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THAILAND'S NORTHEAST: SOME INTRODUCTORY ARTICLES

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## P R E F A C E

This short booklet grew out of conversations about stimulating interest in an enthusiasm for the Northeast, a region of Thailand which traditionally has not had too good an image with newly arrived volunteers. Inasmuch as there seemed to be vast misunderstandings, it was thought that a booklet introducing the Northeast would go a long way to discrediting false impressions generated from the press and other sources and more positively show off the uniqueness of the Northeast. While the articles are by no means definitive, they should go a long way towards making the Northeast's image a more realistic one. Additions or corrections to these articles are welcomed. If you have something you think should be included or changed, write it up and we will see about including it in the next edition.

I want particularly to thank Mr. & Mrs. George Smith (Group 18) who did most of the research and writing. It is largely through their considerable efforts that this booklet is now a reality. Jean Bernard is due thanks for her contribution on the Moo Lam and my wife, Nancy, for designing the cover. The students of Mahasarakam Teachers Training College have made an invaluable addition with their "Tales of the Northeast."

Bob Charles  
Editor

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Supplement: "Tales of the Northeast"

The people of Northeast Thailand, or Thai Issan as it is sometimes called, are customarily referred to as Lao. This term can be a source of great pride for the people themselves, who, while they retain a great loyalty to the Thai ruling family and hence to Thailand, think of themselves as distinct from the central Thais. Although most Northerners are Lao -- that is, they belong to the Lao branch of the family of Thai peoples who inhabit Southern China, Laos, Thailand, and parts of Burma -- there are also many Northerners from other ethnic groups, both Thai and non-Thai. Many of these other groups also have members in the country of Laos where about 50 percent of the people are not Lao but are members of various hill tribes.....

The population of Northeast Thailand was 11 million in 1968. Of this 11 million, approximately 9 million people were of the Lao ethnic group. This group can be divided into two smaller groups -- the Lao wing and the Lao Khmer, both of which are spread throughout the northeastern area.

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 Another large "Thai" group is the Phuthai. Phuthai culture and language differ from that of the surrounding Lao peoples of the Northeast although they are quickly being assimilated into the dominant Isaan patterns. They are said to be hard-working and independent and have apparently done more to influence their physical environment than some of the other groups in the area. They have, for example, already started to diversify crops. Their weaving, dancing, and music are all quite distinctive and very beautiful. It is estimated that there are 70,000 - 100,000 Phuthai in Northeast Thailand at the present time. Most of them are settled in Kalasin, Sakon Nakhon, and Nakhon Phanom provinces.

Korat Province is the home of the descendants of Chinese soldiers and Khmer women. In the 14th century, King Siamloke gained control of what is now Korat Province from the Cambodians who ruled the southern northeastern provinces at that time. Some of his soldiers stayed behind after the victory and married Khmer women. Their descendants are known as Thai Korat (or Korat Thai). They speak the Thai language, but with some peculiarities. They are said to bear a great resemblance to the Khmers.

In the southern provinces of Surin, Srisaket, and Buriram, there are many people of Cambodian descent. These Khmers have retained much of their own culture and are bi-lingual in Cambodian and Lao. There may be as many as 400,000 Khmer people in Thailand.

Another ethnic group in the southern provinces, especially Surin, Srisaket, Udon, and Roi-Et, is the Soi or Kui. Other members of this group remain in Cambodia. The Kui are known for being excellent elephant handlers and every year in November they stage the famous Surin Elephant Round-Up.

The So or Khm people, known to the Lao as Khm Yang Luang and to the Thais as Phi Yang Luang (the spirits of the yellow leaves), have settled in Sakon Nakhon, Kalasin, and Nakhon Phanom provinces. They are a very small group and not too much is known about them because they live high up in the hills and are not friendly to outsiders. They prefer to live off the land and move when they have depleted an area. Their religion is very animistic. The Khm are, perhaps, the most primitive group to be found in the Northeast.

Other small ethnic groups that live in the Northeast include the Yaw (in Nakorn Phanom, Sakol Nakhon, and Buriram); the Iao (in Sakol Nakhon), the Saek (in Nakorn Phanom), the Kh. Boro (Buri), the Chao Bua or Nakhon (in western Korat and Chaiyaphum), and the Koo (in Loei).

Although most of the ethnic groups which are found in the Northeast of Thailand are becoming well-mixed and less distinctive with each passing year, they still have group loyalties and conceive of themselves in terms of their relationship to other members of their ethnic group. Most of them do, however, have a definite loyalty to the Thai nation. It is a loyalty that is, in many cases, based more on a worship of the King than on a concept of the Thai state and government, but the loyalty does exist.

One ethnic group living in Thailand which has perhaps less loyalty to the present regime is the Vietnamese. There are now more than 40,000 Vietnamese refugees in Thailand and most of them are settled in the Northeast. Sakol Nakhon, Nakorn Phanom, and Nongkhai have the largest settlements, but the Vietnamese have spread out throughout the region. Some families have been in Thailand for two generations; others have come as refugees from the warfare that has torn Vietnam asunder for the last 20 years. Almost all the Vietnamese who have come to Thailand came from North Vietnam and thus they are subject to a great deal of suspicion and distrust, especially in view of the "Communist problem" in the Northeast. The government has them constantly under surveillance and occasionally arrests those who it suspects are "subversive". Many of the Vietnamese refugees do carry on their own "education" programs and refuse to send their children to school where they will become "Thai-ized". It has been said that a great deal of financial support for North Vietnamese aims and projects comes from certain refugee groups, particularly in Nongkhai. The Thai government has been negotiating for sometime with the Vietnamese government to repatriate some, if not all, of the Vietnamese who presently live in the Northeast. Large groups of them are still looking forward to repatriation and refuse to consider Thailand as their home, though many have apparently accepted Thailand and "Thai-ization". Some Vietnamese were repatriated in 1959, but since then the Thai government has had little luck with this program. The Vietnamese are generally hard working and clever. Many are employed as merchants, mechanics, radio and television repairmen, tailors, or vegetable farmers.

The history of Northeast Thailand until recently is the history of the various states that ascended to power at various times in present day Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Probably the first empire to leave a lasting influence on the Northeast was the Khmer. Expanding to the North and West from Angkor as early as the 9th or 10th century, the Khmer established themselves along the Mun River and its tributaries. The present provinces of Surin, Srisaket, Buriram, Ubol, and Korat were the first to be settled, but during the next four centuries the Khmer Empire continued to expand northward. At the apex of its power, Angkor controlled all of present day Northeast Thailand (and some historians contend that its influence may have reached as far as Luang Prabang in Laos).

One theory holds that the Thai peoples had begun their migration out of Southern China during the period of early Khmer consolidation and expansion. Known Thai states were already in existence in the 7th century in what is now the Northern Shan states of Burma. It is thought that the Thai continued to migrate southward and by the 11th century there were a number of them in the upper Chao Phya valley, as well as in the upper Mekong valley. Here they began to form small states under chieftans. Some of these states acquired a degree of power and in 1238 two Thai chiefs attacked and defeated the Khmer commander at Sukhothai (the capital of the Northwestern part of the Angkor empire) and established a kingdom that became a strong state under King Ram Khamkaeng from 1275 to 1317. During Ram Khamkaeng's reign, Sukhothai controlled land as far east as Vientiane, but most of the kingdom's efforts were directed towards the south. After King Ram Khamkaeng's death, Sukhothai declined in importance, and soon a new Thai kingdom, Aythaya, rose to power farther south in the Chao Phya valley. Assuming power around 1350, this kingdom immediately began to look eastward at the Khmer held land of the Korat Plateau. For the next 80 years there were almost continuous wars between Angkor and Aythaya. Several times Aythaya occupied Angkor, only to be driven out. In 1431 Aythaya again captured the city, took everything that they could carry away, as well as thousands of prisoners. The Khmers soon took back control of Angkor and remained a country of some power for many years. But its control over Northeast Thailand had been broken and soon the capital itself was moved to Phnom Penh, a more easily defended position.

During the next several centuries, Thai culture became dominant in most of the Northeast except in parts of Buriram, Srisaket, and Surin. After the wars many of the Thai soldiers took Khmer wives and settled in the Korat area.

Not too much is known of the historical development of the area to the north of the Korat region. It is known that Luang Prabang was established in 1353 shortly after Aythaya rose to power. For some years this essentially Thai state was a vassal of one or another strong state, but eventually it began to expand southward toward present day Northeast Thailand and down the Laos peninsula. In 1707, after many years of power and unity, this kingdom was divided into two separate states with capitals at Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Beginning in the middle of the 16th century, people began to migrate into Northeast Thailand from the Vientiane area. Many of these people settled in present day Sa-ol Na-orn, Udorn, Kalasin, Mahasarakham, and Roi-Et. Added to these people were those Lao who were deported by the Thai armies after victories against the Laos armies during the course of the 18th century. Thus, by the early 19th century much of Northeast Thailand was inhabited by people shifted out of what is now recognized as Laos and thus of ethnic background.

During the latter part of the 18th century and into the 19th, the capital at Vientiane (as well as at Luang Prabang) was under the control of the Siamese government, which had moved to Bangkok in 1782. In 1828, Chao-Anori, the king of Vientiane, decided to attempt to free his kingdom from Siamese control and led his army toward Bangkok. He was assisted by armies from Ubol and Roi-Et (regions also in his kingdom), but after threatening Bangkok, the Lao forces were completely routed. The Ubol army was crushed first, and then the Siamese army continued on to Vientiane. The city was sacked and thousands of Laos were driven into Northeast Thailand to people the region. This was the end of the Vientiane kingdom and from 1828 on the Thai government had effective control over the entire area. In fact, until the end of the 19th century, Siam also controlled much of present day Laos on the east bank of the Mekong River.

Ethnicly and geographically, Northeast Thailand has changed little in the last 125 years. There are three major subcultures: Cambodian, located in parts of the three provinces bordering Cambodia, the Korat Thai, located primarily in Korat, and the Lao, located throughout the Northeast and by far the dominant group. There have been only minor migrations into the Northeast in the last century, the most important being the Phuthai from the Laos mountains. To bring the history of the area up to the present, then, one must discuss the relationship between the Northeast and the Bangkok government. This is not easily done, however, because of the lack of reliable research. Also, the "pronouncements and plans" of the Thai government as regards the Northeast have tended to be quite different from the actions or inactions of government in the not too distant past.

From the fall of Vientiane in 1828 to the beginning of the 20th century, the Northeast, like the outlying districts in the other directions, was treated as a vassal state. Money and power were concentrated in the central region and whatever development there was took place there. The first attempt to open communication with the Northeast came in 1892 when King Chulalongkorn began a railway from Bangkok to Korat. The project was completed in 1900 and greatly benefited the Korat area. Another line from Korat to Ubol was begun in 1921, but the area north of Korat remained effectively isolated for many more years. It was not until sometime after the coup of 1932 that the line was extended towards Nongkhai. Before the railroad, travel from the Northeast to Bangkok was limited to the "cart trail" roads which were completely impassible during the wet season. Unlike the North, the Northeast does not have a water system that runs toward the central plains. Thus waterways could not act as a connecting system in the wet season.

The absence of a good physical connection between these two areas for so many years, however, does not alone explain the separateness between Bangkok and the Northeast which still exists today. Not more than a 1000 years ago, the Laos and the central Thais were essentially the same people. Sometime around the 11th or 12th century one group migrated south into the Chao Phya valley. Another group migrated east and settled into the Luang Prabang area. In the 18th and 19th centuries, some of this group continued south and eventually became the Northeast Thai-Lao, when they were relocated by victorious Thai armies from Aythya and Bangkok. Along the way the physical environments that these two groups experienced were different enough to cause a very noticeable variance between them in language, culture, and attitudes.

## HISTORY (continued)

In choosing the southern route, the group that became the central Thai took the way most conducive to development in the sense of nationhood. The Chao Phraya valley proved to be quite fertile with sufficient water throughout most of the year. And very importantly, it offered a good transportation system to most of what became the central kingdom. Further, it was favorably located so that these people came into frequent contact with other civilizations, both Asian and European.

The group that migrated westward encountered quite different conditions. The land was not so fertile, and due to the mountainous terrain, these people found it difficult to bind the territory into a tight and manageable kingdom. The riches that were acquired by the kingdom of Siam were never attained by the Laos kingdoms. In short, over the period of several centuries the central Thai kingdom at Aythaya amassed riches, which in turn enabled it to foster the development of arts which we, today, consider to be classical Thai. The architectural heights reached in Aythaya, Sukhothai, and other central plains towns were never remotely challenged by Laos. In assessing Lao art, one must look in different places. The temples were smaller, but much detail was achieved in wood carving. In dance, it was not the royal court but rather the villages that developed the uniquely Laotian style. In Siam classical dance was developed for and enjoyed by the elite, while in Laos the dance was for the folk, developed, enjoyed, and participated in by everyone. These styles have carried on down to the present. Today, when one mentions the Thai dance, he means the classical style, which only a few people are really able to perform. However, when one talks about Laos and Isan dance, he means the folk style. What it lacks in gold-colored beauty and eloquence is soon forgotten in the vibrance, exuberance, and simple beauty of the performers (who can be almost anyone in the villages).

The concept of government also varied between the two regions. Over a period of time the Aythaya kings developed a very centralized government with a rather complex administrative structure. The kingdom was also helped by a large number of strong kings, who extended Siamese power into wider areas. Generally, the armies were strong and except for the Burmese, the Aythaya government would have been paramount in Southeast Asia by the 16th century. Much was demanded by the king from his subjects, such as military service which if necessary amounted to half of each year from the age of 20 to the age of 60 years. Also, all land belonged to the king who "loaned" it in relation to one's position in the established hierarchy. But along with more land came more responsibility to the king. Thus, all power really rested in the king.

In Laos, however, this strong centralization was never accomplished. For a time into the 17th century, the Laos kings held the country together fairly well, but it then slowly broke apart, due to the difficulty of communication, stronger neighboring states, and a lack of strong kings who could pull the peoples together.

Thus, by the time the Bangkok government won a final and decisive victory over Vientiane in 1828, the people in the Northeast, though Thai in origin, were qualitatively different from the central Thais. During the remainder of the 19th century, the Siamese government treated the Northeasterners much like defeated prisoners, which in a sense they were. Virtually all power and authority derived from Bangkok; local officials were almost always chosen with the approval of the central government but were virtually autonomous as long as they sent enough taxes to Bangkok each year. After the boundary treaty

between Siam and France in the early 1890's, the present Northeast was a defined region, and a definite part of the Siamese state. With hindsight we can say that had the Bangkok government proceeded to incorporate this region into the integral governmental and developmental plans of the nation at that time, meaningful integration would be far easier today.

Along with reforms in many other areas, King Chulalongkorn began the reorganization of the provincial governments in 1892. Many of the previous abuses, such as forced labor, were outlawed. The provinces were redrawn and smaller units of authority were also created. The provincial officers became more directly answerable to the Ministry of Interior. However, this did not result in any significant change in the relationship of the Northeast to the rest of the country -- it remained relatively isolated. Until very recently, Bangkok did little to change this isolation. Additionally, a condescending attitude to their "linguistically inferior, culturally deprived," poor country cousins alienated many Northeasterners. Thus over a period of years the Isaan has come to see himself as basically different from the central Thai, something that he had previously not considered or thought about.

After the revolution of 1932, and when there has been a parliament, the Isaaners were able to get a certain amount of representation in the central government. By the 1940's the Northeast had begun to produce first-rate legislators, many of whom were Isaaners who had managed to get a good education. These people were generally very interested in the development of their region and supported or proposed liberal programs. But the Northeast-oriented programs did not usually fare so well in a parliament, dominated by central representatives or with a cabinet, more oriented toward the development of the central region.

In prime ministers, the Northeast has found leadership sympathetic to its problems. The first was Pridii, who had varying degrees of power from 1932 when he was one of the chief engineers of the coup to the end of the 1940's when he was finally driven into exile (now reportedly in China) for purportedly being implicated in the death of Rama VIII. The second man was Sarit, who rose to power in 1958 after the last military coup. Though considered corrupt, he was sincerely interested in the Northeast and channeled much money into the area for the construction of roads and village improvements. He controlled the military with an iron fist, and in spite of dissent he was able to maintain control of his government. He died in 1963; soon after Thanom Kitakorn became Prime Minister and has continued and expanded Northeast development.

There is indeed a Communist threat in the Northeast (as well as in some border provinces in the North and South); thus a short evaluation of its causes and seriousness is necessary in bringing the history of Isaan up to the present. The truth of Communist activity perhaps lies somewhere between the naive theory that the present assassinations are only the work of bandits and personal vendettes and that all incidents in the Northeast are Communist-inspired.

No discernable Communist movement was evident until sometime after World War II, and in its early stages was almost positively foreign inspired and led. It gained little backing for several reasons. Thailand had never been under colonial rule, thus there was no real "devil" to unite against. Secondly, though very poor, the Isaan villager has always had enough rice to

eat. And third, there seems to be a basic Thai-Lao trait that does not make them too susceptible to overt protest. Thus, during the 1950's the Communist movement found the going rather rough. Eventually, however, the leaders found a suitable "devil" to rally at least some of the Northeasterners: the Thai government itself. As the conditions in Isaan improve, villagers have become more aware of just how much better off the central plains farmers are.

To counteract its negative image, the central government has undertaken a development plan for the Northeast. With the assistance of various U.S. and other foreign agencies and some private companies, extensive development has been started. USOM has contributed advisors and material for the greatly expanded road building and water projects. The U.S. military has also built many roads, greatly assisting the opening of more villages to economic development. Also, the U.S. military has been assisting in the training of the Thai military; USOM, in training the police in counter-insurgency operations.

The Communists have been able to make inroads in the Northeast because of the now very extensive presence of the U.S. military in the area. Major bases are located in Ubol, Korat, Udorn, and Nakorn Phanom, and there are at least two more bases in Sakol Nakorn and Khonkaen. The communists have taken advantage of the obvious American presence in the Northeast and its influence on the Thai military. The propaganda has highly distorted the facts and contends that the U.S. government has occupied Thailand and is using the country as its base for imperialistic advances. Some villagers, because of their lack of education, their deep distrust of the government, and the promises made by the communists, have joined the terrorist movement. As false as the charges are against the U.S., they cannot be easily disproved in the eyes of the villagers. Until the presence of the American military is reduced or hidden (which is difficult), this will be a strong propaganda weapon of the communists.

Of the villagers who do join the terrorists, many eventually surrender to government forces because they see that the Communists cannot give them what it promised. Sniping at and then running from government forces and living in fear in the forest with insufficient food and little friendship is very alien to the Thai-Lao farmer. He much prefers the security of the village where there is always at least enough to eat. In spite of this there are some ideological Communists in the hills who come from two main sources. First, there are the foreign elements. Of these one group has come to Thailand for the expressed purpose of creating discontent. The other group is made up of Vietnamese (who mostly support Ho Chi Minh) who fled to Thailand during the French-Indochina War. Settling primarily in Nongkhai, Sakol Nakorn, and Nakorn Phanom, most of these people planned to return after hostilities ceased. At first, the Thai government did assist them in returning, but eventually South Vietnam refused entry to any more because most of them support Ho Chi Minh, and North Vietnam refused them repatriation because they had enough trouble caring for their population already. Most of these "Thai" Vietnamese have not taken Thai citizenship because they still hope that one day they will be able to return, and because of the second-class status the Thai government has forced on them.

The second source of Communist ideologists is those Northeast Thais who are sent "abroad" to North Vietnam or China for intensive propaganda and insurgency training. A possible third source might include exiled Northeast politicians who left Thailand in the early 1950's after the fall of Pridi.

The state of the Northeast at present, then, seems to be somewhat confused, but not necessarily unpredictable or pessimistic. Given a few favorable developments, the Northeast may very well reach virtual equality with the mainstream of Thai society. Three things seem to be of paramount importance if this is going to come about. First, the central Thai people must tone down their "country cousin" attitudes toward Northeasterners. The Thai government has already made efforts in this direction. Officials are encouraged to learn the local dialect and customs; some have and this has greatly improved the rapport between official and villager, but there is still a long way to go. Another encouraging sign is that the Northeasterners now have a feeling of regional identity and people from other regions are becoming more aware that the Isaan does in fact have an old and rich culture that is worth studying and maybe even worth saving.

The second thing is that the Thai government must continue and accelerate developmental plans when possible. Up to now the Thai military government has instituted development somewhat grudgingly. It is basically a problem of whether or not the richer regions will be willing to pour a larger portion of funds into the poorer regions. The new constitutional government is not far in the future, and it is possible that a parliament that should be one-third Isaan, will be more concerned with the poor areas. A new government could go a long way in easing some of the old and painful friction between the Northeasterners and the government.

The third element of change necessary will be a concerted effort by the U.S. or any other government to assist in the development of the region. At present, the U.S. has been forced to cut back many of its programs, but if the Vietnam crisis can be settled, much money would be freed, enabling the expansion of new projects in the Northeast. One of the critical necessities is for the increase and expansion of the educational system. Regardless of the amount of economic development that takes place, little will benefit the poor villager until he is taught of the advantages of irrigation, second cropping, and fertilizer. And little long-range improvement will occur until he sees the advantages of education for his children.

All three elements have been begun, but they must be greatly expanded. Every effort should be made to bring the Isaaner into the mainstream of the Thai economic structure. At the same time, however, the people should be encouraged to maintain their cultural identity. There is nothing inherent in their culture that would inhibit them from being Thai. They have an amazingly resilient culture that has withstood years of subservience to other governments; they are proud, independent, and have a strong ability to produce leaders both in the village and in national politics.

The Isaaner, in fact, considers himself a Laos person, but a Thai citizen. He has a strong loyalty to the Thai king and to his area.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

By all tokens, Northeast Thailand, with its area of 66,000 square miles (one third of the nation's total area) and 34 percent of the population, should be an important force in the economic, political, cultural, and social life of Thailand, yet it has yet to find its place in the national life. Economically speaking, the Northeast has always lagged far behind the rest of the nation. Although figures are hard to find and often do not agree, it is estimated that in 1953, the Northeast average income was around 44 percent of the national average. By 1968 this had improved to only 50 percent of the national average or one-fourth of the per capita income in the central plains region. Since this per capita income reflects the improvements made by townspeople, who have approximately the same income as town dwellers in other parts of the country, and large farmers, it does not really reflect the economic position of the Isaan villager. Less than 600 baht (US\$30.00) of the average per capita income is in cash -- this means that the Northeast villagers receive far less cash income than the national average. It is estimated that 78 percent of the villagers in the Northeast receive about \$15.00 cash income a year and consume another \$15.00 or so in kind.

As the equality of income in kind to cash income for the majority of villagers shows, the Northeast villager is not yet involved in the cash economy of the "modern" world. He begins to adjust to the workings of the cash economy as he adjusts to the wide world outside his village (thanks chiefly to the improved transportation and communication of the past few years), but until the past decade or so money was a thing of little meaning to the rural Northerner. The Northeast farmer has traditionally been self-sufficient; he has produced only for his own needs and has been dependent on the outside world only for such necessities as metal tools which he could not easily produce. This self-sufficient, subsistence level production attitude is one of the big problems facing those who wish to increase farm production in the region. There seems to be little concept of maximizing output -- farmers with larger holdings often cultivate a smaller percentage of their fields. Government officials often find their efforts to increase production by introducing innovations such as fertilizer, second crops, etc. frustrated because of this self-sufficient attitude. Other outside observers have commented on the reluctance of the Isaan farmer to make himself dependent on outside institutions such as the world market, which he doesn't understand, or trust. The low educational level in the Northeast explains a lot of this reluctance. Recently a government official said it would be difficult to persuade farmers to accept the government's offer to clear trees and stumps from their fields; they couldn't read the agreement and would be afraid to sign it because they feared they might be signing away their property rights. Traditionally, outside institutions are not to be trusted -- and that goes for the competitive marketplace as well as the government. Some farmers who experienced the terrific decline in the price of kenaf after being assured that it was indeed a good cash crop found this out only too well.

Attitudes of farmers are not of course the only deterrent to economic progress in the Northeast. In most of Thailand, farmers must only be taught to do better what they are already doing, e.g., to use better strains of rice, to use fertilizer, etc., to improve their economic position. In the Northeast, however, the land is so poor and the water supply so limited that simple education of farmer will not solve the problem. The land of the Korat Plateau is, for the most part, high, dry land. Much of it is hilly, some is termed

"marginal upland" and is not suitable for rice; other land which is used for rice is, in actuality, marginal for this crop. Compare rice production per hectare in the Northeast with that of the rest of the country: In 1960, the Northeast produced 1.03 metric tons/hectare while the rest of the country produced 1.66 metric tons/hectare. The agricultural product value/rai in the same year was 149 Baht/rai for the Northeast compared with an average of 260 Baht/rai for the nation as a whole. Not only is the percentage of land which is cultivated low (18 percent), but the production rate on what is cultivated is appalling, especially so in years with bad weather. Changes of crops, and completely new methods of farming are necessary to improve production.

Rice is the main crop in the area, occupying approximately 68 percent of total farmland. Most of the rice grown is of the glutinous or "sticky" variety which has a shorter growing season than the non-glutinous varieties; it is also favored by Northeasterners. It is not, however, suited to the national market as it is not in much demand in other regions or for export. Attempts to introduce other varieties of rice, such as the new high-yield Philippine variety, have not with little success. The farmers don't like the taste of the new varieties and so long as their main interest is in production for their own needs, they will not want to change from their old, familiar *khaw niaw*. Experiments are being done to find a new variety which will be both higher-yield and acceptable to the villagers.

Other crops currently grown in the Northeast include corn, sugar cane, watermelon, cotton, and kenaf. Kenaf is the largest cash crop grown. Its production increased by 1500 percent from 1957 to 1961 as a result of a government drive to introduce it as a second crop. It might be a good second crop for the Northeast as it can be grown on newly cleared forest land or other upland area not suited for paddy. Its production, thus, does not interfere with the main crop - rice. The initial optimism about kenaf as a cash crop has, however, been desiccated by a dramatic price decline following an overabundance of such fibers on the international market. The low price now paid for Northeast kenaf is also due in part to the low quality of kenaf produced. Northeast kenaf is of low quality because there is insufficient water to "ret" (process) it. Kenaf processing requires soaking the reeds in water for a long while and then beating them to break up the fibers. It is a process which requires a great deal of water, which over much of the Northeast is just not available.

Again, the problem comes down to water. Statistically speaking, there should be enough water, for Northeast total rainfall equals and, in some regions, exceeds the total annual rainfall of the north and central regions of Thailand. The short, concentrated rainy season, the high hilly land, and the sandy, coarse-textured soil combine, however, to render the Northeast arid for most of the year. Farmers in the area raise one crop a year, during the rainy season, but the other 6-8 months of the year the land in the Northeast is as dry as the proverbial bone. In fact, even during the rainy season a large portion of the land is dry because drainage takes place so fast. One who has visited the region will never forget the thick reddish-brown dust; this dust typifies the Northeast's major problem - lack of water, or, rather, lack of adequate water control, for there are times when the farmers suffer from too much water (rainy season floods can destroy a farmer's crops as easily as a lack of water). When asked about the needs of their people, village leaders are quick to respond that water control and storage are number one on their list; it is easy to understand why.

Various projects have been started to provide the much needed water control and irrigation facilities. Smallest among these are village-level projects started by ambitious village leaders and, perhaps, encouraged by the local monks as merit-making activities. (The role of progressive monks in the development process is an interesting factor.) These projects may be financed on the local level or they may receive some aid from the central government. The government was exceedingly slow in recognizing the problems and needs of the Northeast (see the section on History), but since the 1950's, it has responded by realizing the necessity of governmental assistance in the region. Central government aid has produced impressive results. The government's first six-year plan of 1961-66 began work on infra-structural projects such as roads, dams, etc., and included some work at the village level. The second plan, scheduled for 1967-71 continues work on the large projects and include village level projects for social change and economic development.

Large dams have been built at Nam Pong in Khonkaen Province, Lam Pao in Kalasin, Lam Ton Noi in Ubol, and Nam Pung in Sakol Nakhorn, and many others are scheduled for construction. Irrigation systems to distribute the water from these reservoirs are also presently under construction. However, less than one-third of all cultivated land in the area is irrigated.

Ubolratana Dam at Nam Pong in Khonkaen is part of the Lower Mekong River Basin Project of the United Nations which will provide water, electricity, flood control, and eventually a whole new economic climate for the Northeast Thai farmers. The project, which will develop the Mekong and its tributaries for use by the four nations on the banks of the Mekong is also carrying on research to help with the modernization of farming in the area when adequate water is available. The Pilot and Demonstration Farm for Irrigated Agriculture in Kalasin, a joint Food and Agricultural Organization and Thai government project, just one example among many projects, is carrying out experiments to develop new crops and methods of cultivation for the Northeast. Experiments are being done there (as at other Thai government farms) with crops which can be grown during the dry season with help of irrigation. Experiments are being done to determine appropriate crops, varieties, fertilizers, methods of irrigation, etc. Among the crops being experimented with are corn, cotton, soy beans, mung beans, and peanuts. It is hoped that these can be introduced to the farmers who will receive irrigation water. Presently, farmers on the experimental farm in Kalasin receive free seeds, fertilizers, water, and agricultural advice. There is some success, but of course it is slow in coming because of the traditional attitudes of the farmers. A core of farmers favorable to new ideas will have to be developed if real agricultural progress is going to be made in the Northeast. Agricultural education and education for change in the schools, particularly at the lower praction level which is as far as many village children go in school, will be important in developing this core of receptive farm leaders. Such education must be stressed by the government to reinforce its other projects.

Aside from irrigation and outside of the crop-producing realm, the government is carrying on other projects to aid the economy of the Northeast. Among these are promotion of silk raising, livestock, and fish. The Fisheries Department is aiding farmers with the construction of fish ponds and is providing fingerlings. Planting of fish on a larger scale is presently being done at Ubolratana, Lam Pao, and Nam Pung reservoirs; such plantings will probably

increase as more money becomes available for the project. The annual production of fish from Ubolratana now is valued at 5 million baht. It is estimated that this will rise to 20 million baht when the project is completed. The fish will be available to Northeasterners for their own consumption, thus providing a much needed increase in protein intake and will also be processed for distribution to large population centers in other areas of the country. If continuing governmental support is forthcoming, fishing may become a substantial industry in the "arid" Northeast.

Important both to the fishing industry and to the development of all cash crops is an adequate transportation system. It has been estimated that roughly 50 percent of Northeast villages are more than 10 kilometers away from roads usable by cars in the rainy season. The government's Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) program, the major development program in the Northeast which was started in January 1966, as a direct response to the Communist threat, has as one of its major goals the connection of villages to the outside by means of feeder roads. It is hoped that eventually no village will be further than 3 kilometers from a feeder road. ARD is doing a good job of bringing the outside world to the villagers, or vice versa, and this alone will give impetus to economic development. People who see what the outside world has to offer probably will have more incentive to become cash-producers.

In addition to road building, ARD operates to encourage development through encouragement of agri-business (the production of cash crops), through its youth worker program where trained young people try to bring communities together into workable units, by giving medical aid and in many other ways. Progress in all of these areas is necessary. One of the most important in the long run may be the promotion of agri-business because Thai farmers need lots of counsel and assistance in becoming businessmen/farmers. Credit and marketing cooperatives, loans from banks, simple business education -- all these are desperately needed by the Northeast villagers.

The ARD program, locally under the control of the provincial governors to provide a sense of participation, is part of the overall economic plan for the Northeast. Developed last year as a long-term and comprehensive regional developmental plan, the NLED (Northeast Economic Development) Plan is an attempt of the Thai government to greatly influence growth of the region in the next five years. It was initiated by the Committee for the Development of the Northeast and project proposals will be drawn up from suggestions submitted by village, tambul, and province leaders. It is expected that as a result of this plan, farmer per capita income will be doubled at the end of five years. This is a big task, but one that may be accomplished if the right steps are taken. Such development is certainly necessary if the Northeast is going to take its place as an important part of the Thai nation.

The language of the Northeast differs a great deal from the language of central Thailand and the other parts of the country. A newly-arrived Volunteer, anxious to test his listening and speaking ability, may well be dismayed at the language situation in the area. Central Thai is simply not spoken by most village Northeasterners. People in towns and cities can speak the Bangkok dialect, but do so only when talking to superiors, such as officials from Bangkok or to foreigners who have learned only Bangkok Thai. Thai is supposedly the official language for education as well as other government activities, but use of it in schools varies from none to most of the time depending on the local situation. The local dialect, or "phasa phynn maeng" is, however, the dominant language in all parts of the Northeast.

The local dialects vary from the Cambodian dialect of Buriram, Surin, and parts of Sisaket to the north Thai of Kamruaj-sriy to the languages of the small ethnic groups such as the Phutai. (See the section of Peoples.) The most common local dialects are all, however, variants of Thai-Lao, a Thai language close to the "true" Lao of Laos. It is estimated that there are approximately 37 Lao dialects. The differences among these dialects are generally slight, having to do with tone changes and vowel differences. There is, however, a noticeable change as one goes closer to Laos. Going from Mahasarakham to Kulsin to Sakol Nakhon to Nakhon Phanom, one notices a drop in clarity of speech, an increase in nasalization, and other evidences of increasing "Lao-ization".

In recent years, thanks chiefly to radio and in a smaller degree to television, there has evolved a "standard" Isan language. This is the educated Northeasterners' language and is the language of the radio and TV. Most Northeasterners can probably understand this language. This language is now being taught to at least some of the officials coming from other regions to the Northeast. In the past, these officials were explicitly lost when they arrived in the Northeast and caused a great deal of resentment by their inability to speak the local language and their reluctance to learn it. Some progress has been made in this area, but certainly the problem of language is one which in the past has added to the antagonism between the Northeast and the rest of the country.

Speakers of non-Lao dialects (Khmer, Phutai, etc.) generally also speak the local variation of Thai-Lao. This means that for some Northeasterners central Thai is their third language. For virtually every resident of the area, Thai is the second language and this presents one of the largest barriers to the success of the educational system in the Northeast. Beginning elementary students in the Northeast must learn to speak and understand Thai, not only read and write it, and until they master central Thai very little learning can take place in their other subjects. Add English as a third or fourth language at the Preter 5 level and you really have a problem.

Volunteers in the Northeast who work mainly in towns and with reasonably educated people, e.g., TEFL teachers, can get along without a knowledge of phasa Isan, but it is always useful to understand as much as possible or much of the world of Northeast Thailand may pass you by. Those Volunteers who spend a great deal of time in the field will find that mastery of phasa phynn maeng (local dialect) is more important than mastery of central Thai.

Language materials are available from the Peace Corps Regional Office in Khonkaen and these provide a sound introduction to the complex problem of Northeastern language. Some differences between Central Thai and Thai-Lao involve not only but vocabulary differences -- others are simply consonant, vowel, or tone changes and follow some fairly regular rules for each area dialect.

In general, Northeast dialects have fewer sounds than Bangkok Thai -- and more tones. Among the easily learned changes are from the initial consonant *ch* in central Thai to the consonant *s* in Northeast dialects (e.g., *chuy ong* becomes *suyang*, *chyy* becomes *syy*, etc.), and from initial consonant clusters to single consonants in Northeast (e.g., *khyu* becomes *kya*, *khut* becomes *kut*, *kwaa* becomes *kua*, *plaa* becomes *pa*, etc.). One consonant sound which does exist in the Northeast dialect but not in central Thai is the initial *nj* sound. This consonant was in old Thai but the evolution of the language has caused it to disappear in the central region. This sound, which is like the *n* in canyon or the *gn* in cognac, takes the place of *s* in *jj*'s in central Thai (e.g., *jeek* becomes *njeek*, *jang* becomes *njang*, etc.).

Vowels change also but these changes are not consistent throughout the Northeast. Neither are tone changes. Lao dialects have from 5-7 tones with 7 being quite common. These tones often change from one area to another. For more information on a comparison of Thai-Lao and central Thai, see "An Introduction to Phasa Phak Isan" by Jimmy G. Harris, available from the Peace Corps.

Northeast Thais are like most other Thais, principally Buddhists. This means that most of their organized religious practices are conducted through the medium of the Buddhist religion and take place at the local temple. It is fair to say, however, that northeastern religious practice differs more than a little from the norm prescribed by the Department of Religious Education in Bangkok. It is necessary for a man to conform to many of the directives if he wishes to advance in the hierarchy -- that is, he must "Thai-ize" himself just as a Northeasterner who wants to advance in the governmental hierarchy must Thai-ize himself by renouncing many "Lao" or "Isaan" ways of acting, thinking, and speaking. The average Isaan monk (or resident) is not, however, very much concerned with advancement in this world and so he will generally adhere to the Northeast beliefs and practices, even to including spirit worship in temple ceremonies and acting as a "spirit doctor" on occasion.

Most village Northeasterners are not too preoccupied with advancing themselves in this world; their main concern is ensuring a better life the next time they come back to earth. Thus their main religious objectives center around merit making (thao bun) by feeding monks, building new temples, presenting gifts to the monks and doing other things which have been designated as "merit-producing" activities. (With the help of clever community development workers and a cooperative local abbot this desire to make merit has proved to be an effective tool of development. Some villages have dug wells, built toilets, constructed roads, etc. under the guise of merit-making activities. It would be nice if all local abbots were as progressive as those who thought up these schemes.)

Buddhism is, thus, a matter of doing things, not of meditation and study and this differs radically from the teachings of the Lord Buddha. But this last is true in all parts of the country. Religion is, however, a vital force in the life of Northeasterners. Statistics show that more Northeast men have spent time in the novitiate or priesthood than in other regions of the country. Such service is, of course, a way to achieve respect. One who has served in a monastery always retains a title of respect and he commands a great deal of admiration.

Aside from Buddhism, or maybe more accurately, in conjunction with Buddhism, the religion of Northeasterners involves spirit worship. This religion, or should we say cult, is usually classified as animism. It involves a worship of, and respect for, the spirits which are believed to be present everywhere. Most Northeast ceremonies, such as house-warmings, weddings, funerals, going-away and home-coming ceremonies, and birth rites, involve propitiation of the spirits. The spirits of one's ancestors are especially well cared for as Northeasterners don't want unhappy spirits hanging around.

There are many spirits, however, and they can cause accidents, make people do what they don't want to do, cause illness, disturb people by making loud noises and generally cause trouble. Each village has a phi or spirit doctor to treat illness and advise about treatment of spirits.

Whether one believes in these spirits or not, they are very real to a majority of Northeasterners and practices related to propitiating them and thereby avoiding their wrath are as important in the villages as Buddhism itself. Most often, of course, the two are tied together so closely that it is hard to separate them. This is why those who have studied Buddhism carefully say that the Northeast religion is not Buddhist, but rather animist. However classified, religion means a great deal to Northeasterners and is a living force in their lives. Temple ceremonies, merit-making activities, and spirit propitiating all are important in the lives of the Northeast villagers.

As might be expected, food in the Northeast differs quite a bit from food in the other regions of Thailand. Always available, of course, are the various kua-w and buri dishes, the fried vegetable and meat dishes, and kha-w phet. Various other Chinese and Thai foods are also available, but residents of the Northeast also have a chance to eat many dishes which are peculiar to the Lao areas of Thailand.

In general, Lao food tends to be quite spicy. Northeasterners do not use coconut as much as the other Thais and their foods are not as rich. The Northeast diet is considerably less nutritious than that of other parts of Thailand, partially because there is not the variety of fruits and vegetables here that is found in the rest of the country. Another explanation is, of course, that the people are much poorer than their brothers in the other regions of Thailand and cannot afford the more nutritious foods such as meat. A great many Lao dishes are uncooked. This is partly due to the fact that the whole family is obliged to work in the fields in the Northeast and no one has time to cook food. Northeasterners also prefer their food uncooked. They are not concerned about the parasites that are often transmitted through the raw food. For your information, many of the dishes eaten raw can be cooked and are just as good that way though many Northeasterners will deny the latter statement.

Here are brief descriptions of some of the foods you may run into. There are, of course, many other dishes which are peculiar to one region of the Northeast or another. This is just for a start, you will discover many other delicacies.

kha-w niaw (sticky rice) -- This is the staple food of the Northeast, as opposed to kha-w ca-w (regular rice), the kind of rice you are used to. Your friends in the other regions of the country will claim that they too eat kha-w niaw, but outside of the North and the Northeast, kha-w niaw is used only in khanams (deserts). Here it may be an entire meal and it is usually eaten three times a day by country residents. Most Volunteers in the Northeast love it. This is incomprehensible to those from other regions, but then Volunteers too are victims of regionalism. Sticky rice is eaten with the fingers.

plaw laa (fish sauce) -- The official name of this is plaw ran, but Northeasterners having no r's and few "pl's" in their dialects usually call it plaw laa, or pa-w laa, or call it by its Lao name, pa-w daek. It is the most common kap kha-w (things eaten with rice) in the Northeast. Plaw laa is a fermented fish sauce or paste which is aged about three months before it is eaten. It's eaten plain with sticky rice and is also put into other dishes such as sa-w tan (see below). It has a strong taste and smell. Plaw laa is made from raw fish and sometimes contains liver fluke, a not-so-nice parasite. It can be cooked.

sa-w tan (unripe papaya salad) -- Sa-w tan is another common kap kha-w in the Northeast. It's made with shredded green papaya, chillies, garlic, tomatoes, na-w plaw (fish soy), or plaw laa, and sometimes other things. It is kind of like a salad and is eaten with the fingers as most Northeast dishes. Its flavor can range from na-j phet la-j to phet phet. Don't give up if it is too spicy the first time -- it's delicious. It is sometimes referred to as tan sa-w or by its Lao name, tan bak hung.

- lap (spicy chopped meat) -- Lap is ground meat (beef, pork, fish, chicken, duck, goose, or frog) mixed with lime, chillies, and other spices. It tends to be very spicy. Sometimes lap is eaten raw and sometimes it is cooked. It ranges from very good (sarp ilii in Lao) to awful. It's interesting to note that the first foreigner to eat lap was Marco Polo who was served a similar dish when he visited the Orient.
- kaj yang (roasted chicken) -- Although other parts of Thailand have kaj yang, barbecued chicken, the Northeast is probably best known for it. It's sold by the piece or by the whole chicken and is usually eaten with sticky rice.
- sajbrook (sausages) -- There are many good kinds of sausages in the Northeast. Look for them. Koi-Et is especially known for its sausages. Nam is one popular kind of sausage. It is eaten with beer or Mekong. It is made from raw pork and is not cooked before serving. Another variant from Kalasin is especially famous, nam (chopped aged beef).
- kop (frogs) -- Frogs are eaten by many people in the Northeast. They can be made into a curry or barbecued or fixed in other ways.
- insects -- Assorted beetles, ants, and other insects are eaten by Northeasterners. They are fried or eaten alive. Red ant eggs are very popular -- it is said that they add a sour taste to food.
- lyat (blood) -- Northeasterners use blood in many ways in their cooking. It provides a nutritious supplement to their meager diet. Blood can be eaten (drunk?) raw or it can be cooked. One way of cooking it is to steam it and make little cakes. Another way is to make lap with it.

These are just a few of the dishes peculiar to the Northeastern people (and their Lao cousins in Northern Thailand). Many of these dishes are village food and a Volunteer who spends his time exclusively in town may not encounter some of the more exotic ones. All of you will discover many more interesting things. Happy Eating!

The number of Thai national holidays seems at times to include four days of the week. Many of these celebrations are connected with the Buddhist religion, so they are not distinctive to Isan alone. The relative importance of these ceremonies varies only slightly in most cases among the Central Thai, Isan, and Lao cultures. There are, however, notable exceptions, such as Makha Bucha and Witsakha Bucha which are celebrated in the central villages and Isan cities, but not in the Isan villages; conversely, Bun Phawet, a ceremony (but not a national holiday) commemorating the "Great Life" incarnation of Buddha, is celebrated only in Isan.

The remaining national holidays in Thailand are either secular or royal. The royal ceremonies, such as the ploughing ceremony, are generally observed only in the Bangkok area, and the secular festivals are usually not celebrated in the Isan village, except that the schools are closed. The Isan villagers, then, celebrate most of the national religious holidays, but only some of the secular holidays. On the other hand, these people have developed a number of ceremonies which they share to a large extent with their Lao neighbors. These are primarily related to phi (spirit) worship. Included in this category are the bun cherwei, a thanksgiving festival held at the end of the rice harvest; the "liang ban" or "liang phi pa ta" at which time the people feed the village spirits; and "bun padapdin" and "bun khaw sak" in which ancestral spirits are given special food and attention.

There is one other important annual celebration in the Isan village, which may be of Khmer origin. This is the "bun bang fai", held just before the rainy season is supposed to begin in May. This may be one of the most exciting, colorful, and ribald festivals of the Isan villagers, and is usually held on a Sunday in May, although customs and dates differ throughout Isan. The people make huge rockets generally from bamboo and gunpowder and launch them from trees in the paddy fields. A well-constructed rocket may go up several hundred meters before crashing back into the fields. The villagers dress up and play their native instruments, i.e., khin (a bamboo reed instrument), ching (cymbals), klong jaw (long drum), and sao (a two-string violin). At the same time the men get progressively more drunk and a young man will be persuaded to dress up like a woman. He will be followed by a small band with which he carries on both an orally and physically risqué dialogue. If successful, the bun bang fai brings the rainy season and the rice planting begins.

The bun bang fai, however, does not always bring the rain at the appropriate time; so, if necessary, other ceremonies are performed in an attempt to bring on the rain gods. The most widely used ceremony is the cat ceremony which possibly originated in Chingwat Chaiyaphum. A group of young men (drunk and singing, of course) carry a cat tied to a pole around the village. They carry the cat around the outside of a house and wait until the occupants come out, pour a cup of water on the cat, and give the men some money, then the parade proceeds to each of the other houses. The pouring of water on the cat is supposed to bring rain, while the money is used for further celebration by the young men.

A second related ritual stems from the belief among villagers that the king cobra causes droughts. This snake hatches its eggs only in the dry weather, thus those who believe this myth try to find and destroy the eggs of the king cobra. This is done by building a large fire with a pot of water in

the middle. Then one man, on a horse, searches in the field until he finds an egg. He takes the egg and rides back to the fire, where he throws the egg into the now boiling water. Theory has it that the snake pursues the egg, "jumps" into the pot, is killed, and the rains come.

Many other informal ceremonies are invoked in order to take care of the various occasions or emergencies which the Isaan person faces in his life. Sickness is a very common problem due to the Isaan villagers lack of knowledge about health and medicine and to the very limited number of doctors available even in emergencies. In the Isaan cities, where there are doctors and hospitals, most people frequent these services for almost any real or imagined sickness. The standard solution to the problems is a shot and possibly several different colored pills. (Most Thais honestly believe that the doctor is slighting them unless they are given a shot whether or not one is needed.) In the villages, where there are no doctors, the inhabitants nevertheless have "outstanding" medical care in the form of curers and mystic monks which rival the successes of city doctors. The most interesting "expert" in medicine is probably a monk who has mystical powers to drive out the bad spirits which everyone "knows" causes sickness in the first place. The well supplied medical mystic kit might contain candles, holy water, special symbolic replicas, and assorted prayers. The monk will come to the house, and perform his **exorcisms** (reminiscent of medieval Christian exorcisms). The patient then either recovers because the spirit has fled due to the great powers of the monk, or dies because the spirits wanted the body and could not have been displaced under any conditions. In either case, the monk can't lose, and if the person dies, there is a whole new ceremony to be performed.

Death is cause for one of the largest ceremonies in the life cycle of the Thai person, and very special procedures must be followed. In the cities of the Northeast fairly standard religious ceremonies are followed. If the person dies a natural death, he is usually cremated within three days. The body lies in state at his home until it is taken to the wat for cremation. The final journey begins at the house and is led by a small brass band of drums, cymbals, baritone horn, and sometimes a clarinet. (The tempo and even the melodic structure of the music is strikingly similar to the old New Orleans funeral bands.) Next comes a monk in a saamlaw, the people who pull the casket-laden ox-cart, and last, all the other people in the ceremony. When the procession reaches the wat, some prayers are offered by the monks, the people pay their last respects, and then leave, or wait until the body is cremated. The days preceding the final rites are consumed by numerous dinners or gatherings at the deceased's home by neighbors. This is done to keep the deceased's family from getting depressed. After the body has been cremated, people assume an attitude of joy, and comments which might seem very impolite or cutting to the Western mind are heard incessantly. (It is possible that this flippant attitude toward death is an external cover, hiding a real feeling of loss among the people.)

In the case of death by unnatural means, i.e., murder, car accidents, child-birth, cholera, and other incomprehensible reasons, the body is buried in the temple grounds. Some Thais say that after a number of years the remains will be brought up and burned, while others say the body is never cremated. In any case, it seems likely that the body is buried in order that the phi will have time to leave the body and find its way to "heaven". This belief that the phi lives in the body is very prevalent in the Northeast, especially in the villages, but also in the cities. Thus, the ceremonies preceding the final rites have certain aspects which are intended to placate the phi. In

the village, the degree of animism in the religious ceremony is much greater than in the city. Tradition is different in each village, but it might be helpful to mention a few from Baan Yang Terng in Ubol Province. When the person dies, a satong is placed in his mouth so that the phi will be able to find its way to the spirit house in the sky. Strings are put around the wrists of a dead man to remind him of his wife, around the neck to remind him of his children, and around his ankles to remind him of his earthly treasures. In selecting the cremation site, an egg is thrown; if it breaks, it is because the spirits like the spot; if it doesn't break, then the egg must be thrown again in a different place until it breaks. Repeated and different signs are continually being made to inform the spirit that the man has died and to leave the body. Finally, it is very important the spirits be offered food everyday so as to appease them. A full death ceremony which might consume parts of three or four days would probably be one of the most interesting events to see, though also very mysterious unless one has a well-informed interpreter.

Another ceremony that one will very possibly experience is the "good luck" or good health ceremony. This may be invoked when one is about to leave on a journey or has just returned, or possibly to invoke luck for some endeavor. The event will probably be held at the house of the person who is sponsoring the ceremony. Monks are invited to the home, where they pray for good fortune. Then they are fed and return to the wát. Then the friends are invited for dinner and a small ceremony is conducted by the sponsor. The friends tie string around the wrists of the person for whom the party is held. The strings are supposed to bring good luck.

One last ceremony that is very common is the blessing of a house. This is performed when a person builds a new house, or when a new family moves into a house. The procedure is much the same as the "good luck" ceremony, except that strings are not tied to anyone's wrist. The ceremony ends with a large dinner and small talk.

This is a short and by no means complete list of Isaan holidays and ceremonies. Many festivals, etc., are only celebrated in the villages, thus it will be very difficult for most Volunteers to learn about them. If this is the case, you should ask one of your Thai friends who comes from a village to take you to them when they occur. (For a list of official and semi-official celebrations in Isaan, refer to the table on the following page.)

FESTIVALS INDIGENOUS TO THE NORTHEAST

<u>Lunar Month</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name of Ceremony</u>
III	1st half	<u>Bun khaoi</u> (Harvest ceremony in which special types of rice dishes are prepared.
	No set date	<u>Sukhuankhao</u> (Harvest ceremony to give offering to the soul of the rice; in Central Plains, <u>thankwanyung?</u> )
III- IV	Full moon	<u>Bun phiwet</u> (Festival devoted to the Vessantara or "Great Life" Jataka.)
IV	In March	Teachers Day
V	Full moon	T'ai New Years (traditional reckoning.)
	Apr 13-16	<u>Songkran</u> (T'ai New Years according to fixed dates).
VI	1st day of waning moon	<u>Liangban/liangshiputa</u> (feeding of village spirits).
	Latter half	<u>Bun hongfai</u> (Firerocket ceremony to tell the Devas to send the rains).
VIII	Full moon	<u>Atro phansa</u> (Beginning of Buddhist Lent).
IX	Last day	<u>Bun padapdin</u> (Ceremony for feeding ancestors; coupled with <u>bun kaosak</u> ).
X	Full moon	<u>Bun kaosak</u> (another ceremony for feeding ancestors; coupled with <u>bun padapdin</u> ).
XI	Full moon	<u>Ok phansa</u> (Leaving of Buddhist Lent).
XI- XII	Full moon	<u>Thot kathin</u> (Ceremony for presenting robes and other gifts to Buddhist monks).

Entertainment, like the celebrations, in the Northeast is quite different from that of the central Thai culture. On certain occasions one can see classical Thai dancing or music in the cities, but the most common, and by far the most popular, forms of entertainment of the Isaan populus are the *ma-lan* and the medicine show.

A common sight available on practically any passenger bus ride to nearly anywhere in the Northeast is a troupe of rather gaudily dressed men and women carrying with them a huge dilapidated vaudevillian trunk, an electrical generator, and two or four loudspeakers. The women, dressed in loud phasins and heavily made-up, travel with professional loreton, while the men, usually wearing stonepipe trousers and long-pointed and raised-heel shoes, patronizingly accept the curious stares of the surrounding populace. This aloof little group is doubtless on its way to a temple fair or similar type of celebration to perform, at a rather exorbitant fee, a very special and popular kind of entertainment known as the "*ma-lan*". Literally translated as "doctor dance", an adequate English appellation would be difficult to concoct. The players half-sing, half-dance, and half-chant their way through a kind of folk operetta in a way so thoroughly alien to any Western equivalent so as to elude verbal description. Because of its own peculiar qualities, especially those of vocal gymnastics, rhythm, and body movement, the *ma-lan* is one of the most interesting aesthetic experiences to be had in the Northeast.

On the morning or afternoon before the performance, the company prepares its scenery and sound equipment upon a small, hastily constructed wooden stage. There are side-wings of painted canvas hung upon wooden frames, and a large scene-depicting canvas backdrop. Above there are six or seven canvases, rolled in curtain-shade fashion, in reserve to be dropped at scene changes during the play. At the bottom and top are more narrow strips of painted canvas to surround the stage in a frame effect. A microphone hangs center-stage and at the front a row of variously colored footlights wait to add light and fantasy to the show.

In the evening, after the fair is underway, the first activity upon the *ma-lan* stage is usually a program of songs and dances, interspaced with some often rather ribald humor. The humor is again reminiscent of vaudeville, commanded by a fast-talking wise-cracking comedian, and including straight-man/funny-man dialogues, and local slap-stick fist (and foot) fights. Also quite prevalent is play upon sexual identity as a source of comedy, since for example the M.C. may happen to be wearing long hair, exceedingly heavy make-up, and a phasin.

This little pre-show variety program serves as a belly to signal the impending beginning of the dance. Most of the firm regular disciples have, naturally, firmly situated themselves one or two hours previously. Families come equipped with straw mats and snacks, while many of the men come equipped only to squat endlessly enchanted by the dance.

As the drama begins, the first sound is that of the Northeastern organ-like reed instrument known as the "*khien*" which plays a single suspended note while a major character, usually the hero, enters. The hero is dressed in costume according to the era of the epic, but always to the gaudiest,

flashiest extreme, and his face is caked with white, nearly caricature make-up. Since many of the stories originated in Laos, the costumes are also Lao, of either royal, upper-class, or peasant variety. The hero "wags" and proceeds to introduce himself in the singular nasal whines of the m-ran, holding forth with rapid-fire sentences and phrases, interrupted at unpredictable intervals by a long voice slide from high to low, undoubtedly creating every size and type of soundwave in existence. The language of the players is some form of the Northeastern tongue, depending upon the origin of the m-ran troupe. Most are from Khonkaen, Udorn, Korat, or Ubol. But whatever the variance from the native language of the listeners, it seems that they can understand all or most of the words.

After the hero has introduced himself and given the background for the oncoming story, the rhythm of the accompanying "khean" picks up, and then suddenly, even joyously, a drum begins sounding loudly and vibrantly, and the speaker bursts into a song and dance, moving his body rhythmically and gracefully using his hands to emphasize and illustrate his song. The song finished, the music continues and the speaker-turned-singer emerges from his position behind the microphone and dances up, down, and across stage in the movements which will throughout the drama establish his character, as has the particular melody of his song. After the hero's initial appearance, the other characters charge for a two or three minute performance, each unfolding a section of the plot. The plot is always fairy-tale simple, but often extended by incredibly long complications. The other characters include a heroin, a villain, and a comedian, as well as minor heroes, heroins, etc. Interchanges often occur with three or four or more characters on stage, exchanging speeches, songs, and ending simultaneously in extended dance.

The length of the show ranges from long (3-4 hours) to very long (6-8 hours) and often the audience will squat unblinking all night long completely captivated. The most avid fans are older townspeople, villagers, and children, while many of the young, sophisticated, and educated population seem to disdain this form of entertainment as crude and old-fashioned. Many villages, where residents cannot afford shoes and clothes, can somehow come up with the two or three thousand baht necessary to engage a m-ran for one night. Each company has two or three stories in its repertoire, some of which are well known throughout the Northeast. The sounds of the larger and better companies are available by radio, and by films which circulate around the various provinces.

The m-ran is known of throughout Thailand although its' performance route is limited to the Northeast and its' language is strictly the Northeastern dialect. It is difficult for a foreigner to understand completely, even if he is well acquainted with the particular dialect, because of the rapidity of speech and the large scale injection of idioms and slang. Conversely, much of the story, character expression and humor is comprehensible simply through body movement. It is, at any rate, one of the most well preserved traditional art forms of Thailand, and one which is still widely popular and widely available.

The second distinctive entertainment is the medicine show, which can be compared with those in the United States less than a hundred years ago, except that today the Thai medicine vendor enters town in a make-shift motorized

vehicle that almost defies description. It is possibly the offspring of a VW bus and a WWII tank, but it fits the purpose very well. The sides are covered with gaudy advertisements extolling the merits of the medicine and on the top are mounted several fog-horn-sized megaphone speakers, connected to a 5,000-watt amplification system (or so it seems when the system is put into operation). During the day the medicine man may drive through town announcing his presence, but by the late afternoon he has parked his vehicle in a wat compound, the salaikang, or just a plain field where the people can gather for the evening show. He puts up the movie screen, readies his projector, and waits for the evening procession of men, women, and children with rolled mats under their arms to gather around the screen. If on the first time you go to this show you reach the action before the movie begins, you may well think that one-half of the people are out of their minds, for in fact they are literally sitting around the screen (on both sides as it were). However, as soon as darkness comes the movie begins and you realize that the screen is rather transparent and the show can be seen from both sides. The range of pictures is quite astounding; you may see a second-rate American cowboy movie (in English yet) which the people appear to understand, and you can't quite comprehend how this could be until you then see the second feature which is a second-rate Thai movie (in Thai) which you actually understand even though the words are completely incoherent. If you are a TEFL teacher, you suddenly realize that language is indeed movement as much as sound. If you are lucky, you may even witness a Charlie Chaplin classic.

Though the people may have come for pure entertainment, the medicine man has his own ideas, and sooner or later the movies are stopped and the hard sell begins. Some people are immune but a good many can be seen returning home late in the evening with several bottles of the cure-all medicine, medicine that cures headaches, sore stomachs, dysentery, fever, malaria, dengue, cholera, and every other malady that may exist. American hasn't had medicine of this unrivaled stature since the passage of the Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1907.

There are other forms of entertainment, such as the town movies, the wat fairs, and the traveling Chinese opera, or "nyiw", but these can be seen anywhere in Thailand. Actually almost any reason can be an excuse for a party. Sending a person off to a new city, receiving a person from another city, and the annual Thai university reunions are only a few of the occasions for entertaining. You will find, we believe, that the Isaan person is much less inhibited than the central Thai. He is more earthy and shows his emotions much more readily; thus although he may not be the example of "caj jen jen"-ness, which the Thai is supposedly supposed to be, his caj-ron'ness allows him to release his tensions, rather than harboring them like the central Thai person. All in all you will probably get the feeling that the celebrations, etc., help to relieve the otherwise hard life of most Isaan people. Maybe their gatherings are a bit raucous or a bit petty, but seldom are they stuffed-shirt.

Sometime after receiving your assignment (while in Bangkok), you will probably be asked by an all-knowing Bangkok Thai where you will be sent. When you reply "an amphur in the Northeast", you could be met by one of two replies. Either he will confess that he has never heard of the place or he will offer his sympathy sincerely fearing that you will never return from that region. These remarks may lead you to question the Peace Corps staff for its' obviously irresponsible behavior in placing you in a dangerous and desolate region. But after you have "settled into your new home and have had a chance to meet the people and look around, you will realize that staff was not irresponsible, but that most Bangkok Thais" are not very interested in things more than 100 kms from their city.

The differences in culture and entertainment are discussed in other sections, but a brief sketch of the archeology and "thiaw" sites might also be helpful. If you are really interested in archeology or related fields, then the Northern or Central regions would be more to your liking (at least up to now). Nothing yet excavated in the Northeast can match the ruins of Sukhothai or Aythaya, or the still functioning, exquisite temples of Chiangmai and Bangkok. We say "yet" because the Northeast is just now coming into its own as a field of serious research. According to some anthropologists and archeologists, the Northeast will prove to be the most valuable archeological site in Thailand, and possibly in Southeast Asia.

On the surface the Northeast temples and cities of today look much like the central culture, only smaller and poorer. But underneath the ground, buried by 800 to 5000 years of dirt, are the remains of at least several civilizations or migratory groups. Looking back beyond the present Northeast culture, which in most cases has not been here for more than 200 years, one finds the remains of the Khmer or Cambodian cultures. Still strong today in the provinces of Srisaket, Buriram, and Surin, the culture once extended as far north as Chaiyaphum. Except for a few exceptions, this civilization in the form of temples and cities is difficult to find, but with increased interest and money and need to dig before the Mekong River Project inundates the land, much is being unearthed now. Phimai (50 kms north of Korat on the Friendship Highway and 10 kms east from the highway junction) is the best example in Thailand today of the Khmer's architecture. The ruins, located in the center of the city, are being reconstructed by the Department of Fine Arts. Though most of the outer buildings and walls will not be repaired, the inner temple has been reassembled very well. It, along with the carved lintels, is well worth the trip.

Phanom Wan Temple (7 kms north of Korat, just east of the Friendship Highway) is easily reached and dates, like Phimai, from the 11th Century. There are hundreds of remains of the Khmer Empire (aerial photography has located more than 200), but only a few have been excavated. Many of these are quite inaccessible, but a few of varying degrees of worth can be reached. About 4 kms from Amphur Kamalasai, Changwat Kamasin, an ancient Khmer city is being reconstructed by archeologists near Muang Fao Det. The town of Sung Boen (just off Friendship Highway, south of Korat) is near two sites. The first is Nong Ku, as part of the ancient city of Khorakapura, which dates from the 10th Century. About 2 kms away at Huang Sama are the remains of an older city that flourished during the Dvaravati period when the Mon ruled at Lopburi from the 4th to the 6th Centuries. (Other cities, however, particularly in Buriram, Srisaket, and Surin, are difficult to reach and private vehicles are required to reach them.) In Changwat Roi-et there are the remains of two ancient towns, one in Amphur Suwannaphum, the other in Amphur Phanom Phrai.

Preceding the Khmer civilization, not much is known about the people who inhabited the Northeast. For years it has been thought that most present Thais are descendants of migrating Southern Chinese who began to appear only 800 years ago. Now, however, due to one of the most spectacular finds in Southeast Asia, anthropologists are going to have to change their theories of Chinese migration, at least into the Northeast. Recently, the remains of a town dating from about 3000 BC has been uncovered near Ban Nua Dii, Changwat Khonkaen. At this site the earliest bronze instruments in Asia have been found and they are contemporaneous to earliest ones found anywhere in the world.

Not all places worth seeing in the Northeast are connected with the distant past. There are many temples in the Northeast that while old are still in use. Again, Korat probably has the most impressive display. There are many old impressive temples in the city itself that date from the Aythya period. While in Korat you can also visit the old town wall and the statue of Taw Suranuri, the famous heroin of a 19th Century war with Laos. In Ubol, 6 hours east of Korat by train, there are also many fine old temples. If you are really interested in architecture, here you can see the most unusual temple in Thailand. Located only a few blocks from the center of town on the bank of the Moei River is a 19th Century temple which was designed by a German architect. Almost a joke because of its massive pillars which remind one of the old European cathedrals, it is nevertheless a very handsome building.

A 5-hour bus ride North and West of Ubol will bring you to Changwat Mahasarakham. In Amphur Kantharawicha, Phutha Mongkhon Temple is located, which has a famous legend connected with it. In addition to two large statues, one in front of the temple and the other nearby in the woods, there is a legendary third one somewhere made of solid gold, which, if seen by anyone, will cause death within one day. Just to the north is Changwat Kalasin. In Takol Mongpon, Amphur Khamlasai, there is an old monastery with carving, possibly dating from the Aythya period. To the Northeast, along the Lao border is Changwat Nakhon Phanom which (along with Sakol Nakhon and Kalasin) has some very interesting ethnic groups. The most famous are the Phuthai. Renu Village in Nakhon Phanom can be easily reached and is famous for its weaving. In Amphur Tat Phanom the most important temple in Northeast Thailand is located. Phra Tat Phanom Temple is the center of Buddhist learning and has a beautiful, tall stupa. Every year (around February) there is an enormous temple fair, which people from all over the Northeast and Laos attend.

To the north Changwat Loey is located. In Amphur Chiangkhan there are some old temples. And here one will find some of the most beautiful mountains in Thailand (legends have it that snow has on occasion fallen in these mountains). Unfortunately, the road to Loey is marginal in good weather and it takes a hardy soul to brave the bus ride, which starts at Khonkaen. Nongkhai is the other province along the northern border. It has some old temples and ruins, but is best known as the crossing point to Vientiane, Laos.

Two more things are well worth mentioning as places to see. First, is Ubolratana Dam, north of Khonkaen, and then west from the Friendship Highway. It is an impressive structure, providing irrigation and fish for a large number of Northeasterners. The second is the Sarin Elephant Round-Up which comes every November. A one or two-day affair, one can ride on elephant for a very reasonable price and enjoy the festival atmosphere.

No doubt many places have been overlooked, but the above-mentioned places do offer a change of place from your work site, and contrary to what most people will tell you, you will not have to flee the Northeast in order to "thiaw".

## THE GIRL WHO WEAVES SILK AT NIGHT

Nang Yai village is on the edge of the town of Mahasarakham. A canal flows through the village, and in one place there is a pool in the canal. The pool is also named Nang Yai. The people in the village tell this story of how their village and the pool got their names.

Many years ago before there was a village, two families lived on the edge of the canal. Both families were very small. In the first family there were only a mother and her son named Jum. In the second family there were only a father and his daughter named Yai. The two families were rice farmers. They worked together because they were good neighbors. When they were old enough, Jum and Yai were married.

Jum and Yai were very happy together, and they built a new house on the canal between the houses of their parents. One day Jum had to go to Khonkaen on some business. Before he left, he told Yai, "I will be gone for several days. If you need help, my mother will be glad to help you."

Yai replied, "Thank you, Jum, but I do not think that I will need any help."

But Jum was not sure, so he told his mother, "While I am gone, will you make sure Yai is all right. She is young, and she should not be alone." Then Jum said the same thing to Yai's father.

That night Jum's mother heard a noise coming from Jum's house. She looked out of her window and saw a light coming from Yai's room. The noise was coming from Li's house too. Jum's mother wondered what Yai was doing, and the next morning she asked Yai, "What did you do last night, Yai?"

Yai replied, "I did not do anything." Jum's mother did not believe her, but she could not say anything.

The next night and on every night that followed, Jum's mother saw the light and heard the noise coming from Yai's room. Every morning she asked the same question, "What did you do last night, Yai?" And every morning Yai gave the same reply, "I did not do anything."

Jum's mother did not know why Yai was lying to her. So the last night before Jum returned, she went over to Jum's house and looked through a hole in the wall into Yai's room. She saw Yai sitting in the middle of the room. There was a loom in the room, and Yai was weaving silk. She used her hand to pull the new silk thread from her mouth! Jum's mother was very surprised when she saw Yai pulling the thread from her mouth. She could not believe it, so she looked again. The silk was not ordinary, it was silver and gold! When Jum's mother saw that, she shouted, "Oh! Yai what are you doing?"

Suddenly, Yai's room was completely dark, and the noise had stopped. Jum's mother could not make Yai come out of her room, and so she returned to her home. She decided Yai must be a witch.

When Jum returned, his mother told him what she had seen: "One night there was a light in Yai's room, but when I asked her why, she would not tell me. Last night I went to your house and I saw Yai weaving. She was weaving silk, but

the thread did not come off a spool, it came out of her mouth and it was silver and gold...Jun, you must be very careful, Yai is a witch."

Jun did not know whether to believe his mother or not, so he quickly returned home. He looked under his house for the loom. It was not there, but that was where the loom had always been. He went into his house and looked into Yai's room. Yai was not there, but part of her loom was. Jun began to wonder, "Can it be that Yai is really a witch? How will I find out?"

When Yai returned home, Jun asked her, "Yai, what did you do each night?"

Yai would not answer Jun, she looked angrily at him. Jun thought, "Now I believe my mother, Yai is a witch." So he said, "Yai, you cannot live in this house any more. You will not answer my questions and you have lied to my mother. Leave, I never want to see you again."

Yai was very sad, but she did not cry. She walked out of the house slowly, and all day long she walked around the town. She would not talk to anyone, not even her father. That evening she went to the pool in the canal. She jumped into it and drowned.

When her father heard this he told Jun, "You have killed my daughter. You would not trust her, you believed your mother more than your wife. Yai was faithful to you, but you were not faithful to her. And now she is dead." Then Yai's father left; no one ever saw him again.

Jun returned to his house, he was very sad. He looked for Yai's loom, but it was entirely gone. He could not find it anywhere. He thought, "If Yai was weaving, there will be some cloth somewhere," but he could not find any. Jun was very lonely and worried. He did not know if Yai was a witch or not. He could not work anymore, he walked around the little village all of the time. Even at night he did not stop walking.

One moonlit night Jun walked by the pool where Yai had drowned. He looked into the water, and it looked as if Yai were weaving in the pool. Jun ran to get his neighbors, and when they looked into the pool, they saw the same thing.

Nobody knew what to believe. Every moonlit night, however, they could see Yai weaving in the pool; but at day, there was nothing in the pool but water and a few fish. Jun changed after that. Now he was happy and he did not worry any more. He became a wealthy farmer, and many years later he told his children the sad story of his first wife.

So the pool was named after Yai, it is called Yai's pool (or in Thai: Gud Nang Yai), and the village was named Yai too (or in Thai: Ban Nang Yai). Today if you go to the pool on a moonlit night, you can see Yai weaving too. Well, what do you think Yai really was? Jun knew, but he never told anyone, not even his children.

## FOUR FOOTPRINTS OF FOUR BUDDHAS

In Sakol Nakorn there is a famous temple. It looks like the Temple of Respect in Tat Phanom, except that it is smaller. This temple is named the Temple of the Four Footprints (or in Thai: Pratat Cheang Chum). Here is the story telling why it was built and how it got its name.

One king of Intarapart Nakorn had helped build the Temple of Respect. People today believe that the city of Intarapart was in the province of Sakol Nakorn. But they do not know where it was.

Another king of Intarapart Nakorn, named Sura Utaga, had two sons, named Suvana Pingka and Kum Daeng. One day Sura Utaga told his sons, "You are now old enough to leave my home. I would like both of you to build new cities."

Kum Daeng built his city where the town of Kumpawapee is today. And Suvana Pingka built his city near the shores of Harn Lake. He built his city on the Mountain Under Which Water Flows (or in Thai: Phu Nam Lod).

### A.

The people of Suvana Pingka's town tell this story:

Once the Buddha came to the shores of Harn Lake. He had been told that the lake was very beautiful and peaceful. The Buddha also wanted to teach the people in this town. So he decided to stop there. The Buddha came to Harn Lake and he saw the town. Then he stopped to teach Suvana Pingka.

One day the people found some footprints on the mountain. They were very surprised to find the footprints, because they were in stone, not sand. So they went to Suvana Pingka and told him what they had seen.

Suvana Pingka went to see the footprints; he was amazed and he thought, "This is very strange, I must ask my teacher about this." So Suvana Pingka went to the Buddha and said, "Today some people have found four footprints. They are in a stone. They do not know how they got there, nor do I. But I wondered if they might not be yours."

The Buddha looked at Suvana Pingka and replied, "Only one of the footprints is mine. The others belong to the three enlightened men (in English we say Buddha-- in Thai it is phu ta) who came before me. One footprint belongs to Kukusundho (the first enlightened man); another belongs to Konokamano (the second enlightened man); and another belongs to Kasapa (the third enlightened man). The fourth is mine because I am the fourth enlightened man in this world. They are to remind your people of the past history of the world, and also of the future of the world. For, before the fifth enlightened man, Sriaryamethai, can come, this world must be destroyed."

Suvana Pingka was impressed when he knew this. He wanted to tell everyone his knowledge. After the Buddha had left, he built a temple over the footprints. That is why it is called the Temple of the Four Footprints.

B.

Some people say that a serpent lives under the temple in the mountain. They say it lives in the water, and that sometimes it swims from its home in the mountain into Harn Lake. If you are lucky, you can see the serpent in the lake.

There is also a deep well near the temple. People say that if you drop a bucket into the well, you will not be able to get it out again. But, maybe, you will find it several days later floating in Harn Lake. This shows that the water from the mountain flows into the lake, and that the serpent, who protects the temple, could leave his home and go to the lake without coming up on the land.

## TWO ADVENTURES OF YAI

In the Province of Loey, the people tell stories about a great hunter named Yai. They say that Yai was born in the town of Makorn Churpasak in Laos, but that Yai moved to Thailand and lived in Loey most of his life. Yai was a great hero and he did many famous deeds. Once he saved a village from spirits, and once he discovered a beautiful and strange mountain.

### YAI AND THE SPIRITS

When Yai moved to Loey he wanted to find a place to be his home. Finally, he came to a small village which is now called Na Pee Ton. Yai gave the village that name, this is why he chose that name.

One day some of the people in his village came running to Yai. "Help us, help us!" they cried, "our rice crops have been destroyed."

Yai asked them what was wrong, and they said, "Yesterday when we worked in the fields, our rice was all growing. Today, when we returned to work again, we saw that the best rice had been destroyed. It looked like someone pulled the rice out of the ground. What can we do?"

Yai was very surprised when he heard this story. He did not know what to say. He thought for several minutes, and then he said, "I do not know what to do, but if someone is destroying the rice, we must find out who that person is. Someone will have to stay in the rice fields all of the time. When he sees the person who comes to destroy the rice, he can return to the village. Then all of us can go out and help catch the bad man."

Every night several men went out into the fields to watch. But they could not see anything because there was no moon. And every night more of their rice was destroyed. They were very upset, but Yai said, "You must be patient. Soon there will be a full moon, and then we can see who is doing this to your rice."

On the night of the full moon every man in the village went to the rice fields. Then they saw something very strange. The rice was being pulled out of the ground, but no one was pulling it. "What is happening?" the people asked.

Yai said, "It must be evil spirits; wait for a minute, and then we will all shout together. Maybe that will frighten the spirits away."

When Yai told them, they all shouted. Suddenly, the rice stopped being pulled out of the ground. It was very strange, but the spirits had gone away. They did not return. When he was sure the spirits would not return, Yai said, "Let's call our town, Where the Spirits Pulled Up the Rice," and that is the name of the town until today.

### YAI DISCOVERS A MOUNTAIN

Yai was a hunter, not a farmer. He would spend many days in the forest hunting for food. One day he shot a deer. He was sure that the deer would die, and he followed the wounded animal. But the deer did not die, it kept going on and on. Finally, it stopped on some flat ground. Yai was very tired. He had been following the deer for many hours. He looked around him, now he was on the top of a mountain!

As he looked at the deer on the top of the mountain, Yai saw an amazing thing. There were many more deer near the one he had wounded. And the deer he had shot, now was not wounded at all. The deer were not afraid of Yai, they came around him. Yai thought, "This is very strange, these deer must be holy, I will not shoot them."

It was late in the afternoon, and Yai was tired. He thought, "I must get to the bottom of the mountain before night comes." He walked around and around, but he could not find the path down the mountain. He noticed that the top was flat and wide; "This is a very unusual mountain," he thought.

Yai was very worried now. "I cannot stay here all night. What will I do?" He tried to find the deer, but they were all gone. Just as he was about to give up looking for them, he saw one going down the side of the mountain. "That must be their path," he thought, and he followed the deer. The path took him down the side of the mountain.

When he got to the bottom of the mountain, he looked for the deer again, but they were gone and he never saw them again. He looked back at the mountain, "That mountain looks just like a bell," he said; and from that day the mountain has been named Bell Mountain.

#### ANOTHER STORY ABOUT BELL MOUNTAIN

Some people in Loey do not believe the story about Yai; they tell a different story about Bell Mountain. This is their story.

When the first people came to Loey, they noticed the big mountain. It looked like a bell. And on the Buddhist holy days it sounded like a giant bell was being rung on the top of the mountain. The people named the mountain, the Bell, because it looked and sounded like a bell.

Since then the bell has been lost. No one ever saw it, they only heard it; but now the bell cannot be heard either. Some people say the bell grew with the mountain and that it was holy. They believe that someone climbed up the mountain to find the bell, and that the god destroyed the bell so that that person could not find it. So today, if you go to Loey you can see Bell Mountain, but you cannot hear its bell ring.

## TOUR TO

Sometimes the same story is told in different ways. Here are two stories about how a valley and a waterfall in Nong Bualampoo district of Udon province got their names. The stories are both about the same man, but they are very different. One story is told by women, and the other story is told by men.

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Once upon a time in the Province of Udon, there was a small village. The people there were rice farmers. When they did not have to work, they liked to walk to the mountains to see the beautiful scenery.

One day one of the old men in the village, Tour To, and some of the young women took a walk to the mountains. It was a beautiful day, and they were going on a picnic. Finally they came to a deep valley with a waterfall at one end of it. The women said to Tour To, "If you can climb down to the bottom of the valley and bring us a small rock from the stream, we will marry you."

Tour To was very happy. Even though he was old, he knew that the young women were beautiful. His wife was dead, and he thought, "Now I will have many beautiful wives." So he agreed.

The women thought, "Now we will get rid of this foolish old man. He will surely die trying to climb down the steep cliffs of the valley." They watched Tour To go to the edge of the cliff. They saw him start to go down, and they heard him slip on the rocks and scream. They said, "Tour To has fallen, he is dying. We must go tell everyone." So they ran back to the village.

But Tour To was not dead. It is true that he had fallen, and that he had screamed; but before he had fallen to the bottom of the valley, he landed in the branches of a big bamboo tree. His life was saved. He was frightened, but unhurt. He said, "I am still alive, I still have a chance to marry the women."

So he climbed out of the bamboo tree, and he went to get a little rock from the stream. Then he thought, "Even if I have the rock, they will not agree to marry me, they will say I did not go down to the bottom of the valley. They will say I picked it from the side of the cliff." So he cut a big branch of the bamboo tree which he had fallen into, and he started to climb up the walls of the valley.

It was very hard to climb the wall of the valley because he was carrying a rock and a branch of the bamboo tree. At last, after several hours, he did it. When he got to the top, he saw many people there. They were all crying "Old Tour To is dead, he has fallen into the deep valley."

"I am not either dead!" he said. "I am alive, and I am going to marry the young women."

"But," they said, "you did not really go to the bottom of the valley."

"Yes I did, and I can prove it," he replied. Then he showed them the rock and the branch. "If you do not believe me, you can go down into the valley and see the tree which I cut the branch from." Then everyone believed him, and they made the young women marry Tour To. He was very happy the rest of his life. And from that day, the valley and its waterfall have been named for the lucky Tour To.

Many years ago there was a small village on the edge of the forest. All of its people were hunters. They would go into the forest and the nearby mountains to find their food. Sometimes they would travel very far, and they would stay away from their village for several days. Sometimes, if they went far enough, they would come to a deep valley which had a beautiful waterfall. When they were thirsty they would drink from the clear, cold water, and they would rest near the waterfall. It was quiet and peaceful there, and the hunters liked to go to the valley.

One day, one of the hunters named Tour To was in the forest alone. He saw a beautiful deer. He followed the deer for several hours. The deer ran toward the mountains, and then down into the valley. Finally, Tour To was close enough to the deer to shoot it. When he shot it, he thought, "Now the deer will die and I can take it back to my village. Everyone will be proud of me." But the deer did not die.

It ran to the waterfall and died there. Tour To looked for his deer. He thought, "It must have died by this time, when I find it, I will take it back to my village." At last he found it dead by the waterfall. He started to carry it out of the valley. After he had taken three or four steps, he fell down for it was a very big and heavy deer.

"I cannot carry this deer," he thought, "it is too heavy. I will have to have some help." Tour To wondered how he could find someone to help him. He did not think that anyone would be in the valley. Very few people ever went there. So Tour To sat down on a big rock to think what he should do. He heard something, it sounded like someone singing. Tour To was very surprised. "The song is very beautiful," he thought, and he ran to the place where the singing was coming from.

There was a pool in the stream. In the pool a beautiful girl was swimming and as she swam she sang her song. When Tour To saw her, he fell in love. And he said, "Beautiful maiden, I have just met you, but I love you and I want to marry you. If you will help me carry a deer I have shot, I will take you to my village and marry you."

The young woman looked at Tour To. She saw he was very handsome and strong. She said, "If you want to marry me, and if you want me to help you, you must first jump into this pool and swim with me."

Tour To forgot he could not swim. All he thought of was this beautiful woman. So he jumped into the water. The water was very cold and very deep, and he drowned immediately. As soon as Tour To had died, the beautiful girl turned into the deer Tour To had just shot and it ran into the forest again.

When the people in his village heard about Tour To's death, they were very sad. So they named the valley and the waterfall after the unlucky Tour To.

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Now that you have read both stories, can you guess which story men like to tell, and which story women like to tell? Which story do you believe?

## THE TEMPLE OF RESPECT

The Temple of Tat Phanom is the Most Important Temple in the Northeast, and it is one of the most important temples in Thailand. Much of the story of this temple is only legend, so no one knows how old it really is.

### A.

Hundreds of years ago, before there were any great countries, each city was its own nation. Sometimes, one city would have a powerful king, and it would rule over three or four other cities. Sometimes none of the cities would be able to rule over any other. Often groups of cities would work together. They would help protect each other from enemies, and they would sell things to each other. It was in this way that the Temple of Tat Phanom was first begun.

Once upon a time there were four kings. Their cities were near the Mekhong River. Sometimes one king would be more powerful than the others, sometimes no one was more powerful than any other. The four kings came together for a meeting.

The King of Chenlaue Prommatat said, "My city needs rice, but we have many other products which we can trade for rice."

The King of Kam Dang replied, "I have rice, but can I trust you? Many years ago your people tried to destroy my city. My people would be angry if I agreed to sell rice to you."

The King of Nanta Sen agreed with the king of Kam Dang, "We must find a way of showing all of our people that we are friends, and that we want them to be friendly too, what can we do?"

"I have an idea," the King of Intarapart Nakorn said. "Let us build a temple. Each person will build one fourth of it. This will show our people that we can work together. If we can work together, then our people know that they can be friendly with each other."

So they agreed to make a temple showing their friendship. They looked for many months for a good place to build their new temple. And after a while they had a meeting again. The King of Intarapart Nakorn said, "I have found the exact place. It is on top of a small mountain. Let us all go and look at this place."

The four kings went with the King of Intarapart Nakorn to the Mountain which Has No Parents, for that was the mountain's name (or in Thai: Phu Kam Pra), it was covered with forests. The four kings looked at the mountain and they saw that it was suitable for their temple; so they said, "It is agreed. We will build our temple here."

The King of Nanta Sen built the northern wall of the temple because his city was to the north. The King of Chenlaue Prommatat built the eastern wall because his city was to the east. The King of Intarapart Nakorn built the southern wall for the same reason, and the King of Kam Dang, who built the western wall, did so for the same reason.

Their temple looked like a cave. When it was finished each king brought many jewels and a lot of gold and money to put into their new temple. Everyone said, "Now we know we can work together, for we have built the temple together. Our gifts will show that we can trust each other also." When all the gifts were brought, the temple door was closed and sealed. The kings were very happy and proud of their work.

B.

Buddhist scriptures tell us that when the Buddha died, the priests took pieces of his bones and carried them throughout Asia. Each piece of bone, called a relic, was put in a temple. The relic was to remind people in that area of their faith in the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddhist scriptures tell us that one of these priests (Pra Maha Katsapa) took the breast bone of the Buddha with him to Northeastern Thailand. He wanted to build a temple in this part of the world which would be a great center of Buddhism. As this priest wandered through the Northeast, he came to the Mountain Which Has No Parents. He saw the newly built temple to the friendship of the four cities, and he thought, "This is the place where I will build my temple. These kings are Buddhist, and if they will cooperate to build their own temple, I know that they will also cooperate to build my temple."

So the priest went to each of the four kings. He showed them his relic and he said, "I have seen your temple on the Mountain Which Has No Parents. I want you to help build my temple there too." Each of the kings was very happy when he learned of the priest's plan, and they all agreed immediately.

They decided to build the temple to hold the relic on top of their temple of friendship. They built a tower on top of their cave-like temple, and in the middle of their tower they placed the relic of the Buddha.

C.

Very soon the temple became famous throughout all their cities, and many people came to worship there. But the temple did not have a name, and most people thought it was not good to call it the Temple on the Mountain Which Has No Parents. That sounded strange.

After a while the people found a name for the temple. Because it was very holy, many people came to pay their respects there. When they came, they prayed in the Buddhist manner, and first they bowed their heads and folded their hands (or in Thai: phanom). Gradually, the temple received the name, the Temple of Respect, (or in Thai: Pratat Phanom), because many people prayed there. And it was that name until today. The town in which the temple is is also called by the same name, and the province is called the City of Respect (or in Thai: Nakorn Phanom).

But all of this is only legend, for there is no history from the early times. Many years later people began to write down the history of the temple, and so for the building of the temple we have to believe the stories about it.

## THE BROTHER RETURNS

In the Province of Korat there is a famous town named Pimai. The temple in Pimai is one of the most beautiful in Thailand. It was built by the Cambodians before they built Angkor Wat. The craftsmen who built Prasat Hin Pimai, later built Angkor Wat. But this is not the story of how the temple was built, it is the story of how Pimai got its name.

### A.

One of the Kings of Cambodia was Suryavarman II. His kingdom was very big, and it included much of northeastern Thailand. King Suryavarman had a son named Tao Prajet. He was a handsome young man, and he wanted to find a wife.

One day Tao Prajet said to his father, "I am old enough to be married. I want to travel throughout the kingdom to find my wife." His father agreed with him, and Tao Prajet left the palace in the capital of Angkor Thom. He travelled for many months.

Tao Prajet was very tired of travelling, but he had not yet found his wife. Finally he came to the part of his father's kingdom which is now in Thailand. At a small village, called Sumrit, he saw an old woman. Tao Prajet saw that the woman was going to have a baby. He thought, "She is old, she will need help. Perhaps I can become her servant."

Tao Prajet asked, "What is your name?"

"I am called Grandmother Bua," the old woman replied.

Tao Prajet did not want to tell anyone who he was, and so he said, "I am a poor traveller, I do not have any money, but I am strong. If you need someone to cut wood or to take care of the rice plants for you, I can do it."

"Well, I could use a servant," Bua answered. So Tao Prajet agreed to be her servant. He did not tell anyone who he was. Everyone thought he was a very poor man.

### B.

When Bua's baby was born, it was a girl. She was named Orapin. Tao Prajet helped Bua look after the baby. He stayed for many years as Bua's servant. He was like a brother to Orapin. And because no one knew his name, they called him Pi, or brother.

When Orapin became a young lady, she was very beautiful. All of the young men wanted to marry her. Tao Prajet also fell in love with Orapin. He wanted to marry her, but he had to have his father's approval first. So Tao Prajet left Bua's house one day. He did not tell anyone where he was going or why he was going.

King Suryavarman was very glad to see his son again after many years. He thought that his son was dead. Tao Prajet told his father how he had travelled to many places in the kingdom without finding a wife. He told his father how he had been a servant to Grandmother Bua for many years. He told his father of Bua's daughter, Orapin. And then he said, "Orapin is very beautiful. I want to marry her."

The King did not know what to do. He had never seen Orapin. She was not the daughter of a prince or a princess. But Tao Prajet said he loved only Orapin. Finally, the king agreed, and he said, "If you want to marry Orapin, we must take some presents to her. We will all go to visit her in the town of Sumrit. So the king, the queen, Tao Prajet, and many relatives set out for Bua's house.

C.

When Tao Prajet left Bua's house, Orapin and Bua were very sad. They both loved him very much. Bua said, "Pi would have been a good husband for you, Orapin, but he is gone. We will have to find another man to be your husband."

One day a man named Prommatud came to Bua's house. He was a rich and powerful man. He said to Bua, "You are very poor, and I am very rich. I love Orapin, and I would like to marry her."

Orapin did not love Prommatud, but she agreed to marry him because he was rich and powerful. She was not happy, because she loved only Tao Prajet. Sometimes she was so sad she would cry all night.

D.

Tao Prajet and his family travelled for several days. At last they came to Ban Kong Road. They stopped and asked some people, "How far is it to Bua's house?"

"It is not very far," they answered, and then they said, "why are you carrying all of those packages?"

"I want to marry Orapin," Tao Prajet answered.

"Don't you know that Orapin is already married to Prommatud. He is a rich man," the people said.

Tao Prajet was very sad, and his parents were very angry. There was a small river near the road, and they threw all their gifts into the river. Then Tao Prajet said to his parents, "Please return to your palace. I want to go to the village of Sumrit alone."

E.

When he came to the village, he asked where Prommatud's house was. The people told him. They wondered who this handsome man was. That night he went to the house. It was very dark, and he entered the house quietly. No one knew that he was there. He came to the bedroom where Prommatud and Orapin were sleeping. Very carefully, he opened the door, and went to their bed. Then he took out his knife and stabbed Prommatud.

Before Prommatud died, he shouted, "I am dying, help me!"

This shout awakened Orapin. She looked up and saw Tao Prajet. She said excitedly, "My brother has come back to me (or in Thai, Pi ma lew.). How happy I am to see you here! I have never loved this man, I had to marry him because he was rich and powerful."

Tao Prajet believed Orapin. He said, "You do not know my real name. I am Tao Prajet, King Suryavarman's son. For many years I was your servant. When you became a young woman, I fell in love with you. So I returned to my father's palace to ask him if I could marry you. But it is a great distance from here to my father's palace, and so my journey took several months. When I returned, you were already married. I was very sad, and very angry. I wanted to kill you. When I asked some people where you lived, they said you were very unhappy with your husband. Then I believed that you loved me, and I love you."

Tao Prajet and Orapin went to Grandmother Bua's house. She was very surprised to learn who Tao Prajet was. When she heard that Tao Panchit wanted to marry Orapin, she asked Orapin, "Do you want to marry Tao Prajet? You can only marry him if you love him."

"He is the only man I have ever loved, Mother. I want to marry him very much," Orapin replied.

And so Tao Prajet married Orapin. They went to the city of Angkor Thom, the capital of King Suryavarman, and they lived happily ever after.

This story is remembered in two names. The river where Tao Prajet and his parents threw their gifts is called, Lamprainad, which means, the place where Tao Prajet was disappointed. And the town of Sumrit was named Pimalew. Today it has been shortened to Pimi, but it still means what Orapin said that night, "My brother has come back to me."

## FOUR FOOLISH MEN

When Cambodia ruled this part of Thailand, the town of Song Korn was very important. It was very powerful, and the Prince of Song Korn ruled many other towns too. One famous prince was named Worata. Worata tried to be a good Buddhist. He did not believe in fighting. He did not like armies. Armies killed people, and Worata knew that it was wrong to kill. He told his people, "The Buddha teaches us not to do evil. He teaches us not to follow the ways of most people in the world, but to make merit." Prince Worata decided that he did not need to have an army, and he told all of his assistants that in his part of the country, there would be no armies.

Worata had a very beautiful daughter named Pen. When she was still a little girl, Worata taught her to be kind and generous. When she grew up everyone agreed that Pen was not only a beautiful woman, but a very good woman too. Many young men wanted to marry her, but four men especially wanted to marry Pen. They were Worata's assistants: Bang, Wiengchook, Karn, and Bualampoo.

When the four assistants discovered that they all wanted to marry Pen, they became very angry, and they argued for many hours. Finally Bang said, "There is only one way to solve our problem. We must all go to our towns. When we get there, each will raise an army from his town. Then we will march our armies to Song Korn. The man whose army defeats all the others will take Pen."

Wiengchook said, "But what if Worata does not agree? What if he does not like the man who wins?"

Bualampoo replied, "It does not matter. Worata does not have an army. If he disagrees, then you can use your army to take Pen."

And so the four men went to their towns to raise armies. When they had left, a man came to Worata and told him, "Oh, Prince, do you know what your assistants are doing? They are building armies, and they will return to Song Korn to fight. The winner will take Pen and marry her."

When Worata heard this he was sad and frightened. He did not have an army. He told Pen what was happening. She said, "Father, we must do something to show our faith. Then the Buddha will help us. Go to the temple and build a tower. It must be ten meters high and on one side there must be a door. There must be no windows and only one door to the tower. But you must build it quickly because it must be finished before the armies come."

Although he did not understand everything Pen had said, Worata thought this was a good idea. And he built the tower. When it was nearly finished, Worata heard that the armies of his assistants were coming. Then he went to Pen and said, "The tower is nearly finished, and the armies are coming. Now what should I do?"

Pen replied, "Put me into the tower. I will stay there until I die."

When Worata heard this, he refused. "You are my only child," he said, "I cannot let you die."

"Father, I must die. When I was born I did not want to be a beautiful girl. I only wanted to be a good girl. But I was beautiful too, and my beauty has brought you many troubles. If I die, then perhaps your assistants will see how foolish they are, and they will not fight. Is it better for me to die, or to let them fight and kill many people?"

Worata was very sad, but he agreed because he knew it was the best thing to do. Before Pen went into the tower she put on a dress of red silk, and she said, "If you think of me, name this town, Nang Pen."

Soon the four men and their armies arrived at Song Korn. They were all eager to fight, but one, Karn, said, "Let's find Worata and Pen first, and tell them what our plans are." So they all went to find Worata and his daughter.

When they came to Worata's palace, they saw that he was very sad. "Why are you sad?" they asked.

"I am sad because you want to fight, and now before you have begun to fight, one person is dead already. Come with me," Worata replied. He took them to the tower, and then he spoke again, "If you open the door, you will be sad too, Pen is in there. She is dead. She died because she thought that if you fought for her that would be very evil. She died so that you would not fight, and so that you would not do evil."

But the men did not believe Worata. They thought, "If Pen is in the tower, she is still alive. She is only hiding." They made Worata open the door of the tower.

When the door was opened, they saw the beautiful Pen in her red dress lying dead on the floor. They were all very sad. Bang said, "Pen was right, we have been very foolish. Worata we are ashamed for what we have done to you. Can you forgive us?"

The four men became good friends again. They quickly left Worata. They took their armies back to their towns, and then they told all of their soldiers to return to their homes. They had learned their lesson.

Worata was very unhappy for many months. He loved Pen very much, but he knew she was right. She had saved Song Korn from four foolish men. If she had not died, there would have been a war, and everything would have been destroyed. So Worata decided to name Song Korn, Muang Pen.

Today the town of Pen is not as important as it was many years ago. It is a district of Udon province. But if you go to Amphur Pen you can still see the tower built for Pen. It is in the temple, and it is surrounded with water filled with lotuses. Every year in July, people from all over Udon have a festival there in honor of the brave and unselfish Pen.

## THE WIDOW'S LUCK

Everyone likes to have good luck. But sometimes people feel that only people who are already lucky ever have good luck. Some people are lucky, and some people are unlucky. Unlucky people never have good luck. But here is a story that tells you just the opposite. Here is a story about a person who was very unlucky, but who had some very good luck one time.

### A.

Once upon a time there was a powerful Cambodian prince who lived in a big city in Northeastern Thailand. His city was very beautiful, and thousands of people lived in it. There were fine buildings everywhere, beautiful temples and many stores. Even the houses were all very new and very large, except for one house.

In all of the city there was only one, small, old, ugly house. It belonged to a widow. The widow could not work because she was old and crippled. People used to give her food and money, but then one day the Prince said, "Old lady, we want you to move your house to another place. We want to build a new temple here."

The old lady replied, "I cannot move my house because I have no money to move it, nor do I have any more land." So she refused to move her house. No one thought to give her money to move her house, or some more land to move it to.

They became very angry with her, and they would not give her any more food or help. They thought, "She will soon die. Then we can tear down her ugly old house and build our fine temple on this land."

### B.

The Prince had a very beautiful daughter. And everyone wondered who she would marry. Men from many provinces came to ask her father if they could marry her. The Prince said, "Only a very handsome young man can ever marry my daughter. I will choose him carefully. I am going to have a party to choose the Princess' husband. Everyone is invited."

Beneath the city in the ground was the kingdom of the serpents. The serpents knew about the beautiful city of people above them. They wondered what these people were like. So they often sent serpents up to the city. The serpents became people and walked around in the streets. Then they returned into the ground and told the other serpents what they had seen.

One day a serpent came back and said to the king of the serpents, "The daughter of the Prince is very beautiful. The Prince wants her to have a husband. The most handsome man will be chosen to be her husband at a party to be given next week."

When the son of the king of the serpents heard this, he thought, "I will change myself into the most handsome young man in the world, and then I will marry the princess."

C.

On the night of the Prince's party, everyone prepared to come to the palace. Even those who were married came, they wanted to see who the Prince would choose. Only one person did not come, she was the crippled old widow. She could not come because she could not come because she could not walk and no one would help her.

Even the young serpent was coming. When he got near the city he saw many young men going to the palace. He thought, "I must do something, or I will be the last one there, and the Prince will have chosen someone else." Then he changed himself into a handsome white squirrel. He knew that a squirrel could run faster than men could walk. He thought that if he changed himself into a squirrel, he would get to the palace first.

The princess looked out of her window. She saw a big white squirrel running along the wall of the palace. She said to her maid, "I want that squirrel. Tell a guard to shoot it with an arrow. Then bring it to me."

So the guard shot the squirrel, but before it died the serpent whispered a curse:

Whoever eats my meat tonight  
Will die before the dawn's in sight;  
And all the houses in his town  
Will by that time have fallen down.

The guard brought the dead squirrel to the princess. She said, "Yes, it is very beautiful. Take it to the cook and tell him to roast it. We will eat it at the supper tonight."

D.

By this time many of the young men had come. Everyone was very excited. At last the Prince and his daughter entered the dining room. Before the meal began, the princess said, "Tonight, one of the guards shot a white squirrel. We have cooked its meat. Because the squirrel is very small, you must only eat a little bit. Then everyone will have a piece."

They began to eat the squirrel, but as a person took a piece of the meat, there was still more meat on the plate to be eaten. The squirrel was the most delicious thing they had ever tasted. No one ate anything but the squirrel that night, for the meat never ran out.

Meanwhile, outside it began to rain. It rained very hard for many hours while inside they were eating the squirrel's strange meat. Soon the water was pouring into the palace, and everyone drowned. It happened so quickly that no one could save himself. The water destroyed everything: palace, houses, stores, and even the temples. By dawn the entire city was under a lake of water...except for one house. Because she had not eaten the squirrel's meat, the widow did not die. Her home was not ruined. The land around her home became an island in the middle of a huge lake.

E.

Many people still believe this story. And they can show you the lake to prove their story. Only, there is a problem: the story is told about two lakes in the Northeast. The people of Sakol Nakorn tell it about Harn Lake, and the people in Roi-Et tell it about Palanchai Lake. Each of these lakes has a small island in it. And each of these provinces was ruled by the Cambodians for many years. But the story could only happen in one place. Which place do you think it was?

## THE WOMAN WHO SAVED KORAT

If you go to Korat, you will see a statue of a woman in front of the old city wall. The statue is Tao Suranaree, and she is one of Thailand's greatest heroines. Here is the story of how she defeated the Laotian army and saved Korat.

About one hundred and fifty years ago the Thais were then enemies of the Laotians. The King of Laos, Anuwong, brought his army into northeastern Thailand. King Phanongklao of Thailand was not ready to fight, and so the Laotians conquered most of the Northeast.

In Korat the people were very worried. Their governor had gone to Bangkok to see the king. There were no leaders to defend their town. The people asked each other, "What will we do? How can we fight the Laotians? We have no army."

When King Anuwong came to Korat, the people did not fight against him. They hoped he would be kind to them. The Laotians did not hurt the people of Korat because they wanted them to be captives. They wanted to take them to Laos. Laos needed people to work in the fields and in the towns. So King Anuwong decided he would not kill people, he would take them back to Laos.

The captives were very sad, they did not want to leave Korat and they did not want to go to Laos. They walked very slowly and they said, "We must stop. We are very tired. We are not used to walking." So the Laotian army did not go very far the first day.

One of the captives, a woman named Mo, was very clever. She had an idea. She said to the general of the Laotian army, "It is evening now and everyone is hungry. We must soon stop for the night, let us stop here. Then we can cook food for you. But we do not have any knives and we must have some to prepare the food."

The Laotian general was very hungry, so he told his soldiers to give their knives to the women. Then the captives began to prepare food. Mo had another idea, and she said to the women, "First, we must give the Laotian soldiers some liqueur. It will make them drunk and sleepy. Then we will feed them."

After they had eaten, the Laotian soldiers fell asleep. Then Mo said to the women, "Take your knives and give some of them to the men. Now we can fight, and the Laotians cannot defeat us; they are drunk and asleep, and they do not have any weapons." So the women took their cooking knives, which the Laotians had given them, and they gave some of them to the men.

At midnight Mo led the captives to the Laotian army. She said, "It is dark and they cannot see us. Now let us fight with them." The Thais quickly defeated the Laotian army, and they returned to Korat. The Laotians had to return to Laos without any captives.

When Mo and her army came to Korat everyone was surprised and happy; the captives told everyone of Mo's plan, and of her bravery. Soon even King Phanongklao in Bangkok heard of Mo's bravery. He was very impressed, and he gave her a new name, the Brave Woman (or in Thai: Tao Suranaree).

When the famous Tao Suranaree died, the people of Korat wanted to remember her. They decided to build a statue of her, and they also named a school after their greatest heroine.

The Hunter and the Golden Swan (continued)

2.

Today, if you go to Chaiyaphum, you can see the statue of the swan. It is by the pond called the Pond of the Golden Swans. Near the statue is a clear, deep well. Tradition says the well is where the swan was buried; today it is holy.

## THE RED HAND OF THE BUDDHA

Before people had paper to write on, they wrote on stones or bricks. Sometimes, if they wanted their writing to last, they would write on the walls of caves. And the writings and pictures found in caves today are often very old. In the country of France there are some drawings of deer and other animals that are over four thousand years old.

### A.

In Thailand, too, hundreds of years ago, people wrote on the walls of caves. They wrote religious stories. In Kerat there is the Red Cattle Cave (or in Thai: Tam Ngua Dang). In this cave there are many pictures telling the story of the god, Esuan. In Buriram there is the Golden Duck Cave (or in Thai: Tam Phed Thong). The pictures and writings on the wall of this cave tell the story of the ancestors of the Cambodian kings.

One of the most famous caves in the Northeast is in Kalasin. This cave is called the Hand Writing Cave. On the ceiling of the cave there is a big red hand painted. This is a religious painting, it is supposed to be the hand of the Buddha.

### B.

The villagers who live near the cave tell this story of how the Hand came to be painted in the cave:

One time the Buddha passed through this part of the world. He came to this mountain late in the day, and he decided to rest there that night. He looked for a place to sleep, and he found the cave. So the Buddha slept in the cave all night long. The next day he was very thankful for this place he had found to rest in. He decided to leave something in the cave.

Nearby he found some red soil which he made into red paint. And before he left the area, he painted a hand on the ceiling of the cave. The hand looked like the Buddha's hand, only it was many times bigger.

### C.

Maybe you do not believe this story. Archeologists say the hand was painted about one thousand years ago. That means the Cambodians must have painted it there when they ruled this part of the country. But if you go to the Hand Writing Cave, and if you talk to a villager, he would disagree.

The villager would say, "How does the archeologist know? He has not lived here all his life? But everyone who has lived here knows that the Buddha painted the hand himself. Our parents told us. And our grandparents told our parents." This story has, therefore, become a legend, and even if it is not true, the people living near the Hand Writing Cave believe this story.

Today you can see the Hand Writing Cave if you go to Kalasin. It is a very holy place, and many people go to worship the Buddha there. And that is why the Hand was put there in the first place -- for worship. So it does not matter who made the painting, but it does matter that the hand was painted to remind people of their belief in the Buddha and his teachings.

## HOW THE MOON RIVER WAS MADE

The Moon River flows from Korat to Ubol and then into the Mekhong. It is the biggest river in the Northeast. Here is a story people all over Thailand tell about how this river was made.

Thousands of years ago, there were no men in this part of the world. In fact most of Thailand was a big sea. Two serpents lived in this sea. They were so big that each one lived in one half of the sea. In the northern part lived the serpent named Pinta-yonak-wati. In the southern part lived the serpent Thana-moon.

Because the serpents were so big, they were always hungry. They decided to work together to find food. When one of them found some food, he would give half to the other serpent.

One day a very big elephant fell into the southern part of the sea. It could not swim, and so it soon died. Thana-moon found the elephant, and he took it to Pinta-yonak-wati. "Here is an elephant I have just caught. It is very big so we will have lots of food to eat today. We will not be hungry."

The next day a porcupine was drinking water, and it fell into the sea and died. Pinta-yonak-wati found the porcupine. According to their agreement, he gave half of the animal to Thana-moon. But the porcupine is a small animal, and it has many quills. The quills cannot be eaten, so before he took the porcupine to Thana-moon, Pinta-yonak-wati took the quills off the porcupine.

When Thana-moon had eaten his part of the little porcupine, he was still very hungry. He saw the quills and thought, "Pinta-yonak-wati has not given me half. He is keeping some more for himself." Thana-moon became very angry and he began to fight with Pinta-yonak-wati.

Soon many fish and animals could not sleep, nor could they drink the water from the sea. The two serpents were fighting all of the time. The fish and the other animals asked the god, Indra, to help them. They said, "Indra, you must make the serpents stop fighting. If they do not stop, we will all die."

Indra came to the sea. He said to the serpents, "You must stop fighting. You must leave this sea. Pinta-yonak-wati, you must go to the northwest. Thana-moon, you must go to the southeast."

When Pinta-yonak-wati left the sea, his great body left a mark on the earth. That mark became the Ping River. When Thana-moon left the sea his body left another mark on the earth. His mark became the Moon River. Even today these rivers are named after the serpents. If you go to northern Thailand, you will see the Ping River. And if you go to northeastern Thailand, you will see the Moon River.

## THE TEMPLE OF THE TWO LOVES

Over three hundred years ago, Thailand and Laos were enemies. The Thai king, Juckaphat (or in Thai: Pramhajuckaphat), was unhappy. He knew that when the armies fought, many people suffered. He knew that the Thai people did not want war. He decided to make peace with the King of Laos.

One day Juckaphat wrote to Chaiyachetta, the king of Laos. He said, "My people and your people are tired of war. They have suffered for a long time. Now we should agree to be friendly and to help our own people. If you agree, let us build two chedis to show our agreement."

Chaiyachetta was also tired of fighting, and when he received King Juckaphat's letter, he was very happy. He answered, "I will be glad to be your friend."

Then King Juckaphat told his people, "We must build two chedis on the border of Thailand and Laos. The chedis will show that our countries are good friends. One chedi will be for Laos, and the other Chedi will stand for Thailand."

The people asked where they should build the chedis, and after much discussion they decided to build them in Dansai district of Loey. So today if you go to Dansai, you can see these two old chedis. They are in the Temple of the Two Loves (or in Thai: Wat Srisongrak). They are very old, but they tell everyone that Thailand and Laos are friends, and that they want to help each other.

## THE LOST PRINCE

Long, long ago, but after the Thai people had left southern China, there was a Thai prince in Srisaket. He was very strong and brave. The people in his town said, "Prince Bantud is the greatest hunter in the whole country. Every day he goes into the forest to hunt animals, and every day he kills many fierce and terrible beasts." Because he was such a good hunter, he soon knew every part in the forest. He could not get lost. If he wanted a tiger, he knew just where to find one in the forest. If he wanted a deer, Prince Bantud knew where all the deer lived.

Prince Bantud got tired of hunting in the forest he knew so well. He was proud of his skill as a hunter, and he said "When you know the forest, then you do not need any skill to catch animals." He was very sad, and he would not hunt.

The people were worried, they loved their prince. One day a man came to the town and said, "I know of a forest Prince Bantud has never seen. It has lots of animals."

Prince Bantud was very happy and decided to go to this new forest. He took his soldiers with him, and they went to the forest which was on a mountain. They had just come to the darkest part of the forest when Prince Bantud saw a deer. It was eating grass, and everyone agreed that it was the most beautiful deer they had ever seen. Prince Bantud thought, "I would like to have this deer for myself." He said to his soldiers, "I want to kill the deer. You will all take the path to the left. I will go to the right and chase the deer until it comes to you. Then we can kill it easily."

Prince Bantud was very excited. He ran after the deer. He thought, "When I return with this deer, everyone in the country will know of my fame." But the deer saw the prince and it ran farther and farther into the forest away from the soldiers of Prince Bantud. Soon the prince was lost and could not find his way out of the forest. He had forgotten that he did not know the paths in this forest. He sat down, he was lost, and he had not killed the deer.

Meanwhile, Prince Bantud's soldiers were waiting for him. One said, "Almost four hours have gone by, where is our Prince? Is he lost? Has some wild animal killed him?" No one knew the answers, so they decided to look for Prince Bantud. Soon night came and they had not seen him, even though they had been all through the forest.

So the soldiers returned to the palace. They said to the people, "The Prince is lost, we have tried to find him, but we do not know our way in the forest. Tomorrow everyone must come with us to help us find the Prince." Because everyone loved Prince Bantud, they agreed. For many days after that everyone looked for the lost prince, but he was never seen again.

The people were very sad, they loved their prince very much. They decided to name the forest, Bantud Forest, and the mountain, Mount Bantud. You can see the forest and the mountain in Srisaket province. Their names have not been changed since Prince Bantud disappeared many centuries ago. And until today, no one has ever seen Prince Bantud again. Don't you wonder what happened to him, and why he disappeared?

## YAMA AND THE POOR MAN

Once upon a time in the Province of Roi-Et, there was a man named Yama. He was the mayor of his town. Yama had a beautiful wife named Nuan-chan, but he was even more proud of his beautiful daughter, Chantra. Many young men wanted to marry her, but Yama would not let her marry them. He wanted her to marry a very good young man.

At this time the land near Yama's town was covered with grass. The people raised horses in the fields. Yama raised some horses too. One day he went to the city of Roi-Et, and saw the horse races in Roi-Et. Yama thought, "Horse races are very exciting. I think the people in my town would like to have a race track."

So Yama returned to his town and built the race track. Many people came to watch the races there. If Yama liked to watch horse races, he liked to win them even more. Yama had the best horse in the town. He called it Loi-lom. It was a very fast horse, and no other horse could defeat it in the races.

Soon everyone in the province has heard of Yama's horse, Loi-lom. And mayors from many other towns brought their horses to race against Loi-lom. But Loi-lom always won the races; and all of the people were discouraged. They liked to win too, but they always lost. Finally, no one would bring their horses to race against Loi-lom.

Now Yama was very sad. He would not speak to his friends. He was cruel to his wife and daughter. One day Nuan-chan asked him, "Yama, what is the matter? Why are you so angry?"

"No one will race against Loi-lom," he replied.

Nuan-chan did not know what to do. Several days later, Chantra came to her mother and said, "None of the young men will ever ask to marry me, they are all afraid of Father." Nuan-chan had an idea. She went to find Yama.

She said, "Yama, everyone is afraid of you. No one comes to visit us anymore. Chantra and I are lonely. I have an idea how you can race Loi-lom and be happy." So she told him her idea.

The next day Yama sent letters to all parts of the province. The letters said: "Yama will race his horse against any man's horse. If Yama's horse is defeated, he will give his daughter to the winner. The men who want to race against Loi-lom may be rich or poor, young or old, but they must be bachelors." Yama thought, "Only rich men will have enough money to own good horses, and only young men will want to race to win Chantra, so I will find a fine husband for Chandra."

The god, Indra, had been thinking for a long time. "Yama is a very foolish and proud man. I must teach him a lesson." So Indra changed himself into a man. He became a very poor man, and he found an old tired horse. Then he went to Yama's town and told everyone, "I have come to race against Loi-lom. I want to marry Chantra."

Yama thought this man must be crazy. He said, "Your horse is very old, it cannot run anymore, I will not race Loi-lom because your horse is not a good one."

But the people said, "Yama, you must race Loi-lom. You made a promise against any bachelor and his horse." So Yama agreed to race his horse the next Saturday.

Everybody knew that there was going to be a race. And hundreds of people came to the race track. They all expected to see Loi-lom win, even though they did not like Yama. No one thought that the poor man and his old horse could win.

When the race began, Loi-lom had run around half of the track before the old horse had even begun. But then something strange happened. Loi-lom stopped running! He ate some grass, and slowly walked toward the finish line. Meanwhile the old horse walked as fast as it could. Ten meters from the finish line, the old horse passed Loi-lom and won the race. Yama was furious!

Yama said to himself, "He is a poor man. He is not suitable to marry my daughter." So Yama broke his promise and said that the poor man could not have Chantra.

Indra was very angry. Suddenly, the poor man was changed into the god, Indra, again. Indra said,

"Open pit, deep and wide,  
Let proud Yama fall inside."

At that moment the ground beneath Yama opened into a great pit. Yama fell into the pit. It was so deep that no one could see to the bottom of it. All of the other people ran away because they were afraid. And Indra returned to the heavens.

When Nuan-chan and Chantra heard about this, they went to see the pit. It was so big and so deep that they could not see Yama anywhere. They sat on the edge of the pit and began to cry. Their tears fell down into the pit, and gradually it was filled with them. The pit had become a lake, the water was Nuan-chan's and Chantra's tears.

The people named the new lake, Yama Lake, and that is its name until today. They also named their town, Yama, after their foolish mayor. Yama Lake is still very important. The Government has improved it, and now the farmers in that area use its water for irrigation. It is a very beautiful lake, and many people go there for picnics and to play games. Maybe some day you will go to Yama Lake. When you are there, will you remember Yama's race against the poor man?

## WHEN THERE IS NO RAIN

Farmers need lots of rain to grow their rice. But sometimes the rain does not come. Then the farmers have a drought. If they cannot get rain, their crops will die. In the Northeast there are many different traditions for making the rain come. Here are four of them.

### A.

The Bong Fai Festival is held every year, in most parts of the Northeast. It is a Cambodian festival; and the people have celebrated it ever since they were ruled by the Cambodian kings. People in central Thailand do not have this festival.

When the rainy season has begun, on a certain day people from several villages will come to one wat for their festival. This festival is held in honor of the rain god, Tan. Everyone wears bright costumes. The women put on traditional Thai and Northeastern dances. The men are busy with their bong fai, or bamboo rockets.

Every village will have at least one rocket. And the rocket will be built by the people in the village. You cannot go to a store to buy a rocket, you must make it. First, some men go out into the forest to find a big bamboo tree. After it is cut they will dry it in the sun. The bamboo must be very strong, and it must have a thick stalk. Second, while the bamboo is drying, the man will make the rocket powder. This powder is like the powder used in guns. It gives the energy to the rocket which pushes it up into the sky. Third, when the bamboo is dry, the men will decorate it with bright, colored paper. Sometimes their rockets look like dragons, or even jet planes. Fourth, the powder is put carefully into the rocket, and the men carry the rocket to the wat. It takes many men to carry one rocket because the rockets are often over four meters long.

At the wat the people meet to look at the rockets. They try to guess which rocket will be the best. Before the rockets are shot into the sky, there is a ceremony at the wat. The rockets are carried around the wat three times. Some people carry the priests, some people beat on drums, others dance, and others carry the rockets.

Then the rockets are shot into the air. If they go very high, the rain god, Tan, will be pleased; but if they do not go very high, Tan will be angry and there will be no rain that year.

### B.

The second tradition is one thing people do when there is no rain. Some people believe that droughts are caused by the King Cobra. This snake only hatches its eggs in dry weather. When it does not rain, people believe that the Cobra has made the rains stop so that its eggs will hatch. The snake must be killed before the rains will begin.

To kill the snake, many men must work together. One man gets a fast horse. He rides through the fields looking for the snake and its eggs. When he finds the eggs, he takes one of them from the snake's nest. At the same time other men are building a big fire. In the middle of their fire is a big pot of boiling water. When the man on the horse has stolen the egg, he rides his horse to the fire. The Cobra follows him because it wants to get its egg back. This man rides his

horse by the fire and throws the snake's egg into the pot. When the snake sees this, it jumps into the fire to get its egg, and it is killed. Then the rains will begin.

C.

The third tradition comes from the Province of Kalasin, but other people in other provinces have similar traditions.

In Kalasin there is a very holy statue of the Buddha. It is in Wat Klang Muang. This Buddha is named Ong Dam, because it is black. Once, many years ago, there was no rain; the people did not know what to do. They went to a priest and he told them, "If you will carry Ong Dam around the streets of the city, the rain will come."

So today, when there is no rain, many people come to Wat Klang Muang. They talk with the priests, and they ask them for advice. Then they carry Ong Dam around the city of Kalasin. The people believe that when Ong Dam is carried around the city, the rains will begin.

D.

The fourth tradition comes from the province of Chaiyaphum. Many years ago in a small village there lived a young man named Siang Bua. He was very sad because there was no rain, and he knew that the rice would soon die. But Siang Bua was clever, and he asked himself, "What must we do to make the rain begin?"

He could not answer this question, so he asked many people in his village. But they did not know the answer either, because they were poor and they were not clever. So Siang Bua said, "I must find the answer myself." One day he went to the village headman's house. Siang Bua said, "We need rain, but none has come. We must pray to the god. We must ask him for rain."

The village headman believed Siang Bua. He called all of the people together, and he told them, "We must pray to the god for rain. Siang Bua believes if we do not pray, all of our crops will die, and our families will starve." The men tried to see Siang Bua in the crowd, but he was not there. So they began to pray.

Suddenly, Siang Bua appeared. He was carrying a big basket. In his basket he had a fat cat. The people were amazed, they looked at Siang Bua. "What are you doing?" they asked, "we are praying because you told us to, but you are playing with a cat."

Siang Bua was not worried, he said, "If you want rain, some of you must follow me, and the rest of you must return to your homes. We will come to each house, when we come bring a cup of water out of the house and pour it on the cat."

Siang Bua and some of the men walked around to each house. One person from each house poured a cup of water on the cat. Soon the rains began.

Now when there is no rain during the rainy season, people in many villages repeat this tradition. They call it the Cat Parade (or in Thai: Hae Nang Mew).

You can see that all of these traditions use magic. When the drought comes, and there is no rain, the people believe that they have to use magic to make the rains begin again. If they are successful, the rains will come, their crops will grow, and they will have enough food to eat for another year.

### THREE BUDDHAS FROM LAOS

Long ago the King of Laos had three beautiful daughters. Each of his daughters loved her father very much, and they decided to make something for their father. Each daughter made a statue of the Buddha. The statues were very beautiful and for many years people from all over Laos came to Vientiane to see the statues.

Many years later the King of Laos became the enemy of the King of Thailand. A war was fought, and the Thai king won. When the Thai king went to Vientiane, he saw the three statues. They were so beautiful that he decided to take them with him to Thailand.

So he put the statues in ox carts and took them to the Mekong River. Then he put them in boats. As they were crossing the river, a rainstorm came and one boat was sunk. The statue in it was also lost. But the other two statues were not lost, they were taken to Nongkhai where they were kept for many years.

When Mongkut became the King of Thailand, he wanted to bring the two statues to Bangkok. So he sent his servants to Nongkhai to take the statues. Again the statues were loaded in ox carts, and the long journey from Nongkhai to Bangkok began. They had not left the town of Nongkhai before one ox cart broke. Its statue fell to the ground. The people would not let anyone put the statue into another cart; they said, "Prasai does not want to go to Bangkok; he had broken the ox cart by a miracle because he wants to stay in Nongkhai."

The king's servants did not know what to do. The king had told them to bring both statues to Bangkok, but they only had one. They decided to tell Mongkut the story. When he heard it, Mongkut decided to leave the statue named Prasai in Nongkhai. Mongkut agreed that Prasai did want to stay in Nongkhai.

So only one statue is in Bangkok now. It is named Praserm. The statue which fell into the Mekong River was named Prasuk; it is still in the river because no one could ever find it. And Prasai is still in Nongkhai. You can see this famous statue in the Temple of the Po Tree (or in Thai: Wat Po) in Nongkhai. Many people believe that Prasai has strange powers. They believe that it can make the rain fall, or keep the rain from falling.

## THE TEMPLE OF MANY ARCHITECTS

Most temples are built by one architect. He makes a plan of what the temple will look like, and then the builders start to make it. But a temple in Ubol has two architects, and as a result it is very different from any other temple in the country.

One of Thailand's most famous priests was named Promoone. He knew that the Thai people wanted to show their belief in Buddhism. One way to do this was to build temples. In Promoone's time there was great competition in building temples. The winner, the man who built the most beautiful temple, would receive a prize from the king.

One time Promoone went to Ubol. When he was there, he had a dream. In his dream a priest said, "I know you want to build a temple in this town. The temple must be built on the banks of the Moon River." Then Promoone woke up and his dream was over. The next morning he took a boat and went up and down the river until he found the land for his temple.

Promoone wondered what would be the best design for the temple. He decided to build a temple in the Cambodian style because many centuries ago the Cambodians had ruled over this part of the country. The builders began to work, but when they were about half done, the architect died. The plan for the temple was gone.

No one knew what to do. They had to find a new architect. Their next architect was a German. He had his own ideas of how temples should be built, and so the part of the temple he planned looks like a German church. Finally, a Thai roof was added to the building. At last Promoone's temple was finished, but it was now very different from any other temple in Thailand. Still, it was very beautiful.

If you go to Ubol today you can see Promoone's temple. It is named the Well Built Temple (or in Thai: Wat Supatanaram) in honor of its architects.

## THE FAMOUS TREE OF KHONKAEN

If you go to the Railway Station in Khonkaen, you will see a big log with the name of the city carved into it. This log shows you what the name means, but do you know how Khonkaen got its name?

A.

Over two hundred years ago when the Northeast was still ruled by the King of Laos, a man named Kunlung was the Prince of Suwannapum. His wife was Chantra. When they had been married for several years, they had a son, Piamuang. Piamuang was very handsome, and everyone thought he was a fine young man. When he was nearly an adult, many parents wanted him to marry their daughters. Piamuang did not know how to choose a wife, so he said to his parents, "Will you choose my wife? I am afraid I cannot choose wisely."

Kunlung and Chantra agreed to do this. They looked for a very fine young woman to be Piamuang's wife; one day the Prince said to his son, "We will be very pleased if you marry Oumaradee." Piamuang saw that she was very beautiful, and he gladly agreed. Piamuang and Oumaradee lived in Suwannapum for several years. Finally, the Prince and Princess said, "Suwannapum is too small for all the people living here. Why don't you begin a new city, Piamuang? You can take some people with you."

B.

So Piamuang and Oumaradee left Suwannapum to begin their new city, and about four hundred people went with them. They finally came to the little town of Kam. In the center of the town was a huge tamarind tree. It was nearly dead. Piamuang thought, "It is foolish to leave that dying tree there, its wood may be valuable." He said to a villager, "Why do you leave this log here?"

The villager replied, "Five years ago this big tamarind tree died. But a wise man told us it would become alive again. When it becomes alive again, our village will have some goodluck. Just this year it has become alive again. Every week it has more and more leaves."

Piamuang was impressed, and he thought, "Perhaps this tree is holy. It should not be destroyed." Piamuang and his people built a chedi to protect the holy tree. When this was completed they decided that Kam was such a nice little town that they wanted to live in it. Some of the people said, "It has very fertile fields, we will all become rich here." So they built their new homes in Kam.

C.

About this time King Taksin defeated the King of Laos and all of the Northeast became part of Thailand. Many of the princes of the Laotian king decided to send presents to the Thai king. In his village, Piamuang convinced the people that they must be loyal to their new kings. They decided to send presents to the Thai king too.

When Rama I became King of Thailand, he remembered the loyalty of Piamuang and the people in the village of Kam. The King said, "Because of your loyalty, Piamuang, I will make you a governor. And your little village will become the capital of a new province."

D.

For many years the famous Piamuang and the beautiful Oumradee ruled the town of Kam. But one day a man came to them and said, "Governor, our tamarind tree is dying."

Piamuang was very sad. He thought, "My own life is now like that of the tamarind tree. When it dies, I think I will die too." Finally, the tree died; and very soon after that, Piamuang died too.

By this time Kam was a big town, the people decided it needed a new name. The most important thing about the town was its famous tree. The people said, "Our town's power is like the strength of a tree. It is very great." So they named their town, the Hard Log (or in Thai: Khon Kaen).

Today Khonkaen is a big city. It is no longer like the quiet village in which Piamuang lived. Trains, buses, and planes all come to Khonkaen because it is the capital of northeastern Thailand. The power of the city is now much greater than the strength of the tamarind tree.

## THE THREE BUDDHAS IN KANTARAWICHAI

Have you even been to Kantarawichai? It is a district of Mahasarakham Province. Kantarawichai is a beautiful little town on the road to Kalasin. It has some famous statues of the Buddha. The people of Kantarawichai tell this story about these holy statues.

Hundreds of years ago, the Northeast was ruled by the Cambodian kings. This was before the Thai people came here. Kantarawichai was a very important town in those days. It had a ruling prince and princess. One of the princes was named Phranong Phruturman. He and his wife had a son named Tao Singh Toh.

Tao Singh Toh was a cruel young man. The prince and the princess were afraid of their son. They thought he would be a very bad prince. They did not want him to become the prince when they died.

When Tao Singh Toh heard that his parents did not like him, he was very angry. One day he ordered some soldiers to capture his father and put him in jail. The soldiers obeyed Tao Singh Toh because they were also afraid of him. So the Prince of Kantarawichai was put in the jail.

Then Tao Singh Toh said, "Now, I am the Prince of Kantarawichai. The old prince, my father, has been put in jail because he was very evil." But the people did not believe him, because they knew the Prince was good. Tao Singh Toh wanted his father to die, but he was afraid to kill him. So he said, "I will not give him any food, and then if he dies, it will not be my fault. I will not let anyone, except my mother, visit him, so no one can bring him food."

When the Princess visited her husband in the jail, she brought him food. Tao Singh Toh learned that his mother was bringing food with her. So he said, "You cannot visit the Prince for thirty days."

The Prince knew that he would soon die because he had no food to eat. He called his son to him and said, "Soon, I will die, and you will be the Prince of Kantarawichai. But everything that you do will become evil." And three days later the Prince died.

B.

Tao Singh Toh was very happy. He was the Prince now. But he was still angry at his mother, so he ordered the soldiers to kill her. They had to obey him because he was the Prince.

Everything that Tao Singh Toh did, turned to evil, just as his father had named him. He tried very hard to do good things, but everything he did was ruined. The people in Kantarawichai laughed at their Prince. They said, "Our Prince may be powerful, but he is foolish. He cannot do anything right."

This made Tao Singh Toh ashamed of himself. He was very sorry that he had been so cruel to his parents. He wondered what he could do that would be good.

Finally, he sent for an astrologer. The astrologer told Tao Singh Toh, "You have been very evil, and you are being punished. You must build two statues of the Buddha. One will be for your father, and the other will be for your mother. The two statues should be very beautiful, and they should be built in different places. When you build these statues, you will show that you love your parents, and your evil will go away.

Tao Singh Toh believed the astrologer, and he built the two statues very carefully. He wanted to be sure that they were very beautiful. The statue Tao Singh Toh built for his father is in the center of the town. And the statue he built for his mother is on the edge of the town.

Still Tao Singh Toh was not happy, for he knew that he had been very evil. He told his people that when he died, they should bury him in the forest which is far from the town. Over his grave he asked them to build another statue of the Buddha. When he died, the people buried him in the forest, and they built a statue of a reclining Buddha over his grave. Today the forest is called Don Phra Non, which means the Forest of the Reclining Buddha.

6.

This story happened many years ago, and if you go to Kantarawichai today, you can still see the two standing Buddhas. One is in the center of the town, and it is under a little pavilion. It is very holy, and many people worship it every year. The other Buddha is on the edge of the town. You might not see it because a big tree is growing up around the statue.

But the statue of the reclining Buddha in the forest is lost. Some people say it is made of gold. But no one will try to find it, because the people believe that it has a curse upon it. The people believe that the spirit of Tao Singh Toh still lives in the grave. The spirit is very evil, just like the Prince was so many years ago. If anyone sees the statue in the forest, they will die in the same day because of the evil spirit.

So the statue is lost; sometimes people try to find it. Only a few years ago three or four men from Bangkok went into the forest to find the statue. That evening they returned, and they said, "We have found the statue of the reclining Buddha. It is made of gold. We will take you to see it tomorrow." But before they could take anyone there, they all died.

## THE LAND OF THE ELEPHANTS

The Province of Surin is famous for its elephants, but for hundreds of years there were many elephants in Thailand. Today there are only a few, and most of them are in Surin.

### A.

Many years ago, elephants were very common in Thailand. The elephants were used in wars, and they were used to carry logs from the forests to the towns. The flag of Thailand used to have a white elephant on it.

But today machines can do the work of elephants, and so in Thailand there are not many elephants. Sometimes they still carry logs from the forests, but they do not fight in wars anymore, and there is no elephant on the Thai flag. Only in one place are there many elephants today, that is in the province of Surin.

### B.

In Surin there is a group of people called Suay. These people came from the Cambodian people who lived in Surin hundreds of years ago. In the villages of Krapo and Jompra the suay people still use their elephants to earn their living. The elephants carry logs, and they also plow the rice fields like water buffalo.

Today the government protects elephants. They cannot be killed or caught. The government is trying to preserve the elephants so that they will not all die. Every year in Surin the Suay people have an elephant festival. This festival is to show other people how wild elephants used to be caught, how they were trained, and what they could do. Many people from all over Thailand, and from many countries as well, come to see the elephant festival in Surin.

### C.

In Surin there is a strange mountain. Some people say that it looks like Phra Prang, the three-headed mythical elephant. They say it reminds people how important elephants are to Surin. But other people disagree; here is their story of why this mountain is here.

Many hundreds of years ago in the forest near Surin there lived a man with his wife. The man thought his wife must be a witch because she quarrelled with him every day. She was always telling him, "Now, you do this," or "Now, you do that." And she always said he was the laziest man alive.

The poor man thought, "Unless I can get rid of my wife, I shall go mad." But no matter how hard he tried, he could not find a way to get rid of his wife. Finally, he decided he would marry again, and he told his wife, "I am tired of you telling me what to do. I am tired of listening to your voice, so I am going to marry another woman. She will be kind and beautiful, and she will not always say that I am lazy."

His wife did not believe him. She thought, "He is so lazy that he will never leave his home."

But one day the man did leave his home, and he went to find a new wife. He thought, "My old wife will follow me, she will never let me marry again. Perhaps I can trick her, and she will not find me. Then I can marry. When I am married, I will return to my house, and my old wife will not be there. She will be still looking for me. Then I will have peace."

But his old wife did not leave the house. She thought, "He will return;" and she was right, for after three months the man and his second wife returned to the house. His second wife was very beautiful and kind.

At first the man was happy, his new wife was very kind to him. But his new wife saw the old wife. She saw how the old wife shouted at the man, and after a few weeks, the new wife was shouting at her husband just like the old wife.

If the man was unhappy with one wife, he was now even more unhappy with two wives. Not only did his two wives quarrel with him, and tell him, "Now you do this," or "Now, you do that;" but when one wife said, "Now, you do this," the other wife said, "Now, you do that." They both said, "You are the laziest man alive." And what is even worse, the two wives fought with each other.

The poor man did not know what to do. He did not have any peace, and he spent day after day thinking how he could solve his problem. He did not talk to anyone, he only spoke to himself. "All I want is a little peace!" But there was no way to solve his problem, and soon he died worrying about his problem.

After he was dead, the two wives stopped fighting with each other. If they had not been kind to their husband while he was alive; now that he was dead, they were very sad. They did not know what to do. Both wives realized that they really did love their husband, and they said, "Without our husband we cannot live, we love him too much." So they went to the body of the dead man, and as they leaned over the dead man's head, both of the wives died.

When the god, Indra, knew this he decided to help people to remember this story. He built a mountain that has three peaks leaning to each other. It looks like the wives leaning over the head of their dead husband. Indra thought, "Now people will not forget the story of this foolish man and his two wives."

But many people did forget the story. They say the mountain looks like Erawan. And so today only some people remember the story of the man, and they think the mountain looks like three people. If you go to Surin, you will have to decide for yourself what the mountain looks like. It is called Mango Mountain, and that is because still other people think the mountain looks like a mango. So you can see how difficult it is to choose a name for a mountain, especially in Surin.

## THE TWO FRIENDS

Do you remember the story in which Prajet married Orapin? This story takes place only a few years later.

Prajet was very happy in his father's palace, but one day King Suryavarman said, "My son, I want you to become the ruling prince of a city. You know this city very well, it is Orapin's village which is called Pimai now. I want you to help me do some building in that town." Prajet was surprised when he heard this, but he was also happy. He knew that one of his best friends was the Prince of Nangrong. His name was Prayen. Prajet was happy when he moved to Pimai.

But he had a big problem. When he came to Pimai, he learned that the general of the army there wanted to be the next prince. The general was very angry when Prajet was chosen. When Prajet came to his new home he said to the general, "I know that you wanted to be the prince, but let's be friends. When I go, I'll ask my father to make you the prince." The general agreed but did not trust Prajet.

One day Prajet went to visit his friend, Prayen, in Nangrong, which is Buriram today. They talked about many things, and about how happy they were. Suddenly, a servant came into Prayen's room and said, "Master, the army of Pimai has surrounded the city." Prayen was surprised and angry, he thought that Prajet had come to kill him and seize his city. Prayen said, "So are you really my friend, Prajet? Friends don't need to bring armies."

Prajet knew what had happened. The general did not trust him, and the general was afraid that Prajet would take the army from Nangrong to destroy the army of Pimai. He said, "No, you do not understand. I did not bring the army. It is not you the army wants, it is I. The general is afraid of me. He fears I will borrow your army to destroy him. So if we do nothing, he will not do anything. He cannot hurt me, I am the King's son."

Prayen was not sure, but he trusted Prajet because they were friends. Then Prajet said, "I have come here on some business. My father wants to build a temple in Pimai. He wants to test his workmen because soon he will have them build a much larger temple in Angkor Thom. But I do not think it is a good idea just to build a temple. I need a reason for building a temple." "You are my friend, I trust you and I love you. Will you build a temple in Nangrong while I build mine in Pimai. Our temples will show our friendship and trust for each other. I will send workmen to help you."

Prayen quickly agreed, "Yes, it is a good idea. I will build a temple, too." When the princes parted, the general could not believe what Prajet told him. But he believed the prince when he saw the two temples being built.

You can see both temples today. One is called the Temple of Pimai (or in Thai: Prasat Hin Pimai), it is in Korat Province. The other is called the Temple of Mount Pranumrung (or in Thai: Rasat Hin Khao Pranumrung) because it is built on a mountain. It is in Buriram Province. These temples are very beautiful and they remind us of a strong friendship between two princes many years ago.

## THE BAI SEE CEREMONY

The Bai See Ceremony comes from Laos. People in Bangkok do not know about it. In Thailand people in the Northeast practise it because at one time the Northeast was part of the kingdom of Laos.

The Bai See brings good luck and merit. It is a religious celebration, but it is not performed by priests. When someone is about to go on a trip, or to get married, he feels this is a very important event in his life. He wants it to turn out well; one way of making things turn out well is to have a Bai See ceremony.

First, he will ask one of the old men in his village to say the prayers in the ceremony. Then he will invite all of his friends and relatives to come to his house, where the ceremony is usually held. His friends and relatives all want to come because they know this is an important time.

For the ceremony you must have a vase of beautiful flowers, some joss sticks and a candle. You also need lots of string. And then you must have some sticky rice, an egg, and a bottle of whiskey.

The joss sticks and the candle are put into the vase with the flowers, they are lit at the beginning of the ceremony. The person who is having the ceremony and his closest friends and relatives sit in a circle around the flowers. Everyone in the circle holds on to one string which shows they are working together. They all listen while the old man prays.

While the people in the circle are praying, many other friends and relatives are calling the soul of the person who is having the ceremony. They want his soul to come and bring the good luck with him. So they will call until they believe the soul has come. The rice and the egg are for the soul. This part of the tradition goes back many centuries. Whenever a guest came, it was polite to give him food; so, even today, the rice and eggs are food for the soul. The whiskey is also for the soul, but after the ceremony it will be given to the man who said the prayers as a gift.

After the prayers have ended, each friend will take a piece of string and tie it around the person's wrist. While they are tying, the string he holds the rice and the egg showing his hospitality. As they tie the strings around his wrists, they say some words of good luck. When all of his friends have done this, the ceremony is over. The strings tied around his wrist remind him of everyone's wishes for good luck in the future.

## THE LITTLE STICKY RICE BASKET

If you go to the village of Tard Tong near Ubol, you will see a strange chedi in the middle of a field. On the top of the chedi is a sticky rice basket. That is a very strange thing to be on the top of a chedi. Here is why it is there.

In Tard Tong most of the people are rice farmers. They grow sticky rice. Every morning the people go to their fields to plow the ground, and to plant the rice. They stay in their fields until they are through working with the rice for that day. Sometimes it takes many hours.

Some people have to stay at home. They have to watch the children, and they have to make food for those in the fields.

In Tard Tong there were many families; but one was very small, it had only two persons, a mother and her son. The son was about 17 years old and he was strong. So every day he went out to his mother's fields to take care of the rice. One morning he left very early. He took his water buffalo with him, and he went to plow the fields. It was the time of the year to plant rice. He worked for many hours until he was tired. The sun was hot and there were no clouds in the sky. Finally, he decided to rest under a tree. He thought, "Where is my mother? She should have brought me my lunch by now. She is very late today, I wonder why?" Because he did not see his mother coming, he decided to start working again.

By this time he was very angry. His mother was very late. It was past the time to eat. When his mother came, he looked at the rice basket and thought that it was very small. So he was impolite to her. She said, "Son, I am late; but here is your lunch. Stop working, and come and eat under this tree."

Her son did not listen to her. He took a yoke from the buffalo, and ran to his mother. Because he was so angry, he hit his mother on her head with the yoke. Then he grabbed the sticky rice basket which she had brought and went to eat it on the other side of the tree.

Meanwhile, his mother was dying. She said, "Forgive me son. I am sorry I am late. Although you may think there is only a little rice for you, I am sure it is enough."

The son ate for several minutes, and soon he was full. Then he remembered hearing his mother's last words. There was still lots of rice left in the basket. And he was full! He looked around for his mother, and he saw her lying on the ground. She was dead! When he realized what he had done, he sat down and cried.

He did not know what to do, so his neighbors told him to go see a priest. The priest said, "Young man, you have been very evil. You must build a chedi at the place where you killed your mother. On top of the chedi you must put a sticky rice basket to show how silly your anger was." The young man obeyed the priest. He built the chedi. Every holy day he came to the chedi to pray to the Buddha. But his neighbors said he could never forget his evil.

Even today, if you go to Tard Tong, you can see the chedi. The people call it the Chedi of the Little Sticky Rice Basket of the Killed Mother.

## THE HUNTER AND THE GOLDEN SWAN

In the province of Chaiyaphum there is a beautiful little pond. It is near the mountains and it is filled with water all of the time. Near the pond there is a statue of a swan. This is the story of why the statue was built.

One time long ago there was a flock of golden swans. Every afternoon they would fly out of the sky and swim in this little pond. Not many people knew about this, but some people did and they liked to watch the swans swimming in the water. They thought that they were very beautiful. Some people believed they were holy. The swans were really fairies from the Green Mountain which was nearby. Every day the fairies changed into the beautiful swans as the sun rose. They flew from the mountain to the pond. But every day at sunset they changed back into fairies. No one knew that the swans were fairies, and they always wondered why the swans left before the sun had set.

The people living near the pond loved the swans very much. They did not want to hurt them, and they told their friends not to hurt the beautiful swans. But sometimes people came to their village who did not know about the swans. This is what happened when a stranger visited the pond.

A hunter from another province came to the pond. He had never been there before, and he did not know that anyone lived nearby. He saw the swans and he wanted to have one for himself. The hunter thought for a moment. How could he catch a swan? He was surprised that the swans were not afraid of him, they were not afraid of anybody. So the hunter took out a long rope and he threw it around the neck of one swan. Suddenly, the other swans were frightened. They saw the hunter catch the swan, and they flew away.

The swan that the hunter had caught was very sad. She knew that she could not escape. If she could not escape, then she would become a fairy and everyone could see her. So she knew that she had to die before the sun set. The swan held her breath until she was dead.

When the people in the village saw all of the swans flying away from the pond so early in the afternoon, they were surprised. Why were the swans leaving, they wondered; and they ran to the pond. They saw the hunter standing there with the dead swan. "What have you done?" they shouted.

When the hunter told them what had happened, the people were very angry. They said, "Those beautiful swans did not hurt anybody. Everyone loved them, and they were not afraid of us because we were kind to them. But you were very greedy, you wanted a swan just for yourself. Now that swan is dead and the rest are gone. That will teach you what happens when you are selfish."

The hunter was very sorry for what he had done, but what could he do? He could not make the dead swan alive. He thought, "Perhaps the swans will come back tomorrow, and I can help them in some way." But the swans never returned to the pond and no one has ever seen them since.

Several days later the hunter decided to build a statue of a beautiful swan by the pond. He spent many years working on it. Near the statue he buried the dead swan. Finally the statue was finished. Everyone agreed that it was very beautiful and they forgave the hunter for his evil deed.

The Hunter and the Golden Swan (continued)

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Today, if you go to Chaiyaphum, you can see the statue of the swan. It is by the pond called the Pond of the Golden Swans. Near the statue is a clear, deep well. Tradition says the well is where the swan was buried; today it is holy.

