Ann Duncan, leading to their conviction for intentional, premeditated murder. What they were created was a predicative classification system that could be used to help identify criminals through their crimes.

The notion that it would be possible to codify the vagaries of crime, of human action in all its myriad variation, might seem odd today (except maybe to sociologists and political scientists whose methodology includes the quantification of human action), but in the early twentieth century it made perfect sense, not only in Europe and the US, where scientific methods were taking policing by storm, but also in Thailand, which saw the adoption of methods deemed modern as a way to prove its status as a civilized, sovereign state and stave

⁴⁶⁶ Vollmer, 1919, 233.

off the colonial advances of England and France. In the ‘humane sciences,’ the urge to quantify information, to generalize through formalization, had been going on in Europe since at least the eighteenth century. Historian Carlo Ginzburg calls this focus on general types, as opposed to individual cases, “the Galileian paradigm” of knowledge production for its analysis of objects and categories rather than of humans and specific incidents.⁴⁶⁷ In the area of criminal investigation, the ‘Galileian paradigm’ began to exert an influence at the end of the nineteenth century when phrenology and anthropometry came to prominence. These methods, sometimes associated with the ‘Italian School’ of criminology and its controversial founder, Cesare Lombroso, were attempts to rethink crime and its investigation through the identification of broad, reoccurring phenomena. Thus, they sought to classify criminals into groups according to physical attributes such as head size and facial features. The movement to identify criminal types has been written about, and denounced, elsewhere. The point here is that the Modus Operandi System was part of a larger movement to classify the world into types. Moreover, the human body was not the only thing that people attempted to categorize. Human actions and historical events, particularly the ones that unfolded in the spaces of crime, were also targets for formalization.

The power of material evidence, in addition to its perceived inertness (and thus factness), resides in its function as a bridge to the absent (criminal) past from the present. This connecting function has been noted by several historians (and literary critics writing on the detective novel). Ginzburg writes that clues act as “traces” that lead to the comprehension of a “deeper, otherwise unattainable reality.”⁴⁶⁸ The practice of making

⁴⁶⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans., John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 106-8.

⁴⁶⁸ Ginzburg, 1986, 101.

inferences from these traces, or clues, turns them into evidence.⁴⁶⁹ Along similar lines, Robin Collingwood writes that “evidence is a medium – a window to reality (a past one).”⁴⁷⁰ Carl Becker, a Cornell professor of history at the time of Siam’s police reforms, stated in a presentation in 1931 that the present depends on knowledge of things “said and done in the past and distant places.”⁴⁷¹ This knowledge, in turn, is embodied in what he called “the artificial extension of memory.”⁴⁷² From the discussion above and that in Chapter 3 on modern facts about crime, it is possible to rephrase Becker by stating that knowledge of the past resides in the artifactual extension of memory; memory is stored in physical objects of evidence, each with its own aesthetic rules. The objects of evidence introduced to Siam at the turn of the nineteenth century and produced by the police today on a routine basis are what connect past crimes to the present and thus to their adjudication. The re-enactment, on the other hand, is not so much a connection between the absent past and the present, but a reality of its own; it connects a simulation of the past to itself. It is a sort of fiction that creates a referent into which history, or ‘the real,’ disappears.⁴⁷³ Or to use a line from novelist Henry James, “the echo had finally become more distinct than the initial sound.”⁴⁷⁴

Of course, rituals of people acting out their crimes, whether they really committed them or not, is far from what Atcherley and Vollmer had in mind when they created and refined the Modus Operandi System. How did a quantitative system for classification and

⁴⁶⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, “Representing the Enemy: Historical Evidence and its Ambiguities,” in *Evidence*, eds. Andrew Bell, John Swenson-Wright, Karin Tybjerg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29.

⁴⁷⁰ Cited in Carlo Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian,” in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, eds. James Chandler, Arnold Davidson, Harry Harootunian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 294.

⁴⁷¹ Cited in Robin W. Winks, “What is Evidence: The Relativist View,” in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 11-12.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ See Jean Baudrillard’s *The Perfect Crime*, in which he argues that reality has been murdered by mass media and the novel *The Simulacra* by Philip Dick in which the real world is a simulated one. Both explore the notion of media technologies on reshaping what reality is. Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1996) and Philip Dick, *The Simulacra* (New York: Vintage, 2002).

⁴⁷⁴ From Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 148.

prediction introduced before World War II become a method for historical representation only twenty-five or so years afterwards? In terms of legislation, there was no standard operating procedure with relation to the Modus Operandi System, or *phaen prathutsakam* in Thai, when it was introduced. The practice was not codified in the kingdom's laws, as no mention of it was made in the Criminal Procedure Code of 1935, which replaced parts of the kingdom's previous code of law, known now as the Law of the Three Seals (*kotmai tra sam duang*).

In fact, what is commonly called the *phaen prathutsakam* today by the police, the press, and the public is actually a separate procedure that developed over years of trial and error as a response by the police to the demands of the judicial system (and the mass media, as will be discussed later and in the next chapter). In 1938, a *san dika* (Supreme Court) decision (number 901/2482) referred to evidence provided by the police that they had taken a suspect to the scene of the crime to verify his confession. When and why the police started doing this is not known. The court, however, stated that a suspect's ability to point to a location of a crime alone did not constitute sufficient proof of guilt. This dilemma of proving a confession was solved a few years later when in 1948 the re-enactment of a suspect's testimony was officially made part of Thai police procedures, which stated that if a suspect confessed to a serious crime, police should take him to the crime scene and *demonstrate* (*sadaeng*) what transpired.⁴⁷⁵ Confessions by themselves were not adequate proof of wrongdoing because they may have been coerced or given falsely.

A new police procedure code (*nangsu rabiap kan tamruat kiao kae khadi lem 1*) was issued in 1954. Section 10, Item 261 of this new police rule book mentions the practice of taking a suspect to point out the location of a crime, stating: "if a suspect confessed

⁴⁷⁵ Pattaravit, 2007, 107-8. Emphasis added.

voluntarily then have the suspect tell the story of his crime (*lao rung kratham phit*) and listen to the details. Then write (*jot*) the statement of the suspect out in detail. The officer is to also record in brief the cause and effect of the crime. The practice is required because even if a suspect confesses, it is not enough as the suspect may refuse the confession during the trial stage of a case. Therefore, one must ask oneself regarding the suspect's confession whether there is any other evidence to corroborate it. If the case is a serious one (*khadi ukchakan*) or one that has a penalty of ten or more years imprisonment or is a case with weak evidence, then the officer in charge should have the suspect point out the crime scene and make a plan of the location (*tham phaenthi sangkhaep*) for the suspect to confirm. If a photo can be taken of the scene then this is even better."⁴⁷⁶

The 1954 regulations have since been superseded, but the practice remains in the books. Police regulations continue to instruct officers to take suspects out to a crime scene: "...when a suspect confesses let the officer in charge of the *sop suan* (investigation and questioning) process take suspect to point out the location of the crime and record the pointing out of the location of the crime with a map by the suspect for evidence. The suspect must sign off on the plan of the crime scene." Furthermore, the suspect may be asked to show the police how he committed his crime (*sadaeng tha thang nai kan kratham khwam phit tam chan ton tang-tang doi la-iat*). Police are to keep a record of the procedure in their case files (*samnuan sop suan*).

The imprecise origins of the re-enactment in Siam may be one factor contributing to the present day confusion as to what the practice does and how it is supposed to be used. This uncertainty, in turn, stems from the overlap between and subsequent merge of what really are two separate procedures. This is clear from the number of different, but similar,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 107.

names used to refer the Modus Operandi and the pointing out of a crime scene in support of a confession including ‘demonstration of criminal acts in support of a confession’ (*kan tham phaen prathutsakam prakop kham rap saraphap*), ‘pointing out the location of an event in support of a confession’ (*kan nam chi thi koet het prakop kham rap saraphap*), and Modus Operandi (*phaen prathutsakam*). The Modus Operandi originally referred to the recreation or reconstruction of a criminal act to determine how a crime was committed and thus alert investigators to potential patterns. The practice is theoretically used for crime suppression and prevention but not evidence in trials *per se*. It is conducted when a crime is committed but the identity of a criminal not known. It is a practice that has been used in Europe since at least the 1890s and still used in some instances today in countries around the globe. The data produced by this demonstration is kept in the police’s Criminal Records Office (*kong thabian prawat atchayakam samnakngan tamruat haeng chat*). It is this practice that adheres most closely to Atcherley and Vollmer’s Modus Operandi scheme and with police practices worldwide. With the court decisions and subsequent revisions to the police rules, the Modus Operandi became intermixed with the practice of pointing out the location of a crime after a confession. As discussed, neither is clearly defined in the law or in police procedures. This later practice, of demonstrating a confession, while technically separate from the Modus Operandi, has thus come to be confused with it. Even the police get the two practices, the Modus Operandi and the re-enactment of a confession, mixed-up and use the different terms more or less interchangeably.⁴⁷⁷ For all intents and purposes, then, the two practices have come to be one in the public imagination.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with former head of the Central Investigation Division (*kong sop suan klang*) on 14 March 2011. He noted with some consternation that the two were indeed different procedures, but that mostly people simply called the re-enactment of a confession the Modus Operandi (*phaen prathutsakam*).

⁴⁷⁸ Pattaravit, 2007, 102-6.

For the present argument, once the police had come up with a way to bring a criminal act to life again, the next step was to capture it and re-present it to the court. Here I cite Ginzburg again, who notes that the term evidence is from *evidentia*, which means “the ability to make a topic evident, palpable, or vivid. It is the translation of the Greek word *enargeia*, a word used to praise historians, poets and painters for their ability to conjure absent realities belonging either to the past or to fiction.”⁴⁷⁹ Clearly, Atcherley and Vollmer’s Modus Operandi formula did not make the crime it described ‘palpable.’ And while the demonstration of a confession may have been quite vivid for the police and any onlookers at the performance, judges could not see it first hand, just as they could not see a fingerprint or a dead body at a crime scene. Just as those facts had to be captured, transported, and presented, so too did the demonstration of a criminal’s method. As the map defined and recorded the scene of a crime, the documentation of a re-enactment captured the ‘time’ or ‘history’ component of that space.

Origins of an Idiom: Role of the Media

The Thai police, with help from the press and the private sector, solved the problem of representing time (or the past) through the technology of the photograph (and now the video recorder). Aside from putting faces to names with fingerprints and photos, the Siamese police were beginning to employ photos to create what might be called ‘pictorial narratives’ of crime as early as the late 1910s. Take the case of Iron Trunk Bunpheng, described in Chapter 2. The story proved such a sensation that picture cards showing various aspects of the crime were produced for sale. One photography shop called Chailak made photos of Bunpheng and sold them as a sort of memento of the case. The photo card had

⁴⁷⁹ Ginzburg, 2008, 29.

the title “The secret in the floating iron trunk” (*Khvam lap nai hip lek loi nam*). Another photo-card shows two pictures on same cardboard stock with the title “Office of Pheng, Phan, Charat, Charoen. The mystery in the case of the important iron trunk, the story of Miss Prik [Bunpheng’s victim].” One of the photos showed a picture of Bunpheng. The other showed the trunk in which he put Miss Prik’s body (Figure 14). At the bottom of the picture was the caption: “King’s evidence includes this iron trunk that was used to hold the body of Miss Prik.”⁴⁸⁰ Yet another photo card showed a portrait of Miss Prik.⁴⁸¹ Though not exactly a re-enactment, these pictures show the chest Bunpheng used to store his victim’s dismembered bodies placed on the trishaw he used to transport them to the river for disposal. It is unclear whether the police or the photographer had the trunk placed in the trishaw for effect or whether it was simply chance.



Figure 14 – ‘Iron Trunk’ Bunpheng Photo Card.
Picture shows the rickshaw and chest Bunpheng used to carry his victim. From Anek Nawigamune, 1995.

⁴⁸⁰ Anek Nawigamune, *Dao rai nai adit* [Criminals in the Past] (Bangkok: Saeng Daet, 1995), 103.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 103. The photo had this caption: “Miss Prik, the deceased in the case of the floating iron chest.”

In another example, police documents for a murder investigation of a man named Puan in 1929 include eight photos of various locations, numbered sequentially, with symbols and short captions describing from beginning to end how the suspect began his crime at a nearby market, made his way to the house of the victim, and then attempted to escape (Figure 15, see also Chapter 3).⁴⁸² This type of pictorial narrative developed to help judges in criminal cases visualize a crime and facilitate conviction, for like maps and diagrams, photographic evidence was seen as something that added “weight” (*namnak*) to witness testimony as they helped “judges can see what was real just as you [the investigator] have seen them.”⁴⁸³ When the order to demonstrate a confession met with the scientific techniques of capturing and recording facts about the past, a new artifact of evidence emerged that, unlike Atcherley’s numerical system, could represent and prove a historical event visually. It did not generalize or put specific crimes into categories nor did it make the specific universal. Instead, it maintained history’s specificity by recreating it, albeit under controlled conditions.

The interactive process in which the police, reporters, and photographers engage to produce ‘media’ comes through other examples as well. Thawon Suwan, a crime reporter with the *Daily Mail* in the 1950s, noted that getting stories meant establishing a close relationship with the police.⁴⁸⁴ A *Far Eastern Economic Review* article from 1998 described a drug bust in Suphanburi province intentionally conducted under “the gaze of scores of reporters and cameramen” to promote the government’s war on drugs.⁴⁸⁵ If this

⁴⁸² Phraya Manwaratchasewi, *Kan tai suan lae phitjarana khadi khabhakam Nai Puan Aekharaphanit thi jangwat janthaburi* [The investigation and deliberation of the murder of Nai Puan Aekharaphanit in Janthaburi Province, 1929] (Bangkok: N.p., 1930). Photo pages not numbered.

⁴⁸³ Phraya Sisena, 1917, 42.

⁴⁸⁴ Thawon Suwan, *Fa thalai nam muk* [Navigating a sea of ink] (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2007), 169. The relationship between the reporters and the police will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁴⁸⁵ Rodney Tasker, “Questions of Justice,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (27 August 1998), 28. Despite the “glare of media publicity,” the police felt no qualms about shooting (off-camera but within earshot) six suspects dead,



Figure 15 – Pictorial reconstruction of crime scene. From 1929.

orchestration of police work for the media does not bring home the point that the form and the content of evidence and mass media are ‘interdisciplinary’ projects, the case of Siripong Kanchananiwit, a 40-year-old taxi driver, should. In 2009, Siripong turned himself in at a local television station, rather than the at a police station, to confess that he had shot and killed a Thai woman and her half-Japanese son in the back of his taxicab. Saying that he had murdered his two passengers after a heated argument, Siripong refused to talk to the police without the presence of the media, cameras running. Images, both still photographs and video footage, of Siripong’s re-enactment show the police directing the scene, pointing suggestively for the suspect to look into the camera (Figure 16).

all of whom were handcuffed. Sanoh Thienthong, then Minister of Interior, said afterwards that the suspects deserved to die.



Figure 16 – Re-enactment of a Confession. Note the police officer giving directions.

The market for crime stories established by the early press through newspapers, *lamtat*, and crime fiction therefore helped determine the form of both police evidence and what is now mass media. So even if it remains unclear as to why Siripong chose a television station as the site of his last stand, what is relevant is that the artifacts of the law and the media are jointly created by agents across professional boundaries. This statement is not meant solely as rhetorical flourish. In an interview conducted with a former head of the Central Investigation Department (*kong sop suan klang*) on 14 March 2011, it was stated that the police sometimes try to make the suspect smile into the camera to indicate that that he or she has voluntarily agreed to participate in the re-enactment.⁴⁸⁶ It has been suggested also that some photographers will occasionally spice up a crime scene, say by hiking up the skirt on a female murder victim, before taking its picture.

All this might not be a problem if the re-enactment operated like the fingerprint or photographs of dead bodies or preserved objects at crime scenes. The status of re-

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with former head of Central Investigation Department, 14 March 2011.

enactments as reproductions of facts is not so clear cut, even if they might be treated the same, epistemologically speaking, as other types of evidence. For instance, I earlier compared the re-enactment to real crime television shows and crime dramas. Real crime shows like America's *Cops* may be considered 'documentary' in that they are journalistic recordings of crime and criminals captured by camera as they happen. They are 'true' or 'unmediated' representations of actual events, 'first level' evidence. Crime dramas, however realistic, employ actors to play fictional characters acting out imagined crimes. In some instances, they employ actors to play out real crimes, those that actually happened, as in dramatic adaptations of historical events. In either case, they are generally considered fictional, either completely imagined or a not-quite-true account of an event from the real world. In re-enactments, however, suspects play themselves after having confessed, at least theoretically, to a crime.⁴⁸⁷ They act out their own pasts for the benefit of the police and the press. They (or rather photos of them) also become evidence for use in criminal trials. And despite the fact that they often take place in their actual locations with as many elements of the original occurrence replicated as necessary, re-enactments occupy an epistemological space that is neither clearly documentary as in real crime television nor completely imaginary as in television dramas.

The difference between a photo of a crime scene and one of a re-enactment is that the photo is a reproduction of a real object 'out there' whereas a re-enactment is a recording of a simulation. Thus, the application of formal rules to 'fix' the factness of a re-enactment does little to ensure its fidelity to any external reality, the way the rules for fingerprints, photos, and maps might. In a way, then, re-enactments may be likened to the solutions of

⁴⁸⁷ Victims are played by either officers or civilian volunteers. There is even a Thai film, *The Victim* (2006), about an aspiring actress hired by police to play victims in re-enactments. In the film, the actress is possessed by the ghost of one of the victims she portrays. The ghost helps the police solve the crime.

literary crimes found in detective fiction in that they are revelations “not exposed to tests against an outside reality.”⁴⁸⁸ Their ‘truth’ is internal to the detective narrative’s form. In this way they cannot be proved false except, as in the case of Sherry Ann Duncan, through their replacement by another simulation.

The Functions of Simulation

That evidence and entertainment, as in *fait divers*, are overlapping projects is now clear.⁴⁸⁹ The question remains, however, what exactly does a re-enactment do for the criminal justice process and for society more broadly. Why is it useful, accepted as proof of a voluntary confession and as a way of solving crime? In a recent study on incidents of lynching, mob violence, and other forms of extra-legal social retribution that sometimes occur during a public re-enactment, the authors state that the practice of demonstrating a crime at its location after a confession is held to be a basic procedure of the investigative police believed by many to be a vital aid in the search for facts in the *sop suan* (post-crime questioning and investigation) process.⁴⁹⁰ Moreover, there is a general consensus that the practice provides a public benefit (*prayot satharana*).⁴⁹¹ So where does its usefulness lie? Does it merely confirm existing knowledge as the police and many lay people seem to think and as part of its name

⁴⁸⁸ Franco Moretti, “Clues,” in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, David Miller (London: Verso, 1983), 149.

⁴⁸⁹ The recent trouble in Britain with Rupert Murdoch’s *News of the World*, in which it is alleged that agents of the paper paid bribes to the police for information, is another example of the close relations between the press and the police.

⁴⁹⁰ Aphisak Thongnaphakhun and Jutharat Ua-amnoey, *Kan prachathban kap kan khum khong sithi khong phu tong ha nai kan nam chi thi kert het prakorp kham rap saraphap* [Vigilantism and the protection of the rights of suspects in the practice of pointing out a location of a crime to support a confession]. Draft paper provided by authors, 2010, 7. The phrase they use is *thu pen lak batibat khong phanakngan kan sop suan thi chua wa mi khwam samkhan lae mi suan chuai nai kan khon ha khwam jing nai kham ton kan sop suan* [...it (the re-enactment) is a basic practice of the investigative police that is held to be important and aids in the search for truth in crime investigations].

⁴⁹¹ Aphisak, 2010, 8.

in Thai, to ‘assemble’ or ‘gather’ (*prakop’ kham rap saraphap*), suggests or does it create a new truth about the past that does not exist independent of or prior to the re-enactment?

A ‘true’ modus operandi re-enactment, as opposed to the one made of a confession, helps the police determine the identity of a criminal by showing patterns between separate but similar crimes, as Atcherley and Vollmer intended. In the famous case of Si Ui, a serial child murderer from the late 1950s in central Thailand, this purpose is stated directly by the head of the modus operandi section (*phanaek phaen prathutsakam*) of the police’s science section (*kong withayakan*). In 1958, a Chinese man named Si Ui was arrested for the murder of a child in Rayong province. The murder became a big news item because of the sensational way in which the killings were committed. Si Ui cut open the chest of his victims to remove and eat their hearts and livers. Si Ui confessed to the crime in Rayong and to two similar murders from previous years, one in Bangkok and one in Nakhon Phathom province. In an interview with a reporter from *Phim thai* daily, the head of the police’s modus operandi section expressed his confusion as to why he had not yet received orders to conduct a re-enactment for the murder in Rayong. He said that in an important case like this one, his officers should be sent to the scene of the crime to collect evidence and conduct a modus operandi re-enactment (*tham phaen prathutsakam*). Since the police had already performed and recorded modus operandi re-enactments for the other two murders (the one in Bangkok and the other in Nakhon Phathom), the data could be tested (*thot sop*) against each other to determine whether or not the killers in each case were the same person. Conducting a modus operandi test was especially important, he said, since the police had no fingerprints from the earlier cases to identify a culprit. A modus operandi test would show details like whether the children’s chests were “cut from bottom up or top down,” noted the modus operandi section head. In the first case, he added, the victim’s genitals were cut off but in the second

case, the girl's genitals were only cut with a knife. By comparing details like these, the police would know "instantly" (*thanthi*) if the killer in each of the cases was the same person.⁴⁹²

By contrast, the function of the demonstration of a crime in support of confession (including a simple pointing out of a crime scene without a full re-enactment), as opposed to the *modus operandi* practice in its 'pure' form, is to confirm that a confession has been obtained voluntarily.⁴⁹³ In Pattaravit's account, a suspect's voluntary confession that aids the police in the solving of a case (*prayot to rup khadi*) is the most important form of evidence (*kham saraphap pen phayan lakthan thi samkhan thisut*) in the trial process.⁴⁹⁴ However, the testimony of a suspect obtained during a police investigation is acceptable in court only for comparison with testimony given during the trial stage of a case according to Criminal Procedure Code section 134. Testimony obtained during a police investigation by itself is not enough to gain the conviction (*long thot*) of a suspect (see Criminal Procedure Code Section 232 and Supreme Court Decision *khamphiphaksa dika* 35/2532). A confession made to the police is treated as hearsay evidence (*kham thoi kham bok lao*) while a confession made directly by a defendant during trial counts as direct evidence. This is due to the court's concern about the use of force by the police to obtain a confession. The police also worry that a suspect may retract his confession, even if voluntary, during the trial stage by saying that he was coerced or forced (*thuk bangkhap*).⁴⁹⁵ It was therefore necessary to find a standard way (*matrakam*) to prove the voluntarily nature of a suspect's confession, which like other forms of police evidence need to be formalized through rules to become fact. The taking of a

⁴⁹² No author, "Phaen prathutsakam ngong khao kbatakon pha ok dek" [Criminal methods section confused in case of child murderer], *Phim thai*, 1 Feb 1958, front page.

⁴⁹³ How this is so remains a mystery to this author, but the police and courts see the re-enactment as indicating a confession was obtained without the use of physical coercion.

⁴⁹⁴ Pattaravit, 2007, 85. He cites Wong Wiraphong, *Kan ruapruam lae kan nam sup phayan lakthan nai khadi ukchakan* [Compiling and investigating evidence in serious cases] (Bangkok: Dusit Samphan, 1963), 172.

⁴⁹⁵ Pattaravit, 2007, 85, 110. He cites Supreme Court Decision 1346/2530, 890.

suspect to a crime scene to demonstrate his crime developed a solution since the police believed that if a suspect was willing to act out his testimony and have that demonstration recorded and signed-off that this would prove to courts that no coercion was involved.

For the suspect, the re-enactment is important as it can help him obtain a reduced sentence for his cooperation. The concept of confession as a sort of penance may be related to the notion that ‘negative karma’ (*baṇ*) built up from bad deeds “can be cancelled if the wronged party grants forgiveness.”⁴⁹⁶ In the well-known folktale *Khun chang khun phaen*, this is exactly what happens in a scene immediately preceding the execution of Wanthong, a woman that both protagonist Khun Chang and antagonist Khun Phaen desire for their own. The idea of a confession and subsequent forgiveness might also be related to the need to maintain harmony at the local level, especially in the past, when conflicts could be potentially quite destabilizing to village life.⁴⁹⁷ In this sense, re-enactments also do work for society, as opposed to just the police and the media. In an interview, a retired criminal court judge who presided in the trial of the Kangwon Wiranon, the kingdom’s first godfather, notes that in addition to proving that a confession obtained by the police is voluntary, the re-enactment allows the public an opportunity to enter the criminal justice process.⁴⁹⁸ The presence of the public at re-enactments aid the suspect, he notes, because having a group of eyewitnesses protects against the suspect being manipulated by the police during the process.⁴⁹⁹ He goes on to state that re-enactments are usually performed in the daytime, unless the timing of an event is crucial to the confession, just so that the public can be present. Another reason the public must be present at these events is so that they can have the opportunity to indicate

⁴⁹⁶ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *The Tale of Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010), 939.

⁴⁹⁷ For more on this, see David Engel, “Landscapes of the Law: Injury, Remedy, and Social Change in Thailand,” *Law and Society Review* 43.1 (2009): 61-94.

⁴⁹⁸ There are no juries in criminal trials in Thailand.

⁴⁹⁹ Translated text from interview with retired criminal court judge conducted on 25 November 2010. Text provided by Viengrat Nethipho via email on 29 November 2010.

whether the demonstration of the confession is accurate or not.⁵⁰⁰ The truth of a re-enactment is thus seen by the police and judges as guaranteed by the presence of an audience.⁵⁰¹ I suggested in Chapter 2 that the activity of criminal detection, as it plays out in the mass media, is a social activity. Nowhere is this more clear than with the re-enactment, which serves as the revelatory ending of a social murder mystery as well as ritual that mediates relationships between individuals (as suspects), the police, the press, and society.

In each of these instances, the function of a re-enactment, whether a modus operandi or demonstration of a confession, is to bring together or compile evidence (*ruap ruam phayan lakthan*) for consideration by the state's prosecutors and in courts.⁵⁰² At a basic level, then, the re-enactment performs a unifying function, helping make sense of the material objects the police have been taught to gather as evidence. It stitches together facts that *already* exist. The authors of the aforementioned study on lynching during re-enactments note that the police they spoke to generally agree with this. Similarly, the retired officers interviewed for the *Bangkok Post* article cited earlier state that a re-enactment is useful since it enables investigators to retrace the steps they took to solve a case and help determine whether the information they have collected is enough to prove the guilt or innocence of the suspect.⁵⁰³ Again, the notion is that facts already exist and the re-enactment is a practice that helps organize those facts, makes them comprehensible.

The definitional lack of clarity, the lack of a standard set of rules, and the police's own confusion about what the practice is and how it is supposed to work, however, points to something more than a simple compiling purpose. Instead, a record of a suspect pointing to crime scene or a full re-enactment creates *new knowledge* because it allows circumstantial

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with retired criminal court judge, 25 November 2010.

⁵⁰¹ Interview with retired criminal court judge, 25 November 2010.

⁵⁰² Aphisak and Ua-amnoey, 2010, 8.

⁵⁰³ Text of interview provided by Erika Fry. Personal correspondence.

evidence to be accepted in court even if a defendant refuses charges against him: The re-enactment in this case “can help in the discovery of clues or make sense of existing material evidence (*phayan waet lom*) related to the case.”⁵⁰⁴ That is, the re-enactment allows for previously excluded objects to become part of a broader narrative about a specific case, one that would not be possible without going through the process itself. The point about circumstantial evidence being allowed into a trial through the re-enactment process was repeated by the retired judge in the Kangwon case.⁵⁰⁵

In the case from 1957 where three men were arrested on suspicion of derailing a train, for example, the police took the three suspects to conduct a re-enactment after their confessions. This allowed the officer in charge to test a hypothesis that tools specific for laying train tracks had to have been stolen from a rail yard and taken to the scene of the crime for use. The officer guessed this because tools used to lay train tracks (or remove them) are not typically found in local markets. The three men, Mr. Noi Ketkaew, Mr. Foe Somsuk, and Mr. Sen Khanthong, began their re-enactment by showing the police the location near a bridge crossing the Nan river where the three men sat together to plan out their heist, how they removed the bolts and screws of the train tracks using a *chalaeng* and a *kunjae pak tai* (both are essentially heavy duty wrenches for laying train tracks). Afterwards, the three suspects took the officers to the place where they hid themselves to wait for a train to pass and showed them the path they used to escape into the forest. Throughout the process, the police took photos of the crime scene (*banthuk phap sathan thi koet bet*). They also made a map, which was included in the news story. During the re-enactment, the police were able to locate the *chalaeng* and the *kunjae pak tai* used in the heist. It turned out that the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 111.

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with retired criminal court judge, 25 November 2010.

officer's assumption that the three accomplices took the tools to the site without the knowledge of the railway foreman was correct.⁵⁰⁶ The re-enactment turned a hunch into fact.

The re-enactment thus confirms existing truths (here a voluntary confession) even as it helps to construct new ones. It is a tool as much as a representational procedure, one shared by the state and society, performing multiple functions for the police, judges, suspects, and communities affected by violence. Franco Moretti writes that “The *fibula* [story] narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration.”⁵⁰⁷ In Thailand, the spectacle (e.g. the re-enactment) is what the police employ to complete their detective narrative. Moretti has also suggested that the solving of a crime, here embodied in the re-enactment that ends the narrative process, preserves the innocence of society by fingering a specific individual criminal.⁵⁰⁸ Perhaps this is what is happening when, in the news, individuals point to criminals and criminals to themselves. The integrity of Thai society is being saved by the sacrifice of those making confessions. Of this, I have no ‘proof,’ only the observations of one literary critic on a genre of fiction associated most closely with England. What I do have is what appears every day in the print media and now on broadcast news programs. And in the face of the overwhelming presence of these images and the narrative mysteries they solve, it seems that what they do is really not that mysterious at all. They make power, as an aesthetic logic, visible.

⁵⁰⁶ Chalothon (pseudo.), “Plon 617” [Plundering 617], *Phim thai rai pak*, 2nd half April 1957, 20-22, 44-46.

⁵⁰⁷ Moretti, 1983, 148.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, 145.

Summary

The last two chapters have shown that the factuality of material objects related to the investigation of crime conform to aesthetic rules and that some of these objects or facts function like devices that operate on perceptions of reality as much as they represent it. Thus, the re-enactment, like other forms of visual evidence – photos, maps, charts – used in trials, may be thought of as a sort of diagram, a visual portrayal of real world phenomenon, but not necessarily a representation of something real. The example from the Sherry Ann Duncan case illustrates this. The police, needing to close the case manipulated a knowledge practice and created an image of something that would explain visually how a criminal act was committed. Diagrams, graphs, and maps, Moretti writes, don't just provide explanations, however. They are things that need to be explained.⁵⁰⁹ This is exactly the point – the various representations of violent crime used commonly today require exploration because they have effects; power exists in their forms and these forms are in some ways open rather than hidden from view. For a historian, to understand that power exists in the documents he uses to produce narratives about the past forces a reconsideration of historicity, of the categories of traditional and modern.

⁵⁰⁹ Moretti, 2007, 39.

CHAPTER 5

POLICING THE PRESS

“A ‘crime wave’ is generally the creation of the newspapers. It is enough for three or four murders to be reported in rapid succession for the press and the public quite reasonably to assume that there is a great rise in serious crime.”⁵¹⁰

A Joint Project

The previous two chapters argued that to police is to document, that the status of a document as fact resides in the adherence of its content to a set of formal rules, and that these rules are the result of a joint project between the law and the media. That is, policing is not the exclusive domain of the police. In what is considered the modern era, policing is carried out by the police *and* the press. This ‘interdisciplinarity’ means that violent crime, as a material object of knowledge, takes the form of both fact (e.g. news and evidence) and fiction (detective novels and movies). The police and the press (and now television and the internet) developed in tandem, though not always in harmony, to produce what ‘media’ is, both form *and* content. Police, reporters, photographers, and attorneys are all media men, bound by a shared set of knowledge practices and artifacts they create together. Objects like the ones introduced in the previous two chapters including crime scene photos, mug shots, fingerprints, autopsy reports, and especially recordings of crime scene reenactments are objects of knowledge mutually generated and used by the police as evidence and the media as entertainment. This chapter describes the relationship between the two institutions and argues that the divide between the epistemological categories of fact and fiction are determined through a struggle over form.

⁵¹⁰ Basil Thomson, *The Criminal* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 204. Thomson was not only a well-known officer in the British Police, but an advisor to the Siamese government under King Vajiravudh on setting up a secret police. See Chapter 2.

The Honeymoon is Over

At just after nine in the morning on 9 March 1953, Ari Liwira, the publisher of Thailand's top daily newspapers *Phim thai* and *Sayam nikon*, made his way back to the beachside retreat where he was staying in Hua Hin, a quiet coastal town about three hour's drive south of Bangkok. He had just finished taking a walk along the shore and his new wife, Kanda Liwira, was waiting for him at home. The two had been married only two weeks before and this was their honeymoon, a welcome respite for Ari. He had been arrested on charges of taking part in a Communist conspiracy in November of the previous year and held without trial for sixty-seven days before being released. When Ari reached his bungalow he saw his maid, Chanthana Yimcharoen, in the yard washing clothes and talking to a man he did not know. As Ari approached, the man turned to him and said that 'Rong Matri' (Police Lieutenant Colonel Maitri Banyen), a police officer and a friend, was coming to town and would like his help in finding him a place to stay. The two men then walked out of the yard through a gate in the compound's fence, where a second stranger stood waiting. This man drew a pistol and with great calm shot Ari three times. Both strangers then got into a jeep that had been waiting for them nearby and left the scene. Ari died ten minutes later, with his wife at his side.⁵¹¹

⁵¹¹ This version of events is adapted from accounts in several sources that differ, sometimes significantly, in their details. In some accounts there is only one gunman. In others, Ari was upstairs sleeping in his bedroom when the gunman (gunmen) arrived at his bungalow. One account says he was held without trial for eighty-six days. In cases of discrepancy, I have followed the narrative presented in Thawon Suwan, *Fa thalai nam muk* [Navigating a sea of ink] (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2007), 199-224, which claims to be based on police interviews of witnesses. Other sources include articles from the *Bangkok Post* including "Publisher, Plot Suspect Shot Dead" (9 March 1953), "Police Held in Publisher's Slaying" (10 March 1953), "Kanchanaburi Police Say their Trip Official" (13 March 1953), "Police Take no Part in Aree Investigation" (13 March 1953), "Sixth Man Sought in Aree Murder" (18 March 1953), and "Hired Killer in Aree Case, Phinit Says" (23 March 1953); from *Phim thai lang khao sapada*, "Khadi sanghan ari su san [Ari's assassination case goes to court] (23 March 1953); no author, *Chivit lae ngan khong Ari Liwira* [The life and work of Ari Liwira] (Bangkok: Siam Phanithayakan, 1963), no page numbers listed; *Sayam phimpakan* [Publishing in Siam] (Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2006); P. Watcharaphon's *Khon nang su phim* [Newspaper people] (Bangkok: Odeon Store, 1963); and Khatha dam (pseudo.), *Kha nak nangsu phim* [The murder of a newspaperman] (Thonburi, Thailand: Thanakanphim, 1971).

The news of the assassination spread quickly through the press. The story appeared on the front pages Ari's company's flagship dailies, *Phim thai* and *Sayam nikon*, those of his competitors like the *Daily Mail* (no relation to the *Daily Mail* of the 1920s and 1930s), and also that of the English language *Bangkok Post*. It remained there for several days as officials conducted their investigation. The case was, after all, one that hit close to home for many journalists. One reporter for the *Daily Mail* described the murder of Ari as “news that shook the soul of the publishing world.”⁵¹² The staff at another popular paper from the period, Kamphon Wacharaphon's *Khao phap rai wan*, echoed the sentiment, saying the murder left them ‘shaken.’⁵¹³ The day after the murder, Director-General of Police, Phao Sriyanond, announced to reporters that five policemen from the province of Kanchanaburi had been detained on suspicion of being involved in the assassination and reassured everyone that the police would get to the bottom of things. A few days later, Sirichai Krachangwong, Police Superintendent of Kanchanaburi, defended his men, saying all five had exhibited “one-hundred percent good conduct” over the years; they did not drink liquor and were “afraid of ghosts.” Phao then put Deputy Police Chief Phra Phinit Chonkhadi, a man accustomed to dealing with high-profile cases, in charge of the investigation.⁵¹⁴ By month's end, Phinit announced the police's inquiry indicated a mysterious “sixth man” had hired a gunman to assassinate Ari and that the police were now looking for this person. He added that the

⁵¹² Suwan, 2007, 220.

⁵¹³ Narong Phoemphun, *Poet pum chivit kamphon wacharaphon lao pho thai rat* [In praise of the life of Kamphon Wacharaphon: Godfather of *Thai rat*] (Bangkok: Black and Grey, 1989), 87. The term ‘soul shaking’ (*khayon khwan*) was a standard expression used in the press when writing about violence at between the 1950s and 1970s.

⁵¹⁴ Phra Phinit Chonkhadi was recalled to the police after retiring to handle the investigation of the death of King Ananda in 1949.

motive in the murder was not political, but was related to Ari's "personal business" involving women.⁵¹⁵

Murder itself was not new to the news. Newspapers had for years carried stories about crime, including violent ones, albeit in varying amounts and degree of detail. Crime stories did not, however, always play as dominant a role in the substance or appearance of a newspaper as they did in between the late 1940s and the 1970s. In this respect, Ari's afternoon paper, *Phim thai* daily, and his other periodicals including *Phim thai lang kbao sapada*, which were famous for their crime reports and photos, were at the forefront of the post-World War II newspaper world. The former put crime prominently on its front pages. The latter elaborated on cases that appeared as shorter news reports in Ari's daily papers with in extended, in-depth treatments of particularly heinous crimes, well-known criminals, and note-worthy police investigations. It is ironic then, that Ari's death fit so seamlessly into the form he helped pioneer even as it effectively cemented the sensational crime story as a mainstay of the popular press in the post-World War II period. The 'real news,' therefore, was not just Ari's murder or even its cover-up, for both (government indiscretion and denial) had been a staple of Thai life since before the World War II. Instead, it was that the government, in addition to a range of other weapons, was now employing murder and the police as a method of censoring an unruly, stubborn, and highly competitive press. In the process, crime news and crime detection were drawn together. In addition to investigating crime, the state's new detectives were gradually set on the case of policing information in the press.

⁵¹⁵ Phao Sriyanond quote from "Police Held in Publisher's Slaying," *Bangkok Post* (10 March 1953). Sirichai Krachangwong quote from "Kanchanaburi Police Say their Trip Official," *Bangkok Post* (13 March 1953). Phra Phinitchonkhadi quote from "Hired Killer in Aree Case, Phinit Says," *Bangkok Post* (23 March 1953).

Crime News after World War II

When Ari was shot dead in 1953, Thailand had just come through a period of turmoil following the Japanese occupation and World War II. Shortages in most categories of basic goods including cloth, oil, gasoline, sugar, and salt were widespread. For example, the Minister of Parliament from Saraburi Province wrote that the oxen population there had suffered a critical decline, recovery from which would require no less than seven years. This decline was caused by the wartime food shortage that led people to kill draught animals for meat.⁵¹⁶ These shortages caused prices for consumer goods to rise precipitously. A study by the Committee to Consider the Economic Situation after the War puts inflation at anywhere between 436 and 1,446 percent.⁵¹⁷ Alleged price gauging by Chinese merchants, especially in commodities like gold, did not help the situation.⁵¹⁸ Rampant corruption and inefficiency in state-owned enterprises and the civil service only made matters worse. “Irregularities” in rice exports, for example, were common with shipments sent to the British via Malaya in exchange for cloth and cooking oil.⁵¹⁹ From these conditions of economic crisis and corruption came a rise in radical labor unionism, which led to “a wave of strikes among the

⁵¹⁶ NA [2] SR 0201.22.4/2, folder 1, *Ekasan sammaknayok ratchamontri, kammathikan phijarana panha sethakit lang songkram, ruang kbo kraboe* [Documents from the Office of the Prime Minister, committee to consider the economic situation after the war, on the issue of buffalo], 1945. On shortages of other goods see NA [2] SR 0201.22.4, boxes 1 and 2.

⁵¹⁷ NA [2] SR 0201.22.4/14 *Ekasan sammaknayok ratchamontri, kammathikan phijarana panha sethakit lang songkram, kham chi jaeng kan kham nuan sathiti* [Documents from the Office of the Prime Minister, committee to consider the economic situation after the war, statistics], 1945.

⁵¹⁸ The Committee called a meeting with Bangkok’s three leading Chinese gold merchants to discuss rising gold prices and to control speculation, NA [2] SR 0201.22.4/2, folder 2 *Ekasan sammaknayok ratchamontri, kammathikan phijarana panha sethakit lang songkram* [Documents from the Office of the Prime Minister, committee to consider the economic situation after the war], 1945.

⁵¹⁹ NA [2] SR 0201.22.4/2, folder 1, *Ekasan sammaknayok ratchamontri, kammathikan phijarana panha sethakit lang songkram, kbo kraboe* [Documents from the Office of the Prime Minister, committee to consider the economic situation after the war, on the issue of buffalo], 1945. On corruption in rice exports, see Thak Chaloeontiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University 2007), 21.

big work-forces in the railways, port, rice mills, cement company, soap factories, and tobacco factory.”⁵²⁰

Not surprisingly, Thailand saw an increase in petty and violent crimes in the years after World War II. Historian Chalong Soontravanich writes, “Crime and violence spread throughout the country, becoming a national crisis and the subject of frequent parliamentary debates during the 1940s and 1950s.”⁵²¹ Preeminent Thai studies scholars Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker call the period between 1944 and 1951 “one of the most violent and critical in modern Thai history.”⁵²² This rise in crime was attributable in part to the sudden availability of small arms, whose supply had been previously monopolized by the military and police. Chalong writes, “thousands of automatic pistols, submachine guns, hand grenades, grenade launchers, and all kinds of explosives, were almost freely circulating around the country” in the years after World War II.⁵²³ Another historian, Christopher Goscha, writes “Buying arms in Thailand was as easy as buying beer.”⁵²⁴ While most armed crimes were associated with banditry, robbery, plunder, or other ‘personal’ crimes, gun-related violence was not confined to the private citizen. Police and quasi-state agents including hired gunmen adopted increasingly brutal methods for carrying out personal vendettas and silencing political opponents. The midnight murder of four former ministers by their police escorts in 1949 is perhaps the most famous example of state murder from

⁵²⁰ Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, 2nd ed. (Selangor: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197.

⁵²¹ Chalong Soontravanich, “The Rise of Buddhist Amulet Culture in Thailand,” *AGLOS News* 9 (January 2007): 31.

⁵²² Pasuk and Baker, 2002, 283.

⁵²³ Chalong Soontravanich, “Small Arms, Romance, and Crime and Violence in Post WWII Thai Society,” *Southeast Asian Studies*, 43.1 (2005): 31.

⁵²⁴ This quote is from an interview with Tran Van Giau by Christopher Goscha, quoted in Pasuk and Baker, 2002, 283.

that time. Another notable case is the murder of two defense lawyers and several defense witnesses in the 1948 trial of three men accused in the death of King Ananda.⁵²⁵

Perhaps it was no coincidence, then, that the post-World War II period press filled its pages with crime stories, reflecting the real world disorder of the time. One prominent writer from the period noted: “Between the middle of January of this year [1946], news of criminals in the provinces began appearing in different newspapers to such an extent that it became a daily feature. You couldn’t open a paper without seeing a story on a serious crime taking place here or an armed robbery there. The peace that came with the end of the war simply translated into troubles for citizens of all stripes.”⁵²⁶ With the newspaper’s textual reports came also graphic proof of Thailand’s fall into a sometimes violent bedlam. On March 6, 1949, for instance, photos of the bodies of the four assassinated ministers mentioned above covered half of the front page of *Siam nikon*.⁵²⁷ As photography became increasingly portable and affordable the practice of publishing photos, including those of criminals and their victims, began spreading throughout the newspaper world. What began as a trickle of crime photos in the 1920 and 1930s soon became a deluge. In 1950, gangster-turned-newsman Kamphol Wacharaphol first published *Khao phap*, which combined the crime story with the crime scene photo. The government eventually closed the paper, but Kamphol was undeterred and began publishing *Siang ang thong*, a similar daily, in 1959. While crime news had long been a staple of the local press, Kamphol capitalized on the growing trend of supplementing crime stories with photographs to create newspapers featuring lurid and sometimes gory pictures on their front pages.

⁵²⁵ Several other cases of political murder are described in Thak, 2007, 59-62 and also in Kasian Tejapira, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001).

⁵²⁶ Nai Chanthana (pseudo. Malai Chumphinit), *Sua fai sip thit* [Tiger Fai of the ten directions] (Bangkok: Krathom Publishing, 1998), 21.

⁵²⁷ No author, “*Thawin Udon thuk krasun pru yap yen*” [Bullet tears through Thawin Udol, kills him dead], *Siam nikon*, 6 March 1949, front page.

Along with the daily crime reports appeared another post-World War II innovation, weekly and monthly news magazines featuring analysis and investigative reports. A few of the popular titles included *Phim thai lang khao sapada*, *Daily Mail buang lang khao*, and *Khao phap rai duan*. Their front covers mostly featured color photos of women, behind which followed a mix of in-depth news reports, short stories, editorials, political pieces, and social news. Billing themselves as providing the ‘story behind the story’ (or *buang lang khao* in Thai) news magazines offered this varied content a common vehicle of dissemination. The weeklies put out by Ari’s company, Siam Phanithayakan, and those of the *Daily Mail* carried a good share of crime stories as well. The October 1953 edition of *Khao phap rai duan* (Pictorial news monthly) leads with the feature *Phikebat dao jon* (Hunting the bandit) and included a new regular full page news photo, this month featuring policemen on a small raft during the night hunting for bandits (Figures 17 and 18). There is also a full page ad for *Khao phap chao*, the paper’s new morning edition, with a drawing of a skull, an automatic pistol, a knife, and a dove that tells readers “Crimes that take place today all have a back story. In the past, you’ve come to know it from rumor. From now on, you won’t have to resort to methods like that because the story behind the story will be presented by *Khao phap chao*” (Figure 19). In April 1954, *Phim thai rai duan* published *Jotmai rak chok luat* (Bloody love letter), *Atchayakon saraphap* (Confession of a criminal), *Racha jon haeng lum nam meklong* (Bandit king of the Meklong basin), and *Atchayakam luk lap* (Mysterious crime).⁵²⁸

It isn’t much of an exaggeration, therefore, to call the world that Thais found themselves in after World War II a tumultuous one. The resurgent popular press, after suffering for months under tight government control and the general wartime scarcity of printing paper, reported, amplified, and spread this turmoil, giving citizens and the state a

⁵²⁸ The term *atchayakam*, which is translated as ‘crime’ today did not begin appearing until after World War II.

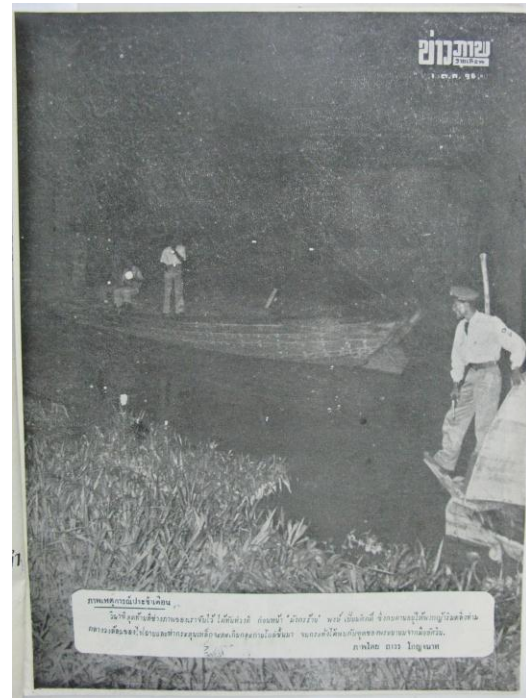


Figure 17 (left) and 18 (right) – Crime Photos from 1950s Popular Press.
“Phikhat Dao Jon” in *Khao phap rai duan*, October 1953 and monthly news photo in the same issue.

ข่าวภาพ-เข้า

★ มั่นใจเป็นยุคการใหม่เดือนนามหัตถ์จรรย ในวงการหนังสือพิมพ์
ซึ่งจะปรากฏคืบหน้า โดยสิ้นเชิง นั่นคือ “ข่าวภาพ-เข้า”

- ท่านเจ้าคุณพระเทพญาณมหามหาคณาธิบดี
- “พระเทพญาณ” จากพระเทพญาณมหามหาคณาธิบดี
- ซึ่งท่านพระเทพญาณมหามหาคณาธิบดี จะใจ “ข่าวภาพ-เข้า”

• ท่านจะไม่เกินความคาดหมายเลย หากเราจะกล่าวหา
• ทุกท่าน ท่านจะคงเรียกหา “ข่าวภาพ-เข้า” เป็นประจำ

- จำให้แม่น เจ้าคุณพระเทพญาณมหามหาคณาธิบดี
- วนเวียนกว้างไกลของ “ข่าวภาพ-เข้า”
- “ข่าวภาพ-เข้า” สืบมาตามลำดับดังต่อไปนี้

เล่มนี้ต่างจากเล่มอื่น ไม่พบเจ้านาม นามเจ้าคุณพระเทพญาณมหามหาคณาธิบดี

Figure 19 – Advertisement for
Khao phap chao.

vocabulary to express and understand their experience of post-war disorder. As seemingly spontaneous, and fitting, as this outbreak of paper violence may seem in light of the conditions described, the sensational crime story that the daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers of the 1950s featured has its roots outside the period's social context, at least as 'context' is typically conceived. The press did not and does not just represent the place and time in which it is produced, a mirror held to society. It reacts to the stimulus of other actors and institutions along paths shaped by historical precedent. What the newspaper became in late 1940s and early 1950s had as much to do with the police's relationship with the media as it did with reflecting social disorder 'out there.' It is to the origins of this relationship I now turn.

Crime News in the Early Years

The Siamese newspaper did not always feature sensational crime news, though crime stories, both 'real' and fictional, had been part of the news since people started publishing periodicals in Siam. The kingdom's "first Thai language newspaper published for entertainment" and the first by a commoner, the weekly *Darunowat*, contained stories about basically everything, including reports about the government and foreign countries, political commentary, advertisements, proverbs, articles about natural science and fine arts, poetry and drama, and fables.⁵²⁹ It also would occasionally publish crime-related news. One example from 1874 presents a government report that states over a period of thirteen days in the sixth month of the year, the military arrested fifteen criminals in the capital, a rate of 1.15

⁵²⁹ Wipha Senanan Kongkanan, *Kammoet nawaniyai nai prathet thai* [The genesis of the novel in Thailand] (Bangkok: Dok Ya Publishing, 1997), 128. See also *Sayam phimphakan*, 2007, 207, which describes the paper as having the goal of providing a growing legion of civil servants with leisure time reading. The journal's importance is the fact that it began publishing 'Thai' stories – *ruang an len*, *nithan*, or *ruang san* – original reading material not translated from foreign language texts. This fiction signaled the shift from poetic to prose narrative for stories intended to entertain.

arrests per day.⁵³⁰ In other instances, the paper published reports of odd happenings, such as the mysterious suicide of a slave, also in 1874, while giving few details. The *Bangkok Times*, a well-known English language daily that began publishing in 1887 that also included some Thai language content, printed reports under the heading *khao bettalet*, or miscellaneous news, which included one or two paragraph snippets describing minor skirmishes, arguments, snatch-theft, police news, and road accidents. On 8 July 1898, for example, a short, untitled report tells of a Chinese named Lae going to the market at Hua Lam Phong district and beating another Chinese unconscious. When the beaten man regained his senses, Lae beat him again, this time to death. No one attempted to stop the fight.⁵³¹

The press reported less serious incidents of crime as well. However, it worded these more light-heartedly, intending them as a form of casual entertainment, especially if the crime contained some comical aspect. On 1 May 1898, for example, the *Bangkok Times* reported that an Indian constable in Bangrak district returned to the police station there after his shift when the station's chief inspector noticed that the Indian's turban was missing. After a bit of investigation, the inspector discovered that someone had stolen the turban from the constable's head after he had fallen asleep on duty.⁵³² In another report, the *Bangkok Times* tells of a snake charmer showing off his prowess by putting his finger in the open mouth of a snake. Unfortunately, the snake bit the charmer, who died the next day.⁵³³ On 26 April 1899, the *Bangkok Times* reports that another constable while on patrol happened to see his wife coming out of a gambling den. Incensed, the constable walked over

⁵³⁰ Wipha, 1997, 128-129.

⁵³¹ Piyakanit Hongthong, *Nangsu chu sayam sanuk khao* [A book called fun news of Siam] (Bangkok: Kanya Publishing, 1988), 39.

⁵³² Ibid, 83.

⁵³³ Ibid, 127.

to his wife and kicked her to the ground in the middle of the street, where she fell briefly unconscious. Shaken with guilt, the constable worked frantically to revive her.⁵³⁴

In some cases, particularly in English language articles by the foreign-owned *Bangkok Times*, crime stories took on a more political tone. In articles like “Thieving, Pawning, and Gambling” (23 June 1894), “The Nakleng (‘Tough Guy’)”⁵³⁵ (26 May 1898), “Buffalo Robbery” (12 April 1900), and “Gang Robbery at Paklat” (19 May 1902), writers wrote longer pieces about crime that were often critical of the government’s poor efforts in prevention, suppression, and investigation. A particularly sarcastic example shows up in the paper on 22 February 1893 in an article entitled ‘Ayuthia,’ which made light of the sorry state of law enforcement in the central plains: “Two years ago, it was not by any means very uncommon to see bands of forty or fifty brigands, some of them carrying red flags, driving before them one or two hundred head of cattle. Last year, we had Ai Thuam, the Tiger, some of whose atrocities I have already related. This year, well, we are *en republique!* We acknowledge no chief yet and we are equals. Everybody able to carry a gun, to use a knife or a lance, or to throw a harpoon, has taken the field – I mean the jungle, whence they start by bands, attacking boats and houses and killing men and women to their hearts content – until they are themselves attacked by other bands and killed in their turn. *Vive la liberte!* Every man watches his neighbor, every house the next one, and every village the other village.”⁵³⁶

Articles like these, written in English, were likely read primarily by the small European and

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 91. Given the nature of this act, however, it isn’t exactly clear how this is supposed to be funny.

⁵³⁵ The George Bradley McFarland Thai-English Dictionary (Stanford, 1944) defines *nakleng* variously as “a rogue; a rascal; a ruffian, a dishonest and unprincipled person; a knave, a scamp, a true sport...” From David Bruce Johnston, “Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930,” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1977), 139. Johnston goes on to cite a *Bangkok Times* article, which defines a *nakleng* as someone characterized by a “manly bearing and courage, readiness to fight in single combat or in a riot, fidelity to friends, deep loyalty and respect towards feudal lords and parents.” From ‘The Nakleng,’ *Bangkok Times*, 26 May 1898, in Johnston, 1977, 139. In other words, the term, though often associated with criminality, does not always have negative connotations.

⁵³⁶ Johnston, 1977, 169.

American community in Bangkok and by educated elites in the royal court. Their politicking did not necessarily reach a broader local audience.

For the most part, then, stories about crime in vernacular papers read more or less as short, sometimes serious, sometimes humorous anecdotes retelling an incident either violent or strange, without much analysis, commentary or political intent. This changed in the late-1920s. The papers during the first half of that decade, including the widely circulated *Sayam ratsadon* printed short crime reports including stories like those described above almost every day.⁵³⁷ A typical edition, like the one from 5 July 1921, included the following short reports under the heading *Khao hua muang* (Provincial news): “*Thuk ying pang tai*” (Shot almost to death), “*Fan khaen kuap khat*” (Slashed arm almost falls off), “*Kho kuap khat*” (Neck almost broken), “*Fan tai kha thi*” (Slashed to death), “*Plon tham rai sap*” (Robbed – property damaged), “*Jek yok phuak ti lae fan kan*” (Chinamen riot), and “*Plon khun dian song rai*” (Robbed twice in one night).⁵³⁸ As with crime reports from the preceding three decades, these stories were generally just a few paragraphs long. They could fall, as they did before, under the category ‘miscellaneous news’ and also now under headings like provincial news or as filler in various sections of different newspapers, mostly between the wildly popular translations of Chinese epic romances or Hollywood movie scripts and ads for various consumer products. The crime report in the early days of the press was thus typically short, simply worded, and free of excess commentary.

Of course, there were longer stories, some with an extraordinary amount of detail, during the early years of the press. Anek Nawigimune, a prominent collector of Thai ‘ephemera’ including old books and other printed matter, comments that periodicals towards

⁵³⁷ The title of this newspaper is Romanized here as *Sayam ratsadon* rather than *Sayam rat* (following its pronunciation) to distinguish it from the better known *Sayam rat* made popular by Krukrit Pramot later.

⁵³⁸ *Sayam ratsadon*, 5 July 1921, 5, 9.

the end of the Fifth Reign, or roughly the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, often included short stories about physical fights (*thup ti kam*) and other altercations. In some stories, fights ended in death, others with less serious injuries. Some were about masters beating their servants or slaves, others about police constables beating suspected criminals (*phu rai*). One story that became big news in 1882 involved the now common elements of a good crime story – adultery and murder – and received a somewhat longer treatment. In 1879, Amdeng Yu evidently began having an affair (*pen chu*) with one of her slaves, a man named Hai.⁵³⁹ This went on for about two years without the knowledge of Yu's husband, Phrabanru. One day, Phrabanru walked in on Yu and Hai, catching the couple in the act. Enraged, Phrabanru took a wooden umbrella (*mai kban rom farang*) and delivered a good beating to Yu before tying Hai up with a chain and beating him fifty times. Afterwards, Yu began to suspect that she had been caught because of the machinations her 57-year-old servant Kiang, another of Hai's lovers. Yu, while drunk, called Kiang in for questioning. When Kiang would not admit to anything, Yu beat her with a stick (*mai samae*) about thirteen or fourteen times. After this, the beatings became regular and more ferocious until finally Yu beat Kiang to death after first having shoved a hot fire poker between Kiang's legs two or three times. Yu was eventually sentenced to ninety lashes at Wat Khok (or Wat Phalap Phalachai), a punishment witnessed by many locals.⁵⁴⁰

These examples indicate crime news served two purposes. First, they acted simply as informational pieces or as light-hearted entertainment, a kind of *fait divers*, with peripheral status in the grander scheme of published serials. Second, they served a didactic purpose, describing various social transgressions and punishments thereof. The example of Mrs. Yu

⁵³⁹ *Amdaeng* was used during the fifth reign as a prefix for a woman, as in Ms. or Mrs.

⁵⁴⁰ Anek Nawigamune, *Khatbakon yuk khun pu* [Murderers in olden days] (Bangkok: Saeng Dao, 2003), 27-29.

demonstrates this. They did not, however, dominate printed matter, either in content or form. Nor were they structured like the mystery stories that feature police work and detection described in Chapter 1. From the discussion in the previous chapters, the situation in the ‘real’ world, one referred to as a ‘Kingdom of Crime,’ may be argued to have been just as ‘chaotic’ as the years following World War II. Yet the papers had not yet exploded into an orgy of crime and violence. Short stories, *sarakhadi*, general news, advertisements, translated Chinese epics, and summaries of Hollywood movies still made up a major part of the Siamese periodical.

Around the late 1920s, when the crime story began to occupy a more central role in the news, it also took on a new purpose and a new look. The change began with the revamp of the *Krungthep Daily Mail* by Andrew Freeman, the paper’s new American editor. Credited with starting the practice of deliberately choosing sensational news (*khao tun ten*) for his front pages and reformatting the paper’s appearance, he moved quickly and decisively in transforming Siam’s printed reality.⁵⁴¹ Describing the *Bangkok Daily Mail*’s layout before his arrival, Freeman noted, “They were staid British sheets with advertisements on the first page. Except for one column of cables, each paper contained a monotonous array of clipped items from six weeks to three months old. There were set up under lifeless headlines like black clay pigeons waiting to be shot,” adding that they reminded him of “tombstone epitaphs.”⁵⁴² Freeman was one of the first editors to begin printing headlines in extra large script to draw the eyes (*khao sadut ta*) of readers.⁵⁴³ When he completed the paper’s make over, he proudly

⁵⁴¹ No author, *Chivit lae ngan khong ari livira* [Life and work of Ari Livira] (Bangkok: n.p., 1963).

⁵⁴² Andrew Freeman, *A Journalist in Siam* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1997 (1932)), 58, 60. He adds that the *Daily Mail* was not alone in this regard. Advertisements filled the front pages of many papers, including *Sayam ratsadon* and *Sri krung*, through the 1920s.

⁵⁴³ No author, *Chivit lae ngan khong ari livira*, 1963, no page numbers.

described it as “a saucy little sheet with its pictures and piquant headlines.”⁵⁴⁴ Prince Sawasti, the paper’s patron in the royal court, reportedly noted to Freeman, “I never realized that there was so much news in Bangkok until I read your American headlines.”⁵⁴⁵

That Freeman spearheaded the *Daily Mail*’s makeover may not have been coincidence. In his native America, the press in the 1920s went through an era of change that saw consolidation of ownership, polarization of readership, and ‘tabloidization’ in form and content. In New York City in 1920 there were eleven dailies. In 1930, it had seven, but two were picture tabloids and its *Daily News* was the nation’s largest paper. These new tabloids, in turn, featured “a steady fare of murder, startling photos of crime scenes, and courtroom drama.” It was an era in which “murder seemed, to many eyes, to rise phenomenally in the post-World War One years,” “organized crime seemed to link the glamorous world of celebrities to that of criminality,” and “yellow journalism seemed to experience a resurgence.” Scholars estimated there were “many times more crime stories [in the 1920s] than in the 1890s.”⁵⁴⁶ The changes that were taking place in the *Daily Mail* of Bangkok echoed those seen in New York. The police practices, the criminal code, and laws of evidence that were being transplanted from abroad for use by the state were accompanied by a changes in practices of the popular press.

In addition to shifting crime to center stage, employing large and bold typeface for headlines, and sometimes outlandish captions, the *Daily Mail* ushered in another innovation, the use of news photos. Most of the photos that appeared on the front page pictured events like royal parades, meetings of foreign dignitaries, social events, and interesting scenery and many were purchased from international photo services. Freeman noted that he got many of

⁵⁴⁴ Freeman, 1997, 107.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, 87.

⁵⁴⁶ Christopher P. Wilson, *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 73.

his prints sent in by “photographic syndicates,” which included mostly pictures of “movie actresses, skyscrapers, street scenes of New York.”⁵⁴⁷ It was not until the late 1920s that local photographers were employed seriously by the burgeoning publishing industry. And it was no coincidence that Siam’s first photojournalist, Chuang Midet, worked for the *Daily Mail*. The use of a local photographer meant that pictures in the paper could now showcase a wider range of images. If a *Daily Mail* reporter got wind of a crime, for example, Chuang or another photographer could show up and take a picture. Freeman recalls this exchange in the newsroom: “‘That was Chuang [Midet] at headquarters [the central police station],’ he [Daily Mail staff person] says. ‘He’s got a story about a murder up at Wat Saket.’ ‘My God,’ I say, ‘who’d have the energy to commit murder in this heat? Wat Saket? A temple, isn’t it? Let Nakorn take the story and tell Pleng to hurry up there and get some pictures.’”⁵⁴⁸ It was in this way that photos of criminals (and police) made their way into the newspapers, and then not only in the *Daily Mail* (Figures 20, 21, and 22). In fact, the press got their own crime photographers before the police did.⁵⁴⁹ Of course, crime scene photos, criminals, and police were still relatively rare in the papers of the late 1920s, as the practice of employing photographers was just beginning to take off. In addition, many police did not want to have their pictures taken, including the Metropolitan Police Commissioner at the time, Phraya Athikonprakat, who had police officers attack Chuang Midet as he tried to photograph the city’s police chief one day outside a *politsapha* (or police court). The incident came after a hearing in a libel suit brought against Louis Khirawat, the owner and editor of the *Daily Mail* after Freeman, by Athikonprakat himself.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ Freeman, 1997, 199.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 102.

⁵⁴⁹ The police department did not have in-house photographers until 1932 and complained about the hassle of having to obtain a photographer from private shops. See Chapter 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Freeman, 1997, 230.



Figures 20 (left) and 21 (right) – Police with Criminals and Ai Sua Thai.

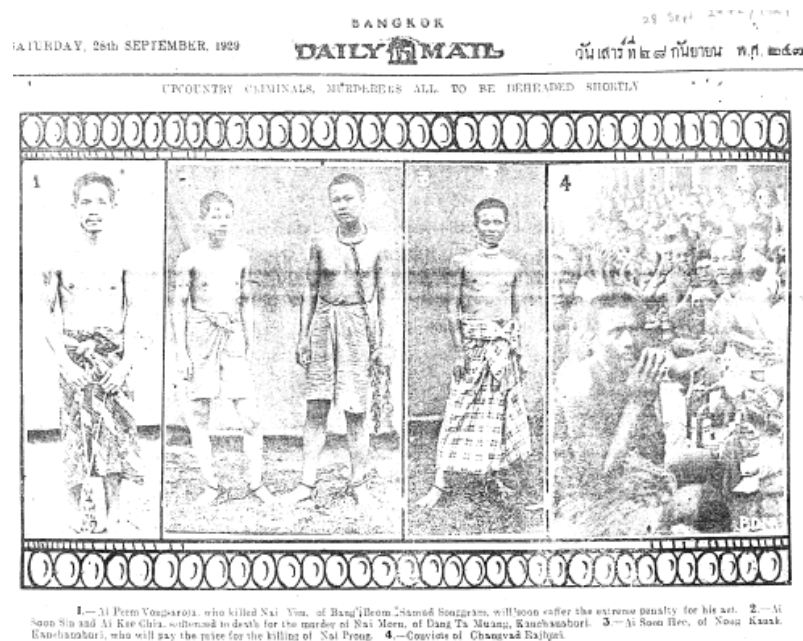


Figure 22 – Photos of Criminals in the Bangkok Daily Mail. From 1930.

Freeman brought another innovation, the exposé (or investigative journalism with a cause), with him to the *Bangkok Daily Mail*. By the 1920s, Thai language papers had already begun publishing editorials and essays critical of various aspects of government or society

and as the years rolled on these appeared with increasing vitriol and frequency. The *Bangkok Daily Mail* and its Thai language counterpart the *Krungthep Daily Mail*, made use of the editorial but also published critical news reports, effectively turning the daily paper into a weapon aimed at exposing corruption and inefficiency. Earlier papers such as the *Bangkok Times* and even Dr. Dan Beach Bradley's *Bangkok Recorder*, the kingdom's first paper, had sometimes published news that intentionally put the government in a negative light or that might lead to critical reaction on the part of the reading public. The example about banditry in the Ayutthaya area above is one example. These were, however, in English and read by a limited audience. Longer pieces in the Thai press, like the one about Amdeng Yu, served a didactic purpose, as discussed above. They described social transgressions, framed them in religious terms, and usually ended by describing the punishment the offence merited. The *Daily Mail*, however, sought more than to poke fun at the government or moralize about a crime. It conceived of itself and the news it published as a weapon for social justice.

The curious part of all this was that this story of justice took the narrative form of a detective mystery, the meta-narrative for police work discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. In one prominent case from 1928, the *Daily Mail* spent days reporting a story about the alleged involvement of Special Branch police officers in a human smuggling ring that tricked or kidnapped young women from China into coming to Bangkok, where they would be forced to become prostitutes. As with most detective mysteries, the paper's crusade began with a dead body, provided in this case by the death of a young Chinese woman named Khoksi, who was found hanged, an apparent suicide, in a shabby room at a hotel, one alleged to be a brothel, in Bangkok's Chinatown in 1928. The girl had left a note to her mother and father, noting how she had been tricked into boarding the wrong steamer from Guangdong province in China to Bangkok, how she had been beaten when refused to become a

prostitute, and how in the end she felt death would be better than a life of shame. Triggering Freeman's sense of moral outrage, the incident set off a long campaign by the paper to expose various facts about the police's role in the affair. Both the Thai and English language editions printed new "evidence" daily, information reporters had been "collecting for months" showing that members of the police's detective division, the Special Branch, had been acting for a slave syndicate run by influential Siamese for a period of ten years to abduct young women from China for prostitution all over the region.⁵⁵¹

To Freeman's credit, this socially active journalism did produce a legal outcome, even if it could only be called a partial victory. The barrage of news stories prompted a legal investigation, which, when concluded, named two Special Branch officers, Wongkit and Chia Khun, as conspirators. To counter the paper's reports and the prosecutor's indictment, Phraya Athikonprakat, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, claimed that he conducted his own, secret investigation and had found Wongkit innocent.⁵⁵² And as with the *lamtat*, the narrative of the news showed signs of change after the introduction of the detective novel. Khoksi's death generated a single mystery with two detectives (the police and the press) and ended with two different solutions. In between these two truths, one public, one secret, a space emerged in which the public was forced to decide on its own what was real. In the end, it was left to Pad Lin, the dead woman's husband, to bring charges against the two officers, which he did with mixed results.⁵⁵³

The editor of the Thai language version of Freeman's paper, the *Krungthep Daily Mail*, Luang Saranupraphan, former editor of the popular journals *Senasuksa lae phae witthayarat* and

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 218.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 223.

⁵⁵³ During the inquiry, a witness for Pad Lin named Tongwah was stabbed to death. It was discovered that officer Wongkit had hired a man named Lao to murder Tongwah. For this, the criminal court found Wongkit and Lao guilty and sentenced both to death. The court, however, did not find the Special Branch guilty of charges of masterminding a prostitution ring.

Saranukun, followed Freeman's in-your-face style. Headlines read in large type across the front page "*Ying tamruat tai klang muang*" (Police shot to death in middle of city) (2 February 1929), "*Phoey khwam lap ruang phu rai ying tamruat tai klang muang*" (Unveiling the secret behind criminal shooting police to death in middle of city) (7 February 1929), "*Ying khon klang phranakhon!*" (Shooting in middle of capital!) (7 August 1928), and "*Jap phurai luat kap lek dai!*" (Villains Luat and Lek arrested!) (14 August 1928). In the paper's reporting of the case against Special Branch officer Wongkit for murder sentences ending with exclamation marks and colorful descriptions of events were common. Wongkit, for example, was described as having sweat pouring down his face as he stood listening to the judge in the case read his verdict. Upon hearing that the court had found him guilty, Wongkit "gasped! Gaped!! Gaped!!!" He then pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his face and try to compose himself. Instead, evidently out of strength, he collapsed into his seat and his head fell on the table as if he had lost his consciousness. And "before the judged could finish the phrase 'death sentence,' Wongkit's wife began to wail out loud," forcing the court police to restrain her. The report ends with by reporting that Metropolitan Police Commissioner Phraya Athikonprakat's libel suit against Louis Khirawat, the editor of the *Krungthep Daily Mail* before Luang Saranupraphan, ended with a verdict in Khirawat's favor. The report pronounced that with these two verdicts that the *Krungthep Daily Mail* had triumphed in every aspect of the case. Triumph (or victory, *chaichana*) was printed in larger font than the rest of the text. After this, there is a Pali phrase which translates roughly as "Karma preserves one's actions," a sort of Buddhist 'touché' or 'serves him right.' This is followed by the report's last sentence, an urge to people to "read the court's verdict in detail, published verbatim in the *Mail* in twenty-one days!" The practice of using crime news, combined with what would now be considered editorial content, to bring attention to the shortcomings of administration and

call for change was not confined to the two *Daily Mails*. Other Thai papers, even those subsidized by the government like the *Nangsuphim thai*, also used their space to campaign for government action. Many crime reports ended with a call for the government to assign ‘men with ability’ to deal with banditry and violence.

Over the final years of the 1920s, then, the form, content, and purpose of periodicals went through a significant make-over. In terms of form, publishers began to move from the staid, text-based broad sheet to a more dynamic tabloid style newspaper familiar today. Headlines became more prominent and eye-catching. Photographs added spice and intensified the feeling of the news’ realism. In addition, advertisements were pushed to pages inside the covers (they had previously filled entire front pages) and new sections were created for specific types of content like entertainment and sports. As the look, layout, and size of the papers changed, so did what it contained. Content shifted from a reliance on documentary pieces (*sarakhadi*) about various social and cultural topics, translated Chinese historical romances, and short fiction stories from English language sources including novels and Hollywood movies to focus primarily reports of local and world events which were commented on through editorial pieces. In other words, ‘factual’ accounts of real world, especially local, events became what news was while opinion was being separated from fact.⁵⁵⁴ It happened that these real world events included a significant number of crimes at the time. In part, the increasing prominence of the crime story in the *Daily Mail*, with its catchy headlines and mystery novel-like plot hooks, was aimed at siphoning interest away from the popular translations of Chinese fiction, historical romances that some royals derisively called *jak-jak wong-wong* tales (meaning roughly tales of ‘kings and palaces’), being

⁵⁵⁴ Duncan McCargo, a political scientist, notes the clear distinction made between news and editorial in today’s newspaper rooms. See Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the Press: Media Machinations* (London: Routledge, 2000).

published by competing dailies like *Sri krung* and *Sayam ratsadon*.⁵⁵⁵ The crime story, was, however, featured more than simply there to attract readers. In exposés, especially of corruption, extortion, bribe taking, favoritism, and general government inefficiency, crime stories were taking on political import. Through the crime story, the truth – that certain government officials were dishonest and the criminal justice system was stacked against ordinary people – was made public. Facts, or ‘real’ things, people, places, events, were thus coalescing around the crime story, a genre that the print media was increasingly relying on to sell papers. As the print media shifted to reporting and away from fiction, it did so through the crime story.

The question remains, “Why did this shift to sensational crime news take place?” It should be remembered that the 1920s saw a general politicization in the press. As historian Matthew Copeland has made well known, the papers of the 1920s featured political cartoons that lambasted the monarchy and other aspects of Thai society.⁵⁵⁶ Writers, some of them including the eccentric Narin Phasit and 555 (Phra Sarasat Phonlakhon), made their name by being critical of the government.⁵⁵⁷ The shift to crime news that occurred between the First World War and the revolution in 1932 coincided with this general political turn of Siamese periodicals. Sometimes crime and political news competed for space in the same dailies, sometimes they were the same story. Mostly they fought for attention against advertisements, fiction, movie news, entertainment stories, and Chinese romances. That crime news would dominate in the era after the Second World War was therefore not a

⁵⁵⁵ No author, *Chivit lae ngan khong Ari Leevira* (Bangkok: Thai Phanithiyakan, 1963). On *jak-jak wong-wong* stories, see Thanaphol Limaphichart, “The Prescription of Good Books” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2008), 64. He defines them as stories about palaces and dynasties featuring fantastical events, a derisive term referring to the Siamese penchant for Chinese epic romances that were not seen as modern and progressive.

⁵⁵⁶ Matthew Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam” (PhD dissertation, Australia National University, 1993).

⁵⁵⁷ 555 sounds like laughter (ha ha ha) when spoken and is used today in text messages as shorthand for noting something that is humorous.

foregone conclusion despite the trend toward crime news in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. There is no reason the chaos of war and subsequent post-war displacement would lead to an increase in sensationalism or the predominance of one specific type of news story over another, even if there was a quantitative increase in the crime rate, as there was in the 1890s and again in the 1920s. If crime was used in the 1920s to draw readers from Chinese romances and to the poor performance of government, what was their purpose after the war? What I argue here is that the prevalence of crime news after the war stemmed in part from the government's increasingly violent censorship practices and the resulting interconnectedness of the police with the press.

Crime Uncensored

The popularity of sensational crime news did not go completely unnoticed by the government. As early as 1954, the second Phibun government called a meeting between the recently established Ministry of Culture, the Police Department, and the Association of Newspapers to discuss the social impact of sensationalized crime reporting.⁵⁵⁸ Nothing immediate in the way of policy came from the meeting; crime reporting practices grew even more graphic as papers competed with each other for readers. In the following year, the Police issued a new policy related to crime news. A story from the *Bangkok Post* dated 11 June 1955 entitled "Crime Stories Taboo if Lurid": "In accordance with a recommendation of the Crime Research Committee, the Police Department will warn newspapers against undue featuring of crime stories, Police Major-General Chamnian Wasanasomsit, Superintendent of the Central Investigation Bureau, said today. He said the committee believes irresponsible reporting of crime has contributed to the increase in crime with

⁵⁵⁸ *Sayam rat*, 4 August 1954.

detailed stories of murders, robberies and rape making potential criminals out of certain types of newspaper readers. It is also felt that press reports on suicide, giving details of means used, have been partly responsible for the increased number of suicide cases. The rise in rape and other sex crimes, according to the Crime Research Committee is also partly attributable to publication of news reports of lurid details.”⁵⁵⁹ Earlier, in 1952, the police had used the 1941 Press Act to ban *Picture Digest* and *Around World Confidential*. Both these magazines were American imports. *Picture Digest* was described as a sex-and-crime magazine while Lee Mortimer’s *Around the World Confidential* was criticized by local newspapers as having published material insulting to the Thai nation and the king.⁵⁶⁰ Crime stories in the newspapers during the Cold War era were therefore still didactic, only they were seen as teaching people how to commit crimes rather than as conveying a moral lesson.

Censorship of the press by the government has a long history in Thailand. Although King Mongkut (r. 1851-1868) attempted to discredit some of *Bangkok Recorder*’s stories about the administration of the kingdom, the press was relatively free to publish what it wanted in the early days of its existence so long as it did not offend the sensibilities of the royal court. This relative openness and lack of any organized control over the print media allowed for lively political commentary to appear during the 1920s. Of course, the passage of a defamation law in 1908 provided a weapon aimed to reign in a freewheeling press and this did result in a number of law suits by private individuals and government officials. Ironically, however, it is only after the revolution that overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932 that the government began to seriously and systematically censor the press. *Khanaratsadon*, the party of the new civilian government set up a *kong truat kbao* (news monitoring division) to check the content of newspapers out of fear of a royalist counter revolution. This unit lasted

⁵⁵⁹ “Crime Stories Taboo if Lurid,” *Bangkok Post*, 11 June 1955, front page.

⁵⁶⁰ “Police Ban ‘Picture Digest,’ ‘Around the World Confidential,’” *Bangkok Post*, 4 August 1952, front page.

only two weeks, but the importance of the print media and the impetus to control it became apparent. More lasting was the government's new Press Act (*Pho. ro. bo. samut ekasan lae nangsuphim kae khai phoem doem* 2475), issued at the end of 1932 declaring all news related to army or government activities and to politics between foreign countries had to be approved by the proper authorities. To facilitate the oversight of information that could be published about the government, Phraya Mano, then the Prime Minister, also established the *krum kbosanakan* (Publicity Department) and prohibited news about the king from being published.⁵⁶¹ From June 1932 to October 1933, the government punished newspapers, typically by closing them temporarily, twenty-eight times for various infractions. The biggest offenders were *Krungthep Daily Mail*, *Prachachat*, and *Thai mai*.⁵⁶²

After Phahon Phonphayupahasena's coup of the Phraya Manopakonnititad government on 30 June 1933, a new period of openness for the press followed. Phahon even invited newspapers to send representatives to parliament meetings. This period did not, however, produce any clear laws on the rights of the press and many continued to be punished for various infractions related to news about the government.⁵⁶³ Any headway that press might have made during this early part of the Phahon administration ended with the Bowonadet Rebellion in 1933, when the government used the opportunity to come down on people believed to be anti-government royalists. It set up for the first time a *san phiset* (special court) in 1933, ostensibly to "protect the constitution."⁵⁶⁴ The target of this new court included the editor of the *Krungthep Daily Mail*, Louis Khirawat (Andrew Freeman's protégé and successor), who was tried and sentenced to death for having incited a rebellion (*kaboi*).

⁵⁶¹ *Sayam phimphakan*, 2006, 133-5.

⁵⁶² *Ibid*, 2006, 234.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, 137-8.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

This sentence was later reduced to life in prison and the *Krungthep Daily Mail* was shut down.⁵⁶⁵

It is during this post-revolution period of instability that the police began to develop an intimate relationship with the press. One of the first acts of the new civilian government was to reform the police, purging it of royalists. Within the new police, a unit was established called the *santiban* (the successor to Eric Lawson's Special Branch). Within this unit was a division that was tasked with monitoring newspapers and political intelligence. The activity of keeping tabs on newspapers might reasonably be compared to the days before Chulalongkorn's administrative reforms when spies were sent out to monitor informal information networks in different parts of the kingdom. The two were efforts by the government to gather information made by non-state actors. Only in 1932, the difference was that information was printed on paper and distributed to a general audience in addition to being spread as rumor through ad-hoc, unregulated networks. Hence, the print press began to reshape the kingdom's information order at the same time the police were drawn into fill gaps of information that existed between state and subject.

This monitoring activity changed to a more proactive role under the government of military general Phibun Songkram, especially as World War II approached. In 1941, a new Press Act (*Pho. ro. bo. kan phim* 2484) was passed to allow the police to review the content of newspaper stories before publication even when not in a state of emergency.⁵⁶⁶ This law gave power to the police commissioner (*athibodi tamruat*) to prohibit the publication of news about the army or politics between nations, allowed for the inspection and censorship of news during states of emergency or war and the power to decide whether articles were harmful to the peace and order and good morals of the people. The Phibun government also issued a

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 139.

⁵⁶⁶ Thawon, 2007, 175.

law outlining new minimum capital investment requirements to establish a newspaper, thus making it more difficult to new papers to start up.⁵⁶⁷ With these laws, the police were now not only monitoring, they were controlling the output of information. The situation only got worse when the Japanese, who put heavy restrictions on newspapers, entered the kingdom and general wartime scarcity made it difficult to publish anything at all.

Immediately after World War II, the civilian government led by Khuang Aphaiwong allowed the press license to publish freely. Khuang even praised the press' role in aid of *Seri thai*, an underground resistance movement, during World War II.⁵⁶⁸ This period of relative freedom might have continued if not for the mysterious death of King Ananda in 1946. Pridi Phanomyong, then the regent to the king, censored all news of the case and issued a statement that the death was the result of an accident. The death was major news that captivated the public, which was now deprived of a thorough public investigation. Left to their own devices, people promoted all manner of explanations, including one that held Pridi Phanomyong responsible. When Pridi was ousted in 1947, his inability to solve the mystery of the king's death was a key reason cited by the coup group. Phibun then returned to power by military coup in 1947.

Initially, the press was critical of Phibun's government. In response, the government arrested a number of journalists. One sweep came in 1952 when several journalists and politicians were charged with being Communists. The government also made good use of the 1941 Press Act to punish papers for anti-government positions. Phibun coupled the new strict enforcement of press laws with a campaign of intimidation conducted by the police, then run by the notorious Phao Sriyanond. When press control and anti-Communist laws were not enough to stop the press from publishing stories that put the government in a bad

⁵⁶⁷ Somphong, 2002, 141.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 145-6.

light, the government resorted to other methods. The use of moles to get intelligence was one way.⁵⁶⁹ Others included intimidation, arbitrary detention, threats, physical assault, and murder. Between the end of World War II and the murder of Ari Liwira, Chuan Rotjanawiphat, editor of *Ithitham*, was shot dead, Suri Thongwanit, editor of *Siang thai*, was shot in the mouth, Manat Wichanphuthon, reporter for Ari's *Sayam nikon*, was tortured at the home of a government minister before dying hours afterwards, Sangat Banchongsin, editor of *Chao nua*, was by killed in a bomb attack.⁵⁷⁰ This crackdown is said to have curtailed the political role of papers and forced them to work within the rules of the government.⁵⁷¹ Daniel Fineman, on the Phao period crackdowns, writes, "After the arrests, disappearances, and assassinations, Phao's political opponents might criticize the police department's inefficiency and his own ruthlessness, but they would never complain openly. That would invite arrest or even death. Indeed, the police killed at least a dozen opposition figures and Phao enemies from 1952-1957. Such murders stifled almost all open opposition speech in the country."⁵⁷²

The government's war on the press continued through the end of Phibun's reign and into that of Sarit Thanarat's rule.⁵⁷³ In 1958, the Sarit government closed down *Khao phap* for its critical coverage of the new regime and personal grudge with its publisher, Kamphon Wacharaphon. One week later, a suspicious fire broke out at the paper's offices, destroying everything. The *Bangkok Post* reported on January 11, 1958: "A three-hour fire before dawn today razed about 200 houses in a 20-rai area between Phra Sawat lane and Vorapong Lane, Banglumpu, causing an estimated eight million baht damage." The fire, which started at

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, 152.

⁵⁷⁰ P. Wacharaphon, *Khon nangsuphim* (Bangkok: Odeon Store, 1963), 419.

⁵⁷¹ Somphong 2002, 152.

⁵⁷² Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 166.

⁵⁷³ There was a brief period at the end of Phibun's reign in which he allowed more press freedom as a part of his 'democratic turn.'

about 2:00am, destroyed four printing presses valued at approximately 200,000 baht and the house of Kamphon. The fire was said to have started at an illegal brothel on Phra Sawan Lane.⁵⁷⁴ In response, Kamphon adopted a couple of strategies. Narong Phoemphun, writing about the life of Kamphon, noted that newspapers in the provinces were not affected much by Sarit's crackdown, so Kamphon contacted his friend Sanong Mongkon, who owned *Siang ang thong* in Ang Thong province, and negotiated a deal for the right to use that name. The paper was registered in Ang Thong but published in Bangkok and thus was able to evade some of the government's pressure. According to Narong, Kamphon said after the burning of his office that his new paper would "not have political news. We will report news about crime. This will be the paper's foundation. It's safe. There will be a bit of politics here and there only."⁵⁷⁵ Because of censorship of stories about government, newspapers redoubled their efforts and focus on crime. It is not odd, then, that it was crime (and entertainment news) that survived the government onslaught.

The Crime Desk

The attraction between the police and the press was not one way. Just as the police were becoming more and more involved with the activities of the mass media, the press was drawn to police work. As with the newspapers and the police in the US in the 1920s, where muckraking journalism and police reform met to create a new genre of crime story called the 'procedural,' the press in Siam similarly grasped onto the practices of the police. The press was keen to report on the work of the police, just as the police were beginning to make reports on crime a critical part of their investigative process. In fact, it has been said that during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a reporter's duty was simply to wait around a police

⁵⁷⁴ "Khao Parb's Presses, 200 Homes Burned," *Bangkok Post*, 11 January 1958, front page.

⁵⁷⁵ Narong, 1989, 91.

station or a court for news.⁵⁷⁶ In the mid-1950s, this was still much the case. Thawon Suwan noted in his memoir that in the 1950s, when he went to work as a reporter for the *Daily Mail*, getting stories meant establishing a close relationship with the police. On his first day on the job, he went with his partner Chaloe to the Phatumwan police station to introduce himself to the *sip wen* (sergeant) on duty. He asked if there was any news. At first, the *sip wen* on duty would always reply “there’s nothing.” Thawon and Chaloe then went to the police station at Phaya Thai, where it looked like there might have been an auto accident and a fight. They asked if they could look at the daily blotter of incoming cases. The *samian wen* (clerk) replied, “You can’t, it’s government business (*ratchakan*). People without any legitimate reason are prohibited from seeing it.”⁵⁷⁷ Later, though, as he became close to the *samian* at each station, he was able to look into the daily logs. He only had to be careful to not let the station’s chief inspector (*saranat*) or deputy chief inspector (*rong saranat*) see him looking at the book. Sometimes the *sip wen* would even call into the office to let them know of breaking news. According to Thawon, this happened after the police had read some positive reports about the police in a case reported by another reporter at the *Daily Mail*. The police at Phaya Thai, he notes, were especially open to working with reporters. In one case that took place around 1951 (he couldn’t recall the actual date), a police officer named Captain Kamon Chanowan went as far as to invite Thawon to accompany him on a mission to arrest a bandit (*sua*) in the outskirts of Bangkok, which he did.⁵⁷⁸

To get information, the press relied on the police, who had by this time institutionalized the new investigation practices imported in the early twentieth century. The

⁵⁷⁶ No author, *Ruang khong nangsuphim muang thai pen buntuk khwam khong phu sonjai nangsuphim khon nung* [The story of newspapers in Thailand: A record by an interested person], in *Chivit lae ngan khong ari liwira* [Life and Work of Ari Liwira] (Bangkok: Thai Phanithiyakan, 1963), no page numbers provided in book.

⁵⁷⁷ Thawon, 2007, 37.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, 169.

press was simply taking this new information and using it to fill the demands of its own forms. The police on the other hand, had come to rely on the press to help justify their existence and the violence they employed as a matter of routine. The two had developed interconnected systems of knowledge and communication. So by the time Thailand hits the year 1953, when Ari is killed, the police were already in a complicated dance with the print media. On one hand, the press desperately needed the police to provide them information about crimes. On the other, the police wanted good publicity, but also wanted to control the news. The result was a sometimes antagonistic, sometimes symbiotic relationship. Ari's paper's regularly published stories critical of government and his refusal to sell his publishing company to Phao Sriyanond preceded his death. The police, realizing that they could not through rules or financial enticements silence the media went at them with deadly force. In this context, Ari Liwira is an important figure in the history of the Thai press not because he was the best writer of his day. He was not even the first newspaper man to be tortured or killed for political reasons. Neither was Ari the last news person to die at the hands of the state. He was, however, the most prominent and influential of the press' martyrs at the time. The lesson of Ari's murder and the censorship efforts of the government were clear: the liberty to publish critical news about the government was one that would no longer come easy.

The preponderance of crime news and the graphic crime news between the 1950s and the 1980s was part in parcel a reaction to this crackdown under the iron-fisted rules of Phibun Songkhram and Phao Sriyanond and later Sarit Thanarat. Against this backdrop, the murder of Ari Leewira was a watershed in the government's efforts to control the press. It was physical, real, and terrorizing, a blunt statement to the media that politics was off limits. Crime news, though a concern for its perceived negative impacts on society existed, was

more ‘apolitical’ than reports about ministers, policies, and the army. In a sense, then, the audacious daylight assassination that took place in Hua Hin in 1953 marked a turning point, one where a long struggle over what could be published in Thailand’s press would take a decisive turn towards the crime story.

Ordering Information

What does all this have to do with fact and fiction or information and knowledge?

Discussions of censorship and journalism are often framed as a debate about freedom of speech, especially if that speech is critical of a sitting government, organs of the state, and especially the monarchy.⁵⁷⁹ There is another important aspect of censorship that is not as often discussed, except perhaps in legal arguments about libel and defamation, and that is the role that censorship of the media has on what is accepted as true. This is where the intimate relationship between the police and the press becomes even more critical, as it is through their interaction that not only the form and content of knowledge about crime is created but also what is fact and what is fiction.

The press did not confine crime stories to ‘real’ news. Crime fiction and dramatized versions of news stories were both popular and the border between the two was often quite permeable. *Sayam ratsadon*, for example, covered extensively the story of Nang (Miss) Kim Lai, a woman who, while ‘possessed’ by a spirit, killed her husband. Court reports from Kim Lai’s trial in 1927, including verbatim witness testimony, were serialized and printed over several days. This news story was almost immediately regenerated in other popular forms. It was published as a *lamtat* the same year as the trial.⁵⁸⁰ One version (there were at least two)

⁵⁷⁹ See for example David Streckfuss, *Truth on Trial in Thailand: Defamation, Treason, and Lèse-majesté* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁸⁰ On the *lamtat* see footnote 81 in Chapter 2.

proved immensely popular and went through at least four printings, running 3,000 copies each time.⁵⁸¹ The case of Iron Trunk Bunpheng (*Bunpheng hip lek*), described in earlier chapters, was another widely reported case from the late 1910s.⁵⁸² The story ran for several days in many of the papers of the time with the killer, Bunpheng, and his method being revealed over several installments, not unlike the story about the suicide of Khoksi and the prostitution ring in the *Krungthep* and *Bangkok Daily Mails*. In this way, the news in the 1910s and 1920s was beginning to read like a serialized murder mystery, a form that appeared on the scene first in the early 1890s and then grew in popularity through the 1920s.

As with the case of Kim Lai, the story of Bunpheng did not just appear in newspapers and some were not even text-based accounts. The case was transformed into a play written in a verse form called a *lae* with the title ‘*Lae thit pheng*’ (Ballad of a returned monk).⁵⁸³ It was also performed as a play called *Hip loy nam* (The floating trunk) by the troop Khana Bamroehathay. The story proved such a sensation that picture-cards showing various aspects of the crime were produced (see Chapter 4). One photography shop called Chailak made photos of Bunpheng and sold them as a sort of memento of the case. The photo-card had the title *khwan lap nai hip lek loi nam* [The secret in the floating iron trunk]. Another photo-card shows two pictures on same cardboard stock with the title “Office of Pheng, Phan, Charat, Charoen. The Mystery in the Case of the Important Iron Trunk, The Story of

⁵⁸¹ Anek Nawigamune, *Khatbakon yuk khun pu* [Murderers in the olden days] (Bangkok: Saeng Dao, 2003), 86.

⁵⁸² Anek Nawigamune, *Dao rai nai adit* [Criminals in the past] (Bangkok: Saeng Daet, 1995), 100.

⁵⁸³ Anek, 1995, 37-8. Anek talks about *lae nai* (‘inner’ *lae*) and *lae nok* (‘outer’ *lae*). He notes that the *lae nok* were quite popular, especially if the singer had a good voice, and often the stories were printed in the hundreds for people to read. Many such stories were popular during the Sixth Reign, including *Lae sua bia* [The ballad of tiger Bia], *lae songkram muang nork* [The ballad of foreign war], *lae nang sao phroma* [The ballad of miss Phroma], *Lae sua an sua plian* [The ballad of tiger An and tiger Plian], *lae futbon* [The ballad of football], and *Nai bunpheng kha mia laew aow sai hip lek thuang nam* [Bunpheng kills his wife, puts her in a trunk and dumps her in the river]. These were all printed by Phanitsuphaphonruam in 1925.

Miss Prik.” One of the photos showed a picture of Bunpheng. The other showed the trunk in which he put Miss Prik’s body. Yet another photo-card showed a portrait of Miss Prik.⁵⁸⁴

Old copies of *lamtat* like these would survive and inspire the real-crime news stories that appeared during the post-World War II period in the weekly versions of *Daily Mail* and *Phim thai*. Suwan Thawon, a reporter for the *Daily Mail* in the 1950s, describes a story about the bandit Sua Nak that a veteran reporter for the *Daily Mail* named Sirichai, had written before his death. One day Suwan came across the story in Sirichai’s desk. After reading it, he found that it contained a very detailed account of the bandit’s life from 1922 when the bandit was active. Sirichai had written the story approximately eight years after the height of Sua Nak’s career, or sometime in the 1930s, but never published it. Suwan also found the source for Sirichai’s news story in his desk. It was a pocket book, he recalls, but one “not written like a *sarakbadi* (non-fiction report intended as a factual report) that one recognizes now.” It was in the form of a *lamtat* telling Sua Nak’s story and Sirichai had likely come across the booklet one day at a book shop. This was, Suwan says, the origins of Sirichai’s project of creating a weekly edition of the *Daily Mail* called “*buang lang khao*” (behind the news).⁵⁸⁵ Factual stories about crime have their roots in fictionalized ones, which themselves were inspired by ‘real world’ events.

In another example, the popular daily *Sayam ratsadon* regularly wrote of the exploits a famous bandit active in the ‘suburbs’ of Bangkok in the early 1920s named Ai Sua Thai. *Sayam ratsadon* was also the first paper to print a copy of his photograph (see Figure 21). Freeman, writing about the bandit years after his last heist notes: “...Siam has its full share of gangsters and bandits... For example, there was Ai (meaning criminal) Suer [sic] Thai. According to the story current in the kingdom, he began his career of crime on the day he

⁵⁸⁴ Anek, 2003, 103.

⁵⁸⁵ Thawon, 2007, 89-90.

ran off with his first wife. When her parents tried to stop the elopement, Criminal Suer Thai shot them and escaped with his wife. After several years of intense activity as a jungle outlaw, his name disappeared from the newspapers.”⁵⁸⁶ From the pages of daily newspapers, Ai Thai then made his way to Siam’s first crime novel, *Phrae dam*, written coincidentally by Luang Saranupraphan before he edited that pioneering paper the *Krungthep Daily Mail*.⁵⁸⁷ In his *Phrae dam*, Ai Thai is wrecking havoc in the countryside and the novel’s hero, a Special Branch officer named Jamnong, is sent to capture him. A few days later, a newspaper report (that appears in the text of the story) indicates that the hero is killed while in pursuit of the bandit. The bandit became so notorious that crimes not committed by Ai Thai were attributed to him by the police and the public. Ai Thai even wrote a letter to the police to clear his name for crimes being committed in Samut Prakan province.⁵⁸⁸ Ai Thai’s exploits fascinated a broad spectrum of people and his story appeared in printed matter across the modern epistemological divide of fact and fiction.

Pointing out that real people and events that actually happened appeared in news, plays, novels, and photo-cards does not tell the reader much. Most fiction in the early days of the press employed this technique of claiming the real, hence the inclusion of ‘realism’ in definitions of the novel and ‘real events’ or ‘factuality’ in definitions of the news. In seventeenth century England, for example, early novels, many crime-based, featured imagined stories with real-life characters, sometimes taken right from the pages of one of the many and immensely popular daily tabloids, known pejoratively as ‘penny dreadfuls,’ of the time. Early prose narratives, called ‘novels,’ were most often “tales of criminals, brief

⁵⁸⁶ Freeman, 1997, 226.

⁵⁸⁷ For more on Luang Saranupraphan, see Chapter 1 on the detective novel.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 226-7.

accounts of jokes and jests, Boccaccio-like love intrigues.”⁵⁸⁹ In fact, of all the ballads listed on Hyder Rollins’ *Analytic Index to the Ballad Entries in the Stationers’ Register* (1924), the most popular single subject of printed news ballads in the mid-seventeenth century was criminal behavior. There were fifty on murder, forty-five on hangings, fifteen on public burnings, three on pressing to death, and two on beheading for a total of 115. The topic with the next highest number of stories was Queen Elizabeth about whom fifty-four ballads were published. Ballads about the Spanish Armada came in third.⁵⁹⁰ These ballads, both read and sung, mixed ‘fact’ and ‘fiction,’ that is, real people and actual events appeared in printed texts that were both meant to convey news and to entertain.

In America in the 1920s, the *New York Daily News*’ stories were typically peppered with facts that named each player in a crime case with his current address, or dutifully cited the medical examiner and a man referred to as Inspector Coughlin of the Detective Bureau. One writer notes, “Stories provided lead-ins and italicized passages - not unlike the soap summaries of TV guides today – to update readers of the progress of the investigation. Indeed, the particular convergence of police power and cultural narrative meant the popular proceduralism of this kind actually ‘cut across’ the news field.” The *Times*, for instance, “tracked right through the grainiest details of the case, reporting the initial investigative clues at the crime scene, the work of the autopsy, and the rounding up of suspects; clues were sifted, like whether it was ‘possible for a person to descend’ a back stairway ‘without being seen by the elevator operator.’ Even the careful attribute of ‘objectivity’ often said to be in embryo at the *Times* could just as easily blur into the gossip and hearsay on which the news

⁵⁸⁹ Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 46.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

depended.” Thus, “tabloid proceduralism ... mimicked the police’s own.”⁵⁹¹ Not only did people, places, and events move across genres, so did the techniques, tropes, and vocabulary for researching and writing about them.⁵⁹²

That printed matter contained fact and fiction, news and novels, does not mean that people were confused as to what was real but that readers “had no expectations that a newspaper was to report only facts or real events like they do today.”⁵⁹³ The novel, as Lennard Davis argues, is the product of a subdivision of a “news/novels discourse” that included a range of publications from newspapers and advertisements to handbills and open letters.⁵⁹⁴ News ballads of the sixteenth century were, after all, called ‘novels’ and the term ‘newes’ applied to both factual and fictional writing.⁵⁹⁵ Yet many ballads and news books claimed to be ‘trewes,’ even when content was of miracles and occurrences that today would be deemed fantastical.⁵⁹⁶ These stories, though ostensibly about ‘real’ events, were not entirely ‘factual,’ at least not in any way that one might think of fact today. That is, parts of the stories were made up by their writers. Dialogue, for instance, was attributed to killers and their victims that they never uttered, that would have been physically impossible for anyone to know that they actually said or felt at certain times during their lives. It wasn’t until the nineteenth century, due to legal restrictions, that the ‘news/novels discourse’ split into ‘news’ and ‘novels,’ with news containing ‘real’ events and novels ‘imagined’ ones.

⁵⁹¹ Wilson, 2000, 75.

⁵⁹² Philip B. Corbett of the *New York Times*, for example, notes that adjectives like alleged and suspected have crept into newspaper reporting from police reports. The *New York Times* stylebook, for example, says: “Alleged and allegedly are police-blatter jargon” and should be re-written in “conversational English” such as “accused of” or “charged with.” From Philip B. Corbett, “Bright Passages,” *After Deadline* (blog), *New York Times*, 1 June 2010, accessed at www.topics.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/01/bright-passages-2/ on 5 June 2010.

⁵⁹³ Davis, 1983, 10, 76.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 44-46.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 50, 52.

Objects produced by the print press in Siam were similarly jumbled, though perhaps much less so than in seventeenth century England. The publishing industry, after all, had two centuries to develop in Europe before Dr. Bradley brought the first print press to Siam in 1835. Presumably, he and his missionary counterparts had some inkling of what it was they were producing – newspapers versus novels, facts versus fiction. So did the Siamese elites, some of whom had studied overseas, who began publishing papers in the later part of the nineteenth century. Some of the earliest publications in Siam, including *Wachirayan* and *Wachirayan wiset* did have section headings for different types of writing. There was poetry (*klon*, etc.), announcements, meeting minutes, entertainment reading (*ruang an len*), and documentary non-fiction stories (*sarakbadi*). The closest category to ‘fiction’ was *ruang an len*, which featured short stories translated from English language sources and also items such as travel reports that were not necessarily ‘fictional.’ Luang Saranupraphan’s pre-*Phrae dam* stories were accounts of his travels to Chiang Mai called *Phajon phai chiang mai* (Chiang Mai adventures). In the first, called the “*Jin luk lap*” (Mysterious Chinese), Luang Saranupraphan tells of his encounter on a northbound train with a potential secret society member. These early divisions in the content of printed matter did not, then, signal a clear division between what was ‘real’ and what was ‘imagined.’ Sometimes this led to serious issues concerning the discerning of fact and fiction. In an example from post-World War II Thailand, the *Bangkok Daily Mail* reported in the murder of four former ministers that at a meeting of police officers the Director-General of Police “Phao [Sriyanond] nervously paced the floor in front of his aides with a drink in his hand.” This was reported as a quote from a high-ranking police officer at the meeting. Yet, in the testimony the officer gives for the trial of the four officers accused of the ministers’ murder, he adamantly denies ever having said anything

remotely like this and then denounced “the report in the said newspaper as false.”⁵⁹⁷ The newspaper fabricated details of the story to make it a more gripping read.

In another example, histories of the press in Siam invariably bring up the famous ‘*Sanuk nuk*’ (Fun thinking) episode, one that Benedict Anderson writes was the first time a Siamese paper was subject to the “modern-style imposition of censorship.” In 1886, the first installment of the story by Krom Luang Phichit Prichakon, a “prominent young foreign-educated nobleman,” appeared in *Wachirayan wiset*. The journal was immediately forced to stop publishing the story because it featured an imaginary conversation between four young Buddhist monks at one of Bangkok’s most famous temples, Wat Bowonniwet, about their futures. Anderson summarizes the controversy this way: “...some spoke of soon leaving the monkhood to resume civil service careers, while one rather matter-of-factly pointed out the practical advantages – economic security and peace of mind – offered by remaining in yellow robes. The insertion of an imaginary conversation into a well-known ‘real-life’ setting is, of course, a commonplace, effective, literary device of modern Western-style ‘realism.’ But to the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet and to the Supreme Patriarch, Phichit’s text appeared as an irreverent, insulting reportage of the actual state of mind of young monks at the temple. They made known their anger to King Julalongkon (Rama V), who then banned publication of any further episodes of the tale.”⁵⁹⁸ Some have noted that the problems arose because the story referred to the present time and real places and that this was something new at the time in Thai literature.⁵⁹⁹ However, the folk tale *Khun chang khun phaen* is based on real events and takes place in locations that exist in Thailand, so the reference to ‘real life’ is not really a new

⁵⁹⁷ Testimony of Police Major General Luang Sinlaprasat given on 16 December 1957 in *Khadi kha phu un tai doi jethana (4 ratthamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], LMAG.

⁵⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1985), 13.

⁵⁹⁹ *Sayam phimpakan*, 2007, 209 and Anderson and Mediones, 1985, 13.

development in Siam. For the objects being created with the print press, their factuality or fictionality was a work in progress, and continue to be even today, though mostly in the area of television and film.⁶⁰⁰

In an oft-cited case of early censorship, K.S.R. Kulap, an ambitious, educated commoner who published the periodical *Siam praphet sunatharawatwiset* between 1897 and 1908, got into hot water with the royal family for his ‘factual’ accounts of royal rituals and histories. His paper, which he claimed sold over 1,000 copies each edition, carried news and non-fiction stories.⁶⁰¹ But it was his histories that drew the attention of the royal court. Working from stolen sources, Kulap “elaborated, emended, and corrected” their accounts by putting in his own “insertions and speculations” without royal permission.⁶⁰² At first, the royals found him only to be a nuisance, not a serious threat. Damrong, in *Nithan boranakhadi*, derided Kulap’s paper as sensational (*yu khang ja lot phon*)⁶⁰³ and King Chulalongkorn gave Kulap a public dressing down for not citing his sources or noting his changes or embellishments.⁶⁰⁴ Things got worse when Kulap began to make up his own sources, as in the case of his history of the Sukhothai kingdom. In this history, he planted two characters, a king named Phra Pinket and his successor and son, Phra Chulapinket.⁶⁰⁵ This heir was incompetent and led the kingdom to defeat and dishonor. Chulalongkorn, whose title was Chulachomklao, took offense to the story because of the association between himself and

⁶⁰⁰ The brouhaha over the television drama *Songkhrām nang fa* (War of angels) from 2008 about the salacious personal lives of flight attendants is one example. Thai Airways threatened to sue the creators of the series as libelous to the airline and its staff even though airline in the series was fictitious.

⁶⁰¹ K.S.R. Kulap claimed to have 500 subscribers in Bangkok and another 800 in the provinces (*bua muang*). He even said that he had fifty subscribers in Europe, America, and Cambodia. Sukanya Tirawanit, *Prawatikan nangsuphim nai prathet thai phai tai rabop sombunnanasithirat, pho. so. 2324-2475* [The history of the newspaper in Thailand under the absolute monarchy, 1881-1932] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1977), 45.

⁶⁰² Craig Reynolds, “Mr. Kulap and Purloined Documents,” in *Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), 62-3

⁶⁰³ Sukanya, 1977, 46.

⁶⁰⁴ Reynolds, 2006, 64.

⁶⁰⁵ The term ‘Chula’ is sometimes taken as equivalent to the suffix ‘Junior.’

Phra Chulapinket. For this Kulap was sentenced to seven days labor in an asylum (*rong ba*). In another instance, Kulap's cremation biography of Supreme Patriarch Sa, abbot of Wat Ratchapradit, who died 11 January 1900, disturbed Chulalongkorn with its "inaccuracies and distortions." Chulalongkorn refused to distribute it, saying "because the words are not credible, and people will be deceived by Kulap's mixing of falsehood and truth." Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot and two others then were tasked with sorting out what was false in Kulap's account of Sa's life. After a thorough check, the commission found three kinds of error in Kulap's text: falsehoods or items with no factual basis, falsehoods mixed with truth or where items were false but portions were true, and truth mixed with falsehood or where items were true but portions were false.⁶⁰⁶

The *Sanuk nuk* and KSR Kulap cases show that early attempts at censorship were not about freedom of the press *per se*, but about how to categorize information and then how to assign that category a place in a changing information order, to sort out the epistemological 'messiness' created by the many forms of information the print press produced. On this point, Craig Reynolds writes that the Kulap incidents and the commission to question him raised the issue of what it meant to *riang* versus *taeng*. *Riang* is to compile, which is what historians and chroniclers of the time were supposed to do, sort of like the idea of *prakeop* (compile) in the re-enactment. But *taeng* is to compose, which involves corrections and embellishments. The battle lines drawn by the government were not about what could be printed so much as what was to be categorized as true or fictional. As the inter-textuality exhibited by crime stories indicates, the same piece of information can be transformed from fact to fiction or fiction to fact simply by the form that it takes. At worst the mixing of the two categories of information poses a danger. At best the mixing is

⁶⁰⁶ Reynolds, 2006, 65-8, 71.

confusing. Censorship on the part of the government therefore targeted the fact/fiction divide. In reaction to the critical articles that appeared in the missionary press in the early days of the industry King Mongkut issued an announcement to remind people not to believe everything they read in the papers: “Do not put too much trust the stories published in the newspaper because people with vested interests bring their grievances to the paper rather than submit them according to existing practices of *rong thuk* (appeal to someone in authority). Therefore, stories in the newspaper do not enter the press on their own accord. To those who receive and read papers, do not believe what you read is a true story.”⁶⁰⁷ Censorship aimed at truth as much as it did criticism of government institutions.

Moreover, private individuals were key players in censoring the press as they used law courts to sue the press for libel (*min pramat*). Dr. Bradley was sued by the French consul, a Monsieur Obaret for publishing a story about the consul making a secret agreement with a Chinese liquor tax farmer to short the government in revenues from liquor taxes. This was one of the first big cases involving the press. The court decided that Bradely was in the wrong and ordered he pay reparations to Obaret. This, along with the generally poor economic performance of his paper, caused him to quit the newspaper business temporarily.⁶⁰⁸ Another American publisher, Samuel L. Smith, who helped publish *Siam Observer* was sued for printing unflattering news about a local notable.⁶⁰⁹ Andrew Freeman was threatened by a privately owned railway company for printing a story about a faulty rail line in Thonburi province.⁶¹⁰ Phraya Aphairacha sued Louis Khirawat of the *Bangkok Daily Mail*. The police department, as mentioned in Chapter 3, also sued Khirawat for libel, claiming the exposé that the *Daily Mail* ran about the police operating a smuggling operation

⁶⁰⁷ Sukanya, 1977, 17. See also Thanaphol, 2008, 23.

⁶⁰⁸ Sukanya, 18-9.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁶¹⁰ Freeman, 2007, 105.

to kidnap women from China for prostitution in Bangkok damaged the reputation of the police.⁶¹¹ In that case, Freeman notes that Phraya Athikonprakat, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, took the stand and claimed “even though the articles in the paper were true they were libelous.”⁶¹² Papers sued each other as well. The paper *Sayam phaphayon* sued the *Bangkok Herald*.⁶¹³ The heyday of the press in the 1920s and 1930s was not just one of unbridled press freedom, but one in which the definitions of what constituted fact or fiction was up for grabs, not just between the state and the press, but between presses and between individuals and presses. As the battle to define truth was fought, the newspaper and the police became closer and the battle ended with a fixation on the crime story.

Summary

Histories of the press in Thailand typically begin with an account of Dr. Dan Beach Bradley. In 1835, this American Protestant missionary from New York brought with him to Siam from Singapore a printing press capable of producing Thai language documents. They then tell of how Bradley published the kingdom’s first newspaper, the *Bangkok Recorder*, in 1844. Seeing the potential of the press, the royal government established its own publishing house and began printing official news and royal decrees in a periodical called *Ratchakitchannabeksa* in 1858. Between the 1880s and the 1910s, royals (especially Crown Prince Vajiravudh) and educated elites expanded the world of print by forming literary societies and publishing journals to promote reading and writing. By about the middle of the 1910s, state subsidies allowed Thais not directly affiliated with government to begin publishing newspapers and journals, marking the press’ transition into the hands of commoners, albeit ones of elite

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 215.

⁶¹² Ibid, 230.

⁶¹³ Sukanya, 1977, 100.

backgrounds. This precipitated an explosion in the number of journals during the 1920s. The number of new, non-daily periodicals jumped from forty-seven in the fifth reign (1868 to 1910) to 160 in the seventh reign (1925 to 1935), thus putting the public into public sphere. At this point, histories of the press highlight the critical role of the newly vigorous publishing sector in bringing about the democratic revolution of 1932 through its active, sometimes virulent, criticism of the monarchy and its government. The story of the press then turns quickly into a tale of how a series of subsequent civilian and military governments all worked to wring the life out of the vibrant, if somewhat unruly, industry. It is against this backdrop of endangered liberty that histories of the press can then portray men like Thianwan, K.S.R Kulap, Kulap Sai Pradit, and even Kukrit Pramoj and Sulak Sivaraksa as heroes protecting printed speech from the state. Once these histories have identified their heroes, the story of the Thai press may properly be read as a struggle for freedom.

Rather than tell a story about freedom *per se*, this history has focused on censorship, by both government agents and private individuals, and crime news; the two are interlinked, with the latter's growth and character stemming from the former. The history of the press, when seen through the lens of the crime story, reads less clearly as a tragedy about the demise of the public sphere than as a crime thriller, complete with bad cops, noble villains, dead bodies, and sensational violence. The story ends with the revelation that the press and its media – the newspaper, the magazine, the novel – are not fixed objects, immutable over time, but are forms of knowledge that emerged from sometimes violent episodes of a larger struggle over the generation and control of information. While a history of the press that emphasizes press freedom gradually disappearing under the heavy hand of governments that sought to control information is an important narrative, in the process other dimensions of this history are ignored. Ironically, the lasting outcome of government repression is not

silence, but a multi-vocal, destabilizing, ever-changing clamor. This unintended consequence of the evolution of intra-state politics in an age of mass media makes any easy conclusions about the efficacy of state power and repression, or the powerlessness of society vis-à-vis the state apparatus dubious. It is this productive struggle that ultimately is more important in this history of the mass media, which is an attempt to come to grips with how everyday practices of knowledge production transform the violence in Thai society into stories that make sense. It has been claimed, not entirely unreasonably, that “Everything we know about our society...we know through the mass media.”⁶¹⁴ In the case of what people know about violence, one can put forward a strong argument that this is in fact so. The things produced by the print media, and its broadcast and streamed counterparts, are the primary forms through which the general public can think about violence. Figuring out how these objects have come to be and how they work today is therefore a necessary first step in understanding the ‘ordinary’ violence that happens daily in Thailand and the ‘extraordinary’ violence that histories of Thailand revolve around.

⁶¹⁴ Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 2.

CHAPTER 6

A HISTORY OF CONSPIRACY

“So many clues in such a small room – what to believe!”⁶¹⁵

From Mystery to Conspiracy

On the morning of 9 June 1946, young King Ananda Mahidol was found lying dead in his bedchambers with a single gunshot wound to the forehead. He had no known enemies, had not apparently quarreled with anyone prior to his death, and there were no witnesses present when the fatal bullet was shot.⁶¹⁶ A special investigative unit was formed to solve the case. This team of police investigators and medical doctors, using forensic techniques, analyzed the gun found lying on the bed next to him, a bullet and a bullet casing also found at the scene, and the area surrounding the palace to produce various facts that they could use to string together a narrative about how events likely unfolded that fateful morning. This initial effort was unable to generate any definitive explanation, even after several months of

⁶¹⁵ Spoken by the literary detective Hercule Poirot in Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*.

⁶¹⁶ It was rumored, however, that King Ananda had argued with his mother about a possible love interest in Switzerland and with Prime Minister Pridi Phanomyong before his death. Pridi was cast as an enemy of the King almost from the moment his body was discovered. On the rumors surrounding the King's death see Rayne Kruger, *The Devil's Discus* (London: Cassell, 1964), Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), and Alexander MacDonald, *Bangkok Editor* (New York: MacMillan, 1949). These rumors also show up in the legal system when Criminal Court (*san aya*) judges reference them in their verdict against the three men accused of conspiracy to commit regicide. They then attempt over two pages of text to demonstrate that all was well in the Mahidol family. See *Khamphiphaksa khadi pratusarai to phrabat somdet phraparamentaramaha ananthamahidon ratchakan thi 8* [Court verdict in the case of criminal violence committed against King Ananda Mahidol, case number 1878/2491-black and 1266/2494-red] with a foreword by Police Lieutenant General Phra Phinitchonkhadi (Bangkok: Krung Sayam Kanphim, 1974). In Thai, most refer to Suphot Dantrakun's writings on the topic including *Khotbetjing kiankap karani sawanakhot chabab sombun* [Facts in the case of the death of King Ananda, complete edition] (Bangkok: Sathaban Witthayasat Sangkhom, 2001). More recently, Somsak Jiamthirasakul, has written a number of articles about the case. See his “*Prisana karani sawanakhot*” [Mysterious case of regicide], *Fah diaw kan* [Same sky] 6.2 (April-June 2008): 116-135 and *50 pi kan praban chiwit 17 kumphan 2598* [The 50-year anniversary of the 17 February 1955 execution], *Fah diaw kan* [Same sky] 3.2 (April-June, 2005): 64-85.

investigation.⁶¹⁷ In October of the same year, the team announced that the death of King Ananda was likely an accident but left open the possibility for both suicide and assassination. With the door open, newspapers began suggesting all manner of explanation for the death. Pridi Phanomyong, then Prime Minister, subsequently ordered a ban on reporting the case in the media, declared a state of emergency, and had members of the opposition arrested.⁶¹⁸ Censorship, however, acts in the same way as a temporal transposition in the detective novel. It is a withholding of information that leads to mystery, which then spawns narrative.

Alexander MacDonald, the first editor of the *Bangkok Post*, wrote the following passage about the day the news of King Ananda's death broke: "By afternoon the atmosphere of tragedy had become surcharged with suspicion. It came coiling evilly in. The hushed tones of bereavement changed to dark whisperings. Something more is behind this tragic matter, one whispered tentatively to another. There is wickedness here. Death could not have come by the hand of our gentle King. Someone. Someone. There were plotters. Someone ambitious, someone vengeful, someone afraid. This was no accident – our gentle monarch slain. The whispers grew sullen, became an insistent chorus. This was *murder!*"⁶¹⁹ He adds: "The change [in the country's mood] was particularly apparent in politics. What had been a good-humored scramble for places of power, a *sanuk* game, like schoolboys playing King of the Hill, was becoming now a grim struggle for political survival. The first ugly whispers that the King's death had been part of a political plot had begun to be heard. The rumor spread. Politicians out to unseat the Pridi government began to inject the poison into their campaign speeches. The opposition press took it up. Innuendoes, outright charges were made. There was talk of a republican plot, to overthrow the monarchy. Pridi's own

⁶¹⁷ Or it may have come to a conclusion that was not politically practical to reveal.

⁶¹⁸ Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 20.

⁶¹⁹ MacDonald, 1949, 46.

name and the murder rumor began to be linked. Politics suddenly had become a dirty, deadly game.”⁶²⁰

There was a sense that behind the king’s death and the investigation-cover-up lay a darker purpose, a deeper motive. The censorship and unsatisfying resolution presented by the government only added fuel to the fire. Rather than a typical detective story, then, the king’s death case enabled a conspiracy theory. This chapter, as a way of concluding, shows how the detective narrative, centered on the unknown, mystery, and secrecy, that came to define police investigation in the first decades of the twentieth century gave way to a more sinister story about power, agency, and society in Thailand after World War II and how, once this shift occurred, the devices meant to help bring clarity to events had the effect of confirming the conspiracy of history.

The Police after World War II

People looking for the truth that existed behind the scenes in the early 1950s would have had a difficult time avoiding the conclusion that it resided somewhere in the file cabinets of the new police headquarters at Pathumwan in central Bangkok. Compared to the image of the inept, comical figure of the 1910s and 1920s, the police of the post-War period were much more menacing, in large part because the period saw police power bolstered by the aid of the US government and the concomitant perceived rise of a Communist threat. Between 1950 and 1970, the US government’s aid to Thailand totaled \$580 million dollars in gross obligations. In terms of allocation over that same period, the police benefited handsomely. J. Alexander Caldwell, former Special Assistant to the Director of the United States Operations Mission (USOM), wrote: “aid to the police and closely related programs amounted to 19%

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 81.

of net accruals, transportation received 17%, health and sanitation 12%, education 8%, industry and mining 8%, the Office of Accelerated Rural Development 7%, community development, social welfare and housing 5%, public administration 2%, labor 1%, and general and miscellaneous 14%.⁶²¹ In November 1950 a separate credit bill was pushed through Parliament for 48 million baht, of which 26 million was earmarked for the police.⁶²² This aid allowed the police to grow not only in number but in capability and firepower. In 1951, a *New York Times* article on Thailand reported the “police force, which has the job of maintaining internal order, is armed with such equipment as armored cars, Bren guns and mortars” and by 1951 they “outnumbered their counterparts in the Army, Navy, and Air Force combined. Out of a total armed force strength of about 85,000, the police accounted for about 40,000. The Army was estimated to have about 30,000 soldiers. The Air Force 4,000. The Navy 8,000.”⁶²³ Today the police number over 200,000 (including administrative staff), a far cry from the 3,900 or so that Eric St. John Lawson had under his supervision in the early twentieth century.⁶²⁴ So while Daniel Fineman, in his detailed account of Thai-US relations in the Cold War period, writes that “Thailand of 1950 was still no police state,” it can be argued that it quickly became one under the auspices of notorious Director-General Phao Sriyanond, who oversaw the creation of several new police units, including an armored car division for border areas, a paratroopers unit, and also a fire fighting police, a riverboat police, a police radio division, an air police, and a dog assisted police.⁶²⁵ Mizutani Yasuhiro

⁶²¹ J. Alexander Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1974), 29.

⁶²² No author, “Government Defends Grant of Funds to Police Department,” *Bangkok Post*, 3 November 1950.

⁶²³ No author, “Thai Police Force Bigger than Army,” *New York Times*, 23 July 1951, 2. According to the numbers in the article, the police did not actually have more members than the armed forces combined, but the point remains that the police rivaled the army by the early 1950s.

⁶²⁴ Size of current police force from Thai Royal Police, provided by Jutharat Ua-amnoey, personal correspondence.

⁶²⁵ Fineman, 1997, 123.

concludes similarly in a separate study that the Thai police did not become a major force in society, especially in the provinces, until the 1950s with the aid of the Americans.⁶²⁶

In police training, Phao emphasized knowledge production and scientific methods, creating a new school for police investigation in 1952.⁶²⁷ It was reported that the first detection course given to government officials at the Administration School, Wang Suan Sunandha, began in 1954. Twenty *amphoe* [district level] officials, forty-two provincial policemen and eight army officers attended the course, which Phao said “would make them less dependent on informers, who are not always reliable.”⁶²⁸ Regional training schools were set up as well. A *kong suesan* (Communications Department) was created in 1952 with a call center to take complaints and for people to report cases. In late 1959, the police even got a mobile crime lab from the Public Safety Division of the USOM in Thailand. The lab was an ordinary looking delivery van on the outside, but inside it was “equipped with all the necessary aids for dealing with on-the-spot detection work,” including “a complete dark room where film taken at the scene of a crime can be developed, printed and enlarged. There was also a police tape recorder with two four-hour spools and interception devices. Another section of the van housed a well stocked chemical laboratory, complete with apparatus and glassware. Other features included a lie detector, a model finger print camera, and a finger print filing cabinet; a kit for making blood tests, and a kit for casting plaster of Paris models of tire or foot prints. To complete the picture, there was a library of crime laboratory books.”⁶²⁹ That same year, construction started on new police hospital. Police officers were also sent overseas to see other police departments at work while Phao hired British

⁶²⁶ Mizutani Yasuhiro, “A Modern Thai State Stumbling: The Expansion of the Police in Thailand from the 1930s to 1940s” (in Japanese), *Southeast Asian Studies* 43.2 (September 2009): 206.

⁶²⁷ Ibid, 37.

⁶²⁸ No author, “First Detection Class Opened,” *Bangkok Post*, 15 February 1954.

⁶²⁹ No author, “Thailand Getting First Mobile Crime Laboratory this Month,” *Bangkok Post*, 13 October 1959.

advisors.⁶³⁰ Earlier, Phao was reported to have ordered all textbooks related to police work in the world translated into Thai.⁶³¹

If these moves sound familiar, that's because they are. The police reforms of the 1910s and 1920s described in Chapters 2 and 3 were in many ways the same – they were an attempt to transform the way the police went about their business by equipping them with new tools and practices to circumvent local knowledge practices with international ones. New equipment, new training centers and subjects, foreign advisors, and tactics all pointed to the need to access and control information. The difference between the reforms of the pre- and post-World War II periods, however, was the social narrative that the Thai public had to interpret the outcome of any investigation. Conditions in the kingdom were just as, if not more, messy after World War II as they were in the years around the turn of the nineteenth century, but the unsatisfying solution in the case of the death of King Ananda and of series high profile crimes that took place just before and then after World War II meant that the growing power of the police was not an innocuous trend.

In 1944, Wanit Pananon, a close aid to Phibun in the early 1940s, was suddenly arrested on charges of gold profiteering and subsequently died in prison. The government stated that the death was a suicide and even released a copy of his handwritten suicide note, though most of it was illegible.⁶³² This led to speculation as to the real cause of his death. In 1949, four former ministers under arrest were assassinated on a highway in northern Bangkok as they were being transported from one prison to another. The police under Phao blamed Malayan bandits attempting to free the prisoners, though no one believed this. In December 1952, Tiang Sirikhan, former minister of parliament from Sakon Nakhon, and

⁶³⁰ Chumsai, 1995, 33-35.

⁶³¹ Chit Wiphasatawat, *Phao saraphap* [Phao confesses] (Bangkok: Phrae Witthaya, 1960), 41.

⁶³² Benjamin Baston, *The Tragedy of Wanit* (Singapore: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Special Publications Series No. 1, 1990), 19.

four others were murdered, their bodies burned. The same year, Pon Malaithong, another former minister, was killed. Chuan Rotchanawiphat, editor of *Thammathipat*, who “had been writing harshly of government corruption, singling out for special attack a graft-ridden agency known as the Food Drive Organization which was supposed to cut down living costs” was gunned down on the way home from work. MacDonald writes, “Pedaling home on his bicycle one evening, he had just passed Sanuk Palace when a black sedan drove up behind him. The snout of a sub-machine gun was stuck out of the window and a quick splash of bullets felled the editor. The car sped on. The whole town knew that someone had been hired to kill Nai Chuen [sic]; newspapermen knew the police constable who did it, but the case of the editor’s murder was never brought to court. The Police Department had orders to forget about it.”⁶³³ Suri Thongwanit, editor of *Siang Thai*, “which published a racy account of the arrest of a Siamese colonel’s daughter by customs men in Manila for smuggling diamonds out of Siam” was shot. “He had also [like Chuan] just finished his day’s newspaper chores. He was getting into his jeep when a bullet caught him from behind. It didn’t quite kill him. It tore through the back of his neck and came out in the front part of his face, but he was taken to hospital quickly enough to make repairs.”⁶³⁴ In 1954, Haji Sulong, prominent leader from the Islamic south, and his son disappeared without a trace. The police claimed they got lost. In 1956, Ari Liwira was shot dead outside his beach house in Hua Hin. The police, after an investigation, suggested that the culprit was an unidentified ‘sixth man.’ In all, the police killed at least twenty people between 1944 and 1957.⁶³⁵ Echoes of a previous era, an older information order where the identities of murderers were a public

⁶³³ MacDonald, 1949, 57.

⁶³⁴ MacDonald, 1949, 58.

⁶³⁵ Kasian Tejaphira, in *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001), provides a table that lists political murders of the late 1940s and 1950s (85). See also Thak 2007.

secret? Perhaps, but now the killers were agents of the state, who could not be named. As a result, these and many other cases remained without resolution for years. Some still have yet to be solved.

Another difference between the early twentieth century police reforms and those of the 1950s was that the post-World War II police build-up was fueled by a network of covert relations between politicians, businessmen, police officers, and Americans living in Thailand rather than through a government approved and sponsored program of modernization. Fineman describes the covert operation, which was run by a committee set up in 1950 by Willis Bird, an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officer during World War II who had “rapidly sank roots in the country.” Using his connections, Bird organized “a secret committee of leading military and political figures to develop an anticommunist strategy and, more important, lobby the United States for increased military assistance.”⁶³⁶ The cabal, called the Naresuan Committee, included Phao, the army generals Sarit Thanarat and Phin Chunhawan, air force chief Fuen Ronnaphakat, and Sitthi Savetsila, foreign minister from 1980 to 1990. It was during the early 1950s too that the CIA established a presence in the kingdom, primarily accomplished through their funding the development of the police’s criminal investigation department. By 1953, there were 200 CIA advisors in the country whose mission was to train the police.⁶³⁷ The Naresuan Committee, in turn, enjoyed close relations with the CIA and both operated clandestinely, often with Phibun’s government in the dark as to their movements. The situation after World War II was not one of a unified state rationally expanding its repressive surveillance apparatus, but a fragmented organism whose parts were often at odds with each other, working secretly against one another.

⁶³⁶ Fineman, 1997, 133.

⁶³⁷ Ibid, 135.

The Dark Hand of Influence

That the police were behind the spate of political murders might be called a ‘public secret,’ something people know but cannot talk about. The police either claimed no knowledge of them or that some non-police agent was behind the violence. Meanwhile, many members of the public, and in some cases, members of the police themselves, were skeptical, knowing full well that Phao’s men were the culprits. In the case of the murder of the four former ministers described in Chapter 4, for example, one officer recalled a telling conversation that took place at Phalap Phalachai police station immediately after the incident occurred.

According to his testimony, an officer named Luang Pichit told another officer named Iam Panthudej that the four ministers had just been shot and killed by Malayan terrorists. Iam responded by laughing and remarked “that is an old trick.”⁶³⁸ Another officer, one that was at the scene of the crime when it occurred, noted that when he saw a paper report that the four ministers had been shot by Malayan bandits that he “did not believe the newspaper report because I knew that the gunfire came from in front of the car carrying the four accused.”⁶³⁹

Not coincidentally, this is the period that sensational crime news took off as reporters and editors attempted to talk about politics without talking about politics, as described in Chapter 5. Publishing houses also began in this period to produce new weekly and monthly newsmagazines with titles that included ‘*buang lang*’ (‘behind the scenes’) like *Phim thai buang lang kbao*, *Phim thai lang kbao sapada*, *Daily news buang lang kbao*, and *Daily Mail buang lang kbao*. There was a notion that behind the news were more interesting tales to be

⁶³⁸ Testimony of Lt. Boonsom Atphadung given on 3 December 1957 in *Khadi kha phu un dai doi jethana (4 ratthamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], Library and Museum of the Attorney General’s Office (LMAG).

⁶³⁹ Testimony of Police Sgt. Kiatisak Phuangthiang given on 20 November 1957 in *Khadi kha phu un dai doi jethana (4 ratthamontri)* [The case of the intentional murder of four former ministers], LMAG.

told through in-depth analysis and opinion pieces that explained the truth behind the violence. When those explanations pointed to people in positions of power, however, reporting them required a bit of finesse. Not coincidentally, the now common phrases of third hand (*mu thi sam*), dark hand (*mu mut*), and people of influence (*phu mi ithiphon*) began at this stage to emerge as very real agents of Thai history.⁶⁴⁰ Viengrat Nethipho, professor of government at Chulalongkorn University, conducted research on political and crime news in the press from 1957 through the end of the 1960s and found that terms like *ithiphon* or *phuak ithiphon* began to appear in the news during the late 1950s.⁶⁴¹ And it was during the era of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963) that the *anthaphan*, or social delinquent, and the *jao pho* (godfather) emerged as figures behind the news.⁶⁴²

Of course stories about *sua*, or bandits, were still popular and often appeared in the weeklies and dailies after just as before World War II: “At the time, reports of banditry in the kingdom were becoming routine copy for the Post. Out in the country bandit gangs were taking over whole areas. Yao’s [Sunthinoon, a *Bangkok Post* reporter] ordeal had to do with two of these *khon sua*, or ‘tiger men,’ named Sua Kaeo and Sua Thanom.”⁶⁴³ The two were brothers from Kanburi who had made a fortune from robbery. They had decided to retire and celebrate by holding a two day feast. They even sent out engraved invitations to their followers, government officials, and the press. At the event, undercover police officers shot Sua Kaeo through the head, triggering a chaotic gun battle that ended with the police

⁶⁴⁰ Terms like the ones in quotes are common in news articles describing domestic politics, referring often to some unnamable, but often widely ‘known’ figure believed to be behind the headlines. A recent editorial in the *Bangkok Post*, for example, mocked the tendency for Thais to explain politics with references to third or invisible hands but had nothing to say about why so many people see society in these terms. (“The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,” <http://bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/191120/the-hand-that-rocks-the-cradle>, accessed 20 August 2010).

⁶⁴¹ Unpublished research report provided by author in personal correspondence.

⁶⁴² The *jao pho*, or godfather, was a new figure of criminality that who masterminded crimes rather than commit them directly himself or herself. See Chapter 5.

⁶⁴³ MacDonald, 1949, 143-4.

burning down the bandits' house. The next morning, the police arrested officials and others for cooperating with bandits. But alongside these exciting tales of bandits and gun fights were an increasing number of reports about murders related to the struggle for territory or commercial profits. In these stories, the explanation was typically that there were 'problems' or personal grudges between intimates or business partners.⁶⁴⁴

In another example, from 1960, a judge in Chonburi was killed, but no solid explanation was given. It was only reported that the police had questioned a man referred to as *sia* Jiw.⁶⁴⁵ In this story, the term *ithipbon*, or influence, was used to describe the people behind the murder.⁶⁴⁶ And as opposed to the stories about crime in the 1910s and 1920s where in many instances there was similarly no indication of who the perpetrator was, the post-World War II reports typically pointed to one of Thailand's new influential phantoms. In the period after the war, stories about illegal economies including opium and marijuana trade, prostitution, and illegal logging were becoming increasingly common. The people behind these operations were referred to as *phuak ithipbon* (influential group).⁶⁴⁷ Rarely, if ever, were the owners of the illegal operations named.

After the end of Sarit period in 1963, stories of murder, and there were many, began to appear with the term *phu mi ithipbon* (person of influence) more regularly and as before the stories did not usually mention who this person was. All the way through the early 1970s, these *phu mi ithipbon* were in full force. A series of stories in the newspaper *Thai rat* about two connected cases, one a mass murder-suicide and the other a murder of a village volunteer, in 1973 appeared with these titles: Thursday, 8 March: "Influence from Illegal Logging Boss (*ithipbon mai thuan*) behind (*buang lang*) the Multiple Murder of Volunteer 8's Family";

⁶⁴⁴ Viengrat, 1985, 5.

⁶⁴⁵ *Sia* is a term used for a wealthy entrepreneur who is typically of Chinese ancestry.

⁶⁴⁶ From *Siang ang thong*, August to December 1960 and 18 March 1960.

⁶⁴⁷ Viengrat, 1985, 6.

Tuesday, 14 March: “Thai Rat Threatened Not to Report on Shooting Death of Volunteer’s Friend, Influential Boss’ (*jom ithiphon*) Gunman Laying Low”; Wednesday, March 14, “Influential Boss’ Underlings in Volunteer’s Friend’s Shooting Death at Odds”; Thursday, March 22, “Influential Boss’ Gunman in Assassination of Volunteer’s Friend Arrested”; Saturday, March 24, “Influential Boss’ Lackeys (*klum ithiphon*) Intimidate Special Investigation Unit in Shooting Death of Volunteer’s Friend”; and Sunday, March 25, “Police Suggest Moving Men of Influence in Case of Volunteer’s Friend’s Shooting Death.”

Beginning in the 1950s, then, a space behind the visible opened up in the modern discourse of power and politics and into that space went all the human agents of violence and power that could not be named. The violent reality in Thailand was not what it seemed, especially as the country was just beginning to promote itself as a safe and happy land for tourists. Euphemisms provided a way to speak about the agents of power without naming them.

Of course, the notion that visible reality was an effect of hidden forces or otherworldly power players is not new. Gods, spirits, ghosts, and other beings have always had a hand in determining the affairs of men. So has the law of karma, though karma is much more of a manmade phenomenon than supernatural beings. Karma, if understood as the results of an individual’s actions and thoughts, may be in many ways controlled – do good things, receive good things (*tham di dai di*). There is nothing menacing behind the workings of karma. Its power is transparent. Even spirits and deities are all ‘real’ entities in that they interact with humans and exist in worlds that form a continuum of existence with the one that humans occupy. Moreover, supernatural beings could all be named (e.g. Indra, Brahma). The change that occurred in the 1950s was that supernatural forces and other beings were joined by powerful, unnamable human actors including military generals, police officers, godfathers, and wealthy entrepreneurs (*sia*) who sought to control parts of the state

or the economy for their own benefit. The narrative expression of this shift to human actors was conspiracy theory.

Strategies of Power

Conspiracy theory, writes Mark Fenster, is “the conviction that a secret, omnipotent individual or group covertly controls the political and social order or some part thereof.”⁶⁴⁸

Conspiracy theories, like the narrative of a detective novel, require clues. Clues hint at something, a hidden truth. In fiction, they sometimes lead to a false resolution or for the reader to expect a situation that is much worse than actually is the case, especially if interpreted incorrectly.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, they generate suspense and point to solutions, suggesting that there is something more than meets the eye. In the aftermath of King Ananda’s death, a number of peculiar occurrences took place. A man shouted in a movie theater that Pridi killed the king.⁶⁵⁰ Meanwhile royalist politicians were telling people at the French Embassy in Bangkok that Ananda was shot in the back, therefore ruling out suicide.⁶⁵¹ Conflicting reports from the government under Pridi, which claimed an accident, and reports by American and British experts, which concluded someone shot the king, were at odds. The months dragged on without a resolution to the case.

In 1947, a ‘white paper’ was circulated after the 1947 coup that drove Pridi and Prime Minister Thamrongnawasat out of the country stating that two Chinese “born in Siam in the town of Ayuthia [sic]” were planning a large-scale Chinese invasion of the kingdom.

The white paper charged that these two Chinese planned to set up a ‘South China,’ of which

⁶⁴⁸ Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1, 7.

⁶⁴⁹ Shklovsky, 1990, 106.

⁶⁵⁰ The man was allegedly hired by politicians of the Democrat Party to shout out in cinemas that Pridi had killed the king. Somkiat Wanthana, “The Politics of Modern Thai Historiography” (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 1986), 329.

⁶⁵¹ Somsak, 2008, 123-4.

Pridi would have been named president. It then went on to connect a series of events – the 1944 overthrow of Phibun, the death of the King, the signing of a treaty with China, and a plot to overcome the army – into a coherent narrative about the recent past that ‘proved’ the truth of the alleged plot.⁶⁵²

In a conspiracy narrative, clues do not lead to a reconstruction of a past in order to solve a mystery. They only help confirm a prefabricated narrative, in this case one created in part by Seni and Kukrit Pramot, leaders of the royalist Democrat Party, that Pridi killed the king. As anthropologists Harry West and Todd Sanders observe, conspiracy theory is not necessarily a form of resistance or a counter narrative to power.⁶⁵³ Nor is it simply an expression of fear or anxiety among adherents or an indication of some sort of pathology on the part of marginalized groups.⁶⁵⁴ Conspiracy theory is a political strategy and its nurturing is a means to an end. Conspiracy theories find adherents because they transform “the messy details of contemporary and historical politics” into “effects caused by a single narrative agent” and suggest “an efficient coherence” that the truth or reality simply does not enjoy.⁶⁵⁵ The allure of conspiracy theory comes therefore from its form. It is an effective way of bringing to heel the mass of clues unleashed onto society by the reformed police and the new mass media since the early twentieth century.

Conspiracy theories are, however, also hard to control. A short op-ed piece from a 1958 issue of the *Bangkok Post* reads: “Bangkok periodically is filled with rumors, and this is one of those periods. There are rumors of plots against the Government, of Government-

⁶⁵² MacDonald, 1949, 178. Both Pridi and Thamrongnawasat were of Chinese ancestry and were born in Ayutthaya.

⁶⁵³ Harry West and Todd Sanders, eds., *Transparency and Conspiracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15-6.

⁶⁵⁴ Richard Hofstadter, in his influential essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” described conspiracy theory as a way or ‘style’ of seeing the world as in a constant state of crises and suggested that it had special appeal to those on society’s margins. Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s* (November 1964): 77-86.

⁶⁵⁵ Fenster, 2008, 116.

Military-Police plans to arrest National Assemblymen and journalists, and of various other startling things. There are even counter-rumors by accused persons that the original rumors were really started by the seeming targets of the rumors so as to make the accused look like wicked rumormongers. It gets very devious at times.”⁶⁵⁶ Thai society was and continues to be marked by rumor, many about conspiracies against the government. Many have gained quite a following, stubbornly resisting attempts to debunk them. When John Peurifoy, the US Ambassador to Thailand, died in car crash in 1955, for example, Phibun and some in Washington became suspicious of Phao. Fineman, again, writes: “On August 12, while Peurifoy was driving his two sons back from a paratrooper display at the PARU camp, a truck ran into his robin’s-egg-blue Thunderbird, killing Peurifoy and his son, Daniel. Although the circumstances of the accident indicated no foul play, the Phibun camp, having seen the handiwork of Phao’s hired killers time and again in the past, immediately assumed police involvement. Apparently, the CIA also had its worries at first.”⁶⁵⁷ Here, the government did not believe its own version of the accident.

In the King Ananda’s death case, the Pridi government’s stance that King Ananda’s death was an accident and the subsequent show trial during Phibun Songkhram’s second shift at the helm of the state did little to dispel lingering questions about the king’s death. In 1955, after the trial of three men accused of conspiring to commit regicide, it was reported in several newspapers that Chaliaw, one of the suspects, requested to meet with police chief Phao Sriyanond just before he was to be executed. It was not known what Chaliaw wanted to talk about, but it was thought that Chaliaw intended to tell him the true culprit behind the king’s death. The newspaper *Chao* reported, for instance, that Chaliaw wanted to tell Phao a secret but only hinted at what this secret was. This was the beginning of the rumor that

⁶⁵⁶ No author, “Rumors,” *Bangkok Post*, 28 June 1958.

⁶⁵⁷ Fineman, 1997, 220.

Chaliaw had told the king's murderers' identity to Phao. Some even think that Phao wrote down on paper the name of the murderer. *Phim thai* also had a story about Phao meeting the three defendants for about ten minutes before their deaths.⁶⁵⁸ The conspiracy theory about Pridi killing the king had turned into one about the government protecting a more horrifying truth than a republican plot against the monarchy. Whatever the case, whatever the plot, the truth exists in conspiracy theory and this is comforting, but this truth is hidden and must therefore be looked for. This is the conspiracy of history, when the recent past and the is seen as a conspiracy, that power and it's the real agents of change cannot be directly named.

What Conspiracy Theory Looks Like

Visualizations of crime scenes, if considered as representing reality seem to offer a fairly simple object of information whose accuracy can be verified by tests against reality. A map or a photograph of a room where a man was killed either corresponds to something outside in the world or not. As I argued in Chapter 4, however, some diagrams do more than represent what is real. They are devices that help people create and operate on reality, the way a timeline help people think of time as a linear progression. As such, their effects are more difficult to evaluate. This issue is important because in Thai studies, and indeed in all the social sciences and the humanities, people sometimes employ other diagrams, similar to those used by the police and the press to aid in the understanding of complex phenomena. Sometimes the visuals are simply clever metaphors that bring to mind a common, easily grasped image that is meant to help one imagine something that has no real material form or something that is difficult to visualize, say for example 'power' or 'social structure.'

⁶⁵⁸ Somsak, 2005, 78.

Benedict Anderson, for example, uses a cone of light to give shape, literally, to Javanese conceptions of power.⁶⁵⁹ Clifford Geertz, via Alexander Goldenweiser, refers to the infinitely inward spiraling designs of Maori art to paint a picture of growth in a bounded, total institution to which he likened the paddy fields of Java.⁶⁶⁰ Lucien Hanks has suggested for Thailand the image of a football field in which people move from one position to another as they accumulate or lose merit: “Instead of presenting a vista of persons occupying fixed positions in the social order, I emphasize persons moving in their fixed setting, like players with their rules and tactics on a football field.”⁶⁶¹ Further, by putting “emphasis on status rather than person, the Thai equip themselves for mobility and transient position.”⁶⁶² Different individuals hold various positions, ranks, and titles for limited amounts of time. Individuals then become the positions they occupy until they move on to occupy another. This mobility and the hierarchy it occurs within is explained and justified through the idea of merit. Power in this mapping is the ability to make one’s accumulated merit have real world effect.

Other scholars have given us more than metaphors, presenting us with actual diagrams. The one below is an attempt by political scientist Fred Riggs to map out what power might have looked like in spatial terms during the late nineteenth century. He shows power located in the royal palace, specifically in the treasury, which becomes the center of a series of concentric squares radiating out towards the city and on into the countryside.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁹ Benedict O’G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁶⁶⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

⁶⁶¹ Lucien Hanks, “Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order,” *American Anthropologist* 64.6 (December 1962): 1247.

⁶⁶² Ibid, 1252.

⁶⁶³ Fred Riggs, *Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1966).

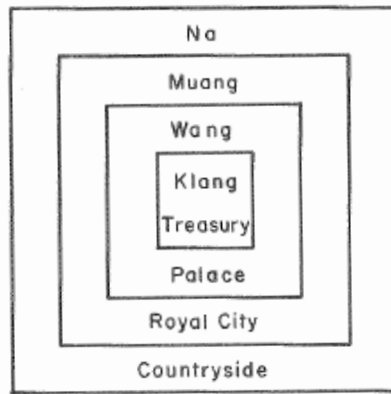


Figure 23 – Diagram of Thai Polity. From Riggs 1966.

The model is simple, elegant, and in some ways, probably ‘right’ in that it is one way that people of the region conceptualized their society.⁶⁶⁴ For scholars of Southeast Asia, this diagram might bring to mind images of the *mandala*, a representation of the cosmos that is a common trope for understanding what power looks like as a spatial entity. It was Oliver Wolters who in dug into the well of local of forms to pull out this diagram, which he suggested gave shape to the traditional polity in Southeast Asia.⁶⁶⁵ And common knowledge holds that Tai (the language family) kingdoms are laid out physically as real world *mandala*, with power centrally located in the capital city and in secondary cities located in the four cardinal directions.

But this is only one way to think of how power looks and works, a way that lends easily to Orientalist notions of traditional polities, an exotic cosmos left over as a palimpsest

⁶⁶⁴ There is one critical mistake in this diagram however. That is, Riggs, later cited in Stanley Tambiah’s *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) without any remark on the error, takes the term *khlang* (คลัง), which he Romanizes as *klang*, to mean center (which would be กลาง). *Khlang* (treasury) and *klang* (center/middle) are quite different words, with the former not meaning center at all.

⁶⁶⁵ Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982). The term *mandala* is from Sanskrit, meaning roughly ‘circle.’ It is a common motif in Hindu and Buddhist art and is used as a tool to help people focus during meditation. Related concepts include Tambiah’s ‘galactic polity’ and Victor Lieberman’s ‘solar polity.’ Both are used to denote the rather flexible relations between centers of power and their peripheries.

of traditional order in the modern world, and so forth. There are, of course, other ways to visualize the form of power and of society. Akin Rabhibdana, for example, gives this more static diagram of Thai society in his 1969 master's thesis describing for the first time in English the Thai social structure.⁶⁶⁶

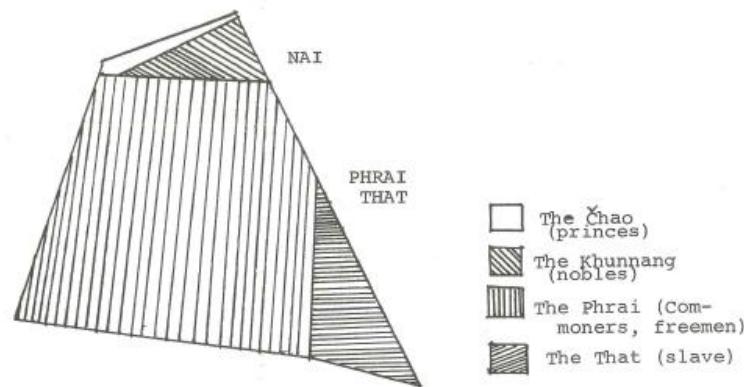


Figure 24 – Thai social structure. From Akin Rabibhadana 1969.

In this diagram, Thai society is shown as much more rigid and hierarchical, with the royal family and nobles at the top of a triangular formation in which commoners and slaves form a large base.

Another example, from Riggs again, gives an example of what power might look like if it were mapped onto paper through the lens of a less ‘traditional’ metaphor.⁶⁶⁷ The diagram below is his mapping of the relationships between competing political groups in Thailand during the mid-1950s.

⁶⁶⁶ Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok, 1782-1873*, data paper no. 74, Southeast Asia Program (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1969), 124.

⁶⁶⁷ I cite Riggs extensively here not to criticize his work, but because he was one of the first scholars of Thailand to make extensive use of diagrams. His account of the workings of politics in post-1932 Thailand remains one of the most detailed and thought provoking books in Thai studies.

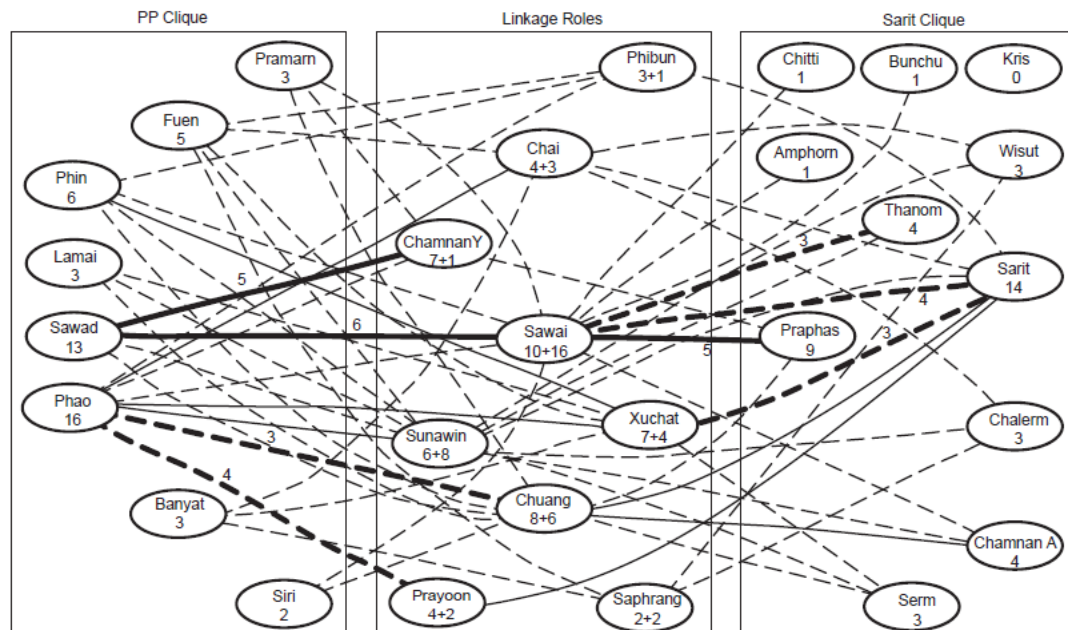


Figure 25 – Political Linkages. Diagram of links between political cliques from Riggs 1966.

These cliques maintained their power, in turn, through their ties with Chinese businessmen. In 1952, for example, Fineman writes that Phao, against his public anti-communist stance, began to expand his commercial contacts with pro-communist Chinese merchants. He also tried to buy Ari Liwira's Siam Panithayakan publishing empire.⁶⁶⁸ Phra Phinitchonkhadi, the head of the unit tasked with determining the cause of King Ananda's death, was part of a group that brought Pepsi Cola to Thailand. It was through these relationships with the largely Chinese business community that the many high ranking police were able to build up substantial personal fortunes and facilitate their many illegal activities. So behind the first set of relations between political players in the 1950s and 1960s was a less visible network that looked like this:

⁶⁶⁸ Fineman, 1997, 162.

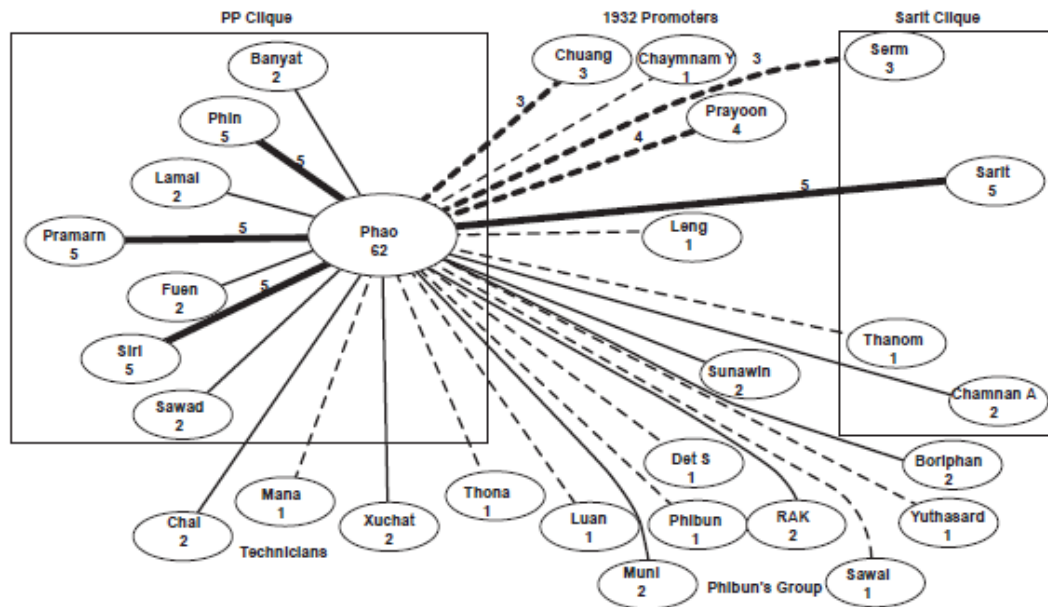


Figure 26 – Business Linkages. Diagram of links between government elites and businessmen from Riggs 1966.

There was, beginning in the 1950s, the same time the conspiracy narrative began to take hold in the popular press, behind this intermediate mapping yet another set of relationships, that of the Thai government with its American benefactor. In the language of diagram, that relationship looked something like this:

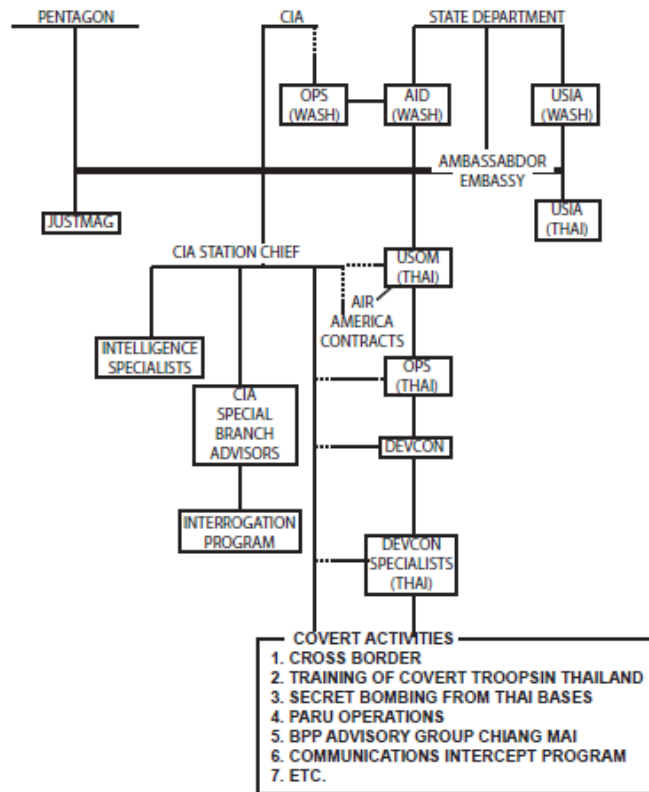


Figure 27 – Government Linkages. Diagram of links between the American and Thai governments from Lobe 1977.

As Fineman writes, years after Riggs had published his masterwork, “In effect, the assistance programs initiated in 1950 and 1951 created a series of multilevel patron-client relationships between the Thais and the Americans. On one level, the United States acted as patron of the state as a whole. American economic aid benefited the entire state apparatus, including the civilian bureaucracy.” On another level, the American military was the Thai military’s patron. And at a personal level, the US was patron to individuals like Phibun and Phao.⁶⁶⁹

In these diagrams, networks of power are made visible by lines and arrows between bubbles, boxes, and names. People do not move in space (through a football field, for example) and there is no center from which power radiates. In fact, there is no ‘space,’ at

⁶⁶⁹ Fineman, 1997, 136-7.

least not any that represents a physical territory, in these diagrams. Neither is there any time. This is because these diagrams are not really representations of anything physical or historical. They are pure diagram, pure form, in a way that the crime scene map and photograph are not. The point is that power and society, just as with evidence in criminal trials, have a 'look,' an aesthetic. This aesthetic is not always immediately clear and it is not, in some cases, even meant to be open to view. But if carefully studied and mapped, as Riggs does in his work, its form might become apparent to the general public. At least this is the assumption behind the production and use of modern diagrams like the ones above. They foreground the invisible forces that are thought to be behind current events, the way crime scene re-enactments bring to the present that which has already past. What lies behind, *buang lang*, the visible events of the world, the forms that the police and media produce and present as the socio-legal world is a power whose physical form may be seen only through diagrammatic constructions. In Rigg's diagrams, bubble diagrams in the modernist tradition give form to a network where form (circles and lines) follows function (flows of money and favors). The power behind these diagrams is a way of representation, a set of aesthetic and epistemological rules.

One might counter by saying that these diagrams and their rules of production do not reflect 'Thai' conceptions of power, the way say a *mandala* does, because they are produced by an American academic whose epistemological tool kit happens to include the types of mapping and diagrams that allow for this kind of representation to make sense in the first place. American academics, however, are not the only ones with recourse to the tools of diagram, either modernist or traditional. In Thailand, many high ranking bureaucrats and other government representatives are equipped with the same tools as non-Thai academics, having been trained in the US or Europe or in local institutions that teach

students the practices employed by Riggs and others. Indeed, Akhin's produced his triangular representation of Thai society while at Cornell University.

More recently, on 26 April 2010, amid mounting protests for the government to step down, a Center for the Resolution of Emergency Situations (CRES) spokesman gave a press briefing at which he distributed a handout with a diagram depicting a scheme to overthrow the monarchy:

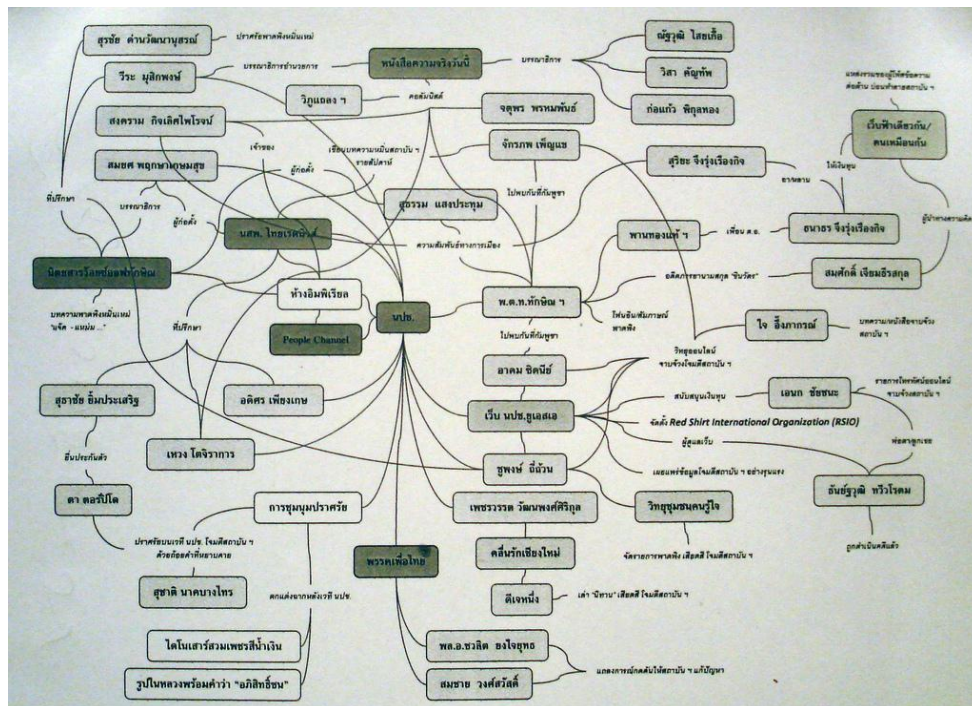


Figure 28 – Diagram of Conspiracy to Overthrow the Government.
Distributed by the Center for the Resolution of Emergency Situations (CRES).

With CRES' diagram, conspiracy theory had, for the first time in modern history, a form.

The plot's most tangible manifestation before this was the phrase 'Finland Plan.'⁶⁷⁰ In a single diagram an unseen threat to power was made real and thus accessible as a vast, cabalistic network with lines, bubbles, and text. It, like Riggs' diagrams, is not historical or spatial. It presents a floating, timeless network that exposes the agents that reside behind

⁶⁷⁰ The Finland Plan is the name of an alleged compact made between Thaksin Shinawatra and the Crown Prince in Helsinki as to how to share power after the current monarch dies.

visible events. Conspiracy theory may not be new to Thailand – rumors of plots to overthrow the government and establish a republic have been around since the first decade of the twentieth century – but there is now a way to make it visible, one that strips narrative of space and time.

Disappearing Acts

It has been written that visual representations like drawings, graphs, and charts when produced well “induce the viewer to think about the substance rather than about methodology, graphic design, the technology of graphic production, or something else.”⁶⁷¹ They reveal data but hide their means of production as well as the aesthetic basis of their validity. Evidence, when produced well, also makes the techniques of its production fade from sight. That the fingerprint and crime scene photo do this in Thailand is testament to the formal rules of their production, developed over the past hundred years, which aim to establish a permanent connection between representation and reality. That the recording of a re-enactment does this results less from any connection between itself and the historical event it refers to, but to its status as a simulation rather than a representation. This disappearing act becomes especially concerning when photos or videos of suspects performing crime are reproduced unquestioned in the mass media as they are in Thailand. If, as Lorraine Daston and others suggest, people generally view fact as something that becomes evidence when enlisted to support an assumption or hypothesis, what is it exactly that becomes a re-enactment or any visual representation? More importantly, what does the disappearance of the agents of power from visual diagrams mean for how society is understood and experienced?

⁶⁷¹ Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1983).

I turn again to literary criticism and the formal rules of narrative in the detective novel. In the arrangement of the ‘classic’ or ‘pure’ detective novel, the story of the investigation has “no importance in itself.” It “serves only as a mediator between the reader and the story of the crime. Theoreticians of detective fiction have always agreed that style, in this type of literature, must be perfectly transparent, imperceptible; the only requirement it obeys is to be simple, clear, and direct. It has even been attempted – significantly – to suppress this second story altogether. One publisher put out real dossiers, consisting of police reports, interrogations, photographs, fingerprints, even locks of hair; these ‘authentic’ documents were to lead the reader to the discovery of the criminal (in case of failure, a sealed envelope, pasted on the last page, gave the answer to the puzzle: for example, the judge’s verdict).”⁶⁷² In this example, even the figure of the detective disappears, leaving only the mind of the reader. In a detective novel, what the detective does is simply to act as an interpreter. The real detectives are the clues that ‘already exist’ in the world. What the police and the media have accomplished is just such a disappearing act; all they do is state the facts as they already exist and the work that the artifacts they generate do disappears by the wayside.

Even when something goes wrong, as when the use of force to obtain confession is accidentally disclosed or a piece of evidence is discovered to have been manipulated or someone blows the whistle on a payoff to the police, conspiracy theories are only proved: “See, I told you that Prem was behind the coup,” or “That only goes to show that the Queen is behind the assassination attempt.”⁶⁷³ With the people behind the diagrams – the police,

⁶⁷² Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 46.

⁶⁷³ The coup of the Thaksin Shinawatra government in 2006 is widely believed to have been masterminded by Prem Tinsulanonda, a retired military officer and current member of the king’s Privy Council. One cab driver explained to me that the assassination attempt in 2009 on Sondhi Limthongkul, a media mogul and key figure

attorneys, judges, reporters, photographers, and academics – gone from the scene, the dark hands of real power emerge. This is the magical effect of modern diagrams and conspiracy theory. Todorov, writing about horror fiction, notes: “Throughout the tale [a ghost story], the reader wonders if the facts reported are to be explained by a natural or a supernatural cause, if they are illusions or realities. This hesitation derives from the fact that the extraordinary (hence potentially supernatural) event occurs not in a marvelous world but in an everyday context, the one most familiar to us.”⁶⁷⁴ This is the case in the *lamtat* by Hayi Khiat about the legend of the ghost of Phra Khanong. The mystery is the reported presence of a ghost. The ‘solution,’ however, does not make clear whether the ghost is just a dream of the narrator-detective or something else. In fact, because the narrator wakes from a dream at the end of the story, the mystery of the ghost really is irrelevant since the literary tactic employed by Hayi Khiat means the reader does not even know in the end if the story being told actually ‘happened’ or if the narrative itself was part of a dream.

The ambiguity described above applies not only this particular *lamtat*, but to the state of modern Thai society. How many people were killed in 1976? What do the abandoned cargo containers at the bottom of the gulf of Thailand contain? Who were the men in black with AK-47s during the May 2010 protests? How did Sonthi Limthongkhun survive an assassination attempt that saw him fired at with a machine gun at near point blank range? Why the need to call on Khun Ying Phonthip, the kingdom’s preeminent forensic detective, whenever a dead body shows up on the streets of Thailand?⁶⁷⁵ And despite even her best

in the movement to bring down the Thaksin government in 2006, was the result of his knowing too much about the operations of the royal family, especially the queen, with regards to politics. Sondhi himself said that the assassination attempt was due to his revealing the secrets of a “lady close to the king.” See *Manager Online*, 1 May 2009.

⁶⁷⁴ Todorov, 1977. 156.

⁶⁷⁵ There are still some who question the reported large number of deaths resulting from the 6 October 1976 massacre of student protesters. In 2009, unidentified cargo containers were found at the bottom of the Gulf of Thailand. Some believed that they contained the bodies of dead protesters from 2009 clashes at Victory

efforts, there is the ambivalence, the disbelief and persistence of alternative explanations. That the narratives of detective fiction and the practices of detection have come to bind Thai society has helped bring guerilla ontology into the realm of the real, forcing Thais into a game of constant guesswork and detection that includes recourse to science, spirits, and supernatural. Non-Thai academics, too, are pulled into the game, publishing articles about network monarchies, a metaphor that brings to mind a shambolic form of power not far removed from the monarchy's own modernist mappings of threats to its position and books that 'unveil' the humanity behind the king, as if people did not already know this.⁶⁷⁶ Alan Taussig, in *Defacement*, suggests that when someone defiles a sacred image, the inviolability of the thing represented becomes apparent while giving people a situation to rally around. Truth, he argues, is not a matter of exposure that destroys a secret, but a revelation that does justice to it.⁶⁷⁷ Public secrets, like the ones that studies of Thai politics want so badly to reveal and explain, do not cover up one reality with another. They confuse what reality might be and then bind people to the deception through their participation.⁶⁷⁸ This is the function of conspiracy theory, itself the narrative form of modern Thai history.

Monument and other locations in Bangkok. At several protests in 2009, armed men dressed in black with covered faces were seen in crowds. They were thought to have been planted by various politicians to incite violence. Sondhi Limthongkul did not die from the attempted assassination attempt and it was said widely afterwards that this was because he wore very powerful protective amulets. Khunying Phonthip is the highly regarded head of the Ministry of Justice's Department of Special Investigations who is known to employ the latest technological devices and scientific methods to find out the truth behind mysterious crimes.

⁶⁷⁶ Duncan McCargo has made popular the term 'network monarchy,' which he coined to describe how the king operates in contemporary politics in Thailand. See Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *The Pacific Review* 18.4 (December 2005):499-519. Paul Handley's book on King Bhumibol is an attempt to make him human. See Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁶⁷⁷ Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 72.

Modern Form of Mind

In 1977, *Domestication of the Savage Mind* by Jack Goody was published.⁶⁷⁹ Goody's argument, being made commonly then and still sometimes today, was that there is no physical or inherent biological difference between a modern and a traditional human being, between hot and cold cultures, between savage and domesticated minds: "We speak in terms of primitive and advanced, almost as if human minds themselves differed in their structure like machines of an earlier and later design."⁶⁸⁰ Rather, the difference between societies and groups within societies resides in the tools they have for communicating. Goody notes, "differences exist [between societies and cultures], but these are material and in the system of communications more than in the structure of the mind."⁶⁸¹ He says, "Practically speaking, speech on paper (or other surface), allows people to edit, rearrange, and play with order and thus have an impact on rationality, here simply a system of making connections." He concludes, "...modern man is emerging every day... without, I suggest, the total transformation of processes of 'thought' or attributes of 'mind' that existing theories imply."⁶⁸² Speech and the ideas it expresses become formalized when it is made material, put to paper, documented, and this allows for their decontextualization and manipulation.

An example from the Sherry Ann Duncan case makes this clear. As the first trial in the case began, a letter dated 3 June 1988 stamped 'Secret, Urgent' (*lap duan*) arrived at the provincial court at Samut Prakan, where the trial was taking place. The letter, from the commander of the Central Investigation Unit (CIU) of the Thai Police (*kong banchakan sop suan klang*), asked that the charges against the four men accused of murdering Sherry Ann Duncan be dropped. It stated that an investigation, initiated by the police's initial suspect

⁶⁷⁹ Jack Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, 1.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, 9.

⁶⁸² Ibid, 16.

Winai Chaiphanit, by the Crime Suppression Division (*kong prap pram*) had uncovered important evidence that showed the four men on trial were not involved in the young woman's death. According to the evidence, the real perpetrators were individuals still at large. The police requested that the court dismiss charges against the four men before any 'injustice' was done.⁶⁸³ The judge in the case then consulted with the Special Prosecutor for Samut Prakan. The Special Prosecutor considered previous cases, Attorney General Office rules, and procedural codes including Ministry of Interior document number 31/9 dated 28 October 1954, which stated that the police do not have the authority to investigate cases after a trial begins.⁶⁸⁴ The Special Prosecutor therefore pronounced that the Crime Suppression Division's files could not be accepted by the court and therefore neither could any evidence showing that the court had the wrong men on trial. The Special Prosecutor recommended that the hearing continue. The information contained in the Crime Suppression Division's report, marked 'Very Secret' (*lap mak*) in red at the top and the bottom of the cover page, remained undisclosed.⁶⁸⁵ An order on a piece of paper travels across time linking one historical context, 1954, with another, 1995. History is not linear even if modern conceptions of time are. Once removed from specific historical situations, ideas on paper become like "reference books... a producer rather than just a product, comparable to the sorts of tables used by astrologers and other specialists to inform the 'man in the street' about the nature of the universe in which he finds himself."⁶⁸⁶

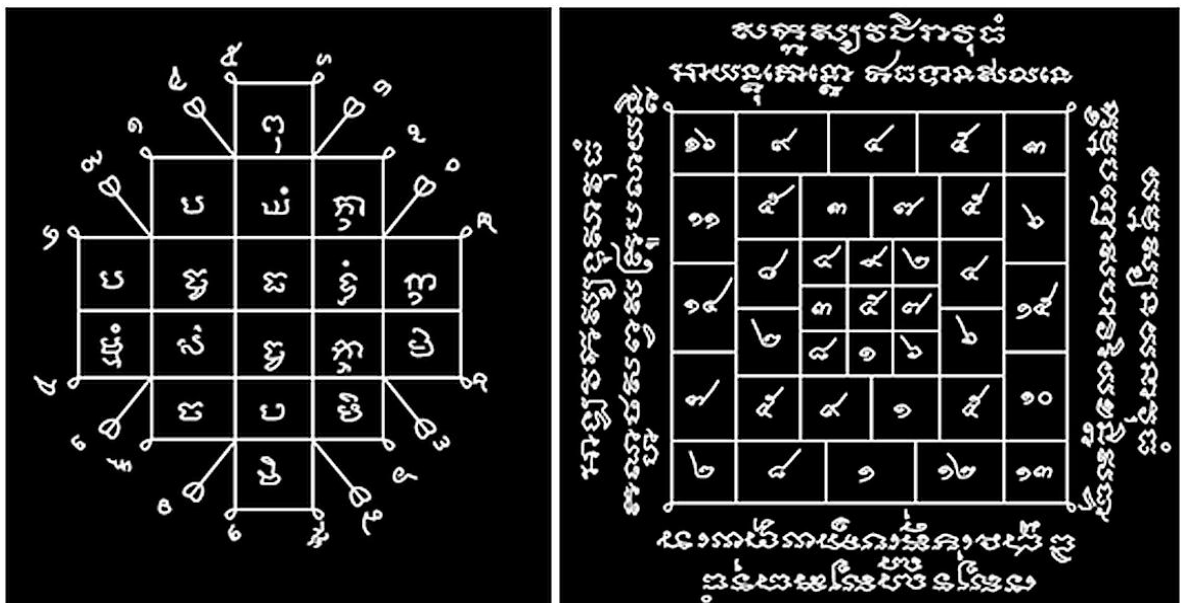
⁶⁸³ Letter from Prathin Santipraphop, Commander of the Central Investigation Unit to the State Prosecutor of Samut Prakan Province, 3 June 1988, in trial documents for *Khadi choeri aen dancaen fong kao* [The case of Sherry Ann Duncan, first trial], LMAG.

⁶⁸⁴ Letter from Special District Attorney to Provincial Court of Samut Prakan, 15 June 1988, in trial documents for *Khadi choeri aen dancaen fong kao* [The case of Sherry Ann Duncan, first trial], LMAG.

⁶⁸⁵ Cover letter dated 17 Oct 1995, Crime Suppression Division, in trial documents for *Khadi choeri aen dancaen fong mai* [The case of Sherry Ann Duncan, second trial], LMAG.

⁶⁸⁶ Goody, 1977, 156.

To wit, there is in Thailand a family of diagrams known as the *yantra* (figures 29 and 30). They can be found commonly as squares of cloth hanging on shop fronts, tattooed on the backs of policemen, soldiers, and gangsters, and as designs on t-shirts. Typically, they combine images of animals like tigers or crocodiles or depict beings from various myths including especially Hanuman, a Hindu deity, with snippets of Khmer script or geometric patterns. These images convey potency or provide protection to their bearers; they give form to an invisible, otherworldly power.



Figures 29 and 30 – Yantra. Examples by author.

Other diagrams, like the *duang chata*, are used to predict the future and discern the past:

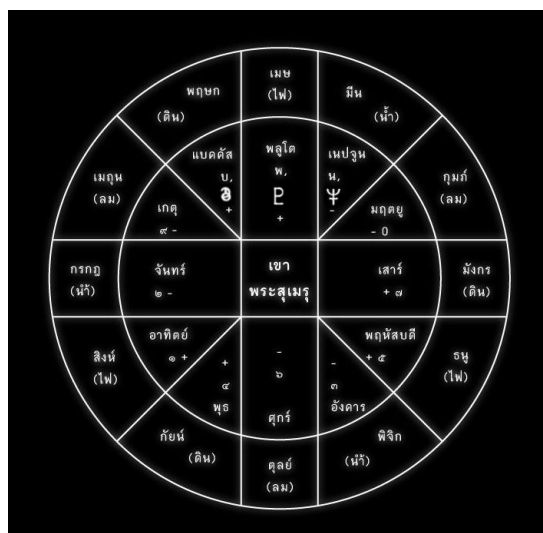


Figure 31 – Duang Chata. By author.

The *duang chata* is a circle divided counterclockwise into twelve sections, one for each *rasi*, the twelve signs of the zodiac. J.C. Eade writes, “This circle can be visualized as representing the sun’s annual circular paths of all the other planets, brought for this purpose to the same plane. At the same time it represents the daily rotation of the heavens through 360 degrees, in that the ascendant [the lagna or *lakhana*], is also plotted in the circle. Here the clockwise angular distance from the lagna to the sun marks the time interval from dawn.”⁶⁸⁷ These are used regularly by fortune tellers and astrologers to predict possible future outcomes as well as explain past events.

Of course the astrologer working with one of these diagrams to predict the future or explain the past does not necessarily know or need to know how this diagram relates to the movement of the stars: “The adequacy of the diagram as a physical model is minimal; but this is a matter of no concern when we recognize that in effect this universe manifests itself as a set of calculations on paper. It does not have to bear the burden of reflecting what is actually going on ‘out there.’”⁶⁸⁸ In other words, “... the *bora* [astrologer] memorizes the

⁶⁸⁷ J.C. Eade, *The Calendrical Systems of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 13.

⁶⁸⁸ Eade, 1995, 13.

numerical values and the successive calculation procedures; he does not need to have any theoretical or conceptual understanding of what he is doing in order to arrive at the correct results.”⁶⁸⁹ Neither does an astrologer need to know anything about the Traiphum (three worlds) cosmology or Mount Meru (the mountain at the center of the Traiphum cosmology’s universe), which many in Thai studies so frequently cite as being the basis of the Thai worldview.⁶⁹⁰ Thais also used a related “watch” system, which was a diagram that aided in discovering the location of missing goods and the identity of a culprit.⁶⁹¹

Though the *duang chata* do not make power visible, they do, like the CRES and Riggs’ diagram, help articulate unseen relationships through an assortment of lines, circles, and symbols. So for example, they help connect what is now considered fiction (or myth) to real life and visual devices to narratives. The divination method known as the *Chat sam chan*, or three-tiered umbrella, links in a diagram an individual’s life to the story of the Ramakian (Ramayana): “Legendary episodes, mainly from the Ramakian, the Thai version of the Ramayana, are assigned to the cells of a 3x3 diagram [*duang chata*]. A man starts at Ram and counts clockwise for his age, less one year. A woman starts from Sida and counts the same counterclockwise. In the resulting square, the inner, middle, or outer position is chosen depending on whether the subject’s birth month is 5-8, 9-12, or 1-4 respectively. Each of these positions corresponds to a certain literary episode.” Each episode is then read as a portent about the life of the individual.⁶⁹² In this divination practice, the division between fact and fiction as it has emerged over the twentieth century in Thailand collapses and a bridge is made between a visual image and a narrative form. The divide between tradition

⁶⁸⁹ Eade J.C. Eade and Lars Gislen, “The Whole Moon Was Eaten: Southeast Asian Eclipse Calculation,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29.2 (September 1998): 310.

⁶⁹⁰ Eade, 1995, 73.

⁶⁹¹ Quaritch Wales, *Divination in Thailand: The Hopes and Fears of a Southeast Asian People* (London: Curzon Press, 1983), 107. Watches (or *yam*), explains J.C. Eade, are the units that a day (between dawn and dawn) is divided into. There are eight day and eight night watches. Each watch is ninety minutes. See Eade, 1995, 92.

⁶⁹² Baker and Pasuk, 2010, 208, fn. 4.

and modern resides in the diagrams and the aesthetic rules used to produce the reality of the world. Visualizations of crime, like divination diagrams and narrative devices, help the police solve crimes by providing a mechanism for manipulating time and space, collapsing fact and fiction and connecting narrative to image, and therein lay their power.

Diagrams also allow for various operations to be made, like shifting zodiac signs or stars to different ‘houses’ or zones in the sky to see what the future may bring depending on different real world variables.

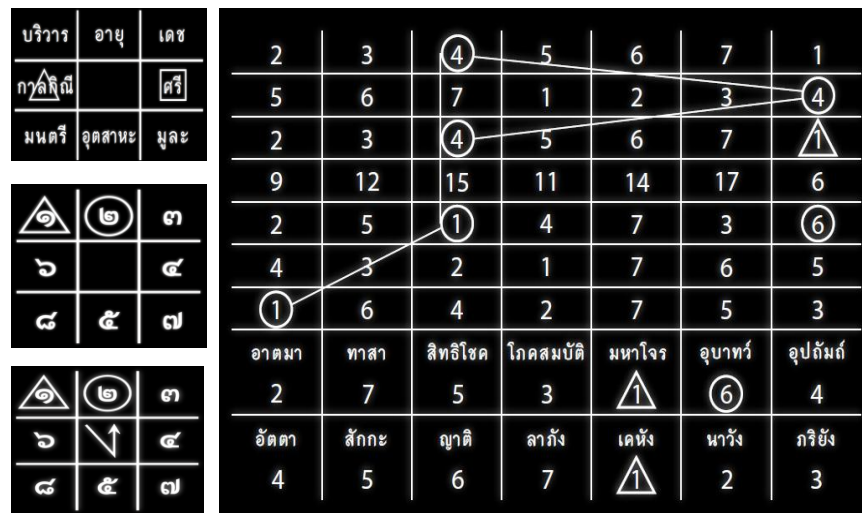


Figure 32 – Astrological Manipulations. From *Phayakonsan*.

In this way, they can be likened to modern renderings of power, exemplified by mathematical expressions of natural forces and diagrams of rational choice:

$$P_{\text{avg}} = \frac{\Delta W}{\Delta t} . \quad P(t) = \mathbf{F}(t) \cdot \mathbf{v}(t)$$

$$P = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} P_{\text{avg}} = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \frac{\Delta W}{\Delta t} = \frac{dW}{dt} .$$

Figure 33 – Equations for Power.

		Player B	
		Cooperate	Defect
Player A	Cooperate	+1	→ +3
	Defect	→ -1	0

Figure 34 – The “Prisoner’s Dilemma.”

Diagrams like the *duang chata* continue to be employed, even by those occupying the highest seats of government and society. In *Lap luang phrang* (Secrecy, trickery, and camouflage), for instance, Wassana Nanuam, describes the use of ‘magic’ and the reliance on fortune tellers (*mo du*) by men like former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, media mogul Sonthi Limthongkhun, and prominent politician from the northeast Newin Chidchob.⁶⁹³ In fact, a study by two Thai academics from 1979, concludes that it is the educated and urban (i.e. modern) segment of the population that more often resorts to ‘superstitious’ modes of knowledge production.⁶⁹⁴ The point is that practices and forms analogous to (but not the same as) those used by social scientists today have existed for a long time in Thailand.

In many ways, what I have been describing in this dissertation has paralleled Goody’s argument. There are differences between what Thais were thinking about crime and policing before 1892 and after 1932 and differences between what Thais and Europeans were thinking. There still are differences. These differences, however, do not reside solely in a shift in mentalité (though I don’t doubt such a shift has taken place in many individuals) so

⁶⁹³ Wassana Nanuam, *Lap luang phrang phak phitsadan* [Secrets, trickery, and camouflage: The improbable phenomena] (Bangkok: Post Books, 2008).

⁶⁹⁴ Sunthari Khomin and Sanit Samakharakan, *Raingan kan wijai ruang kbaniyom lae rabob kbaniyom thai: kruang mu nai kan samruat wat* [Thai value systems: A differential measurement instrument] (Bangkok: NIDA, 1979).

much as in the adoption of new tools and practices of communication, of new forms, that materialize different objects and different possibilities for reality. The images that represent reality do more than that. They help the police and other agents of the law divine the past and thus determine what lies ahead in the future by allowing for new knowledge about the world to be created. This open-endedness is part and parcel of the form, itself a historical artifact.

The scientific revolution in policing that was hoped for in the 1920s therefore created a paper world that has not dispelled otherworldly actors (from ghosts to gods) from the world, it has only given them a hiding place and created new, human powers that now occupy the same sphere. In the tale of *Khun chang khun phaen*, the reality of spirits, deities, and other supernatural beings was not in question the way they are now for some Thais and most foreign academics. The ontological status of the information that existing or ‘traditional’ knowledge practices generated was not an issue. This began to change when new tools came to Siam. In Vajiravudh’s version of the Phra Khanong ghost story, the presence of Nak (the ghost) is resolved by a detective who shows that the mysterious sightings and odd events in the area can be explained in human terms (mischievous kids, who are ‘real’). In the urban legend, the ghost is real. There is no explanation because ghosts are no mystery (though they may be frightening). The police during the period Vajiravudh wrote his detective stories also sought to debunk the myth of magic in crime fighting. In detective training manuals, it was stressed by early police reformers like Eric Lawson, Luang Saranupraphan, and Luang Phisitwithayakan that it was men working with their tools and smarts that solved crime, not spirits and magic. Yet the country’s most famous policeman,

Khun Phantharakrachadet (1898–2006), often relied on magical talismans.⁶⁹⁵ In today's society, men and women, elites and commoners, politicians and private sector professionals continue to conceptualize their actions in terms of narratives that connect various worlds, past, present, future, human, and non-human.

Robert Anton Wilson, former editor at *Playboy* magazine and author of several popular books on conspiracy theory, writes that conspiracies are logical, but people do not believe them for logical reasons. They believe them for “artistic” or “emotional” reasons.⁶⁹⁶ Substitute aesthetic for artistic and one begins to understand the allure of conspiracy theory and the murder mystery. Detection happens when there is lack of information. Conspiracy theory happens when the facts that detection unearth lead to multiple, competing interpretations in the absence of any credible or socially accepted arbiter of meaning as has been the case in Thailand since the 1950s. The tools and artifacts that the police introduced have been coopted by the press and the public and turned against the state's narratives, though perhaps not overtly, deliberately, or consciously.⁶⁹⁷ Secrecy, mystery, and conspiracy are forms of knowledge and mechanisms for establishing and maintaining power that have the effect of turning subjects into radical skeptics detectives parsing every act, every clue, for deeper meaning. The Crown Prince flies to Germany for medical treatment for a blood disease. Reading deeper, one can only conclude this means he is HIV positive. The King is sick and has not been seen on television for weeks. This means that he is on his deathbed or

⁶⁹⁵ See Craig Reynolds, “Rural Male Leadership, Religion and the Environment,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42.01 (2011): 39-57 for a detailed discussion on the life of Khun Phan and his use of supernatural objects in police work.

⁶⁹⁶ Robert Anton Wilson, *Everything is Under Control* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 9.

⁶⁹⁷ The concept of a boundary object might be useful to invoke here: It is an object that “holds different meanings in different social worlds, yet is imbued with enough shared meaning to facilitate its translation across those worlds.” Marilyn Strathern, *Commons and Borderlands: Working Papers on Interdisciplinarity, Accountability, and the Flow of Knowledge* (Oxon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2004), 45. In the case of a criminal investigation, the same fact may operate as a clue in one social or professional setting and as content for a fictional story in another.

is already dead. Conspiracy theory narratives force people to fit (non)events like these into an understanding of the world where the visible can only be explained by something not immediately apparent.

The implication of my argument about aesthetics, documents, and diagrams is that there is no need to go behind the scenes, to look for the power behind it all, as the conspiracy narrative of popular Thai history would have one do. Power and politics are on display, in plain sight on a daily basis. Dark hands, third hands, influential people, and even various spirits and magical objects are not just euphemisms for anxiety or fear felt by people who have a difficult time coming to grips with the dislocation that ‘modernity’ puts on their ‘traditional’ lives. They are evidence of nefarious conspiracies that animate Thai society. People do not *believe* they are real. For many people, they simply *are* real. This is something the traditional-modern divide will not allow us to comprehend and why it is necessary to begin rethinking the divide altogether, just as Goody began to do over thirty years ago. We can use the artifacts produced by our ‘subjects’ and read them back against history. They tell of a different time and place and produce diverse ways of understanding power and truth. They are not critiques as much as they are alternatives we can learn from.

A Final Note

Today, it is generally assumed that there were two major ‘waves’ of crime in Siam during the Fifth and Sixth Reigns, one beginning in the 1890s and another after World War I. The first wave coincided with changes in the Siamese economy after the Bowring Treaty including the production of surplus goods for export and the gradual loosening of corvée labor demands to the Bangkok government and the encroachment of the money economy, all of which

began to rework social relations.⁶⁹⁸ One writer describes the end of the *corvée* system as a ‘liberation of labor’ that set free a “stream of migrants, former prisoners of war and other ‘slaves’” in search of a secure existence in rice growing. Many settlements in the central plain of Thailand date from this period. The new settlers were not only former slaves and other Siamese who previously had been bound to their lord, but also from other parts of the kingdom.⁶⁹⁹ So as land opened up, people from what is now northeast Thailand were migrating to the central plains to work in steadily increasing numbers. In Thanaburi, 1,094 people from the northeast worked as laborers between April of 1901 and March of 1902. Between April of 1904 and March of 1905, the number jumped to at least 5,000 based on the number of requests for permission to return to their home villages.⁷⁰⁰

To pass the time, these mostly male migrant workers gambled and drank, which, of course, was a recipe for crime.⁷⁰¹ A report from Amphoe Sena Yai in Ayutthaya shows that between April 1892 and March 1893, 500 buffaloes were stolen. The next year 600 were stolen. The number of buffalo theft cases from January to August in 1890 was 171 in Ang Thong province alone.⁷⁰² This migration is said also to have led to an increase in banditry in cities, towns, markets, or areas where trade occurred. Thus, incidents of banditry, in addition to increasing numerically, were spreading along with railways and new development in the frontier of the Rangsit region north of Bangkok where acres and acres of land were being cleared.⁷⁰³ Others have noted similarly that many laborers from the Northeast were addicted to opium and gambling, addictions to which they turned to thievery to support. Moreover, the government knew this but allowed the problem to fester because they worried about

⁶⁹⁸ Phirasak, 2008, 40, 54.

⁶⁹⁹ Han Ten Brummelhuis, *King of the Waters: Horman Van Der Heide and the Origin of Modern Irrigation in Siam* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005), 65.

⁷⁰⁰ Phirasak, 2008, 81-2.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid*, 81-2.

⁷⁰² *Ibid*, 57.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid*, 77-8.

possible labor shortages on railway building projects.⁷⁰⁴ Others have cited similar reasons for the increase in crime, including “the excited economic conditions of the time” in which the “rice boom contributed to the expansion of opportunities in illegal as well as legal lines of endeavor” and the growing tension between local and central authority “as Bangkok began, during the 1880s and 1890s to tighten its administrative grip on the provinces.”⁷⁰⁵

The situation remained relatively grave over the first two decades of the twentieth century, when a second major wave, attributed to the end of World War I, occurred. It is thought that the war negatively affected the economy of the kingdom, leading to a large number of un- and underemployed, desperate men that were armed with guns and unafraid.

These explanations of the rise in violent crime were arrived at after the fact, by academics with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, the people of kingdom and its government were also trying to understand the sudden and seemingly interminable outbreak of crime. They did not have recourse to the concepts and methods, including statistics, maps and diagrams, used now by criminologists, police, and historians for making sense of violence. For contemporary observers, the increase in crime was many things, including especially a sign of general social disorder. This view is reflected in articles that showed up in vernacular newspapers along with reports of crime. On the period after the World War I, Khru Thep (Jao Phraya Thammasakmontri), then the Minister of Public Instruction and Religion (from 1915-1926) and frequent contributor to local newspapers, asked pleadingly, “why at this time is there such excessive banditry and criminality?”⁷⁰⁶ His concern, according to economic historian Ian Brown, “lay primarily in what he saw as the social dislocation,

⁷⁰⁴ Wiwana Thewachala-angkun, “*Naijobai kbong rat kap kan tamruat phuthon, 2440 to 2465*” [Government Policy and the Gendarmerie, 1897-1922] (MA thesis, Silapakon University, Bangkok, 1984), 104.

⁷⁰⁵ David Bruce Johnston, “*Rural Society and the Rice Economy in Thailand, 1880-1930*” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1977), 171.

⁷⁰⁶ Ian Brown, “Economic Thought in Early Twentieth Century Siam,” in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, eds. Manas Chitkasem and Andrew Turton (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 92. Note: *Khru* is the prefix used for ‘teacher’.

perhaps the moral disintegration that had been occasioned in Siam by the penetration of the international market, the spread of monetization, and the rapidly emerging commercial power of immigrant Chinese.”⁷⁰⁷ Khru Thep’s question indicates his concern was to comprehend the causes of violent crime, even if only at a broad level of understanding (i.e. in terms of economics and morality). For people that lived in Bangkok or in afflicted villages in the countryside and for those agents of the state tasked with dealing with violent crime, the concern was much more basic – who was the perpetrator, what was the motive, how to capture bandits and get stolen goods back? The argument I make in Chapters 1 and 2 is that the detective figure and his fiction provided the governments of kings Chulalongkon and Vajiravudh the discursive framework with which to deal with and explain crime (albeit at a micro-level) at the time, not in retrospect. The detective novel, which prefigured modern police detection in Siam, provided the state a narrative form, that behind visible criminal events were nefarious human agents that could be revealed through science, with which it could make sense of threats to its existence and expansionist agenda and it was this narrative that helped shape the development of the police force in the early twentieth century.

The legacy of the early twentieth century police reforms remains quite visible today. In the case of Sherry Ann Duncan, police officers, reporters, and members of the general public, in conjunction with the devices of modern knowledge, turned the flotsam and jetsam of the messy city into vital clues that became markers in a mystery about the death of a young girl. In the past (and still sometimes today) this flotsam and jetsam may not have been visible, or heard above the din of the developing city or been muffled by the quiet of the forest. The events, a dead body, a few odds and ends, might have been connected consulting with an oracle or more likely through the efforts of the local community as a collective to

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, 92.

enact justice and discover what had happened. Some might even argue that the event itself would not have been possible in a society that had not yet developed the capacity to experience historical events of ‘national’ scale. The make up of the population and their relationships with one another, technologies, rules for making connections, and the objects that were to be connected – these all changed over the forty year period between 1890 and 1930. The administrative reforms, new technology including trains, telegraphs, cars, banking, paved roads, and telephone allowed the state to get a better handle on information, at least in theory and if only in Bangkok. In addition to physical infrastructure and administrative organization, the ground work for an informational infrastructure was established. Standards and forms were a key part of centralization and documentation was a key method of detection. As information becomes formalized, mass produced and mass distributed, it becomes less necessary for humans to enter the picture. Information is kept on pieces of paper and archived. To get its information requires no guru, no spy, only basic literacy. What we have here, then, is the beginnings of a world in which information could be mechanically reproduced and disseminated. It was however, a world that was still messy and inefficient. That is, no totalizing ‘surveillance’ apparatus or ‘high-modernist’ state developed. What emerged instead is a regime of radical skepticism and disbelief, that the party line of government after government, military or civilian, cannot be trusted, that there is always more than meets the eye, or that behind the spectacle of violence and policing lies a more fundamental power – a human one – that animates the visible world.

EPILOGUE

In the years following the second trial in the murder of Sherry Ann Duncan, the government passed a series of legal reforms as part of the promulgation of a new constitution (the 1997 version) that addressed specific concerns raised by the case. Article 237, for example, required that the police bring a suspect to trial within 48-hours of arrest and limited their power to conduct warrant-less searches. In the Sherry Ann case, the four defendants were arrested and then held for weeks as the police conducted their investigation. Article 246 stipulated that suspects have the right to receive compensation while detained if found innocent. This was known as the Sherry Ann article, owing to the tragic events that befell the four men while incarcerated. After the coup of 2006 that removed Thaksin Shinawatra from power, a new law of the land was issued – the 2007 Constitution of Thailand. This constitution, the country's seventeenth (including charters), was much more circumspect in its detailing of rights in criminal cases. In it, a few of the basic tenets introduced after the Sherry Ann case were retained including the right to an 'uncomplicated' and efficient trial (Part 4, Section 40 of the 2007 Constitution) and the principle that the accused shall not, before being convicted of any crime, be treated as a 'convict' (Part 4, Section 9). Other rights retained, albeit in general terms only, include the right to be treated properly during the entire judicial process, the right to not have to testify against oneself, and the right to the protection and assistance of the state. Compensation for essential expenditures of defendants is also provided for in cases where the accused is not found guilty. In both instances, 1997 and 2007, reforms were procedural, altering (theoretically anyway) the practices of actors in the criminal justice system. Yet, the re-enactment was left untouched and it remains a key part of the Thai legal, cultural, and social landscape.

Perhaps documents, in addition to process (e.g. length of detention, compensation) should be added to the list of things that require reform. Documents, after all, constitute a privileged form of evidence in determining what societies can officially know about themselves. Since the early part of the twentieth century in Siam, and earlier in Europe and the US, police have played a crucial role in the creation, categorization, and storage of this documentary evidence. To understand how knowledge operates in modern societies therefore requires an investigation into the nature of paper-based evidence, particularly that generated by the police. In Siam, the police during the beginning of the twentieth century were busy learning about and making new facts. These they put on paper by writing them down, drawing maps, and taking pictures. They then compiled these documented facts into notebooks, organized into categories and kept in central repositories. These archives were seen as crime-fighting tools not dead piles of unused papers. The new paper facts were (and still are) indexical, calling forth other facts, which when put together described an event, a representation of the past that could be used in courts of law. The police and the criminal archive – agents and their artifacts – constitute part of Siam's factual world, the one which judges use to decide innocence and guilt, reporters rely on for their stories, and historians use to write the past.

Since Foucault, it has been taken for granted that 'knowledge/power' is the way to understand how facts about the world around us are constructed and operate. Or rather, it has become axiomatic that it is through power that one knows and that knowing is a form of power over those people and things that become the objects of knowing. But in the messy cities and sparsely settled countryside of Siam, information took form in and moved through informal networks often inaccessible to the mandarins of Bangkok. Systems used to generate and organize that information, i.e. 'knowledge,' were in the hands of a diverse group of

players. The ability of the central government, or ‘the state,’ to know and thus discipline had not yet been established across the geo-body of Siam in part because the state and the geo-body had not yet created themselves.

From an examination of the development of the detective novel and the detective police, the central government did in fact see knowledge, or at least information, as a critical aspect of society for and to control. Their response to this problem of information, as Foucaultians would be quick to note, was to establish a state surveillance apparatus, one found in the detective agencies *and* detective fiction of England, France, and the US. In their attempts to know and detect, however, the object of surveillance conjured forth was not a pliant, auto-submissive, modern subject (as the arguable lack of any ‘governmentality’ indicate). Instead, government reforms in police and administration practices brought into being a paper-based, mechanically reproduced and commercially circulated world over which new methods of modern detection could be employed. That is, the state and its detectives, along with the mass media, called forth a new space (a ‘storyworld’ in the language of narrative studies) through their crime scene maps, photographs, statistics, and other texts.⁷⁰⁸

This world, rather than being inhabited by rational, modern beings methodically sussing out the truth based on material clues, is one characterized by men and women (and spirits, gods, and other beings) whose imaginations are riddled with paranoia, haunted by rumor, driven by gossip, and organized by conspiracy theories. Today, conflicts of all sorts seem less easily explained by rational thought than by recourse to theories a self-identified modern person might deem magical or even absurd. The ‘folk’ epistemologies that the city and the archive were meant to erase or control did not disappear, they moved into the

⁷⁰⁸ Storyworlds are “the worlds evoked by narratives; reciprocally, narratives can be defined as blueprints for a specific mode of world-creation). David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 105.

narrative space created by the state's (and print capitalism's) documentary impulse and remain there today, cohabitating in modern Thailand.

As alluded to in the Introduction, a similar trend has taken place since the end of the Second World War in societies around the globe, including in the United States. In the 1964, Richard Hofstadter's "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," an influential essay about conspiracy theory as a cultural practice, appeared in *Harper's* magazine. He argued that conspiracy theories were being employed by right-wing extremists pandering to various social fears.⁷⁰⁹ The timing of his essay made sense, coming on the heels of the assassination of a president, a contested war in Vietnam, and Barry Goldwater's rise in the political landscape. Distrust of the stories told by government was common then as it is in these early years of the twenty-first century. One observer has gone so far as to claim that the early twenty-first century is a period where ontological categories and explanations are in flux.⁷¹⁰ Indeed, there has long been a populist strain of American politics conducive to conspiracy theory⁷¹¹ and one scholar, Mark Fenster, has paraphrased Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson, in writing that conspiracy theory has become the poor man's mental map of the postmodern world.⁷¹² The metaphor of the map is apt, as Chapter 6 showed. In Thailand, however, the map of conspiracy is shared, literally, by elites and commoners, rich and poor. So while the intensity, variety, and materialization of conspiracy theories may differ from

⁷⁰⁹ Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's* (November 1964): 77-86.

⁷¹⁰ Daniel Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy, and Hegemony in American Politics," in eds. Todd Sanders and Harry West, *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 290.

⁷¹¹ Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 9. For a look at conspiracy theories in other parts of the world, see Sanders and West's edited volume cited in footnote 3, which compiles essays on conspiracy theory in countries including South Korea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Russia, Indonesia, the USA, indicating widespread radical skepticism in quite different societies around the world. Many of the essays link the phenomena to the proliferation of mass media technologies, markets, and organizations that operate beyond the local level (e.g. the IMF and the World Bank). Hofstadter also saw a connection between the 'paranoid style' and what he called mass society, in which culture was commodified and mass produced. Mass media, he postulated, brought people closer to politics while making it less trustworthy.

⁷¹² Fenster, 2008, 128.

place to place, it is present everywhere in the modern world. The past continues to “bubble up,” and disrupt the narrative of history that says we are modern.⁷¹³

From the argument that I have put forth in this dissertation, it should be clear that conducting a historical analysis of aesthetics and employing the tools developed by formalists in the 1910s does not mean that ideology plays no part in storytelling, that social critique has been tossed aside, or that the meaning of objects (or the objects themselves) like photos of criminals are stable across time and space. There is something more fundamental that documents can tell historians than that the world is not fair, that there are those who would repress people in less fortunate positions, or that interpretations of the same things vary, sometimes wildly. Indeed, what poor or marginalized individual does not already know these things to the core of his or her being? Narrative and the objects that make it material speak to the very epistemological foundations of the discipline of history. A study of narrative, device, and diagram speaks to the documentary trends of the last century in a way that other modes of interpretation do not. It helps one answer the question ‘What are people doing with their documents?’ Or rather, ‘What are documents doing to people?’

In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White describes the writing of history as a process of emplotment, the practice of putting information into a pre-existing storyline.⁷¹⁴ In many ways, this is what the history of Thailand has been: writers placing information into various well-worn plots, sometimes not overtly and often unconsciously. The critical scholar of Thailand often points out that this is what nationalist or royalist scholars do: They write stories about how wonderful the king is and

⁷¹³ The idea that the ‘past’ ‘bubbles up’ to make visible the limits of historical knowledge is from Kunal Parker, “Context in History and Law: A Study of the Late Nineteenth-Century American Jurisprudence of Custom,” *Law and History Review* 24.3 (Fall, 2006): 476.

⁷¹⁴ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). See also Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

how unique the Thai are. On this point, I would not argue, but this exercise in emplotment is also what critical academics do. Benedict Anderson's classic essay, "Studies of the Thai State, The State of Thai Studies," argues, for example, that because the monarchy has not been abolished, among other things, that Thailand is not a modern nation state.⁷¹⁵ One can make this conclusion only through a comparison of real world conditions in Thailand against a story of national development derived from the experience of societies in Western Europe. The history of the West is the narrative benchmark for what was supposed to have happened in Thailand. Peasants and laborers may use a host of hidden transcripts to understand their subordinate class position vis-à-vis a landowners, money lenders, and others, per James Scot, but so do historians and other scholars when they write history. This was one of the key points of White's study of narrative. The question this begs is "What, then, does critique accomplish?" When trying to point out, and thus disempower (or is that really empower?), dominant narratives, underlying assumptions about historical processes, about modernity and tradition, do not change much. The narrative forms of history that guide many scholars remain untouched, the plot of narrative history unchanged.⁷¹⁶

The discipline of history has a reputation for being atheoretical. Perhaps this is because historians, for the most part, see texts primarily as a source of data through which to write stories about the past and it is this lack of reflexivity about what the enterprise of history writing is and how it works, about what formal rules guide it, that lends to the

⁷¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies" in *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History and Political Science*, Elizer B. Ayal, ed. (Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 54, 1978): 193-247.

⁷¹⁶ On this, legal scholar Kunal Parker notes succinctly that "Historians continually identify objects, things, figures, texts, and then situate them in relationship to one another 'in' historical time. Evidence of historians' commitment to locating objects 'in' historical time abounds. Among the gravest errors a professional historian can commit is 'anachronism,' situating an object 'in' the 'wrong' historical time or, God forbid, treating it as if it existed 'outside' historical time altogether." Kunal Parker, "Context in History and Law: A Study of the Late Nineteenth-Century American Jurisprudence of Custom," *Law and History Review* 24.3 (Fall, 2006): 475-6.

impression.⁷¹⁷ What I've done here is provide a way to analyze documents that highlights their aesthetic aspects. It is meant to complement the practice of plumbing the depths of texts for shards of factual data that can be emplotted on some other grid of meaning. Perhaps the idea that one may read from texts a form that provides a hint about the epistemological frameworks of a people or a time may be as naïve as any other method of looking at texts. The potential insights about history and culture, about how people know things, however, seem to me worth the effort.

One benefit of this approach is immediately apparent: We see how facts are subject to conventions that evolve over time and how they, as objects, travel and change. Looking at the development of aesthetic rules thus takes historical studies of the media and its interactions with other parts of social and cultural life beyond simply saying that fiction and reality reflect one another: observing that a real crime or a historical criminal is something described in fictional stories, the news, and in police reports does not really show how these different categories of representation interact, if at all. Stating that fiction exerts an influence on real life and vice versa is, after all, a rather mundane observation to make. Practitioners of legal medicine and forensic science, for example, loved Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous Sherlock Holmes stories from the beginning: "Real-life investigators found the character [Holmes] fascinating. [Dr. Jean Alexandre Eugene] Lacassagne's disciple Edmond Locard said what in part motivated his career choice, aside from his mentor, was the Sherlock Holmes stories. Doyle's own inspiration came from Dr. Joseph Bell, his medical instructor at the University of Edinburgh."⁷¹⁸ It makes sense that people working in the field would have

⁷¹⁷ One study that does address the historian's transformation of material objects, in this case a palm leaf manuscript, into a primary source of data is Lorraine Gessick's *In the Land of Lady White Blood: Southern Thailand and the Meaning of History* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995).

⁷¹⁸ Starr, 2010, 104. Of course, the reaction of real life practitioners was not always positive: "Lacassagne admired the work of Conan Doyle, but he, like his colleagues, had reservations about Holme's methods and the

some interest in stories about themselves. Aesthetics allows the scholar an inroad to the study of how this interest might actually lead to a more substantial borrowing or cross fertilization.

What I have done here therefore has relevance for societies beyond Thailand. The perceived and real descent into irrationality is something that must be confronted if civil society, democracy, and the fruits of the Enlightenment are to be retained for our children. If we are to understand why such ghostly agents as third hands and dark hands, people that cannot be named, maintain such a stranglehold in the today's material world, then we need a way forward that takes both the stories of our subjects and those we tell ourselves seriously and critically. The temporal difference that marks the distinction between societies and individuals as traditional or modern translates into ones about states of knowledge and allow for judgments about civilization and morality. My contention is that these are differences imposed by the plot of narrative history and the point of my approach is to be critical of the distinctions at the same time being critical of the signs and narratives employed the people we study. There is no exercise more political than this.

misleading impression they gave to the public" (p. 105). Holmes worked fast and was always sure. Real life investigations took time and Lacassagne made it a point to always remain uncertain till the end of an investigation. Nevertheless, Lacassagne and others remained "fascinated" by Holmes and his stories (p. 105).

APPENDIX 1

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY ON RELEVANT THAI STUDIES MATERIALS

On each of the topic areas that this dissertation covers, including the police, the press, literature, and knowledge production, as they relate to Thailand there is a varying amount of existing literature. On the police, for example, next to nothing has been published in English on Thailand, aside from one very good account of American aid to the Thai police after World War II.¹ In Thai, a few older histories are available. These are typically institutional histories that list names of various police chiefs and provide a rough timeline of key dates (e.g. date a specific police unit was established or date of a key reform). In some accounts, especially if written by former police officers or for them as part of a cremation volume, the work of the police or of a specific police officer might be lauded. One master's thesis, for example, emphasizes Jao Phraya Yommarat's (Pan Sukhum) many accomplishments in reforming the police, but offers little critical analysis while forgetting to mention the charges of nepotism and corruption made against him in the 1920s.² Thawisak Suphasa's "*Kan jat kan lae botbat khong tamruat nai krungthep rachasamai phrabat somdet phrajulajom klao jao yu hua*" (The establishment and role of the police in Bangkok during the reign of King Chulalongkorn),³ a master's thesis written in 1978, and Wiwana Thewachala-angkun's "*Nayobai khong rat kap kan*

¹ Thomas Lobe, *United States National Security Policy and Aid to the Thailand Police* (Denver: University of Denver, Graduate School of International Studies, 1977). There is also an unpublished report by the United States Operations Mission (USOM) on the same topic called *A Brief History of USOM Support to the Thai National Police Department* (Bangkok: USOM, 1969).

² Manirat Yaemprasert, "*Bot bat thang dan kan boriban ratchakan phaen din khong jao phraya yommarat nai ratchasamai phrabat somdet phra mongkut klao jao yu hua*" [The role of Jao Phraya Yommarat in the administration of the country during the reign of King Chulalongkorn] (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1977).

³ Thawisak Suphasa, "*Kan jat kan lae botbat khong tamruat nai krungthep rachasamai phrabat somdet phrajulajom klao jao yu hua*" [The establishment and role of the police in Bangkok during the reign of King Chulalongkorn] (MA thesis, Sinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, 1978).

tamruat phuthon, 2440-2465” (Government policy and the gendarmerie, 1897-1922),⁴ another master’s thesis, both provide excellent general histories of the police and related government policy. There is also Somphong Jaengrew’s 2002 thesis, “*Botbat khong tamruat santiban nai prawattisat kanmuang thai, 2475-2500*” (The role of the Special Branch police in Thai political history, 1932-1957), a history of the *santiban* (Special Branch) in relation to Thai politics.⁵ Like the other theses, this one provides an informative account of the police as a discrete institution with clear boundaries. While building on these texts, I attempt here to take police work out of its institutional setting so that it may be examined alongside parallel practices in other social fields.⁶

On the press, a similar situation prevails. Relevant analytical studies in English are few. One study is Duncan McCargo’s *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations*, which offers a critique of the newspaper industry through a description of the many shortcomings in the practices of reporters and editors.⁷ This study provides a critical analysis of the press, but does not focus on the historical or sociological roots of why the press acts as it does. Another study, Matthew Copeland’s “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam,” looks creatively at political cartoons in newspapers during late 1920s and early 1930s to make the argument that the revolution of 1932 was preceded by a flowering of republican sentiment, making the coup much more than a putsch

⁴ Wiwana Thewachala-angkun, “*Naijobai khong rat kap kan tamruat phuthon, p.s. 2440-2465*” [Government policy and the gendarmerie, 1897-1922] (MA thesis, Silapakon University, Bangkok, 1984).

⁵ Somphong Jaengrew, “*Bot bat khong tamruat santiban nai prawattisat kanmuang thai pho. so. 2475-2500*” [The role of the Special Branch police in Thai political history, 1932-1957] (MA thesis, Kasetsat University, Bangkok, 2002).

⁶ On the police there is also a dissertation by Eric Haanstad called “Constructing Order through Chaos: A State Ethnography of the Thai Police” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2008). This is an ethnography of the police in the mid-2000s so I do not include it in my overview of historical texts. There are two other historical works in progress. One is a PhD dissertation, also from the University of Wisconsin, about the Border Patrol Police and the other is a history of the provincial police and their role in nation-building in the early part of the twentieth century by Dr. Soren Ivarson at the University of Copenhagen.

⁷ Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations* (London: Routledge, 2000).

by bureaucratic and military elites.⁸ In Thai, the classic text on the history of the press is Sukanya Tirawanit's *Pravattikan nangsuphim nai prathet thai phai tai rabob sombunanansithirat* (The development of the newspaper in Thailand under the absolute monarchy) published in 1977.⁹ This book gives a succinct history of how the press was introduced into Siam and describes the various newspapers and journals that have been produced since then. Matichon Press recently published a very useful reference book on the history of the press called *Sayam phimpakan* (Publishing in Siam).¹⁰ This volume compiles information from various student theses, a great source of data in Thai studies, and other accounts into a single text. In addition, there are several memoirs by and biographies about former writers and publishers. Each of these studies offers an informative look at the press, but as with studies of the police, they are institutional histories. Rather than treat these institutions in isolation, I look at their interactions to construct a history of their effects on each other and on Thai society.

There are more studies in English that tackle violence than there are on the press and the police. Those that have been published to date tend to focus, with good reason, on two key events, the massacres of 6 October 1976 and Black May (1992), when state and right-wing groups combined to crush student and civilian protestors in bloody crackdowns. Most of these are broader political studies of democratic movements and Thailand's military-monarchical government. Of interest here are works by Alan Klima, Rosalind Morris, and Annette Hamilton.¹¹ Each discusses the role of violent images in Thai society and offers

⁸ Matthew Copeland, "Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam" (PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1993).

⁹ Sukanya Tirawanit, *Pravatkan nangsuphim nai prathet thai phai tai rabob somburanasithirat, 2325-2475* [The development of the newspaper in Thailand under the absolute monarchy, 1882-1932] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Matichon Press, *Sayam phimpakan: Pravatisat kan phim nai prathet thai* [Publishing in Siam: The history of publishing in Thailand] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2006).

¹¹ Alan Klima, *Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Rosalind Morris, "Surviving Pleasure at the Periphery: Chiang Mai and the Photographies of Political Trauma in Thailand," *Public Culture* 10.2 (1998): 341-370; and Annette Hamilton,

insight as to their ubiquity. Morris, in discussing the massacre of 1992 suggests that pictures of violence provide a sense of pleasure (of having survived violence) and that this pleasure enables political agency. Klima, also writing about 1992, hypothesizes that images of violence heighten the experience of reality (of state violence), which, in line with Morris' argument, allows for political action. Hamilton, on the other hand, suggests stories and pictures of violence offer Thais a 'counter discourse' to oppose the state's narrative of harmony and order. There are also Thongchai Winichakul's "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past," Benedict Anderson's "Murder and Progress in Modern Siam," and Katherine Bowie's *Rituals of National Loyalty*.¹² The first tackles the 6 October massacre in terms of historical narrative, arguing that while other massacres have taken place, 6 October does not 'fit' in the dominant national narrative which portrays Thailand as a victim rather than an aggressor, as the kingdom's military, royal elites, and right-wing segments of the population were in 1976. Anderson's article looks at the use of political murder and sees it as a sign of democratic progress, noting that in the 1970s the position of national representative had finally become worth killing for. Finally, Bowie's book attempts to explain how during the Cold War the royally sponsored village scout program could turn villagers into rabid anti-communists. More recently, Tyrell Haberkorn has published *Revolution Interrupted: Farmers, Students, Law, and Violence in Northern Thailand*, which explores the use of violence against farmers and rights activists in northern Thailand during the 1970s.¹³ All of these studies connect, though

"Rumors, Foul Calumnies, and the Safety of the State: Mass Media and National Identity in Thailand," in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today*, ed. Craig Reynolds (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002).

¹² Thongchai Winichakul, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory*, eds. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); Benedict Anderson, "Murder and Progress in Modern Siam" in *Spectres of Comparison* (London: Verso, 1998); and Katherine Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹³ Tyrell Haberkorn, *Revolution Interrupted: Farmers, Students, Law, and Violence in Northern Thailand* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

indirectly in some cases, the problem of state violence with the ways in which people understand the world. As such they are relevant to this study, which also looks at the relationship between violence and knowledge production. My departure from these studies is in my conceptualization and methodological approach (see next section), and also in my focus on ordinary violence, which occurs in pedestrian contexts and is serialized in the news. It is through mundane, common activities of everyday life that the state's violence is experienced and that contextualizes the mass violence that Thai history is more often fixated on.

On the legal system, there are several books and articles about the development of the kingdom's law codes. These include several studies on the Law of the Three Seals (*kotmai tra sam duang*), which was used to guide the operation of the kingdom's legal system prior to the legal reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and on the development of modern civil and criminal codes. Some examples include David Engel's *Law and Kingship in Thailand during the Reign of King Chulalongkorn*, Ishii Yoneo's "The Thai Thammasat," M.B. Hooker's "The 'Europeanization' of Siam's Law 1855-1908," and Robert Lingat's *Prawatisat kotmai thai* (History of Thai law).¹⁴ These histories generally concentrate on King Chulalongkorn's legal reforms at the end of the nineteenth century and the influence of foreign experts on the Thai legal system. This focus is justifiable, since it was under Chulalongkorn's watch that the kingdom's most radical legal and administrative changes took place. It has been some time since their publication and with the exception of Tamara Loos' *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand*, which uses court records to examine the instrumental role of Chulalongkorn's legal reform project in shaping the

¹⁴ David Engel, *Law and Kingship in Thailand during the Reign of King Chulalongkorn* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975); Ishii Yoneo, "The Thai Thammasat" and M.B. Hooker, "The 'Europeanization' of Siam's Law 1855-1908," in *The Laws of Southeast Asia*, ed. M.B. Hooker (Singapore: Butterworth, 1986); and Robert Lingat, *Prawatisat kotmai thai* [History of Thai law] (Bangkok: Thai Watthana Phanit, 1983).

modern Thai subject and gender relations and David Engel's recent ethnographic work on the discourse of legal rights in northern Thailand, there has been little innovative work in legal studies since these pioneering ones and none that are historically oriented.¹⁵ In Thai, master's theses on legal issues are legion, too many to list here, but these are primarily policy oriented studies emphasizing technical aspects of law such as how to reform tax collection or inheritance law, rather than the social or epistemological dimensions of legal change, topics this dissertation puts front and center.

Regarding the history of Thai literature there is a relatively significant amount of scholarship. In Thai a number of good, though dated, texts exist that provide a general history of the novel in Thailand and information about individual authors. These include Suphani Warathon's *Prawat kanpraphan nawaniyai thai tangtae samai roem raeek jon thung pho. so. 2475* (The history of the writing of the Thai novel from the beginning to 1932) and Wipha Senanan Kongkanan's *Kammoet nawaniyai nai prathet thai* (The genesis of the novel in Thailand).¹⁶ In English, David Smyth has written several pieces on Thai literature and there is Marcel Barang's *The 20 Best Thai Novels* and Klaus Wenk's *Thai Literature: An Introduction*.¹⁷ Perhaps a bit stodgy for today's post-modern and post-colonial literary critic, these works have over the years helped establish what the canon is in Thai literature. In more recent years, some scholars have begun to question this canon. Thak Chaloemtiarana's "Making

¹⁵ Tamara Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law, and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) and David Engel, *Torts, Custom, and Karma: Globalization and Legal Consciousness in Thailand* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). Engel's study shows how the 'law' and 'rights' have not become part of the Thais legal consciousness.

¹⁶ Suphani Warathon, *Prawat kanpraphan nawaniyai thai tangtae samai roem raeek jon thung pho. so. 2475* [History of the writing of the Thai novel from the beginning to 1932] (Bangkok: Munithi Krong Kan Tamra Sangkhomsat Lae Manutsiasat, 1976) and Wipha Senanan Kongkanan, *Kammoet nawaniyai nai prathet thai* [The genesis of the novel in Thailand] (Bangkok: Dok Ya, 1997).

¹⁷ See David Smyth, *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literatures: Literatures of Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000); Marcel Barang, *The 20 Best Thai Novels* (Bangkok: Thai Modern Classics, 1994); and Klaus Wenk, *Thai Literature: An Introduction* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995).

New Space in The Thai Literary Canon,” for example, attempts to redefine what works of fiction might be included in the genealogy of the Thai novel.¹⁸ Others have sought to analyze Thai literature in relation to their broader historical contexts. Rachel Harrison has written in recent years about early detective novels and post-war crime fiction and film.¹⁹ Chalongsorntravanich’s short but important “Small Arms, Romance, and Crime and Violence in Post World War II Thai Society” describes the emergence of a new genre of fiction that links the chaos of the immediate post-World War II years with changes in literary expression.²⁰ Thanaphol Limaphichat’s Ph.D. dissertation on what makes a good book is another recent study of how literature has functioned in society, looking at the ideological aspects of constructing the canon.²¹ Before these studies there was Benedict Anderson’s introduction to *In the Mirror* and Nidhi Eoseewong’s “Bourgeois Culture and Early Bangkok Literature.”²² These also link history with literature. The former takes on the Cold War period, or the ‘American Era’ as Anderson calls it, and social realist fiction. The later examines social and economic changes in the early nineteenth century through the lens of literature, making an argument that prose fiction in Thailand had indigenous, rather than European, roots. All these are useful works that I build on here. Where this study differs is primarily in the interest in exploring the underlying assumptions that allow a work to be

¹⁸ Thak Chaloemtiarana, “Making New Space in the Thai Literary Canon,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40.1 (February 2009): 87-110.

¹⁹ Rachel Harrison, “Elementary My Dear Wat: Influence and Imitation in the Early Crime Fiction of ‘Late-Victorian’ Siam,” in *Chewing Over the West: Occidental Narratives in Non-Western Readings*, ed. Doris Jedamski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

²⁰ Chalongsorntravanich, “Small Arms, Romance, and Crime and Violence in Post World War II Thai Society,” *Southeast Asian Studies* 43.1 (2005): 26-46.

²¹ Thanaphol Limaphichat, “The Prescription of Good Books: The Formation of the Discourse and Cultural Authority of Literature in Modern Thailand (1860s-1950s)” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2007).

²² Nidhi Eoseewong, “Bourgeois Culture and Early Bangkok Literature,” in *Pen and Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok*, eds. Chris Baker and Ben Anderson (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1982) and Benedict Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in the American Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamon, 1985).

considered fiction (as opposed to fact) in the first place. In many ways, then, this dissertation is less about Thailand than it is about the way Thais and scholars of Thailand know things.

On that note, on information, or studies of knowledge production, in the Thai context, there is Manas Chitkasem and Andrew Turton's *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, a collection of articles about knowledge in Thailand published in 1991 that is perhaps the only book length compilation in English to frame issues of Thai studies in the rubric of knowledge production.²³ The essays in the volume cover a range of topics from invulnerability, the meaning of the forest in contemporary Thai life, sedition, the reception of liberal economic theory in the early twentieth century, and the role of socialist periodicals in the 1950s. I draw on ideas from some of these articles and discuss them in more detail in within the dissertation. More recently, Craig Reynolds and Tony Day have written a paper promoting a Foucaultian approach to studying Southeast Asia entitled "Cosmologies, Truth Regimes, and the State in Southeast Asia."²⁴ This essay, published in 2000, advocates discourse analysis in the study of the region's history. Since that essay, there has been a growing scholarship showing the influence of Foucault such as Davidsak Puaksom's *Chuarok rangkai lae ratwetchakam prawattisat kanphaet samai mai nai sangkhom thai* (The germ, the body, and state biopower: The history of modern medicine in Thai society).²⁵ Peter Jackson, a scholar working on issues of religion and gender in Thailand, has even written an article

²³ Manas Chitkasem and Andrew Turton, *Thai Constructions of Knowledge* (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991).

²⁴ Tony Day and Craig Reynolds, "Cosmologies, Truth Regimes, and the State in Southeast Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 34.1 (2000): 1-55. Thanet Wongyanawa offers an explanation for the appeal of Marx, Gramsci, and now Foucault for people working in Thai studies, claiming the practical aspects of these theorists' works appeal to the utilitarian nature of Thai academics and areas studies in general. See his "Wathakam: The Thai Appropriation of Foucault's 'Discourse,'" in *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, ed. Rachel Harrison and Peter Jackson (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Davidsak Puaksom, *Chuarok rangkai lae ratwetchakam prawattisat kanphaet samai mai nai sangkhom thai* [The germ, the body, and state biopower: The history of modern medicine in Thai society] (Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 2007).

entitled “Why I’m a Foucaultian.”²⁶ Thongchai’s work including his celebrated *Siam Mapped*, also owes a great debt to Foucault’s writings.²⁷ In discussions where the state is the central unit of analysis, this approach, which identifies and focuses on a dominant discourse, makes sense. There is room, however, for studies about a range of social actors who do not necessarily represent the state but yet create knowledge. Studies that do so will require an approach that is less rigid and predictable than what has been produced so far.

²⁶ Peter Jackson, “Why I’m a Foucaultian,” *Sojourn*, 21.1 (2006): 113-123.

²⁷ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

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Division 4 Files of the Legal Advisor Stewart Black.
Division 4.1 Files of the Legal Advisor Stewart Black. Case files.
Division 10 Supreme Court.
Division 13 Provincial Courts.

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- PL Royal Secretariat (*Phraratchalekanukan*)
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