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An Animic Regime Subjugated: The Pu Sae Ña Sae Spirit Cult in Chiang Mai

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従属したアニミズム秩序
—チェンマイにおけるプーセ・ニャーセ精霊祭祀—

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Since the 1990s, ‘animism’ has become a refreshing focal point among anthropologists working in North and South America and, to a certain extent, South East Asia, focusing on its ontological bases of humans and non-humans. In these ontological and ‘perspectivist’ studies, animism is often illustrated by the capacity of metamorphosis attributed to human and non-human beings who have a similar interiority despite having different bodies. What we have often detected in South East Asia, especially in Northern Thailand, are that such unique metamorphic relations are extended between humans and non-humans of various kinds including spirits, souls, cannibal ogres, and aborigines.

This study analyses the complicated processes involved in the propitiation of the ancestor spirits of the aboriginal Lawa through sacrificing a buffalo, cooking, communal eating, and spirit possession by mediums in the Pu Sae Ña Sae spirit cult held annually in the forest of Chiang Mai. In the ritual process of this grandiose cult, it is quite evident that the Northern Thai princes, now the government officials, as the ritual sponsors who embody Buddhist moral superiority could successfully propitiate Pu Sae Ña Sae, the aboriginal spirits. However, for the participating villagers in the cult, the external and potentially dangerous power of the spirits is manipulated in the expectation of deriving practical results, such as well-being,

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health, and timely rain.

This paper thus illustrates the way in which the sacrificial cult is constructed on the basis of the interactions within the animic regime to attain certain purposes, simultaneously and intrinsically involving the reproduction of the conventional social order and legitimate authority. The animic regime is here subjugated under the domination of a political power.

1990年代以降、「アニミズム」は、南北アメリカはもとより、さらに東南アジアで研究する人類学者たちの間でも新たに注目されるようになり、人間および非人間の存在論的基盤に焦点が当てられるようになった。そうした存在論的、あるいは「遠近法主義的」な研究では、しばしばアニミズムは変態する能力の実例と見なされる。この能力は、異なる身体を備えるが、類似する内面性を持つとされる人間および非人間の双方に備わるものと考えられるのである。われわれが東南アジア、特に北タイにおいてしばしば見出してきたものは、精霊、魂、人食い鬼、原住民などを含む多様な人間および非人間の間に広がる特有な変態の諸関係である。

この論文は、チェンマイの森の中で毎年開催されるプーセ・ニャーセ精霊祭祀に焦点を当てながら、水牛供犠、調理、共食、霊媒の精霊憑依などを通して実践される先住民ラワ（Lawa）の祖霊に関わる祭祀の複雑な過程を分析する。この巨大な祭祀の儀礼過程では、北タイの君主たち、あるいは今日では政府の役人たちは儀礼のスポンサーとして仏教道徳の崇高性を体現し、先住民の精霊プーセ・ニャーセを鎮めることになる。しかしそれとは逆に、この祭祀に参加する多くの村人たちは、外在的で潜在的には危険な力である精霊が、幸福、健康、および恵みの雨など実利的な結果をもたらしてくれることを期待するのである。

そこでこの論文では、供犠がアニミズム秩序の中の相互作用を基盤としながら特定の目的を実現するために構築されてきたと考える。しかし同時に、それが本質的に、伝統的な社会秩序と正統的な権威の再生産に関わるものであることを明らかにする。そこではアニミズム秩序は、政治的権力の支配のもとに従属してしまうのである。

1 Introduction	4 The Transformation of Ritual
2 Background to the Cult	5 Conclusion
3 Sacrifice and Its Ritual Process	Appendix: Sequences of the Pu Sae N̄a Sae Spirit Cult

1 Introduction¹⁾

In this study, I take the notion of ‘spirits’ not merely as a cognitive structure or representations, but also as a constituent within the relational ontology extended to humans and non-humans including animals, plants, supernatural beings, and so forth. This relational ontology has often been called an animist system or an animic regime. In this system, as recent anthropological studies have emphasised, human and non-human beings have a similar ‘interiority’, including souls, subjectivities, intentionalities, and enunciative positions, despite having different bodies or forms (Descola 2011: 20; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Kohn 2009). In an animic regime we have often observed that communicative relations and interactions between intrinsically different actors or species are maintained. Moreover, the capacity of metamorphosis is attributed both to humans and non-humans, as is often acted out in ritual scenes including spirit possession as well as in dreams in Thailand, Laos, and other South East Asian countries.

The Northern Thai notion of ‘spirits’ (*phi*) in such an animic regime denotes ‘a real being’ with power or potential (*potentia*) that may affect, sever, or transform the internal equilibrium of a person and, more widely as I have noted elsewhere, engender unequal, asymmetrical relations within social groups (Tanabe 2002: 44–46; 2013b: 176–178; 2016: 3–5).²⁾ The notion of spirits also consists of various forms of knowledge that are orally transmitted, performatively addressed in rituals, or inscribed in texts, most of these usually being less than systematic and often even fragmentary. It is therefore a rather unarranged stock of practical knowledge derived from heterogeneous sources in the animic regime concerning the benevolent and malevolent workings of spirits, the proper methods of propitiation, magical practices to cope with and to make use of spirits, and, more widely, a metaphysical and materialistic rationale for the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, misfortunes, and disasters.

Around this pervasive and deep-rooted animist knowledge, the practices related to spirits become embodied in everyday experiences, but most conspicuously in a variety of spirit rituals. These include in particular the exorcism of malevolent spirits, curing rituals, the more recently developed cults of professional spirit mediums (*ma khi*), and the propitiation cults of various social units such as matrilineal lineages, village communities, and *mueang*, traditional political domains centred in the city.

Viewing the notion of spirits in this way has some theoretical significance. First, in order to understand the Northern Thai (*khon mueang*, Tai Yuan) spirit cults, we should bear in mind that the representations and practices inscribed in the notion, when they come together with participants’ wishes in a ritual, are for requesting ample rainfall for cultivating rice and the well-being, health, wealth, and fortunes of the villagers under the animic regime. Second, although the wishes of

participants as such are intrinsic to the animic regime, its ‘political significance’ is largely attributable to the discursive formation of the notion of spirits, which engender a particular affective response that is an inducement for the participants to recognise and defer to the conventional social order and established authority. This means that such a double-layered ritual process produces a response quite different to what many anthropologists have assumed in terms of cognitive structures or relations of meaning. It is therefore necessary to scrutinise the way in which the discursive formation was historically constructed by a centralising system of belief closely associated with political power, contradistinctive and possibly in conflict with more localised, dispersed belief systems within the animic regime. This could certainly recollect the Foucauldian situation of ‘subjugated popular knowledge’ (Foucault 1980: 81–83).

Among the numerous spirit cults of Tai cultural groups, a particular type of cult called *liang phi mueang* (propitiation of the *mueang* spirits) has proved of special interest to anthropologists, primarily due to its symbolic representations that are directly related to the traditional state or principality, together with its relatively rich mythical background and its grandiose rituals (Archaimbault 1959, 1971; Lévy 1959; Condominas 1975). As I have argued elsewhere, in the case of the Lue (Tai Lue) of Sipsong Panna in southern Yunnan (Tanabe 1988), the formation and further elaboration of these *mueang* spirit cults often involve the borrowing and transformation of symbolism and ritual elements from the cults practised at lower levels, such as village and domestic groups, and possibly from other ethnic groups (Turton 1978: 129–130). This indicates that the study of royal cults or similar ones should direct its analytic focus on the historical formation of the notion of spirits that involves complex relationships with the symbolic representations and ritual practices of lower levels, and the changes that consequently occurred in the highest royal cult (Bloch 1989: 209–210).

The ethnography that follows concerns a Northern Thai spirit cult which has long been a royally-sponsored ritual to propitiate the *mueang* guardian spirits of the Chiang Mai principality until it was transferred to villagers in the early twentieth century. Like in other grand *mueang* spirit cults, such as in Luang Phrabang, Vientiane, Wat Phu of Laos, and in Cheng Hung of Sipsong Panna, their rituals involve buffalo sacrifice, a rite that has continually attracted the attention of anthropologists and historians. Animal sacrifice is, I believe, a central feature throughout the Northern Thai spirit cults as well as in those of other Tai groups in general, as surveyed by Terwiel (1981: 19–120), though practices of spirit possession by mediums have much the same significance in certain instances. Yet, despite its central significance both in the notion of spirits and in the related ritual sequences, theoretical arguments on the Northern Thai sacrifice seem to be extremely underdeveloped when compared with the cases in the Philippines, India, and Africa. I am quite sure that universal schemes of sacrifice postulated at the end of the nineteenth century

by Hubert and Mauss (1964[1899]) based on Vedic sacrifice, and similarly later by Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer (1956), cannot account for the cases of Tai groups. This is due to their inappropriate Indo-European and Greco-Roman ethno-centrism, centred particularly on the concepts of the sacred and sacralisation, as demonstrated in critical analyses by Das (1983), de Heusch (1985), Gibson (1986), and Bloch (1992: 28–29). It is therefore fundamentally necessary in the study of Northern Thai sacrifice to adequately identify this crucial practice in the formation of knowledge of the spirits and to understand it theoretically in the ritual process of an animic regime.

This study thus concerns the Northern Thai *mueang* spirit cult in Chiang Mai, focusing on its sacrificial ritual. First, it will be necessary to examine how the power operates and what effects are produced in the sacrificial process, and then to investigate the functioning of the repercussions brought about by the power of the spirits in the wider context of social and political relations. Second, in so doing, this study will illustrate the way in which the ritual is constructed on the basis of practical knowledge to attain certain purposes, while simultaneously and intrinsically involving the reproduction of the conventional social order and legitimate authority. Third, I hope to elucidate such a contradictory relationship involved in the cult by examining the way in which the legitimate authority of Chiang Mai monarchs has historically been constructed through the modification and subjugation of the animic regime. Finally, I take up the question of how the practical knowledge underlying the animic regime is articulated with the dominant Buddhist-oriented knowledge in view of the recent changes associated with the growing spectacular features of the spirit mediumship.

2 Background to the Cult

The sacrificial ritual has long been held at two places in the foothills to the west of Chiang Mai city: one at the shrine of Pu Sae (Grandfather Sae) in Tin Doi village, Suthep sub-district, Mueang district of Chiang Mai, and the other at the shrine of Ña Sae (Grandmother Sae) in the forest of Doi Kham (Gold Mountain) in Pa Čhi village, Mae Hia sub-district of the same district (See Figure 1, Photos 1, 2, 3). Although interrupted for certain periods in its long history, the sacrifice has continued to be practised at both sites. Yet, as far as the late twentieth century is concerned, while the scale of the sacrifice in Tin Doi village has somewhat declined, now only involving the offering of cuts of pork at the shrine, in Pa Čhi village it still takes place in the traditional fashion.³⁾ In the following I shall provide a basic outline of the myth, noting only the parts relevant to the subsequent description of their related rituals, by mainly drawing on *Tamnan phrathat doi kham* (The chronicle of Prathat Doi Kham) while drawing attention to significant differences, if any, with reference to other versions.⁴⁾

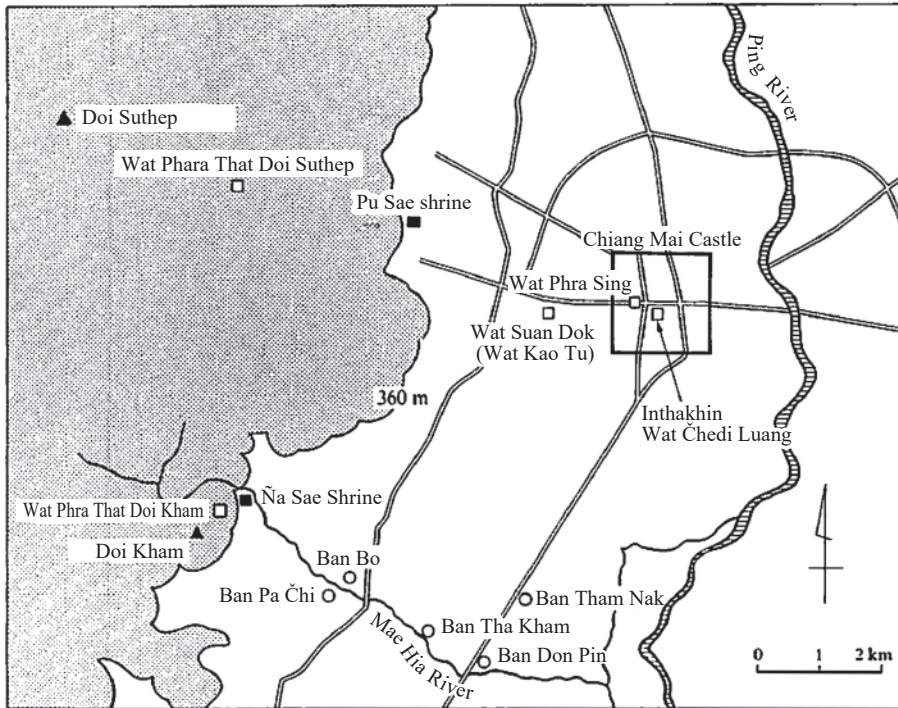


Figure 1 Map Showing the Pu Sae Na Sae Ritual Sites

Towards the last days of the Buddha, before entering *parinipphan* (*parinirvana*), he decided to travel to other parts of the world to lay a firm foundation for his teachings. In the course of this journey, he arrived, together with his disciples and Phaya In (Indra), at Doi Kham⁵ to the southwest of the present Chiang Mai city where he was confronted by three demons (*yak*),⁶ Pu Sae, Na Sae, and their son.⁷ They were cannibals and intended to eat the Buddha. With his mental power of righteousness (*bunyaphinhan*) he influenced their minds and caused them to desist, determined to prevent them from continuing such a vicious habit.⁸ The Buddha then delivered a sermon persuading them to relinquish this offensive practice. While the son came to strictly observe the precepts, Pu Sae and Na Sae could not, asking to still be allowed to eat one human each every year. The Buddha would not assent to their request and finally compromised by permitting them to each eat the flesh of a buffalo, which they should request from the prince of the *Mueang*.⁹ Thereafter, a white buffalo with horns as long as its ears (*khwai phueak khao piang hu*) has been sacrificed each year to Pu Sae at his shrine near Wat Fai Hin (now moved to Tin Doi village) and a black buffalo with horns as long as its ears (*khwai dam khao piang hu*) to Na Sae at the foot of Doi Kham in Mae Hia

sub-district.¹⁰⁾ Yet, their son was so faithful to the Buddha's teaching that the Buddha permitted him to be ordained as a monk. Later, he disrobed and returned to lay life though he became a hermit to whom the Buddha gave the name Vasuthewa-roesi (Suthewa-roesi). After the Buddha taught the *dhamma* to the son, he left a few hairs of his head as a relic. The demons kept the relic in an emerald urn to be worshiped. A good omen then appeared: rain continued for three days and nights and the raindrops turned to gold, flowing down into a cave, called the 'Gold Cave'. The Buddha stamped his foot-print on a stone alter in the *phayom* grove to the east of Doi Kham.

Thus, here the legend is primarily about demons being converted by the Buddha from cannibalism and becoming guardian spirits who receive the sacrifice of buffaloes from the rolers of Chiang Mai. Another important element in the legend relates to Suthewa-roesi who became the guardian of Buddhism and its associated polity of Chiang Mai principality. In fact, the annual sacrificial ritual practised particularly in Pa Čhi village involves all these mythical representations and statements in the form of utterances, performance, or material symbols. It should be kept in mind, however, that what occurs in the actual ritual process is not necessarily restricted solely within the scope of these statements in the myth, but also involves more complex matters in the wider nexus of spirit beliefs, as I shall explain later.

The Pu Sae Ña Sae spirit cult has historically had some particular points of political significance. As indicated in some versions of the myth, the cult is believed to have been derived from that practised by the autochthonous Lawa (Lua), a Mon-Khmer group once dominant in Northern Thailand and beyond, prior to the establishment of Northern Thai principalities in the thirteenth century. Remnants of these populations still inhabit scattered mountainous areas of the same region. In the myth, Pu Sae and Ña Sae are identified as Lawa cannibals who became their ancestor spirits. This Lawa origin of the cult implicitly suggests that it was taken over by the Northern Thai sometime after the Northern Thai conquest in the thirteenth century (Kraisri 1967: 197–198). Moreover, it reflects the Northern Thai claim to a superior, civilised status buttressed by Buddhism as against the uncivilised Lawa, represented as cannibal demons. This view is certainly a typical adaptation of the legends in Buddhist texts which identify the Tamil as demons or barbarians in the Sri Lankan context.¹¹⁾ Furthermore, the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult seems to imply a particular style of the manipulation of ethnic relationships which has much in common with that of other Tai traditional polities (Aijmer 1979; Turton 2000). Such a relationship with the aboriginal Lawa underlying the spirit belief system will be examined later.

Another point of political significance of the cult concerns its supreme status among the numerous spirit cults and Buddhist rituals practised in the Chiang Mai principality. The Pu Sae Ña Sae cult has often been referred to as *čhen mueang*

(literally, crossbar of the *mueang*), denoting that it is one of the most important *mueang* spirits,¹²⁾ together with those protecting the five gates and four corners of the Chiang Mai fortification. The highest sacred object is Inthakhin (literally, the pillar of Indra) which is identified as *suea mueang*, denoting the guardian spirit protecting all the *mueang*. For the *suea mueang* and *čhen mueang* the princes had to, in theory, hold rituals of propitiation on fixed dates, as well as on critical occasions such as when the kingdom was threatened by disaster or plague. Inthakhin, a magical object representing the centralised political power, again relates to the Lawa tradition (Tanabe 2000). It is believed to have originally been installed at the centre of the mythical Lawa city called Wiang Nopburi, presumed to have been located in the present city area of Chiang Mai. It was moved to its present site in the compound of Wat Čhedi Luang in the early nineteenth century by Prince Kawila.¹³⁾ The spatial differentiation of these supreme cults deserves special attention. There is a topological opposition between the two: while Inthakhin overtly represents the political power of the ruling princes at the centre of the city, the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult has as its locales the western and south-western fringes of the forests (Swearer 1987). This implicitly indicates that the latter is strongly associated with the marginal and ambivalent power of the forests.

In its formal, discursive aspects, the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult is thus seemingly of Lawa origin and has symbolically been associated with the legitimisation of the Chiang Mai monarch since its foundation. A different picture of the cult emerges, however, if we examine its rather informal, non-discursive aspects, that is, what the villagers talk about and actually do in the ritual. In fact, despite the legend's stress on its connection with the princes of the Chiang Mai court (*khum luang*), the cult has long been organised mainly by the villagers of the Mae Hia and Suthep sub-districts, at least for the past one hundred years. Until the period of Čhao Inthawichayanon (reigned from 1873–96), the sacrificial rituals at both sites had been organised by court officials who collected money for the expenses from every household in the area (Hallett 1890: 57). The prince was in theory the sponsor of both rituals, partially subsidising the expenses, though never present in person at the sites. The officiant (*tang khao*), who was chosen for having a sufficient knowledge of the rituals and the Lanna (Yuan) script, and also for being close to the prince, invoked Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and the other spirits at the ritual sites in the ruler's name. However, during the early part of the twentieth century, when the Siamese central government completed the absorption of Chiang Mai and the other Northern Thai principalities, the Chiang Mai court transferred the management of the cult to local officials. In the 1920s, during the term of office of Čhao Kaeo Nawarat (1911–39), the last and nominal prince of the Kawila dynasty (ruled Chiang Mai from 1781–1939), Phaya Sing, a court official, presented a copy of the spirit invocation text to Nan Mueang, a local official at Tam Nak village of Mae Hia, and appointed him the officiant of the cult. A few years later, Saen Wiset, a resident of

Pa Čhi village, was subsequently appointed as the officiant. Until his death in 1939, Čhao Kao Nawarat seems to have contributed an annual sum amounting to about 60–70 *thaep* (Indian rupee). However, in general, the cult thereafter was exclusively organised by the villagers without any substantial support from the court, and therefore has had little or nothing to do with the prince and his descendants.

For the villagers, the main purpose of propitiating the spirits is to request ample rainfall for rice cultivation (*kho fa kho fon*), as well as invoking blessings for well-being and health (*yu di mi suk*). The rain-making nature of the cult is widely acknowledged by the villagers and obviously confirmed by the few lines of the incantation to invoke the spirits. The officiant says, ‘Let not the rice of the Lawa die in their swiddens; let not the rice of the Tai [Northern Thai] wither and die in their fields’ (Kraisri 1967: 201). The desire for rain is here clearly not only a concern of the Northern Thai themselves, but also of the autochthonous Lawa who are conceived as superior in ritualistic terms as the descendants of Pu Sae, Ńa Sae, and the other related spirits. Until the early 1970s, if there was no rainfall even after the buffalo sacrifice was completed, then a pig was sacrificed next in order to gratify Pu Sae and Ńa Sae. The rain-making nature of the rite is also reflected in the cult’s organisation. Traditionally, the wet rice cultivation in the above-mentioned villages used to rely exclusively on water drawn from irrigation weirs (*fai*) constructed in the Mae Hia river until the Mae Taeng modern integrated irrigation system was completed in the early 1970s. Thus, the villagers often said that the money to meet the cost of a buffalo and other expenses was collected from those villagers relying on the Mae Hia river system in order to retain a sufficient common supply of water. This explains why the cult has been organised on the basis of the common expectation of water supply to be shared among the villagers within the physical bounds of the catchment area of this river system.

The cult has furthermore attracted wider participation beyond that of mutual economic interest. Historically, there have been people from the city area who have contributed a certain amount of money (*hom ngoen*) to the cult and joined the ritual, and this is still true in the present day. Both these spectators and those villagers in the cult organisation have expressed the idea that they participate in the ritual partly for fun, but also because the ritual to propitiate these important spirits (*čhen mueang*) intrinsically vouches for their well-being and health. We should bear in mind then that the ability to grant their desires for well-being and health becomes an integral part of the authority of the supreme spirits of the *mueang*, despite the temporal power-holder associated with them having already been displaced.

Thus, the social and political significance of the Pu Sae Ńa Sae cult is two-fold. On the one hand, it relates symbolically to the discursive knowledge of spirits confirming the legitimacy of the authority of the monarchs through its derivation from the practices of the aboriginal Lawa. On the other, the cult has long been sustained historically by the practices of the villagers with their wishes for rain, and

also more individually and existentially for their own continual well-being and health. In the next section, I shall examine this problematic congruency. For this purpose, I lay out, in an Appendix, a detailed account of the ritual as it takes place in Mae Hia, drawing mainly on my own observations in 1986, supplemented by other data collected since 1985.

3 Sacrifice and Its Ritual Process

As regards the symbolic representations, we first have to examine the status of the spirits and their change in the ritual process. Like other Northern Thai spirit cults, the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual concerns the power of spirits that is in a sense derived from outside of society. The external status of Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and other related spirits seem to be confirmed by their Lawa origin, as recounted in oral traditions. This external origin is also associated with the older Northern Thai way of referring to ethnic groups outside of society, that is, using the same word, *phi*, in two different contexts. *Phi* means spirit(s), but when used as a prefix to the name of an ethnic group it means people, for example, *phi lua* meant the Lawa people. Aboriginality is here represented as external, ambivalent, and potentially powerful. Such ambivalent power, which though topologically marginal is still attached to the spirits, can be dangerous enough to bring about disaster, plague, and misfortune to the people within the *mueang* polity. The whole business of the ritual therefore relates to the ambivalent and simultaneously potentially dangerous nature of the spirits, which should be transformed into a benevolent and tamed power suitable for the guardian of the *mueang*. In the present day of course this danger would be felt by the people less often and rather implicitly, but it is etched in their folk memory as part of the knowledge of the spirits and is still occasionally threatening.

Statements made by the villagers shed light on another aspect of the ritual. When they speak of the rituals, the villagers invariably stress exchanges, as often theorised in anthropology. In this sense, every ritual has its practical purpose of exchange. The Pu Sae Ña Sae sacrificial ritual is thus interpreted to mean that the spirits are invited to receive the offerings and, as a result, rain, well-being, and health are assured for the people. This kind of statement fits in well with the actual invocations made by the officiant at the ritual site (See Appendix: 6 Invocation). In the ritual, various kinds of offerings, including the sacrificed animal, are made and in exchange the people receive rain and well-being. The ritual is here viewed as a transaction of exchange with the spirits through offerings, including the sacrificed animal *par excellence*. The idea of exchange is deeply rooted in the very term *liang*, which denotes to welcome the spirits with offerings and also to propitiate them when they are explicitly dangerous. The transactions of exchange with the spirits are conjunctive, as opposed to disjunctive access to the spirits by exorcism or *lai phi* (driving away the spirits), as de Heusch (1985: 213–214) formulated in

the cases of African sacrifice. It would thus be possible to say that the sacrifice is a form of conjunctive access to the power, external and potentially dangerous, in order to accomplish the transactions of exchange.

When we look closely at the killing of the animal and the subsequent sequences, the conjunctive access to the spirits involves a further complicated process. The sacrificial process is initially undertaken through a violent attack on the buffalo, the most precious offering, which is an intermediary between the spirits and the people. The expression by the people and in the invocation accompanying the sacrificial process is two-fold: on the one hand, the spirits receive or, even more explicitly, kill the buffalo, and on the other, the people then cook and prepare the meat and blood for the spirits. The buffalo should be killed by the spirits, though it is actually slaughtered by a hired man in the ritual. The position of the spirits as a 'sacrificer' can be also detected in many cases, such as a lineage spirit cult in Lampang where the ancestor spirits in possession of a medium kill a pig and chickens (Tanabe 1991: 199). Even though the identity of the 'sacrificer' varies among the sacrificial cults of the Tai ethnic groups, it is the spirits who kill the buffalo, at least in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult.¹⁴ The killing of the buffalo represents part of the conjunctive access to the intermediary from the spirits, complemented by another form of access from the people.

In fact, the cooking and preparation of the meat, viscera, and blood is really a continuation of the sacrificial process. Throughout the ritual, the practices involved in dealing with the buffalo, whether while still alive or after its death with its carcass, flesh, and blood, have nothing to do with the sacred; the 'sacralisation' of the sacrificial animal in the formulation by Hubert and Mauss (1964: 52; 95) does not occur in this case. Instead, a great enthusiasm for the cooking and preparation of the offerings is aroused throughout the ritual site over the course of several hours after the killing of the animal. Cutting the meat off the bones, collecting the blood, chopping up the meat, mincing and spicing it, and cooking it in pots, the preparation of the food as offerings is directed towards the spirits via the intermediary. The conjunctive access between the spirits and the people is thus made in two ways: the symbolic killing by the former and the cooking and preparation of the offerings by the latter, both of which are intermediated through the sacrificial animal. Although the concluding communal feast has recently been replaced by sharing the food to be eaten in individual households after the ritual has concluded, the conjunctive access used to be further assured through commensality at the site, something that this ritual has in common with many other Northern Thai spirit cults. Thus, in short, the conjunctive access to the spirits initially involves the destruction of the animal in complementary ways from both the spirits and the humans, and eventually ends with the mutual consumption of the offerings that ensures the exchange. In general, the entire process of Northern Thai sacrifice could be seen as a series of magical conducts involving humans, animals, and spirits through a variety of con-

conjunctive access points to attain mutual ‘social relationships’ within the animic regime. Descola (2013: 231), however, maintains that sacrifice could be interpreted as a means of action developed within the context of ‘analogism’, his fourth ontological mode, rather than ‘animism’ to set up a continuity between initially unconnected different actors. I would say, however, that the Northern Thai sacrifice is still carried out through many conjunctive access points between humans, animals, and spirits on the grounds of the animic regime.

It is then necessary to illustrate further the way in which the transformation of the spirits occurs and affects the participants in the ritual process. While the destruction of the animal, including its killing and subsequent treatment, can be seen as a conjunctive process, it in fact represents extremely corporeal practices shared by both the spirits and human beings. Unlike in the Vedic sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 41–43), the sacredness of the offerings and assimilation to the sacredness through commensality are again not emphasised. Instead, as other cases suggest (Tanabe 1991), we should bear in mind that the consumption of the raw meat and blood implies a sort of magical conduct to share and internalise some kind of power created through the preceding sacrificial process. The raw meat and blood here have a particular symbolic significance. Among the Northern Thai, the raw meat and blood of animals, particularly those of the most precious buffalo, are believed to contain a rather ambivalent power. Once consumed by humans, especially men, the meat and blood could provide them with physical power, health, and fortune. Yet, this would be most effective when they consume the meat and blood commensally with the spirits, that is, precisely at the time when the spirits have just finished their own share.

The commensality is thus seen as a magical conduct to acquire power conjunctively with the spirits, but the power itself should be a tamed and benevolent one. The spirits, who themselves are initially external and ambivalent and are invoked to appear at the ritual site, first assault the animal and then eat its meat and blood until they return, both sated and satisfied, whence they came. After they have greedily devoured the flesh and blood and had their fill, the spirits are ultimately transformed into a genuine tutelary power. A transformation of this still external and potentially dangerous power into a tutelary power can thus come about through a ritual embodying the violent act of slaughter and the satiation of physical cravings for raw flesh and blood that are in essence an extreme of corporeal desire. Through this process, the menace of these external powers is negated. It is this transformed tutelary power that can then be shared by the congregation of the participants in commensality and which assures them of protection and the goodness they have requested.

The transformation of the spirits is also detectable in spirit possession. The Northern Thai conceive spirit possession as the spirit’s control of a human body, generally female but occasionally male, whose heart is ‘soft’ (*khwan on*) and hence

controllable (Tanabe 1991: 189–190; 2013b). In the ritual, the possessing spirits are meant to be ambivalent at the initial stage and later become tamed as tutelary beings as the possession unfolds. This transformation of the status of the spirits is in some way reflected in the physiological process the mediums undergo. At the outset of possession when the spirits intrude their bodies, the mediums invariably seem to be in extreme agony, as if their bodies were being violently attacked, and then proceed to a stable state of possession. In this stable condition, the spirits as tutelary powers are able to speak and act in response to the audience, and finally grant their blessings to the people. Since the spirits that possess the mediums are usually believed among the Northern Thai to be benevolent and moral beings, the buffalo-eating demon may be seen as exceptional, but he performs a crucial role in the portrayal of the image of a never eradicated carnality in the ritual. It should then be recognised that the possession by a ferocious and carnal demon represents a still untamed, dangerous phase that is yet to be transformed. Thus, the transformation of the spirits embodied in the bodies of the mediums could be viewed as parallel to the sacrificial process that occurs to the body of the buffalo. The conjunctive access to the spirits that is accomplished through the mutual violence of the destruction of the buffalo's body is also acted out in the spirit possession focused on the medium's body. Spirit possession is then indeed a human bodily technique in which an intermediary body is used to transform an external power into a rewarding tutelary being (de Heusch 1985: 216).

In the ritual, the sacrificial process is further combined dramatically with Buddhist symbols and performances, and the protractedly bloodthirsty and coarsely physical conduct of the demon possessing a medium. These sequences, fitting in well with the original myth, provide a categorical affirmation of the supremacy of Buddhist morality over antithetical human desires. Through the Phra Bot and the monks' chanting, the utterances made by the converted *Ña Sae*, and above all through the dances dedicated by her converted sons, the Buddhist moral precepts are illuminatingly demonstrated as opposed to what is acted out by the buffalo-eating demon. The symbolic juxtaposition of the two extreme poles, morality and desire, is well illustrated in the sequences, as formulated by Turner (1967: 27–29). However, in this case it is made clear that the Buddhist moral example does not simply dominate but eventually overwhelms extreme sensual cravings, which are ultimately extinguished.

The statements are not restricted to the Buddhist moral precepts but are also concerned with the authority of the sponsor of the ritual as in other spirit cults. Explicitly predicated in this case is the statement to recognise the authority of the ruler of Chiang Mai as the representative of the entire *mueang* polity, since his title is inscribed in the invocation text and has been referred to continually at the ritual site for hundreds of years (See Appendix: 1 Preparation and 4 Shrines and offerings). However, the presence of the prince at the site has never been historically

proven before the early twentieth century when it is possible that he may have attended, and evidently, since the title has become nominal, he has been absent thereafter. Moreover, the princes have never been symbolically identified with any spirits in the ritual, which therefore seem to have nothing to do with royal descent. In fact, the spirits are of Lawa origin, and this raises the question of why the aboriginal spirits have been propitiated by the monarchs, or at least why it was done in their name. The answer to this question can be found first in light of a particular ethnic relationship between the Northern Thai and the Lawa in terms of history and mythical representations.

The Lawa, pushed back into the foothills and mountains by the Northern Thai sometime after the founding of Chiang Mai, have long represented a distinctive social category outside the society of the latter, though very close political and social relations have been maintained.¹⁵⁾ It is this aboriginal and external nature of the Lawa that grants extraordinary power to Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and the associated spirits. In the knowledge of spirits, the spirits of the Lawa are identified with marginal, dangerous, but potentially powerful beings, because the Lawa's aboriginality is associated with the original land prior to the conquest. Therefore, the Chiang Mai court seems to have pursued a policy by asserting its authority to claim the right to be the supreme sponsor of the rain-making rites that are held on behalf of both the Lawa and the Northern Thai. This was achieved by assigning the ritual to the Lawa communities under the direct control of the Chiang Mai court so that the aboriginal cult of Pu Sae Ña Sae loses its original claim to control the territory and becomes an appendage of the monarch's authority. However, over a long period of time, these Lawa inhabitants around the western foothills have merged into Northern Thai society. The appropriation of the Lawa tradition occurred likewise in the case of Inthakhin, which more prominently represents the political power at the centre, and which formerly was also accompanied by animal sacrifice but later became more associated with Buddhist ritual (Tanabe 2000). It should be noted that this way of appropriating the traditional authority of the aboriginal Lawa as embodied in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult is quite different from what occurred in neighbouring Laos. In his examination of Lao myths and rituals, Aijmer suggests that in Luang Phrabang Pu Ñoe and Ña Ñoe, the ancestral couple of the conquered aboriginal Kha people, became the ancestor spirits of the Lao king by sending his eldest son to be the chief of the Kha, thus fusing royal descent into one line (1979: 742–745).¹⁶⁾ Such a method of reconciliation leading to the recognition of the authority of the Lao king does not seem to have occurred in Chiang Mai. On the contrary, Pu Sae and Ña Sae remain as Lawa ancestor spirits, but the rulers of Chiang Mai could act as sponsors of the sacrificial ritual while modifying it as a means of demonstrating Buddhist morality's claimed superiority over the aboriginal belief system. The Chiang Mai court appropriated the Lawa cult in order to claim ritual rights over the newly conquered *mueang* domain, but this was accomplished by

taking over the ritual in its newly developed form in which Buddhist superiority was firmly established.

However, it would be quite misleading to suppose that only the message of Buddhist morality could sanction authority. Conversely, the means by which the authority of the rulers is recognised is surely embedded in the ritual itself as an ideological process. As I have shown earlier, the ambivalent power originating with the Lawa is first introduced to the ritual site through the conjunctive access accompanying the destruction of the intermediary and is then transformed into a tutelary power ensuring the social order and offering assurance of individual benefice. The destruction of the animal by both the congregational villagers and the spirits results in a negation of the spirits' original ambivalence and simultaneously leads to the elimination of the present undesirable situation. This destructive process is a preliminary to the emergence of a transformed tutelary power that represents the unchanging order. The transformation is indicated in advance by the characteristics of some key spirits in both the myth and the ritual (See Figure 2). The conversion of Pu Sae and Ña Sae is envisaged and the statement of the converted Ña Sae is transmitted through a medium. Suthewa-roesi, who is believed to be the founder of

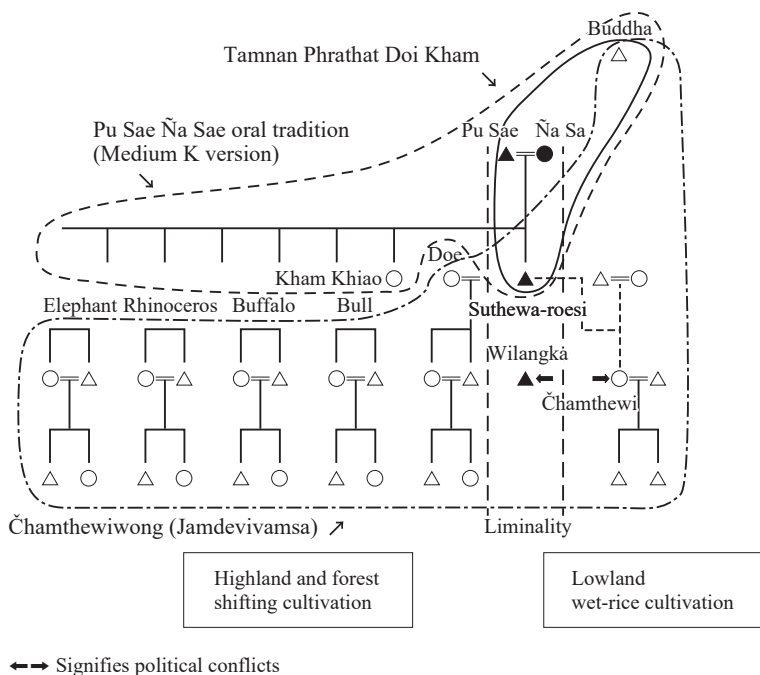


Figure 2 Mythical Representations of the Northern Thai-Autochthon Relationship (Sources: “Tamnan phrathat doi kham” 1965; *Čamthewiwong* 1967; Wijeyewardene 1986)

Hariphunchai, an old predecessor kingdom at Lamphun, and a protector of Chiang Mai with his mystical powers, represents an agent of celestial beings which often appear in Northern Thai myths.¹⁷⁾ The legendary Lawa chief, Khunluang Wilangka (See Photo 4) who was defeated by Čhamthewi, claimed to have been a Mon princess at Hariphunchai, represents aboriginal rights to the land and is therefore transformed into a guardian of rain and water for cultivation. All these figures relating to the Lawa aboriginality are in a state of liminality with the potential to create order in the ritual.

A threatened lack of rain, suffering, and misfortune should all be violently and rapidly eliminated to ensure or recover a normal state of balance in nature and social relations. However, these wishes would only be achieved under the re-created order after passing through the catharsis of a violent negation. The authority that is buttressed by the unchanging order of the *mueang* political hierarchy, inscribed in the invocation, then emerges under the guidance of the tutelary beings. The individual and collective wishes of the participants are thus moulded in an unchanging order that ceaselessly continues to renew its existence. This is an ideological process in which individual hopes and desires are marshalled through the ritual process that reinforces the authority of its sponsors under the created transcendence. The boon of timely rain, health, and general well-being become attributable to the patron, whose authority is thus constantly bolstered with each performance of the ritual. Although no identification of the patron with the spirits ever occurs, and he is absent from the site, the patron's authority can be connected with the imagined transcendence through the invocation by the officiant. Moreover, it could be said that acceptance of this authority is internalised in the ritual itself, regardless of the presence or absence of the patron.

4 The Transformation of Ritual

From the preceding discussion we can discern something about the significance of the non-discursive aspects of the sacrificial ritual. These aspects are centred on the participants' wishes to change the present situation in order to recover a normal state of nature and social relations. As a means of realising these practical purposes, the sacrificial ritual uses an ambivalent and external power and transforms it into a tutelary, rewarding power by way of these transactions of exchange between the spirits and the humans in the animic regime. These practices employed in the sacrificial ritual essentially involve conjunctive access to the spirits, because the sacrifice is a method of making use of the power of the spirits. This differs from exorcism (*lai phi*) in which the disjunction from the malevolent and evil spirits is emphasised.

When we examine such non-discursive aspects involved in the Pu Sae N̄a Sae ritual, we realise that they are quite similar to almost all the sacrifices practised

among the Northern Thai. In fact, the sacrifices for the tutelary spirits of various social units (matrilineage, village, and *mueang* polity) and those for the guardian spirits of professional mediums are all based on the same practical knowledge. Moreover, in respect to its rain-making aspects (*kho fa kho fon*), one of the particular purposes apparent in the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual, we can detect other similar processes in other agricultural rites such as ‘the propitiation of the spirit dwelling at the source of the stream’ (*liang phi khun nam*) and ‘the propitiation of the spirit of the irrigation weir’ (*liang phi fai*). The propitiation of the stream spirit used to be practised in Mae Hia when no rain came even after the completion of the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual. This rain-making rite is complementary to the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual and was conducted by sacrificing four chickens at the source of the Mae Hia river near the top of Doi Suthep. Similar cases have been reported from elsewhere in the Chiang Mai area (Mani 1986: 119–120); in the San Kamphaeng district to the east of the city, a largescale sacrifice of a cow, a pig, and chickens is practised every year to propitiate the guardian spirit of the Mae On river (Sao 1955). Within traditional irrigation groups (*mu fai*), a sacrifice to the irrigation weir spirit is also quite common, which often involves the offering of pigs (Lando 1983; Tanabe 1994). All these agricultural rites share a common cognisance about the working of the spirits that is embodied on the most grandiose scale in the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual.

However, as noted earlier, the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual involves a special feature distinguishing it from others. This concerns the particular statements made in the ritual, namely, Buddhist moral supremacy against human desires and the recognition of the authority of the prince of Chiang Mai, which is constructed through mythical representations concerning the relationship between the Northern Thai and the aboriginal Lawa. These statements are not at all intrinsic to sacrificial rituals. We can thus be certain that they derive from a different source which has been historically formulated outside the practical knowledge of the sacrificial ritual.

Both of these themes, the Buddhist moral supremacy and the acceptance of the ruler’s authority, seem to be a later interpolation to the original ritual which presumably occurred after the royal court took over the ritual. The dissemination of the discourse stressing Buddhist morality and kingship must have occurred after the period when the new Sinhalese Order was firmly established in the Lanna kingdom under the royal support of the Chiang Mai court in the fifteenth century (Swearer and Sommai 1978: 29–30). As cited earlier, there are many versions of the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth, all of which emphasise Buddhist moral precepts and the conversion of the cannibal demons. In addition, the important liminal figures such as Suthewaroesi and Khunluang Wilangka who are connected to the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth repeatedly appear in sixteenth century Pali literature, such as *Āchamthewiwong* (Jamadevivamsa, the chronicle of the kingdom of Hariphunchai), *Āchinnakanlamalipakon* (Janakalamali-pakaranam, the sheaf of garlands of the epochs of the conqueror), and also in the later Yuan (Northern Thai) literature, *Tamnan mulasa-*

sana (1970) (The chronicle of the founding of the religion). We can therefore assume that a new doctrinal interpretation focusing on Buddhist morality and the conversion began to develop under the strong influence of these potent intellectual premises in the sixteenth century. Thereafter, the myth of Pu Sae Ña Sae which had originated in Lawa spirit worship was transformed into a Northern Thai Buddhist myth, though we cannot identify the content of the preceding Lawa version of the myth. The making of this myth was accompanied by drastic modifications to such an extent that the entire story has come to focus on the Buddhist conversion and a reverence for the Buddha's relics. This process seems to have continued over many centuries and resulted in a number of slightly different versions which are often inserted in the story concerning the Buddha's relics, such as Phrathat Doi Suthep and Phrathat Doi Kham, and also that of the Inthakhin pillar. This indicates that the incorporation of these contents in written texts caused a wider dissemination of the slightly differentiated stories through continuous rewriting at Buddhist monasteries in Chiang Mai principality. The written texts of these stories also coincide with the dissemination of the worship of the Buddha's relics, which gained a superior position over the hitherto flourishing spirit worship.¹⁸⁾ As Dhida (1982) remarks, this Buddhist transformation that began in the reign of King Tilokharat (reigned from 1441–87) had a decisive influence on the formation of popular beliefs and practices that have persisted up to the present.

This transformation sociologically explains a functional aspect of legitimating the authority of the monarchs, the sponsors of the ritual. The discursive knowledge has come to involve conspicuous statements that human desires should be extinguished in conformity with Buddhist morality, and that the monarch as its embodiment would provide the desired well-being, health, and rain. The destiny and well-being of the people is attributed to the authority of the monarch. It is the texts of the myth written under Buddhist domination that have given such vigour to the persistent popularity of the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual in Chiang Mai. Yet, this transformation does not entail Buddhist predominance over all aspects of religious practices. There is a sort of division of labour between the Buddhist practices and spirit worship. On the one hand, Buddhist rituals to attain a better otherworldly life are certainly dominant throughout the year, centring particularly on various forms of merit-making rituals at monasteries and lay houses; on the other, more this-worldly desires for fortune, health, and material success are pursued enthusiastically mainly through spirit worship and its related practices. In this respect, the significance of the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult is two-fold: it is one of the most dramatic spirit cults relating to this-worldly practical purposes for personal ends, yet simultaneously represents a royal ritual enacting Buddhist-oriented knowledge involving spirit propitiation that bolsters legitimate authority.

The discourse of spirits based on the Buddhist reinterpretation has been widely disseminated throughout society for centuries and has become incorporated into the

sequences of the ritual, as I have shown in the Appendix. It is, however, quite misleading to see the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual only from the discursive aspects as exemplified by Kraisri (1967) and Rhum (1987). This is because analysis of discursive knowledge such as the myth tends to overlook what is acted out in the ritual itself, and as a result fails to account for the non-discursive aspects that underlie it. As noted before, the discourse confirming the legitimacy of the monarchs is linked with participants' wishes for well-being, health, and rain in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult. What is called a royal ritual is often constructed on this subtle articulation. However, if we look closely at the latter aspect, which can be detected in the sacrificial process through careful observation, we can discern that the non-discursive practices in the ritual could challenge the established discourse. This is because the ritual itself has long been in the hands of the villagers who actually hold the ritual and are relatively removed from the intellectual premises inscribed in the texts of the myth.

Indeed, disputes connected to the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult seem to have frequently arisen, though they are often only implicitly detectable from historical sources. There was in earlier days a case in which a ruler was criticised for his enthusiastic support of spirit beliefs, though the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult was not specifically mentioned. Ratanapañña, a noted Pali scholar in the fifteenth century, severely criticised the former king, Sam Fang Kaen (reigned from 1401–87) for his faith in various forms of spirit cults, which was seen as being at odds with adherence to Buddhism (*Jinakalamalipakaranam* 1967: 116). This case is rather exceptional, because the propitiation of the supreme guardian spirits had been one of the most important obligations of the princes of Chiang Mai until the early twentieth century. A version of the Chiang Mai Chronicle records a political statement that the destruction of Chiang Mai by the Burmese in the late sixteenth century was caused by the people having been prohibited from propitiating Pu Sae Ña Sae and other important protective deities of the city ("Tamnan Chiang Mai" 1976: 8). As Wijeyewardene (1986: 88–89) comments, this statement most likely reflects a political intention in the author's contemporary world of the late nineteenth century rather than a description of the historical incident in the sixteenth century. Hallett (1890: 57) also recorded in the late nineteenth century that the people petitioned the ruler to urge the execution of malefactors in order to induce Pu Sae to allow a larger supply of water, as their fields were suffering from drought. This putative episode of human sacrifice indicates that for the villagers the sacrificial ritual in the cult has a greater significance than any other in coping with the uncertainty of the regular availability of natural resources. The villagers in Mae Hia at present also condemn Čhao Kaeo Nawarat (reigned from 1911–39), the last monarch of Chiang Mai, for his failure to hold the sacrificial ritual during certain periods, which they believe to have caused bad harvests.

In the criticisms and complaints appearing in these historical accounts, the

point of contention is a failure of duty by the rulers. This implies that even though the discourse confirming the authority of the monarchs as sponsors of the ritual has been established and covertly accepted, the actors and participants in the ritual, in their minds, give precedence to the realisation of their personal needs through the ritual. Any unexpected calamity that affects the community at large may be interpreted as due to some preceding dereliction in duty by a sponsor, who embodies supreme authority under this dominant Buddhist discourse of spirits; thus, the relevant monarch comes to be regarded as the precipitator of the disaster. The monarchs have always been exposed to this danger in carrying out the royal ritual due to its pragmatic functions. In other words, the originally underlying knowledge of the sacrificial process within the animic regime can threaten its status as a royal ritual. The Pu Sae Ña Sae cult was reformulated as a royal ritual, buttressed by a new Buddhist-oriented discourse in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, despite this historical transformation of the cult, the sacrificial process of the animic regime dedicated to achieving practical ends remains unchanged but subjugated to the Buddhist royal ritual.

Turner tries to understand the sacrifices among the Ndembu and other African societies by comparing them with the well-established sacrifices of the Iguvian, an Umbrian (Latin) agrarian society, which became a calendrical ritual to confirm the authority of the existing power-holders. He argues that there exists a process of transformation in the Iguvian sacrifice:

In so doing, sacrifice has been put directly at the service of the overarching cosmological and political structures, losing to a great extent its interior quality and its sensitive responsiveness to important changes in specific personal and social relationships (Turner 1977: 211).

Turner is quite right to distinguish between the highly developed sacrifices in agrarian societies that function to maintain order and structure, as opposed to the non-calendrical, *ad hoc* sacrifices responding to crises, as practised among the Ndembu, Nuer, and Dinka. The differentiation of sacrifice as such may relate to different types of societies, that is, state and stateless. Yet, it should be noted that both sacrifices in times of crisis and that of ‘prophylaxis’ to ensure authority and structure are often sustained in a society, as we have seen in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult. In this Turner clearly fails to detect the existence of and the relationship between oppositional bodies of knowledge working within highly developed sacrificial rituals. The centralising political power of Chiang Mai was evidently able to formulate the discourse consecrated to the legitimation of the monarchs, which transformed the sacrifice into a royal ritual. However, the interior quality of the sacrifice within the animic regime has survived and still contains the potential to negate the discursive knowledge linking the rituals to the centralising political power.

In the Pu Sae Ña Sae spirit cult, a further historical transformation took place which has become increasingly apparent in recent years. As noted earlier, the ritual has become a great theatre in the forest involving hundreds of spectators, including both the villagers and outsiders from the city of Chiang Mai and beyond. Even during the earlier periods, the cult was not restricted to the villagers of Mae Hia, having involved a number of outside participants due to its nature as royal *mueang* ritual. It should be noted, however, that the requests for aid from the spirits made during the ritual by the contemporary participants and spectators are often quite different from traditional requests; individual success in business and studies, getting a good job, and winning the lottery are now the most common favours that are asked for, rather than for the well-being of family, lineage, village, and so forth, and for rain-making for agricultural production. Additionally, the motivation of many of the spectators present are very obviously to enjoy the fun of watching the performances of the spirit mediums, such as eating raw buffalo flesh and guzzling its blood, and to receive a blessing from the mediums to ensure that their wishes are granted. All these recent phenomena seem to relate to the transformations that spirit cults in Northern Thailand as a whole are currently undergoing.

As I have analysed in detail, spirit possession utilises a transformation of the power of the spirits in much the same way as that which occurs in the sacrificial process, and they share important sequences in common. Certainly, this has always been the case in the history of the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult. Moreover, oracles given by the spirit mediums of the cult have been regarded as moral and political pronouncements to be followed by the rulers and the people. The offerings and other details of the ritual have also been determined by the preference of the spirits possessing the mediums. Even the pantheon of the spirits now widely recognised by the cult members and others was partly an innovation on the part of the mediums, for instance, naming some important spirits such as Mae Kham Khiao, the daughter of Pu Sae and Ña Sae.¹⁹⁾ Yet, the most significant change in possession practice occurred in the late 1950s, when Ai P (See Photo 5), a male transvestite, succeeded to the mediumship to be possessed by Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and other demons. The spectacular and eccentric performances of the demons, quite popular today among spectators of the ritual, such as drinking blood, eating raw meat, and picking their teeth with a tree branch are invariably attributable to his invention. These dramatic features introduced by the medium have become a peculiar tradition of the cult, an attraction contributing to the increase in the number of spectators from the city and beyond over the past many decades.

This growth in the number of individuals from outside wishing for more personal, material success and the incorporation of more spectacular features into the ritual sequences require further examination of the relationships between the different bodies of knowledge involved in the cult. The sacrificial process, most likely inherited from the aboriginal Lawa tradition, has continued to sustain the cult as a

corpus of practical knowledge within the animic regime shared by the villagers to attain communal and individual wishes. Spirit possession is an integral part of this tradition. However, since the 1960s there has been a remarkable growth in the number of professional spirit mediums, which could be called an emergence of ‘modern’ spirit mediumship, not only in the city but also in the surrounding countryside (Irvine 1984). They are professional mediums, unlike the traditional ones, whose activities, utilising the power of the spirits, are quite extensive and include healing, consultancy about jobs and work problems, business and human relations, and whatever other troubles are mentioned in response to clients’ requests. The rise of this spirit mediumship has brought about a considerable change in traditional spirit beliefs and practices. This change has taken place in parallel with a relative decline that is being experienced by the cults of the lineage and village spirits, which have hitherto upheld the domestic and communal authority and power structures. As Irvine (1984: 315–316) demonstrates, the growth of ‘modern’ spirit mediumship is related to the demands of the people for more individual and material success in attempting to cope with changing social perceptions and values brought about by the recent capitalist economic development (Also see Tanabe 2002; 2013b).

The introduction of spectacular features of mediumship in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult is a response to this change, reflecting more individualised wishes and the demands for sensationalism from the people that are associated with the changing social and economic situation. For those who make requests, the messages now given by the mediums have become a more central element to the ritual than the Buddhist-oriented discourse focusing on the conversion and Buddhist morality. This indicates that the utterances of the spirits, responding more flexibly to individual and this-worldly demands, are taking over the long-lived traditional discourse. It should also be noted that the spirit mediums involved in the cult since the 1960s are, of course, Buddhists, and moreover have tried to display their Buddhist devoutness through the voices of the possessed spirits and also by frequent participation in merit-making Buddhist rituals throughout the year.²⁰⁾ In this respect, the modern spirit mediumship becomes more conformable to Buddhism, though it is simultaneously increasingly undermining the traditional Buddhist discourse of spirits once firmly established in the ritual.²¹⁾

5 Conclusion

The Pu Sae Ña Sae spirit cult is of great complexity both in its ritual process and in its social and political significance. It was established historically as a royal ritual of the Chiang Mai monarchs, buttressed by the discursive knowledge of the Buddhist-oriented interpretation of the spirits as exemplified in the texts, which were formulated in the sixteenth century and have since been further elaborated.

Within the discourse, the legitimacy of the rulers was meticulously postulated on the principle premise that the Northern Thai princes, as the ritual sponsors who embodied Buddhist moral superiority, could successfully propitiate the ancestor spirits of the aboriginal Lawa. However, ontological analyses of spirits and the relevant sociological examinations reveal a very different picture implicit in the ritual process centred on sacrifice and spirit possession. For the participants, the external and potentially dangerous power of the spirits is utilised in the expectation of deriving practical results, such as well-being, health, and timely rains. This is to be accomplished by means of a transformation of the power of the spirits through the sacrificial process and the accompanying spirit possession of the mediums. What I have tried to demonstrate thus far in this paper is a truly problematical congruency. Through their ritual practices to achieve practical purposes of their own, the participants' desires and actions are moulded in the discourse and marshalled by its premise to serve to reinforce the vested authority of the power-holders in the ritual.

Thus, the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult and similar royal rituals should be understood in terms of their two-fold sociological significance. The political and functional aspects of the ritual, which in this case relate to the legitimation of the particular authority, are often formulated historically as a discourse, modifying, elaborating, and sometimes even distorting the original ritual. Producing written texts of the myths and legends associated with the ritual has greatly contributed to the accomplishment of this shift, since dominant statements contained in the texts become incorporated in the ritual process, as exemplified in the case of the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth. Nevertheless, most spirit cults among the Northern Thai have been practised with certain practical purposes to be attained through the ritual process. The sacrifice, cooking, communal eating, and spirit possession by mediums, in fact all the practices and symbolism appearing in the Pu Sae Ña Sae ritual, are internally connected and meticulously organised towards the realisation of these particular ends. The practical or 'popular' knowledge in the animic regime underlying these representations and practices is directed at assuring a benign state of balance both in natural forces and social relations. While now rather fragmented, dispersed, and localised, this animic corpus of knowledge is deeply rooted in popular memory and remains pervasive among spirit cults, though often discounted, undervalued, or disqualified by the discursive Buddhist knowledge. In certain respects, 'popular' knowledge is potentially subversive of the established order enshrined in the discursive knowledge, which is supportive of the centralised political power that has engendered the structure of a deeply stratified hierarchy, along with a more formal, unitary morality completely outside of the animic regime.

Given their different and sometimes opposing bases of reference, localised practical knowledge with its concern for balance in natural and communal relationships has remained capable of challenging the authority of discursive knowledge in its alliance with the hierarchical, centralised power of the rulers. This becomes

apparent in the occasional criticism of the monarchs from the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult, and also in more critical instances of peasant rebellions associated with magical traditions in north-eastern and Northern Thailand (Keyes 1977; Tanabe 1984). However, this should not be taken to mean that this animic practical knowledge is free from any ideological process. On the contrary, sacrifice and spirit possession, aimed at achieving a transformation of the power of the spirits, often result in a reinforcement of the recognition of the traditional order and structure. It is this ideological process, in some cases incorporated in the animic knowledge of spirits, that renders spirit cults politically significant. For it is this political function that made it possible for a minor, localised rain-making ritual to be reformulated as a royally-sponsored *mueang* cult. An ideological process is also detectable, though in a different way, in the recent changes occurring in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult. The modern spirit mediumship, with its accompanying spectacular features, induces the participants to aim for the new social goal of more individualised, material success that is now open to achievement in the changed social and economic milieu. Yet, this ideological effect is continuing not under a particular political authority, as in the traditional *mueang* polity, but in a wider, more complex power structure brought about by the recent capitalist development in Northern Thailand.

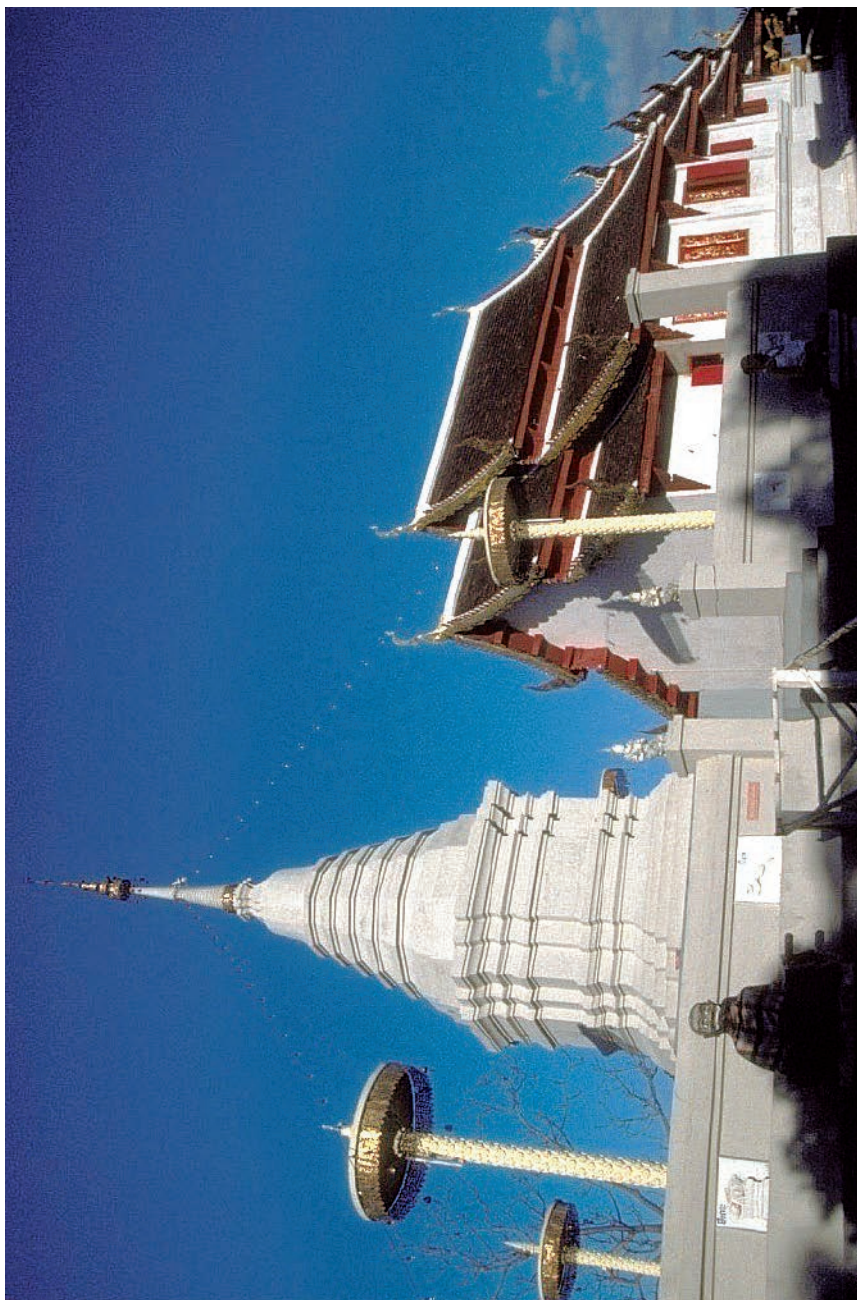


Photo 1 Wat Phrathat Doi Kham monastery, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 2 The statue of Pu Sae (Čhao Čhi Kham) erected by the villagers of Pa Čhi, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 3 The statue of N̄a Sae (Čhao Mae Ta Khiao) erected by the villagers of Pa Čhi, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 4 The statue of Wilangka, the legendary chief of the Lawa people, erected by the villagers of Pa Čhi, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 5 Spirit mediums at Čhaen Si Phum of the Chiang Mai city wall in the 1960s. Ai P is at the centre, sitting against the wall. (Photograph owned by Mae Kaeo, Ban Nong Phueng, Saraphi district, Chiang Mai)



Photo 6 Medium K (83 years old in 1986), a daughter of Saen Wiset, the ritual officiant during the 1920s–30s, supervises the preparation of the offerings for the Pu Sae Nā Sae ritual. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 7 Early morning, a hired 'butcher' slaughters a buffalo in the forest of Pa Čhi village, 1986.
(Photograph by the author)



Photo 8 Men divide the buffalo meat and blood for commensality with the spirits and villagers, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 9 Women prepare the offerings for many shrines, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 10 In the compound enclosed by white cotton ropes, 12 small altars are constructed for the guardian spirits, while the main shrine of Pu Sae Ña Sae is seen behind it, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 11 A government official lights a candle while monks start reciting a sutra, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 12 The unrolled Phra Bot hanging from a tree shows Buddha and his two disciples visiting Doi Kham, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 13 Chao Buaraphet, a converted Buddhist son of Pu Sae and Ña Sae, in possession of Medium E dances in front of the Phra Bot, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 14 Ña Sae in possession of Medium D converses with many villagers while chewing tobacco with her eyes shut at all times, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 15 Demon Khono, a son of Pu Sae and Ña Sae in possession of Medium E enjoys riding on the sacrificed buffalo, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 16 Demon Khono in possession of Medium E devours the sacrificed buffalo meat in a tall tree, 1986. (Photograph by the author)



Photo 17 Čhao Somphet, a converted Buddhist son of Pu Sae Ña Sae in possession of Medium E gives a blessing to a villager, 1986. (Photograph by the author)

Appendix: Sequences of the Pu Sae Ña Sae Spirit Cult

1 Preparation

The date of the sacrifice to Ña Sae in Mae Hia has been prescribed as the fourteenth day of the waxing moon of the ninth month in the Northern Thai lunar calendar (20 June in 1986).²²⁾ The actual date may vary from year to year, mainly due to the delay in collecting money to purchase a buffalo. The sacrifice traditionally marks the beginning of ploughing and other wet rice farming operations, in anticipation of the first substantial rainfall of the year. The completion of the ceremonies of this supreme cult is subsequently followed by the rites of purportedly lesser cults of village spirits and ancestral lineage spirits.

In early June, the head of the cult committee who is also the head of Mae Hia sub-district ordered the *lam* (assistant village headmen) of the five villages to begin collecting the money. It finally amounted to 3,126.25 baht (approximately US\$ 125 in 1986) and a buffalo was then bought at a price of 3,050 baht at the buffalo market held in Thung Phra Bot village, San Patong district, on 13 June. The bodily characteristics and colours of the sacrificial buffalo are prescribed though they are slightly different in detail from those laid down in the legend; it should be a young black buffalo with honey-coloured hoofs and with horns as long as its ears (*khwai dam kip phueng khao piang hu*). This detailed prescription of the sacrificial animal was first given by Ña Sae through a possessed medium in the ritual in the early twentieth century.²³⁾ Once bought, the buffalo was tethered in Tha Kham village until the day of the ritual. The ritual site and the shrine of Ña Sae located in the forest of the foothill right under Phrathat Doi Kham pagoda (See Photo 1) were cleared by men from the five villages a few days before the ritual.

Meanwhile, on the day before the ritual, some ten old women gathered to prepare various kinds of offerings under the supervision of Medium K (See Photo 6) in her house in Pa Čhi village.²⁴⁾ For the past half century, she has performed an important role in the cult as a ‘helper of the ritual’ (*khon upakara*) from her wide knowledge of how to prepare the proper offerings to the spirits with meticulous care and skill. However, a few years ago she became blind and so handed on this ritual responsibility to her daughter who lives with her. This preparation of offerings, called *da khua*, which is mainly the task of old women, continues all day at Medium K’s house.

In the evening of the same day, Nan K, the present ritual officiant (*tang khao*, literally, making offerings of rice) stepped up to the main shrine in the ritual compound to recite the incantation to invoke Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and their followers, who in the invocation were addressed as the guardians of Mt. Doi Suthep and the boundaries of Chiang Mai. He called on these spirits on behalf of the ruler of

Chiang Mai, the princes, the lord ministers, and all their subjects. There was an offering tray to proffer to Pu Sae Ña Sae, holding eight pairs of joss sticks and candles, puffed rice, and flowers. Since the ritual officiant should be a learned man with sufficient knowledge of the Lanna script and the rituals, whether in Buddhism or in spirit worship, he must be an ex-monk (*nan*) or an ex-novice (*noi*). After the retirement of the royally appointed Saen Wiset in the early 1940s, the ritual officiant has been appointed by the cult committee consisting of the head of the sub-district and the five village headmen. (Tam Nak, Don Pin, Tha Kham, Bo, and Pa Čhi, all situated along the Mae Hia river system). Since the time of Saen Wiset, seven learned men in Mae Hia have filled the office in succession and the seventh, Nan K, came to it in 1983.

2 Sacrifice

In the early morning of the day of the sacrifice, the buffalo was led by three men towards the forest and tethered to a big tree on the north-eastern border of the ritual compound. At 7:30 a.m. the buffalo was tied fast by the neck to the trunk by two men. A butcher, who was hired for 100 baht, then stabbed a sharp knife into the back of the buffalo's neck and it fell down on the ground, the legs jerking spasmodically (See Photo 7). The butcher immediately stabbed it again in the carotid under the throat to collect the arterial blood for the offering and for cooking. He then skinned the buffalo's body with the assistance of eighteen men, while leaving the head, the four legs, and the tail attached to the skin. Over the last few decades, the buffalo had been killed by one of several villagers who received certain cuts of the meat for performing this service. According to a committee member, a paid butcher was hired in 1986 for the first time in order to avoid contentions over the share of the meat received by the individual who killed the buffalo. There was neither any ritualised practice nor utterances at the site of the buffalo killing in 1985 and 1986, and there have been no subsequent reports of this either. As far as we can tell from oral traditions and various forms of texts, the cult never seems to have had a formally designated 'sacrificer' who killed an animal as the representative of the person donating it to the deity, as has been widely observed in instances with other Tai groups in Laos and Sipsong Panna (See Note 14). In this sacrifice, more importance is accorded to the ritual officiant rather than to the person who actually kills the animal.

However, until around 1970, when a considerable number of villagers still cultivated rice fields, a divination used to be made to forecast the amount of rainfall in the forthcoming season from the direction of the fallen buffalo's head. If the buffalo's head pointed upstream along the Mae Hia river (to the west) the officiant would predict sufficient rainfall, if the head pointed downstream (to the east) he would portend very heavy rainfall, and if it pointed across the stream it would

serve as a forewarning of meagre rains or drought.²⁵⁾ In the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult this divination has ceased to be practised, partly because the farming population has decreased so rapidly since the 1970s, and partly because a stable water supply has become available in most parts of the Mae Hia area from the Mae Taeng modern irrigation system.

3 Cooking

The buffalo, skin still joined to its head, four legs, and tail, was carried over and placed on a carpet of *toeng* (*Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*) leaves spread out in front of the main shrine, with the head pointing towards Doi Kham. It was laid out in the shape of the buffalo (See Photo 8, Figure 3). Next, two fillets of the buffalo, the finest quality meat, were offered to Pu Sae and Ña Sae, one being hung from the front beam of the main shrine and the other from the side of the shrine of *tao tang si* or the Four Guardians of the Universe, located in front of the main shrine. Subsequently, some twenty men undertook the cooking of the sacrificed animal in front of the main shrine (See Photo 8). There were four basic food offerings: seasoned minced meat (*lap*), meat cuts with blood (*sa*), minced meat with much blood (*lu*), and other meat scraps and viscera were boiled to make viscera soup (*kaeng om*). Six hearths were prepared for cooking the viscera soup, which was distributed later among the householders from the congregational villages.²⁶⁾ An additional pan of soup was also prepared specifically as an offering to the six Buddhist monks and a novice who participated in the ritual. The remaining uncooked meat and viscera were also divided into six portions in the same way.

The cooking of the buffalo meat was done exclusively by men, in contrast with the preparation of the mainly vegetarian and other types of offerings by the old women (See Photo 9). However, until the mid-1960s, old women also participated in the cooking of the meat. Special soup pans called *mo kaeng kam* (literally, bounded soup pan) were placed in an area demarcated by nine white cotton ropes attached to poles with magical pentacles also fixed at four corners to the west of the main shrine.²⁷⁾ Women in menstruation and men, especially drunken men, were strictly prohibited from stepping into the area. Inside the bounded area, four old non-menstruating women cooked the meat and viscera, supplied by the men from outside the area in four soup pans, which were to be placed around the head of the sacrificed buffalo as offerings to the spirits. After the ritual was over, these four pans of soup were shared by the officiant, the spirit mediums, and the four female cooks. It should be noted here that even in this older practice, gender distinction is still clearly made between the male cooking of the raw meat and blood and the female treatment of cooked foods and other kinds of offerings.

4 Shrines and Offerings

While the cooking was going on, old women continued the preparation of various offerings on the northern side of the ritual compound and other men began to construct twelve small shrines consisting of woven bamboo altars on four posts each 50 cm high. Eleven shrines arranged in a line were identified by the villagers, from the nearest to the main shrine, as Mae Kham Khiao (literally, Lady Green Gold), Pu Sae, and Ña Sae, followed by seven of their unidentified descendants, and at the far end Khunluang Wilangka, the legendary Lawa chief. In isolation to the north-east from that of Khunluang Wilangka was the twelfth shrine for Suthewa-roesi.²⁸⁾ All these small shrines, together with the shrine of *tao tang si* (literally, the Four Guardians of the Universe), were enclosed to form a sanctuary of the spirits by means of white cotton ropes (attached to posts) that stretched from the main shrine

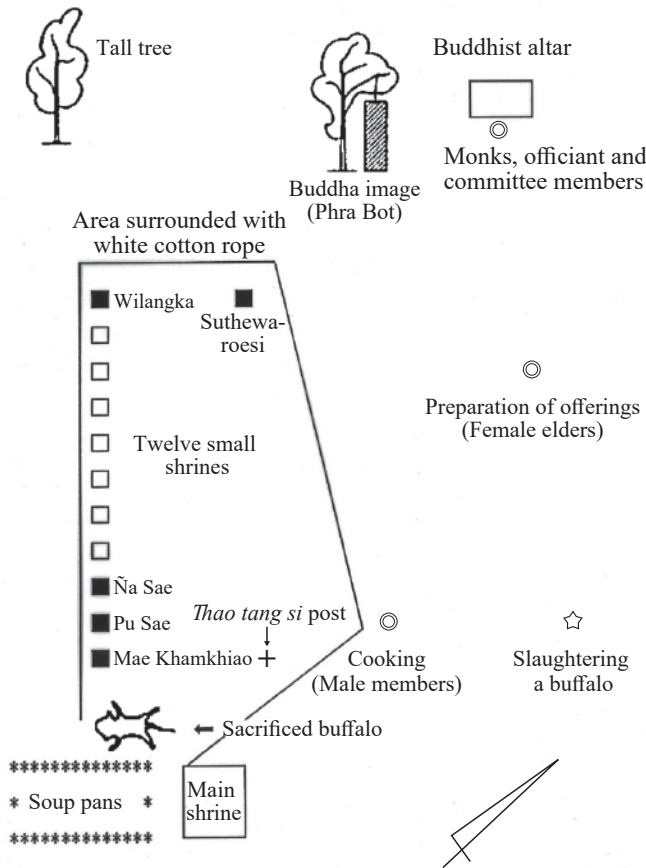


Figure 3 The Ritual Space of the Pu Sae Ña Sae Cult

to the shrine of Mae Kham Khiao (See Figure 3 and Photo 10).

The offerings to the spirit shrines are extremely complicated. There was an offering tray made of *tung* leaves, called *khwak*, containing *lap*, viscera soup, glutinous rice, areca nuts, betel leaves, cigars, rice cakes, bananas, sugarcane, flowers, puffed rice, and four pairs of joss sticks; one each of these sets was distributed to the twelve small shrines. Liquor contained in a small bamboo tube was proffered at all the shrines except for that of Suthewa-roesi. A tray holding a pair of boiled chickens was placed at each of the four major shrines: those of Mae Kham Khiao, Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and Khunluang Wilangka. A tray of fruit was specifically offered to the Suthewa-roesi, a vegetarian hermit; the common tray offered as above was explained as offerings not to him but to his followers. Twelve pairs of golden candles and twelve pairs of silver candles were offered to Mae Kham Khiao, Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and Suthewa-roesi. On Mae Kham Khiao's shrine there was added a tray containing a blouse, a sarong, a mirror, a comb, and a bunch of human hair. Under the first three shrines a tray containing foods similar to those common to the twelve shrines was placed as offerings to elephants and horses, the mounts of the spirits.

These offerings are essentially identical, though different in minor details, with those described in some versions of the myth and the invocation recited at the ritual site (Kraisri 1967: 210–211). There is a varied combination of animal and vegetarian foods and a number of other items in terms of the imagined tastes of each spirit. What is symbolically apparent is that a distinction is made in terms of space and taste between the former cannibal demons and aboriginal figures (Mae Kham Khiao, Pu Sae, Ña Sae, their children, and Khunluang Wilangka) and the hermit Suthewa-roesi representing the mediator in founding the social order of *Mueang* Chiang Mai.

At 8:45 a.m. an invocation to Indra, the Four Guardians of the Universe, and Mae Thorani (Goddess of the Earth) was recited by the officiant at the shrine of *tao tang si*, which has bamboo arms pointing in four directions, mounted on a one-metre high bamboo post, and is located within the bounded sanctuary. This preliminary rite called *khuen tao tang si* or erecting the *tao tang si* post marks the commencement of an important part of the ritual, asking Indra and other gods to protect the people and the ritual, and is common to many other Northern Thai rituals. *Khwak* trays containing water, glutinous rice, bananas, sugarcane, cigars, fermented tea leaves, areca nuts, rice cakes, small paper flags, flowers, joss sticks, and candles are placed at the edges of the altar close to each of the four bamboo arms (for the Four Guardians), at the centre of the altar (for Indra), and on the ground below it (for Mae Thorani). There was no meat nor any blood on the trays.

Meanwhile, many people, ritual participants and spectators, amounting to approximately 300, gathered around the ritual compound. In 1986 the governor of the Mueang district to which Mae Hia sub-district belongs was invited to attend for the first time since the performance of the ritual had been transferred to the villag-

ers, though no financial contribution was made by the government. The governor intended to have a video-recording of the sacrificial ritual made for a public television broadcast, which he thought could contribute to the conservation of the traditional customs of the district under his administrative control. Such participation in the traditional rituals by representatives of the government, sometimes accompanied by financial support, has become increasingly evident, particularly since the mid-1980s in Chiang Mai. The governor was formally greeted by the people and then he joined the group of the cult committee members.

5 Monks and Phra Bot

The Buddhist overtones became apparent when seven monks and one novice came onto the scene and sat on the chairs beside a Buddha image to the north of the main shrine. In theory, five monks from five monasteries (one for each village) in Mae Hia are invited to the ritual, but the number of actual participants has varied in recent years and has sometimes included novices. In recent years, monks and novices from Wat Phrathat Doi Kham and from a newly established monastery in Mae Hia Nai hamlet have also joined the ritual.²⁹⁾

At 9:45 a.m. led by a band, a procession bringing a huge scroll with a Buddha image painted on it, or Phra Bot, contained in a wooden chest and carried by eight men arrived at the ritual compound. On its arrival, two old spirit mediums then sprinkled lustral water and threw puffed rice over the chest containing the scroll. The villagers said that this performance called *fon ha kaeo* (literally, crystal raindrops) symbolically represented the coming of rainfall. The two mediums did this because they are senior women. They are not those about to be possessed by Pu Sae, Ña Sae, or any related spirits; one is a medium for her lineage ancestor spirits in Pa Čhi and the other for the village spirit (*po ban*) of the northern hamlet of Pa Čhi. The Phra Bot is a painting on a cloth 2.5 m wide and 4 m long with wooden poles attached at the top and bottom. On the cloth, the image depicts a standing Buddha accompanied by two disciples, Moggallana and Sariputra. Although this most prominent symbol of the ritual was originally carried in a procession from Wat Phra Sing in the centre of the city, in the present day it is carried from Wat Pa Čhi to the forest by selected male members of the cult.³⁰⁾

At 10:10 a.m. the governor, on behalf of the assembled people, lit the candle on the altar for the Buddha image (See Photo 11). This was followed by Nan K, the ritual officiant, together with the headmen and members of the cult committee asking the monks for the precepts. The monks then recited the sutras, ‘Samathan Sinha’ and ‘Čharoen Phraphutthamon’.³¹⁾ While the monks were chanting, a man climbed a tall tree near the monks in order to suspend the Phra Bot by a rope from one of its branches. The same two elderly mediums again sprinkled lustral water and scattered puffed rice on the Phra Bot as it was gradually being hoisted into

position, with the band loudly beating drums, clanging gongs, and clashing cymbals. As the Phra Bot was secured, it began swaying slowly in the breeze (See Photo 12). The villagers said that the swaying Phra Bot would trick the cannibal demons into believing Buddha was actually present so that they were overawed and impelled to observe the Buddhist precepts, refraining from indulging in their former evil habits.³²⁾ Whether the Phra Bot sways or not is also subject to the divination of future weather prospects, though given its spread and the fact that it is suspended from a single rope, it is difficult to imagine how it could remain motionless.

6 Invocation

Immediately after completing his role in the commencement of the Buddhist rite, the ritual officiant then left for the twelve small shrines. Squatting on his heels under each shrine he recited the incantations to invoke the spirits in succession. Moving to one after another, he offered a tray of twelve golden candles and twelve silver candles particularly to Mae Kham Khiao, Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and Suthewa-roesi.

There were three invocations recited.³³⁾ The first was addressed to Pu Sae and Ña Sae on behalf of the ruler of Chiang Mai, the princes, lord ministers, and all the subjects of *Mueang* Chiang Mai as had been recited the previous evening. Then there came a statement noting that representing these people the ritual officiant offered a beautiful buffalo with pretty horns (*khwai tua lao khao ngam*) and other offerings to Pu Sae and Ña Sae according to the customs (*chahit papheni*). It asked the spirits to ward off troubles (*kangwon*) and to provide protection from illness, danger, and evil (*aphat phayat rokhaphayulaken*) for every person and every domestic animal living within the boundary of *Mueang* Chiang Mai. Water and rain were also requested (*kho tang nam fa sai fon*) for rice cultivation and gardening, accompanied by the already cited passage that ‘Let not the rice of the Lawa die in their swiddens; let not the rice of the Tai wither and die in their fields (*lua yia hai ya hue tai kha tai yia na ya hue tai daet lae hiao haeng*)’ (Kraisri 1967: 212–213). In the second incantation addressed to Khunluang Wilangka as a guardian of *Mueang* Chiang Mai, the ritual officiant asked again for rain and protection from evil. The third incantation was addressed to Suthewa-roesi as the founder of the *Mueang*, and was a similar request to be kept free from illness of every kind, for protection of the people and animals, and for the water and rain needed for cultivation. It should thus be noted that these petitions were made in the name of the ruler of Chiang Mai, though none such exist any longer. It is also deserving of attention that the officiant clearly asked the spirits for the benisons of well-being, health, and rain in return for the sacrificed buffalo and other offerings, without any reference at all being made to their sacred nature.

7 Possession

While the monks were still chanting, another sequence proceeded simultaneously at the main shrine.³⁴⁾ There are two female spirit mediums attached to the cult who have specific roles in the ritual in Mae Hia; one is Medium D who is 53 years old (1986) and from Umong village of Suthep sub-district, 4 km north of Pa Čhi village, and the other is Medium E, a 54 year-old (1986) resident of Pong Noi village, Suthep sub-district, 3 km north of Pa Čhi village.³⁵⁾ On the floor there was an invocation tray containing twelve candles, flowers, and puffed rice that had been there since the previous evening when it had been placed there by the officiant. When a senior woman who was assigned to take care of the mediums lifted up the tray and put it on the shelf, spirits began to take possession of the two mediums.

While the chanting of ‘Čharon Phutthamon’ sounded sonorously throughout the forest, Čhao Buaraphet, an allegedly converted Buddhist son of Pu Sae and Ña Sae, began to take possession of Medium E. Once she had passed into the trance state with the spirit taking command, the Čhao put on the colourful blouse, sarong, and headscarf that had been laid out for him beforehand at the shrine. After that he went over to where the Phra Bot image that was hanging from the tree and began to dance in front of it in a profound profession of his faith in the Buddha (See Photo 13). Meanwhile, Ña Sae had entered Medium D and had put on a white robe, a symbolic form of dress worn by those who observe the Buddhist precepts. Then, in response to successive questions from the people gathered around the shrine, she began to speak about the time more than two thousand years ago when she and her family had first encountered the Buddha. Thus, at this stage in the proceedings, the Buddhist faith was being overtly demonstrated both by her utterances as well as through the bodily movements of the other medium’s dance of homage in front of the image. Thus far, the possession of the two mediums was proceeding in a manner that was fittingly consonant with the monks’ chanting of the precepts and the display of the icon on the banner, the Phra Bot. Until the 1940s, the possession used to take a more elaborate form, being accompanied by traditional songs with a flute recitation called *so mueang*; there was also a special song of invocation, the *ham toeng čhao dong* (a song for calling the spirits from the forest).

At the shrine, Ña Sae continued conversing with anyone who wanted to ask her questions, though she spoke through a mouthful of chewing tobacco and with her eyes shut at all times (See Photo 14). At this point, however, the nature of the ritual underwent a dramatic shift in tone in the following sequences from refinement to coarseness. Medium E returned to the shrine and, having seated herself, seemed to faint. This signalled the departure of Čhao Buaraphet and the arrival of a spirit of a contrasting nature. When she returned to consciousness, she was now possessed by a demon called Khono, who was identified as another son of Pu Sae and Ña Sae. She next dressed in a different costume, a blouse and sarong of rather

rough quality, and set off to visit all twelve of the small shrines, stopping to devour some of the meat and drink the alcohol at all except the last one, that of Suthewaroesi, where the offerings were left untouched. Next, the demon went to the *tao tang si*, snapped at the fillets hanging there, and tugged on them with his teeth before tearing them down and wrapping them around his neck like a scarf. He bit and chewed on these from time to time. After this, he went up to the carcass of the buffalo, drank deep of its blood from a tin, and then pulled back the skin to uncover the bones, playfully sitting on the ribcage (See Photo 15). Then, after all the eating and drinking, the bloodstained demon went out of the sanctuary and climbed up a nearby tall tree to rest (See Photo 16).

Meanwhile, outside the sanctuary, the villagers had offered the before noon meal to the monks and the novice soon after they had finished their chanting. It consisted of *kaeng om* soup and *lap*, the same as that which had been prepared for the spirits, in addition to the ordinary food the villagers had brought from their homes. It can be said that no distinction is made between the Buddhist monks and the spirits concerning the offered food, though blood and raw meat were offered exclusively to the latter. The eating of the meal marked the completion of the role of the monks in the ritual, though they stayed on as spectators.

After his rest, the demon climbed down from his perch in the tree to continue his excessive eating and drinking. He mimed biting the nose of the buffalo's carcass and gnawing on its bones, and when spectators proffered him the branch of a tree, he began, with exaggerated gestures, to use this as a toothpick. This extreme behaviour was interrupted from time to time by spectators asking questions, for example, requesting winning lottery numbers, and he responded to this with certain numbers. This is currently a quite popular activity of professional spirit mediums. The possessed medium seems to have responded quite favourably to such this-worldly demands raised by the congregation and spectators. The demon then went up to the shrine and left the body of the medium, who lay down on the floor in a stupor for a while. Medium E was then possessed again, this time by Čhao Somphet, an alleged younger brother of Čhao Buaraphet and also a dedicated Buddhist. In marked contrast with the demon, he calmly responded to the audience, talking about the previous possession by the uncivilised demon. He often spoke gracefully in a stylised singsong tone (*čhoi*), which is currently retained only by older generations. Towards the end of the ritual, he also offered a dance before the Phra Bot, together with two other possessed mediums who joined in the ritual. Čhao Somphet and these other spirits subsequently tied white cotton threads (*mat mue*), using those that had earlier marked the sanctuary boundary, around the wrists of all who wished to be blessed by them (See Photo 17).

8 Finale

Around noon there was a divination by the ritual officiant to judge whether all the invited spirits had finished the meal, which took the form practised in other spirit cults among the Northern Thai. The ritual officiant picked up a handful of puffed rice from the offering tray in the main shrine and counted its number; even numbers signified they had finished the meal and odd numbers meant they were still eating. Having counted even numbers on his second try, the participants now knew that the spirits were satisfied with the meal and offerings and had departed. Until the mid-1950s, this used to be followed by a feast of the offerings in the ritual compound, but this has since been discontinued.

In 1986, the distribution of offerings to the members of the cult was made immediately after the conclusion of the rite. The heads of congregational villages each received a pan of *kaeng om* soup, raw meat, and viscera to be distributed later among their villagers who had made contributions. The officiant received the head, the four legs, and a portion of raw meat. The skin and bones were sold to a villager for fifty baht, and the money was kept by the head of the cult committee. Smaller cuts of meat were distributed to eight people in the Phra Bot procession, three band members, the person who had arranged the hoisting of the Phra Bot, and those who had contributed from villages other than the five congregational villages and the hamlet.

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Notes

- 1) The system of transliteration of Standard Thai (Siamese) and Kham Mueang (Northern Tai) used in the text essentially follows Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1989[1961], “General System of Phonetic Transcription of Thai Characters into Roman” in *The Nature and Development of the Thai Language*, pp.23–24, Bangkok. However, <ue> is substituted for <u’>, and in the case of Kham Mueang, <n̄>, a nasal consonant as in the Spanish <ñ>, is introduced.
- 2) This ‘realist ontology’, as evident in Deleuze’s philosophy, recognises the ‘reality’ of spirits or other objects as completely autonomous from human perceptions and minds (DeLanda 2002).
- 3) Many anthropologists and historians have already studied this large-scale spirit cult, focusing primarily on the myths and narratives of Pu Sae and Ña Sae and their relations to the Lawa (Lua) tradition and to the Chiang Mai royal family (Kraisri 1967; Sanguan 1969; Kiti 1982; Wijeyewardene 1986; Rhum 1987; Thanan 1993; Asa 2012). However, only Sommai and Doré (1991) and Tanabe (1993; 2013a) pay adequate attention to the ritual practices in their description of the sacrificial and spirit possession scenes.
- 4) There are many different versions of the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth, the most important of which include “Chronique du Mahathera Fa Bot”, translated into French by Notton (1926), the three editions of *Tamnan wat phrathat doi kham* (The chronicle of (Wat) Phrathat Doi Kham), compiled in Siamese from an unpublished text by Sutthawari Suwannaphat (1965; 1981; 1982), “Tamnan phrathat doi suthep” (The chronicle of Phrathat Doi Suthep), edited by Krom Sinlapakon (1967), the unknown text referred to in Kraisri (1967), “Tamnan mahathera pha bot chabap wat muensan” (The Wat Muensan version of the Mahathera Pha Bot chronicle), transliterated into Siamese by Sawat Khamekpasit (1977), the oral tradition recounted by Medium K and translated into English by Wijeyewardene (1986), and “Awahan 25 prakan” (The 25 thefts), transliterated into Siamese by Sarassawadee Ongsakul (1991). Also see Sarassawadee (2005: 31).
- 5) The stories concerning Pu Sae Ña Sae often refer to Doi Suthep as ‘Uchchubbata’ (literally, Sugarcane Mountain) or Doi Ngoen (Silver Mountain), as well as the neighbouring mountain, Doi Kham. In the Medium K version, the Buddha travelled in the areas of San Kamphaeng and Doi Saket in the eastern part of the Chiang Mai basin before arriving at Doi Kham to the west (Wijeyewardene 1986: 216).
- 6) Some versions refer to Pu Sae, Ña Sae, and their son as humans, using an ethnic reference, the ‘Lawa (Lua)’, in place of ‘demons’ (*yak*). In these versions, the ‘Lawa’ are regarded not as cannibal demons but as those having the vicious habit of eating bulls and buffaloes (“Awahan 25 prakan” 1991: 1; “Tamnan mahathera pha bot” 1977: 2). The story of the cannibal demons is provided in detail in the Medium K version (Wijeyewardene 1986: 215). A similar story of a cannibal demon that converted to Buddhism is also found in the case of Alawaka-yak in Chen Hung of Sipsong Panna, Yunnan (Hasegawa 1991).
- 7) In the Medium K version (See Figure 2), Pu Sae and Ña Sae had an eldest daughter called Mae Kham Khiao (literally, Lady Green Gold), whose name never appears in other versions (Wijeyewardene 1986: 217). The Medium K version does not refer to Suthewa-roesi and his story. In the ritual held in Mae Hia, however, both Mae Kham Khiao and Suthewa-roesi are propitiated, as I shall explain later. The Medium K version based on the oral tradition contains a greater deal of particulars about the Pu Sae Ña Sae story, and is quite different from other more official versions and seems to fit in well with the actual ritual sequences as a whole. The villagers often refer to Chi Kham as the name of Pu Sae and Ta Khiao (Green Eyes) as that of Ña Sae, both of which seem to be derived from the names of spirits in possession of a medium in the early twentieth century ritual. A recent version identifies these names, likely following this tradition (“Tamnan lae prawat phrathat doi kham” 1982: 1–2).
- 8) In Kraisri’s version, the demons were frightened by the Buddha’s stamping of his footprint on a huge boulder (Kraisri 1967: 186). The Medium K version maintains that the Buddha displayed miraculous power, emitting a silver and gold radiance to terrify the demons (Wijeyewardene 1986: 217). The latter version reveals much about the Buddha’s miraculous power and the humorous struggle between the Buddha and the demons.

- 9) In Kraisri's version, the Buddha denied their request to have the flesh of the buffalo but suggested that they would have to beg for this from the owner of the beasts (Kraisri 1967: 189).
- 10) Some versions indicate that the ritual for Pu Sae and Ña Sae should be held in separate shrines but in the same ritual compound, together with the propitiation to Pu Čham and Ña Čham ("Awahan 25 prakan" 1991: 3; "Tamnan mahathera pha bot" 1977: 4).
- 11) See "Chronique du Mahathera Fa Bot" (1926: 69). The representations of the civilised Buddhist and uncivilised demons and their relationship to the conception of kingship are discussed by Rhum in comparison to their Sinhalese counterparts (Rhum 1987: 96–101).
- 12) The term *čhen mueang* is interpreted in various ways. Kao Mongkhon, for example, writes that *phi čhen mueang* (the spirit of *čhen mueang*) signifies a territorial guardian spirit like *phraphum čhao thi* in central Thailand, while *čhen* means a vine of winders in Northern Thai (Kao Mongkhon 1943: 20–21).
- 13) "Chronique du Mahathera Fa Bot" (1926) says that it was moved to Wat Čhedi Luang by King Tilokharat in the fifteenth century and that this caused his death. The ritual of Inthakhin has also involved sacrifices and spirit possession, while sometimes being associated with Buddhist *suep chata mueang* (the ritual of 'stretching the destiny' of *mueang*) in which Buddhist monks chant around the pillar for prosperity, fortune, and avoiding disaster in the domain of Chiang Mai (Sanguan 1969: 26–27; Wijeyewardene 1986: 78–90).
- 14) In the Lue cult in Muong Sing, northern Laos, the Mon-Khmer tribal people (Lamet) are assigned to perform the role of sacrificer (Izikowitz 1962). Archaimbault also describes hired Mon-Khmer people who play the role of slayer in the Lao buffalo sacrifice at Vat Phu in southern Laos (Archaimbault 1959: 160). These cases seem to imply that the aboriginal Mon-Khmer peoples play the role of 'sacrificer' due to their stronger connection with the spirits, while the Tai rulers' role remain as a 'sacrifier' who organises the spirit cult.
- 15) The Lawa communities in the Chiang Mai region have become fully incorporated in the tributary system of the Lanna kingdom since the early nineteenth century (Kraisri 1965; Kritsana 1989).
- 16) A similar process can be found in recent instances occurring in southern Laos. Izikowitz, for example, notes that a newly immigrated Tai chief gave his daughter in marriage to a Kha chief so that the latter in return could use his expertise to perform the rituals for the *mueang* spirits (Izikowitz 1969: 139).
- 17) The role of *roesi* or hermit in the founding of the northern kingdoms as appeared in the myths is discussed in detail in Swearer (1974: 67–88).
- 18) The knowledge acquired and used by spirit mediums are essentially embodied in and transmitted through their bodies, as opposed to the more male-oriented knowledge succeeded through written texts. The historical formulation of discursive knowledge is largely attributable to the latter under the dominant Buddhist tradition, while the former has been sustained among female-oriented spirit cults as a whole.
- 19) The role of the spirits in the ritual sequences are roughly prescribed as an unwritten text that has been shared and transmitted among the mediums attached to the cult for many generations, though its details are somewhat varied depending on individual mediums. However, acts and utterances in the ritual are essentially improvisatory and unique interpolations have continually been made by individual mediums.
- 20) In the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult, Ai P was the first spirit medium who explicitly expressed his Buddhist faith by wearing the white robe when possessed by the demons as the symbol of a lay devotee in the early 1960s. The display of the Buddhist faith by 'modern' spirit mediums and their own interpretations of the possession practices are illuminatingly described in some works from the 1980s (Irvine 1984: 319–320; Wijeyewardene 1986: 163–171, 203–206). Also see a more recent interpretation of the spirit mediumship in Tanabe (2002; 2013b), and for more general discussions on mediumship, see Boddy (1994).
- 21) On the other hand, Buddhist discourses and symbolism have been developed in the form of a variety of material culture, especially centred at the Doi Kham monastery in recent years (Rotheray 2017).
- 22) The fourth or fifth day of the waxing moon of the eighth month, corresponding approximately to

- mid-May, is given as the ritual date in some versions of the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth (“Awahan 25 prakān” 1991: 3; “Tamnan mahathera pha bot” 1977: 4).
- 23) The detailed prescription of the sacrificial animal, particularly concerning the colour and size of various parts of its body, is of great concern among many Tai groups, reflecting the elaboration of the tastes of the spirits, or what Lévi-Strauss calls ‘sensory codes’ (1972). A more elaborate description is found in the Lue royal sacrifices sponsored by the Cheng Hung court in Sipsong Panna before the Chinese revolution (according to my field notes, 1990).
 - 24) Born as the youngest daughter of Saen Wiset, the ritual officiant during the 1920s to 1930s, Medium K was 83 years old (1986) and a blind widow. She had a long career of being a medium for the ancestor spirits shared and inherited within her matrilineal lineage centred on a female lineage head (*kao phi*). She also worked as a professional medium to be consulted by individual clients within and outside the lineage, but has never been possessed by Pu Sae, Ña Sae, or any of the related spirits in the cult.
 - 25) The weather forecast and other types of divination associated with buffalo sacrifice are well known in Laos (Lévy 1959: 167–170; Archaimbault 1959: 160), and chicken bone divination (*siang kaduk kai*) is also widely reported among Tai groups (Terwiel 1981).
 - 26) In addition to the five villages (Tam Nak, Don Pin, Tha Kham, Bo, and Pa Čhi), a share was given to Mae Hia Nai, a newly developed hamlet falling administratively under Pa Čhi.
 - 27) The symbolism of the old female cooks represents the purity of the offering to the spirits, which in some way corresponds to certain instances of the sacred waitress and the rather polluted cook in the *phi meng* matrilineal cult in Lampang, Northern Thailand (Tanabe 1991: 197) and the Lue *mueang* spirit cult in Mueang La, Sipsong Panna where selected virgin maidens prepared rice cakes for the *mueang* deity (Tanabe 1988: 12).
 - 28) Mae Kham Khiao is, according to Medium K, identified as the eldest daughter of Pu Sae and Ña Sae. She also claimed that Pu Sae and Ña Sae had thirty-two children but provided only eleven particular names. However, the names of these spirits including Mae Kham Khiao seem to have been invented at a later date mainly by spirit mediums associated with the cult, though going fairly far back to at least the early twentieth century. Khunluang Wilangka is also an important additional figure associated with rain-making as well as with the Lawa tradition (Tanabe 2000), though not directly connected to the Pu Sae Ña Sae myth.
 - 29) Different numbers of monks to attend the ritual are given in some versions of the myth: 19 in “Awahan 25 prakān” (1991: 3) and 12 in “Tamnan mahathera pha bot” (1977: 3).
 - 30) It was originally kept in the Golden Pavilion (Wihan Kham) of Wat Phra Sing in the centre of the city and was removed to Wat Kao Toe, affiliated with Wat Suan Dok, to the west of the city at the time when Wat Phra Sing was being repaired in 1926 by Khruba Sriwichai, a highly respected Northern Thai monk (Kraisri 1967: 201–202). However, the original Phra Bot image was destroyed by fire or some other disaster during World War II and a copy was subsequently made. According to the villagers, it was funded by a donation from two charitable ladies in Mae Hia and thereafter kept in Wat Pa Čhi. Although it is not known for what reason, the present copy carries the date of B. E. 2469 (1926).
 - 31) These are quite popular sutras often recited in Buddhist rituals, concerning the observation of the precepts and the prosperity of Buddhism. No sutra concerning rain-making, such as ‘Khatha pla chon’, was chanted. This indicates that the monks’ chanting has little to do with the rain-making nature of the ritual.
 - 32) The swaying Phra Bot to trick the demons is mentioned as a planned effect of the sacrificial ritual in some versions of the myth (“Tamnan mahathera pha bot” 1977: 2–3; Wijeyewardene 1986: 219; “Awahan 25 prakān” 1991: 2).
 - 33) Kraisri (1967: 208–225) cited the texts of the six invocations to be recited in the ritual: ‘Invocation to Grandfather Saeh and Grandmother Saeh (on Eve of Offering)’, ‘Invocation on the Day of Offering’, ‘Invocation to the Kumbhands’, ‘Invocation to Khun Luang Viranga’, ‘Invocation to Sudeva, the Hermit’, and ‘Invocation to the Four Guardians of the Universe’. The third invocation to Kumphan (guardian demons) was, however, not recited and no related symbol has appeared in the ritual in Mae Hia in recent years. Nevertheless, the shrines and offerings to two Kumphan are

- mentioned in the older texts, “Tamnan mahathera pha bot” (1977: 4) and “Awahan 25 prakan” (1991: 3).
- 34) The possession scene in different years is also described in Wijeyewardene (1986: 212–213) and Sommai and Doré (1991: 165–167).
- 35) Spirit mediums called *ma khi* (literally, horse to ride) often have significant roles in giving oracles and healing in various kinds of spirit cults, including lineage, village, and *mueang* cults. These cults traditionally have their own mediums for regular and occasional propitiation rituals. In recent years there has been a growing number of mediums who provide services to private clients, as I shall discuss later. The mediums involved in the Pu Sae Ña Sae cult are mediums of this kind, providing services to both private clients and their own traditional communal cults. While Medium D has been the medium for Pu Sae and Ña Sae in the ritual since the early 1970s, Medium E joined the cult as a medium for a buffalo-eating demon since 1983. Both had been professional mediums for many years before performing these specific roles in the cult.

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