Informal Northern Thai Group Bulletin
27 January 2019

1. LAST MEETING (441st): Tuesday, 11 December 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai:
“Rituals of allegiance, hierarchy, inclusiveness, change? The Vessantara Festival (Bun Pha Wet) in Isan and Laos” - A talk by Leedom Lefferts.

2. Next MEETING (442nd): Tuesday, 29 January 2019, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai:
“Not just about money! Thai-Farang marriages and intimate relationships”. A talk by Patcharin Lapanun (พัชรินทร์ ลาภานันท์).


5. FUTURE MEETINGS.

6. INTG CONTACTS: CONVENOR - SECRETARY - WEBSITE.


1.2. The Talk: “Rituals of allegiance, hierarchy, inclusiveness, change? The Vessantara Festival (Bun Pha Wet) in Isan and Laos” - A talk by Leedom Lefferts, The University of North Carolina

Note: This piece is a written version of my remarks to the Chiang Mai Informal Northern Thai Group, based on a largely visual presentation. Copies of the presentation are available on request: lleffert@drew.edu

1 In the transcription of Lao and Thai words, the editor has followed [or tried to follow] the rules of the Royal Institute. Apologies for any break of logic due to the uncertain use of central Thai and Lao words.
Bringing the Vessantara scroll (ผ้าพะเวด/Pha Pha Wet) to the community

The Bun Pha Wet (บุญพะเวส pronounced /bûn pà wèt/, shortened from Bun Phra Wetsandon "บุญพระเวสสันดร") , the Festival Celebrating the Meritorious Achievements of Prince Vessantara) of the Thai-Lao of Northeast Thailand (Isan) and the Lowland Lao of Laos is a distinctive product of the evolution of Theravada Buddhism in their culture. Through the Festival these people utilize some of the many meanings inherent in the epic Vessantara Jātaka (Cowell 1907, on-line: http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j6/j6013.htm; Cone and Gombrich 1977; Appleton and Shaw 2015) to establish roles and meanings coming from their respective colonial, post-colonial, and subaltern religious and social organizations.

This talk expands on and digresses from some themes already discussed in Lefferts and Sandra Cate (2012) and by Lefferts in Thomas Kaiser (2017). It also depends on extensive observations and literature on the epic Vessantara Jātaka (e.g. Collins, ed., 2016). In these previous writings, basic characteristics of the Festival and some of the themes articulated by the Lao and Thai-Lao in this celebration were described. In this presentation I expand on these as well as add to the complexity involved in and articulated by these people as they undertake this celebration.²

One of the basic points, brought to my attention by Bonnie Brereton, is that this celebration seems quite similar to the other major festivals celebrated during the dry season. It is one of the Hit 12, Khrong 14 (ฮีต 12 ครอง 14 = 12 Customs, 14 Traditions) codified as the 4th month ritual (celebrated from approximately early March to mid-April). It consists of a procession – most of these rituals have community-wide processions – held under the aegis of The Buddha, providing opportunities for masses of people to make merit – and have fun (McDaniel 2017).

However, this Festival crosses important ritual boundaries; it has a unique role in this ritual system. Usually a distinction is drawn between wet-season and dry-season festivals. Ajarn Suriya Smutkupt et al. (2543/2000) pointed out that, because the Bun Pha Wet is usually the first Bun celebrated after the end of the cool and at the beginning of the hot-dry season, it is the first Bun concerned with encouraging the commencement of the rainy season. However, a more significant set of ritual boundaries is apparent when one sees whether a Bun contributes, on the one hand, to the narrative trajectory of the Buddha’s life and his statements regarding donations – such as the Ngan Buat Nak (“ordination” of a young man to become a

² This is not exhaustive.
novice), *Bun Khao Phansa* (บุญเข้าพรรษา) and *Bun Ok Phansa* (บุญออกพรรษา), the beginning and end of the Rains Retreat, and *Bun Kathin* (บุญกติน), the donation of robes following the end of the Rains Retreat; or, on the other hand, whether the Festivals are more locally generated, community-wide, merit-making opportunities, such as the *Bun Boek Ban* (บุญบื้องบ้าน), the village renewal ceremony, *Songkran* (สงกรานต์), the traditional April New Year, *Bun Bang Fai* (บุญบังไฟ), the Rocket Festival, and the two “ghost” festivals described by Patrice Ladwig (2012), *Bun Khao Pradap Din* (บุญข้าวพระตี๋น), and *Bun Khao Sak* (บุญข้าวสาหร่าย).

The *Bun Pha Wat* straddles these two types of ceremonies: while it was not prescribed by the Buddha, crucially the Thai-Lao and Lao understand the Vessantara story as part of his life and promises. At the same time, it is concerned with community and its members’ soteriological goals: this singular Thai-Lao and Lao Festival as well as the story recited there connects celebrants to the trajectory of past, present, and future lives of the Buddhas of this cosmic period (*kappa*) as it connects past worlds to present and future worlds, both for ancestors and descendants.

Given the multiple directions this Festival faces, the importance of the *Bun Pha Wat* as the largest in the *12 Customs, 14 Traditions* calendar is understandable. However, observers outside of Isan and Lowland Laos rarely see the Festival’s significance: no single large exodus of Thai-Lao from Bangkok returning to the Northeast occurs. It is not a national holiday; celebrations are held at individual *wat* (วัด, temple) over a 1½-2 months period from mid-February to mid-April. While the vast majority of some 5,000 Theravada Buddhist *wat* on the Khorat Plateau celebrate the *Bun*, each celebrates it at a different time during this period. Finally, it usually occurs over a short 2-3 day span and little remains when the Festival ends. However, it is the region’s best attended community-based Festival. Why?

To understand the phenomenon of this Festival’s importance we must understand the relationships between the temporal spans encompassed by the Festival and the meanings of the things that go into and reinforce people’s understandings of these temporal spans. One major characteristic of the Festival is that it brings together people/spirits of past, present, and future. The story and the stories which introduce the story do this, but this organization across time is also communicated by the things and the actions of the people involved. Thus, this Festival and, crucially, its things, bring community, households, and individuals together, as well as the people who have lived in this community in the past, those that will live here in the future, and their soteriological goals of rebirth in a promised, better, future world.

The promise of rebirth is made apparent in the Buddha’s recitation of this and other jataka stories of his past lives. However, the Buddha’s closing statement in the *Vessantara Jātaka*, as translated by Cone and Gombrich (1977: 96) from a Sri Lankan Pali manuscript, makes explicit the identity of the present disciples of the Buddha and, thereby, the community of contemporary followers of the Way and Prince Vessantara’s associates:

> WHEN the Teacher had recited this exposition of the Teaching in this story of Vessantara adorned with a thousand verses, he gave the key to the jātaka.

> 'At that time Devadatta was Jūjaka and Ciñcamānavikā was Amittatāpanā. Channa was the Cetan, Sāriputta the ascetic Accuta, and Anuruddha was Sakka. The great king Suddhodana was Sahjaya, lord of men, and Mahāmāyā was Queen Pusattv. The mother of Rāhula was Queen Maddi, Rāhula was Prince Jāli, and Uppalavannā was Kañhājīnā. The followers of the Buddha were the other attendants, and I myself was King Vessantara.' [emphasis added].

In recitations of the *Vessantara Jātaka* that take place in the Thai-Lao and Lao *Bun Pha Wat*, this statement is usually recited in the *salong/chalong* (สลอง/ช่อง, celebratory) chapter following the 13th chapter of the story itself.

However, community members make this identity explicit when the Buddha’s current associates, they themselves, carry the long, painted *Pha Pha Wat* scroll (พาพะหวะต) that embodies the Prince, from the forest
Vessantara Jātaka. This connection comes through the story of Phra Malai (Brereton 1995). This story is often better known for its discussions of the various tortures and hells to which people are consigned for their bad deeds. But the story has a positive half, comprising the major element recited for the Bun Pha Wet. In this half, Phra Malai is asked by a commoner to take a donation of flowers to an exalted place. Phra Malai goes to Tusita Heaven, where he meets Indra and 10,000 thewada at the Cūlamāni Cetiya. This stupa is significant because it contains the hair that Prince Siddhartha cut off when he left the Palace and entered his quest to discover The Way. Later, Metteyya/Maitreya, the Buddha-to-come, appears with 100,000 thewada and grants Phra Malai an interview. He enjoins Phra Malai to return to the human world and tell the people there that, if they wish to be reborn when he arrives as the next Buddha, they should listen to a complete recitation of the Vessantara Jātaka and make the requisite number of things, each numbering 1,000, for this recitation. This injunction is transmitted to the audience during the recitation of the Phra Malai story and forms one of the basic statements reinforcing the importance of holding and listening to the annual recitation of the Vessantara Jātaka. And, just as the scroll provides a tangible item by which the presence of Pha Wet is conveyed into the celebration, so the many tangible items ordered by Metteyya/Maitreya ensure that Phra Malai’s role in the ceremony are crucial to its success.

The Festival itself can be divided into three parts: 1) preparation of the hall (เตรียม สาลา/triam sala), which can take weeks if not months, ending with decorating the recitation hall; 2) the Bun’s 1st day, the "Coming Together" day (mue hom/ธง ธง); and 3) the 2nd day, the "Teaching" day (mue thet/ธง เทศพ). If the Bun is combined with another Festival, such as the dedication of a building or major statue, these two days can be extended to three or more.

The words that describe this schedule chart the actions that take place during its accomplishment. Preparation usually begins two to four months prior to the anticipated date, when temple and community committees present their suggestions to the community’s assembled household representatives. Discussion with the wat’s abbot often occurs prior to this to establish a preferred date and the extent of this year’s Festival. Most often, the schedule, because it fits into a sequence of neighborhood wat celebrations, has evolved over a long period of time and little flexibility is possible or expected. Most often discussion, often heated, revolves around the amount of money each household is expected to donate in order to support expenses. In more recent times, the Sub-district Administrative Organization (Ongkan borihan suan tambon/องค์การบริหารส่วนตําบล) the local level representative body with access to government funds, may contribute money to help pay for selected portions of the ceremony, such as the theater cum "mo lam" (หมอลํา) singing group.

Preparation begins shortly thereafter. Teen-age girls begin to carve dok no (ดอกโน) flowers [Left] from mulberry branches. Men harvest long bamboo poles to split into baskets and other objects. Women begin making khan mak beng (คันหมากเบ็ง), banana leaf pyramidal offerings [Right]. Preparation becomes intense one-two weeks before the Festival as more elderly men and women, who know how to make such things, make and count the many thousands of things – and other objects – necessary for the Festival’s success. These thousands of things are not only prescribed by the Phra Malai story and celebrate the 1,000 verses recited by the Buddha when he first told the story of his previous life, but they also provide a suitable environment for royalty. The multitude of things transforms the wat and its community into a royal palace and mueang (เมือง), place fit for a king. Phra Malai’s interview with Metteyya/Maitreya elicited a rather general description of what should be offered, “set... up a thousand lanterns and a total of a thousand lotuses, indigo flowers, and madara...
[Rubia tinctorum] blossoms, as well as candles, flags, and umbrellas” (Brereton 1995:211). These directions have been systematized and made to fit into a contemporary Buddhist context, so that 1,000 copies each of incense sticks, candles, several different kinds of flowers, betel nut chews, hand-rolled cigarettes, and paper flags are now part of the repertory (Adunwihaankit 2528/1985:107). These things are termed “things for worship” (กิริยาบูชา/kiriya bucha).

Phra Khru Adunwihaankit also termed these “100 things 1,000 things” (เติบขยายนี้เกี่ยวกับพัน/krueang hoi khrueang phan), referring to “durable items”. These seemingly ephemeral items, made or renewed every year, are termed “durable” because they are kept and contained in a khuruphan or kharuphan (ครุพัน or ครุพัน) a container made the first time a Bun Pha Wet is performed at a wat. This wooden container, no taller than half a meter, is often carved in a shape similar to a stupa and usually tightly wrapped in white cloth with blessed white cotton string(s) (สายสิญจน/sai sin).

The inside is hollowed out and a hundred examples of each of the prescribed items, some miniaturized, are placed in it and it is sealed. It is rarely unwrapped, but in some years community members examine its contents in order to ascertain that the correct number of objects remain. In 2016 Kaiser had the opportunity to examine an open khuruphan in Wat Pa Noi, Ubon city, donated by visitors from a village in Mahasarakham Province in 1974. This khuruphan contained “pieces of incense sticks, sticky rice balls wrapped in aluminum foil, pieces of thin candles, cigarettes, i.e., a bit of tobacco wrapped into arbitrary pieces of paper, small red and silver flags, seed capsules, and petals of lotus flowers.” The function of a khuruphan is at least two-fold: to provide a presence for the ancestors at succeeding Bun Pha Wet, when it should be displayed near the center of activities, and to ensure that the minimum number of requisites for the Bun are present at succeeding ceremonies. It is often remarked that a Bun Pha Wet will not be efficacious if the correct procedures, including the requisite numbers and kinds of objects, are not present.5

---

3 On krueang hoi krueang phan, see in Thai: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W64WASWonWI.
4 At the entry "ครุพัน", the Dictionary of the Lao Ministry of Education (Vientiane, 2505/1963) explains "Heavy’ thing, refers to things which can be used for a long period of time” [Note from the editor]
5 On "kharuphan" see also in Thai: http://www.thaistudies.chula.ac.th/2018/09/28/ครุพัน-สหัสวัตถุศักดิ์/
However, these thousands of things, prepared and counted annually, comprise only a portion of the total array of objects prepared for a Bun Pha Wet. Many items are kept year after year and renewed only when they wear out, disappear, or cannot be found when the time comes around to hold the Bun a year later. These consist of 8-9 long "victory banners" (ธุงชัย/thung chai) formerly woven by co-operative women’s groups in the community, suspended from tall bamboo poles planted in the eight cardinal and intercardinal directions surrounding the sala. If a wat has a ninth banner, its pole is planted near the gate of the wat, “so that Pha Wet will know he nears his palace.” These flags symbolize a royal presence. Additionally, other things denoting royalty, including four sets of a palace flag, a fly whisk, and other accoutrements, must be put in place inside the sala, designating this site as a royal palace (ราชวัง/rajawang) (Wira, n.d.).

But other objects, perhaps construed as more “mundane”, must be collected. These transform the sala into a place representing humanity and the community sponsoring the Festival. Thus, four each of banana trees, sugar cane stalks, and bunches of coconuts are placed in the sala corners, usually tied to the pillars supporting the roof. These are gathered, as they are for many other Thai-Lao and Lao ceremonies, because they represent the agricultural wealth of the community and because they transplant and grow easily, as have the humans who have inhabited the area.

Inside sala, focus on the Royal palace (รัชวัง), with monks reciting, Nong Khai 2008

These objects must be gathered and displayed properly prior to or early on the day of coming together (mue hom). "Mue hom" has a double meaning: it signifies 1) the day when two important personages are asked to enter the community; 2) the day when resident households welcome relatives and friends from near and far who come to visit and make merit. Both Upagupta (พระอุปคุต/Phra Upakhet), who provides protection for the Festival, and Pha Wet (Vessantara) are invited to enter with, usually, separate processions. Each procession can be ornate, with music, dancing, and joy, but the most important is that for Pha Wet. More rarely, for only a few Isan communities (Tambiah 1970:162-3), the procession escorts only Upagupta to the wat. Klausner (1993:47) says that, in the area in which he lived, northwest of Ubon city, the procession was termed the “flowers and elephants” parade. In these latter two instances, the long, painted scroll which distinguishes the Pha Wet procession is not carried.

The procession for Upagupta originates from a water source, usually a pond or stream close to the wat. Upagupta is associated with water (Strong 1992); he is asked to come and shield the environment for the Festival. In some Lao villages, three stones collected from the water may be used to represent Upagupta, while, more often in Thai-Lao communities, a statue represents him. However, it is necessary that water be collected in a kettle and returned to the place where Upagupta will be housed (Ho Pha Upakhet/หอพระอุปคุต), along with the accoutrements that designate him as a monk, such as robes, sandals, umbrella, and bowl. Food is
presented to him at breakfast and lunch when other monks receive their donations. At the end of the Festival, usually the morning after the Festival’s conclusion, he will be returned to the water from which he came. To ensure Upagupta’s protection for the Festival, baskets are placed at the flagpole bases to receive flowers and sticky rice balls; slips of paper with the written chant invoking Upagupta are often inserted into the interstices of these bamboo baskets.

However, the main event for a Thai-Lao or Lao Bun Pha Wet takes place in the afternoon, after the day’s heat. Community members go to a place designated as "forest" and there invite Phra Wet to return to his muang (เชิญพระเวสสันดรเข้าเมือง/choen Phra Wetsandon khoa mueang). I note here again that THE important material artifact of the Festival plays THE crucial role. The long, painted cloth scroll is taken to the forest and, following the recited invitation, repeated three times prior to Phra Wet’s acceptance, is unrolled and carried back by community members to the reconfigured sala/palace. There it is mounted around the sala walls. The scroll, accompanied by all the other things, thus defines the transformative space in which Phra Wet achieves his great merit in order to be reborn as Siddhartha to become the Buddha in his next life. The center of the sala thus replicates the hermitage and its surroundings.

In addition to all that has been enumerated thus far, even more objects and actions help to define the significance of this space. Basins of water are placed in the center. One contains water from a nearby pond, collected along with mud, frogs, fish, a turtle, and lotus plants. This water and its objects mimic the Pokkharanī pond (สระโบกขรณี/Sa Bokhorani) immediately outside Phra Wet’s hermitage, in which Phra Wet’s two children, whom he had donated to Chuchok (Jujaka), hid. Discovering them, their father calls them out and tells them to go with Chuchok as he had previously ordered. The other basin contains water over which the 1,000 candles and incense sticks will be burnt as the 13 chapters of the story are recited. This water, because of the power of the recited words, candles, and incense, becomes holy water (น้ำมนต์/nam mon) and, following the ceremony, is bottled and taken home to be mixed with bath water or kept for medicinal purposes.

In center of sala: 1000 balls of sticky rice with basins of water and khuruphan, and lighting candles and incense during recitation. Khon Kaen, 2006

After the scroll is mounted and the sala’s interior space organized, recitations by monks introducing the Bun Pha Wet begin in the early evening. Following the traditional opening for all Buddhist ceremonies, paying homage to the Triple Gems (รัตนไตร/rattanatrai) and taking of the five precepts (รับศีลห(า)/rap sin ha), a tray representing the five Buddhas of this cosmic period (kappa) is presented to the presiding monk. Then the
community’s lay leader asks one monk to begin the recitation of the Phra Malai readings. This ends sometime after dark, by which time the din of the mo lam troupe’s show booms across the wat grounds.

Entertainment (มหารัศพ/mahorasop) is an essential part of the Bun Pha Wet. The story itself notes that the people returning with their restored ruler, Pha Wet, celebrated for a month as they returned from the mountain. The moharasop consists of a bazaar with games, entertainment, sometimes with multiple mo lam troupes, and several booths where trinkets can be bought. Younger monks and novices man one of these booths, termed soi dao, where people donate money to receive chances entitling them to a gift, sometimes quite expensive, such as a TV set or bicycle, but usually more trivial, such as a small bottle of orange soda. All these gifts are themselves donations, so both donors of objects and people donating money for chances gain merit. Additionally, usually three booths directly related to making merit are manned by more senior monks and men: pit thong phra (ปิดทองพระ), apply gold leaf to a Buddha statue; sai bat roi paet (ใสบาตรรพีแผ่), in which 108 small coins, usually now 25 cents (satang) pieces, are dropped into 108 monks bowls, making merit at each donation; and an opportunity to bow to a Buddha statue and light candles and incense. Some mohorasop can be quite extensive and some of the singing and dance routines prior to the appearance of the main mo lam troupe can be daring, as they are put on by groups of students from local schools.

Finally, signifying the end of the gathering day (mue hom) and the beginning of the teaching day (mue het), the 1,000 sticky rice balls are paraded around the wat grounds, in some communities around the entire living area, and returned to the sala. These balls of rice induce the multitudes of free-floating spirits that inhabit the community space to descend and partake of the merit to be made by listening to the recitation. Some of these spirits might be ancestors, some might be the ghosts of deceased whom we cannot know about. As the procession returns to the wat and makes its way three times around the sala, participants place extra balls of rice, flowers, and candles in the baskets at the base of the flagpoles. Altogether, from the calling of Upagupta through the visits of friends and relatives, to the invitation for Pha Wet, concluding with the calling of the spirits of free-floating beings, all possible sentient beings are brought together for the recitation.

The day of the teaching (mue het), is relatively straight-forward. The recitation begins shortly after the procession of the 1,000 sticky rice balls ends at the sala and continues through the chalong. This includes the introduction to the telling of the story or sangkat (สังกาศ)⁶; the 13 chapters of the Jātaka; and the celebration that is the conclusion. The candles and incense are lit throughout the recitation, making the holy water. At appropriate times, when Vessantara makes merit, furthering his progress toward his goal of future rebirth as Siddhartha, members of the audience may throw uncooked rice, money, and other small objects. Additionally, as monks give especially melodious or inspiring recitations, a monk’s bowl is passed around and the money thus collected is donated to him, or audience members may approach and place money in each monk’s shoulder bag, draped over the front of the chair in which he sits. Throughout the recitations, audience members are involved in various activities; it is unusual for absolute quiet to reign while the recitations take place. Finally, at the end of a monk’s recitation, or at the end of the whole performance, merit is made by the giving of gifts to monks.

Because my presentation focused on the complexity and significance of things in the Bun Pha Wet and because previous works have discussed the recitations, I did not discuss these in detail. My purpose here has been to emphasize that the Thai-Lao and Lao Bun Pha Wet is a significantly different organization of the themes contained in this epic when compared to other Theravada Buddhist uses of the story. I appreciate the opportunity to have presented this thesis to the Informal North Thai Group.

References cited:

อดุลวิหารกิจ, พระครู = Adunwihankit, Phra Khru

---

⁶ "Sangkat" (สังกาศ) is the deformation of "sakkarat" (สัคกราศ), or "[Buddhist] era". It was/is the custom at the beginning of all oral teachings, sermons or "het" to recall the number of years since the complete extinction of the Buddha and remind people that "Buddhasāsana", i.e. the teaching of the Buddha, was/is one year further on the unavoidable declining slope. It was supposed to strengthen the minds so that they stick to the Buddha's teachings. [Note from the editor]
2528/1985 มหาชาติค้ำกล่อนภาคอีสาน อนุสรณ์ ในงานพระราชทานเพลิงศพ, Mahaa chaat kham klaun Iisaan, in remembrance. At the royal cremation ceremony. วัดสร่างแก้ว ตําบลในเมือง อําเภอเมืองรойเอ็ด จังหวัดรอยเอ็ด Wat Sra Kaew, Tambon Nay Muang, District Muang, Roi-et Province.

Appleton, Naomi, and Sarah Shaw, translators and introducers

Brereton, Bonnie Pacala

Collins, Steven, ed.

Cone, Margaret, and Richard F. Gombrich


Klausner, William J.

Ladwig, Patrice

Lefferts, Leedom

Lefferts, Leedom, and Sandra Cate

McDaniel, Justin

Strong, John

Suriya Smutkupt, Pattana Kitiasa, Kanokpon Diiburii, Sathapon Undaeng, Priichaa Sriichai
2543/2000 การเมืองวัฒนธรรมในบุญผะเหวดรเอ็ด = Kan mueang watthanatham nai Bun Pha Wet Roi Et = Cultural Politics and the Secularization of the Bun Pha Wet in Roi Et Market Town). Ekkasaan Thaang Wichaakaan, Hong Thai Suksaanithat, Saakhaa Wicha Suksaa Thuapay, Samnak Wicha Tecknoolooyii
3. Next MEETING (442nd)

Tuesday, 29 January 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai

“Not Just About Money: Thai-Farang Marriages and Intimate Relationships”

A talk by Patcharin Lapanun (พัชรินทร์ ลาภานันท์)

**The Talk:** In locations around the world, transnational marriages and intimacies become a viable option of women and men. Patcharin Lapanun explores Thai women –farang men marriages and complicates the bimodal views about materiality and intimacy within global intimacies. The sentiments and life stories of women and men engaging in these transnational relationships highlight the complexities of the associations that are shaped and reshaped by ‘love,’ money and gender obligations on the one hand and the dynamics of socio-cultural and historical contexts on the other. Transnational marriages also challenge gender relations, perception on sexuality, marriage and family as well as the existing class division in rural Thai communities. Focusing on the ‘local end’ of transnational connections, Lapanun states that women with farang husbands have created a new ‘class’ determined by their distinctive consumption patterns and life styles. This dynamic challenges the village hierarchical structure and puts the village elites in a vulnerable position. Her in-depth examination highlights the important of women’s agency and the strength and creativity of people seeking to forge meaningful lives in the processes of social transition in the face of local and global encounters.

**The Speaker:** Dr. Patcharin Lapanun is a lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology and chair of the MA program in Sociology, Khon Kaen University (KKU). She earned her PhD in Anthropology from Vrije University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Her research interests include gender and development, migration and ‘the left-behind’; transnational marriage and migration, global care regime and cross-border studies. Patcharin’s forthcoming book is “Love, Money and Obligations: Transnational Marriage in a Northeastern Thai Village” (NUS Press); she is also a co-author of “Cross-Cultural Marriage: Stage of Knowledge” (2007-Thai Language) and “Village-based Silk Production in Transition, Northeast Thailand” (2012 - White Lotus Press). Her recent research articles in academic journals and book chapters include “Masculinity, Marriage and Migration: Farang Migrant Men in Thailand” (2018, Asian Journal of Social Science); Masculinity, Matrilineality and Transnational Marriage (2018, Journal of Mekong Society); “Mia farang: An Emergence of a New ‘Class’ in (Rural) Thai Society” (2015, a book chapter, Culture is Power, Chiang Mai University -Thai Language); “It’s Not Just about Money: Transnational Marriage of Isan Women” (2012, Journal of Mekong Society); “Social Relations and Tensions in Transnational Marriage for Rural Women in Isan Thailand” (2012, a book chapter: The Family in Flux in Southeast Asia: Institution, Ideology, Practice, Kyoto University and Silkworm Books).
The Talk: This presentation is based on “semi-structured” interviews with 20 village residents older than 50 years and 20 younger than 30 years. Their individual experiences and views provide rich insights into the dramatic social, economic, and cultural changes that have transformed Thailand over the last several decades and continue in the present. Despite frequent academic observations on growing socioeconomic inequality in Thailand, it is important to understand that residents of villages like Sansai Mahawong are strikingly better off than they were 50 years ago. They are better fed, better dressed, better housed, better educated, healthier, and longer-lived than they were when the Calavans first studied Sansai in 1969-70. Many insights are emerging from the interviews. A few interesting observations:

- Patterns of courtship and marriage have changed. Among elders it was usual for young men to “aeo sao” [“visit the girls”] in a stylized manner. These days it is more common for young people to meet through education or work.
- Investment strategies have changed. Within the past 20-30 years there has probably been no more effective family investment strategy than financing post-secondary education for children.
- Physical mobility [e.g. visits to Chiang Mai, travel to Bangkok and beyond] and knowledge of the outside world [e.g. through TV and the internet] have increased exponentially.
- The HIV/AIDS epidemic struck Sansai Mahawong a few decades back, but doesn’t seem to pose a significant threat at present.
- A youth group/performing ensemble that was very important to young people 40-50 years ago no longer exists, and in some ways the current generation seem more isolated from their village peers.

The Speaker: Kay and Mike Calavan no longer undertake paid work, but expect to observe the world as professional anthropologists until they die. Their Ph.D. research in Sansai Mahawong was carried out in 1969-70. Mike studied small farmer decision-making and how Sansai farmers adopted Green Revolution rice varieties. Kay observed governance and social organization and how some features of the traditional system of aristocrats, commoners, and slaves persisted into the 1960s. Subsequently, the Calavans switched professional roles. Kay earned a post-doctoral masters’ degree in agronomy, and planned and evaluated agricultural programs for USAID and other development groups. Mike focused much of his career in USAID on planning and implementing programs to strengthen governance and democracy and in the first 12 years of retirement planned, assessed, and initiated dozens of similar programs.

The Calavans initiated “50 years after” research in Sansai in 2016-17, and presented that research [and an anthropological film from 1976] to the INTG in February, 2017. Their presentation this year is based on 40 semi-structured interviews. Their plans for 2019-20 include a major survey of all Sansai households that will provide rich quantitative data on social, economic, and cultural trends. If they can muster the energy, they will seek to publish a small book or series of articles on Sansai, and are exploring the possibility of producing a follow-up film with a friend.
Notes from the Editor (LG):
1) The two pictures on page 4 above are taken from the web: สุวรรณภูมิราชบุรินทร์ (FaceBook) and คลังข้อมูลเรื่องราวประเทศไทยยุคสมัยปัจจุบัน (https://data.bopp-obic.info/) ; 2) The drawing illustrating the 29 January talk poster below is taken from: S. Tsow, Thai Lite 2, Bangkok: Bangkok Book House, 2005, p. 50.

5. FUTURE MEETINGS


- **11 June 2019**: (???)th Meeting): - A talk by Francis Engelmann on Luang Prabang.

- To be scheduled: Talks by: Paul Carter, Michel Bauwens, Vanina Bouté.

6. INTG CONTACTS: Convenor - Secretary - Website

1) Convenor: Rebecca Weldon: e-mail: rebecca.weldon@gmail.com, Mobile: 087 193 67 67.
2) Secretary: Louis Gabaude: e-mail: gabaudel@yahoo.com, Mobile: 087 188 50 99.
3) INTG Webdoctor: Clarence Shettesworth: e-mail: nugentsr@gmail.com, Mobile: 0610509996.
4) INTG Website: http://www.intgchiangmai.com

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
1984-2019 = 35th year of Talks!

NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY!

THAI-FARANG MARRIAGES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

A Talk by Patcharin Lapanun (พัชรินทร์ ลาภานันท์)
Tuesday, 29 January 2018, 7:30 pm

At the Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138 Charoen Prathet Road (Opposite EFEO)
Life in Sansai Mahawong:

Elders and Young People Reflections

A Talk by Kay and Mike Calavan

Tuesday, 12 February 2019, 7:30 pm

At the Alliance Française - Chiang Mai

138 Charoen Prathet Road (Opposite EFEO)