

# The Dream of a Contemporary Ayuthaya: Angkhan Kalayanaphong's Poetics of Dissent, Aesthetic Nationalism, and Thai Literary Modernity\*

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This essay examines the constitution of Thai literary modernity in the poetry of Angkhan Kalayanaphong. Focusing on the poet's adaptations of the classical literary genre of *nirat*, the essay investigates Angkhan's conservative political dissent as well as his poetic innovation. Thematically, Angkhan's poetry is marked by forceful statements against the hybridization of Thai culture that has taken place as a result of globalization. At the same time, the poet creates a language that is itself exemplary of globalized hybridity. Investigating the thematic and even formal preeminence of the Ayuthaya period (1350–1767) in Angkhan's work, this essay argues that by combining an intentional content that repeatedly references Ayuthaya's premodern cosmopolitanism with a poetics that is highly reflective of present-day globalization, Angkhan achieves a strident critique of the cultural present.

While several scholars have analyzed the poet's use of the past, the relation of Angkhan's poetry to its own historical and political context remains underexamined. This essay therefore sets Angkhan's cultural criticism also in relation to the reactionary modernism of the Sarit Thanarat regime during which the poet began to write. It further draws into relation the politics of poetics of the "Art for Life" poets who are Angkhan's contemporaries. In this context, this essay pays close attention to the poet's prosodic choices and their significance in contemporary poetic struggles to define Thai cultural and political modernity.

## The History and Development of *Nirat*

Angkhan Kalayanaphong is one of Thailand's most important modern poets. He began writing in the late 1950s, and was initially vilified for his transgressions of poetic convention and use of "vulgar" language. However, in 1989 Angkhan was finally honored as a National Artist. Suchitra Chongstitvatana has stressed the poet's proficiency in integrating elements of the *nirat* genre into his poetry. In fact, Angkhan is the modern poet who uses *nirat* elements most prolifically, and this essay follows the question of how the poet adapts the *nirat* genre to the purpose of cultural critique.

*Nirat* are travelogue poems written in the first person in which the journey itself constitutes the framework and in which the themes of separation, longing, and identity are prominent. *Nirat* poems are characterized by episodes of admiration in which phenomena of the geocultural landscape trigger stream-of-consciousness-like associative thoughts about the person or place the traveler has left behind. The tone of *nirat* is one of lamentation; typically, several verses or even whole sections of *nirat* express sadness or melancholy.

The word *nirat* may have been used as a technical term to classify these poems as a distinct genre of Thai literature since the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> In the manual of poetics *Cindamani* the

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genre is mentioned as *kblong nirat*, whereby *kblong* refers to the meter in which *nirat* of the time were written.<sup>2</sup> Poems bearing the name *nirat* or those in which the author states the intent of writing a *nirat* are attested even earlier, however, as in *Kblong Hariphunchai*, which is believed to have been composed in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

In classical *nirat* that originate in the Ayuthaya period, the theme of longing resulting from separation from a lover is predominant. Manas Chitakasem separates *nirat* of this period into two basic types. In the first, the “fundamental formal structure is expressed in terms of time progression,” while in the second this structure is expressed in the form of “an imaginary journey derived from literary sources.”<sup>4</sup> The two basic types of *nirat* are refined in a third ideal type that Manas terms the “true *nirat*.” This third type consists of a “timed personal itinerary” in which the chronological process and the excursions process are combined.<sup>5</sup> This combination of spatial and temporal dimensions is responsible for the affective charge and presentation of subjectivity of the genre.

What Manas refers to as the “true *nirat*” with its “timed personal itinerary” is exemplified by *Kblong Kamsuan Si Prat*, an Ayuthaya *nirat* from the time of Phra Narai (1657–1688) attributed to the poet Si Prat. Setting out by boat from Ayuthaya to the sea on a journey into exile, the poet begins by praising the splendor of Ayuthaya’s temples and palaces. He then describes his relationship with his lover and the sadness he feels upon their separation. Through the techniques of punning and transfer Si Prat relates place-names and details of the geocultural landscape to his lover, and especially to her body. As Manas notes, the explicit sexual references to certain parts of the lover’s body in the poem are used to intensify the mood of longing.<sup>6</sup>

1 In addition to designating this genre of poetry, the word *nirat* (which derives from Sanskrit *nir* + *āśā* meaning “without hope” or “without desire”), is generally used to mean “separation,” “to leave,” “to be separated from.” Manas Chitakasem notes that it also means “to be without something which is dearly desired.” Manas Chitakasem, “The Emergence and Development of the Nirat Genre in Thai Poetry,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 60, no. 2 (1972): 135–168, 138. The *Rachabandithayasathan Dictionary* defines the term as “a) leaving, roaming about, to be without; b) being without hope, desire.” *Pojanamukrom Chabab Rachabandithayasathan* (Bangkok: Rachabandithayasathan, 1982), s.v., *nirat*. In this essay, I use *nirat*, as in Thai, for both the singular and the plural of the word.

P. Schweisguth defines *nirat* as follows: “*Nirat* est un mot d’origine sanscrite qui signifie ‘séparation, bannissement’; au Siam il sert à designer une pièce destinée à chanter la douleur d’un départ, d’une absence. En général, ce sont des poèmes d’amour, l’auteur chante avant tout les charmes de la belle qu’il vient de quitter, puis au fur et à mesure qu’il progresse sur son chemin. Il note les péripéties de son voyage. Il les rapporte quand il peut à des souvenirs qui lui sont chers; en énumérant ainsi les noms de lieu sur son trajet il aura pour chacun d’eux une pensée affectueuse à l’adresse de sa bien-aimée.” Paul Schweisguth, *Étude sur la littérature siamoise* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1951), 90.

2 The *Cindamani* is a text on versification believed to have been composed during the reign of King Phra Narai (1657–1688), though the extant version is from the Rattanakosin period. The manual codifies the use of poetic vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and versification.

3 Two other *nirat* that are thought to predate *Cindamani* are *Kblong Thavathotsamat* and *Kblong Kamsuan Si Prat*.

4 Manas Chitakasem, “The Emergence,” 143.

5 As Manas (“The Emergence,” 146–147) observes, “Here the chronological process is converted into a time scale which is applied to a particular journey. The excursions process goes through a qualitative change which results in the conversion of the character of a literary figure to the poet writing about himself in his own poem. The fictional excursion described becomes the description of an actual journey taken at a prescribed moment or period and in a prescribed geographical setting.”

6 Manas Chitakasem, “The Emergence,” 143.

Connected to the genre's tone of lamentation is thus a strong psychosexual element. Space, time, desire, and the body work together in *nirat* to create a gendered geocultural landscape. Typically, the rhythm of the movement of the journey and the punning create a constant link between the traveler's surroundings and the body of the lover. In *Thavathotsamat*, a *nirat* dated to the time of Phra Narai that presents a journey through the twelve months of the year, the stations of the journey are moments in time, and the events of each month spark a corporeal memory:

ถึงเดือนหกฝนตกจากฟ้าฟ้า	The sixth month arrives with heavenly rains.
ที่คิดถึงดอกไม้ของฉันนาง	I think of your beautiful blossoms, my love.
คิดถึงยามรักอันรื่นรมย์	This month we used to share our love and happiness.
เจ็บระบมไปก็ท้องที่เนนนาง	Till your soft navel felt the pains.
เสียงฟ้าร้องเหมือนเสียงฟ้าโหหารัก	When thunder roars I feel restless with desire,
เจ็บกลางใจดังจะขาดคว่ำ	My heart so painful as if being torn out.
ดวงเดือนบอกข่าวฤดูไถนากำลังจะเริ่มแล้ว	The month brings news of ploughing,
อกที่แห้งเดกระแหงแต่น้ำตาบอง	My heart wilts and tears fill my eyes. <sup>7</sup>

During the *Rattanakosin* period (1782–present), both the popularity and thematic diversity of *nirat* increased.<sup>8</sup> Sunthorn Phu (1786–1855) in particular, the most prominent *nirat* poet of the period, extended *nirat* conventions into new areas of concern.<sup>9</sup> As the kinds of departures or separations diversify in the development of *nirat*, so does the expression of sadness and pain. Thus, in Sunthorn Phu's *Nirat Phu Khao Thong* it is not the separation from lover or home, but the death of King Rama I that the traveler mourns.

### Journeys of Identity

Many *nirat* poems display a sense of anthropological mission and meticulously record the customs of the peoples in the areas traveled through. A focus on collective cultural identity thus also marks the genre, as the observations of other cultures are accompanied by the traveler's reflections on central Siamese or Thai identity. Frequently, phenomena observed along the way are described as strange and subsequently classified as inferior. Oppositions are developed between what is Thai and what is not, between the urban and the rural, and between the central and the peripheral. Although the boundaries of territory and sovereignty are often indistinct, those of identity remain clear throughout. In *Nirat Nakhon Sawan*, a work likewise attributed to Si Prat or to Si Mahosot, the traveler expresses disdain for some of the rural places through which he trav-

7 Translated by Manas Chitakasem, "The Emergence," 144.

8 Manas Chitakasem ("The Emergence," 156–157) notes that, "although the techniques of pun, transfers, and other ideas arising from the locale have been extensively employed, the conventional theme of love-longing and separation was partially broken. Emphasis has been placed on the poet's personal experiences of life in general. Place names and objects at each locale have been used to reflect ideas, observations, and attitudes toward human life and society in connection with the recollection of the poet's personal history. Other elements, for instance, etymology of the place names, history of the people and places, and humorous as well as philosophical passages, have frequently been included, perhaps to stimulate interest and to arouse questioning in the minds of the general readers."

9 As Manas Chitakasem ("The Emergence," 152) writes, "Sunthorn Phu brought to *Nirat* many elements, such as the concept of personal history as self-reflection, philosophical statements on life and people, social criticism, etc."

els and states a preference for the city.<sup>10</sup> Clear declarations of the superiority of Thai culture and urban life are made by the traveler in Sunthorn Phu's 1807 *Nirat Mueang Klaeng*. The poet repeatedly makes derisive comments about the rural communities that he encounters. Upon reaching *Thap Nang*, for instance, he deplors the lack of beautiful women in the village:

ถึงบ้านนางเวงฤดูหทัย	Reaching <i>Thap Nang</i> (Woman-Hut) I suddenly feel desolate:
เห็นแต่บ้านชาวนาอยู่อาศัย	Only farmers' huts are to be seen,
นางชานาก็ไม่น่าจะชื่นใจ	There is no delight in the country women,
คราบขี้โคลนร่ำคร่ำดังทากราวม	They have shabby spots of scurf as though smeared with indigo.
อันนางในนครอาจหาสิ	The women of the city, even slaves,
ดีกว่านางที่นี่สักสองสาม	Are many times better than these women.
ไอ้พลัดพรากจากบุรีนทร์เสี้ยวสิ้นงาม	Oh, once having left the city there is no more beauty.
ยิ่งคิดถึงความขวิญหนายเสียดายกรุง	The more I think about it, the worse I feel and miss the city. <sup>11</sup>

*Nirat* thus frequently describe journeys from the center of power to the periphery. These voyages are often undertaken for military reasons or as part of royal, and later government, expeditions. Thus *Nirat Nakhon Savan*, for instance, represents a celebration of royal power and military might. Conversely, Craig Reynolds has shown *Nirat Nongkhai*, a nineteenth-century *nirat* written on a military expedition to the northeast frontier of the Siamese state at Nongkhai, to bear "simultaneous referents in both elite and subaltern mentalities."<sup>12</sup> *Nirat Nongkhai* contains graphic accounts of soldiers' suffering as well as pointed remarks about the misguided military decisions responsible for it. However, Reynolds stresses the fact that the charges of sedition that were leveled against the author focused on the transgression of the poetic order, rather than on the critical content of the poem. Reynolds thereby highlights the fact of the traditional significance of form for the political import of Thai literary works. By virtue of using vulgar language that was understood to signify an empowerment of the subaltern classes, *Nirat Nongkhai* constituted a threat to the status of the elite.

## Journeys of Emotion

At the same time *nirat* record journeys of concentrated personal reflection. The scholarly writing about *nirat* describes as particular to the genre the self-conscious subjective identity and emotionality of the *nirat* narrator.<sup>13</sup> In addition to giving rise to considerations of identity, the separations or

10 In this *nirat*, the poet expresses disdain for the countryside in verses 24 and 28 and states his preference for the city in verse 44.

11 Translated from the original text in Harald Hundius, *Das Nirat Müang Kläng von Sunthon Phu: Analyse und Übersetzung eines thailändischen Reise Gedichtes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976), 105. Hundius renders the passage as follows: "Thap Nāng – Wehmut ergreift mich; man sieht nur Bauernhütten. Auch an den Bauernmädchen kann das Herz sich kaum erfreuen: mit einer dunklen, schorfigen Kruste ist ihre Haut bedeckt, als sei sie mit Indigo bestrichen. Die Mädchen in der Stadt, und seien es Sklavinnen, sind zwei-, dreimal hübscher als die Mädchen hier. Ach, hat man die Hauptstadt erst verlassen, findet Schönheit man nicht mehr! Je länger ich daran denke, desto bestürzter bin ich und sehne mich zurück nach Bangkok" (52).

12 Craig J. Reynolds, "Sedition in Thai History: A Nineteenth-Century Poem and Its Critics," in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, ed. Manas Chitakasem; Andrew Turton (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 24.

13 See for instance Manas Chitakasem, "The Emergence," 139, as well as Hundius, *Das Nirat Müang Kläng*, 1.

departures of *nirat* also engender longing, pain, and melancholy. Pain caused by separation from a loved one, from home, or from a certain community is a prominent emotional component of *nirat*.

On his journey, the traveler experiences cultural and emotional displacement so strongly that he therefore calls to mind those things that best reconnect him to home or to the object of his desire, as the scent of a lover's cheek in *Kamsuan Si Prat*, for instance. Classical *nirat* thus chronicle, alongside the journey through physical space, a journey in the mind. As the traveler moves away from home and from the familiar, he undertakes, prior to his actual return, a mental journey back home. In this context, memories of his lover's body frequently seem to provide a stabilizing function and to counter the anxiety produced by the journey through unknown territory.

On the level of language, the meter, rhyme, and punning in *nirat* generate a rhythm that mirrors the movement of the journey. In several poems, the temporality created through the regularity of movement through space is a very linear one. In *nirat* that record actual journeys, this regularity and the organic concreteness of the landscape situate the traveler in an everyday spatiality and temporality. The subjectivity that arises out of these dimensions of time and space is two-fold. On the one hand, the speakers frequently travel as subjects in the sense of officials or employees of the court – and later as citizens of the nation-state. On the other, the imaginary journey back home or to the lover modifies the *nirat*'s linear temporality, and the travelers' subjectivity manifests also in the introspective, emotional charge that likewise marks the genre.

### Contemporary *Nirat*

The modernity of contemporary *nirat* lies in the fact of their self-reflexivity and their consciousness of the history of the genre. In contemporary *nirat* the themes of separation, longing, and identity remain prominent, and movement still plays an important role, but the body disappears as a central referent. *Nirat* now frequently become journeys in history, travels in collective memory, and ways of reflecting on the past. Contemporary *nirat* include Naowarat Phongphaibun's *Krung Thep Thavaramadi: Jaruek Wai Nai Pi Thi 200 Haeng Krung Rattanakosin* (1986) and Mala Khamjan's *Jao Jan Phom Hom: Nirat Phrathat In Khwaen* (1991).<sup>14</sup> Angkhan Kalayanaphong is the modern poet who works in *nirat* most prolifically, however. *Lammam Phu Kradueng* (1969) and *Bangkok Kaeo Kamsuan Rue Nirat Nakhon Si Thammarat* (1978) are long *nirat*, and his other works include numerous short *nirat* as well as pieces with *nirat* character.<sup>15</sup> I will focus on selected passages from his long *nirat* as well as on various short *nirat* poems published in *Kaviniphon Khong Angkhan Kalayanaphong* (1964), *Bang Bot Jak Suan Kaeo* (1972), and *Paniithan Kawi* (1986).<sup>16</sup>

Angkhan began writing during the Sarit Thanarat regime (1958–1963). This regime developed a form of nationalism that emphasized historical roots, but was at the same time strongly committed to technological modernization. According to Thak Chaloemtiarana, Sarit's reactionary modernism

14 Naowarat Phongphaibun, *Krung Thep Thavaramadi: Jaruek Wai Nai Pi Thi 200 Haeng Krung Rattanakosin* (Bangkok: Sinlapawatthanatham, 1986). Mala Khamjan, *Jao Jan Phom Hom: Nirat Phrathat In Khwaen* (Bangkok: Khanathom Book Review, 1991).

15 Angkhan Kalayanaphong, *Lammam Phu Kradueng (Kradueng Mountain Song)* (Bangkok: Sayam, 31991 [1969]). *Idem*, *Bangkok Kaeo Kamsuan Rue Nirat Nakhon Si Thammarat (Lament for Beloved Bangkok or Nirat Nakhon Si Thammarat)* (Bangkok: Sayam, 21991 [1978]).

16 *Idem*, *Kaviniphon Khong Angkhan Kalayanaphong (The Poetry of Angkhan Kalayanaphong)* (Bangkok: Khlet Thai, 1979 [1964]). *Idem*, *Bang Bot Jak Suan Kaeo (Passages from the Crystal Garden)* (Bangkok: Sucksit Sayam, 1972). *Idem*, *Paniithan Kawi (Pledge of the Poet)* (Bangkok: Karat, 21986).

would serve as the dominant philosophy of governance for decades to come.<sup>17</sup> Sarit's advancement of right-wing ideologies was paralleled by the continued development of Thai socialist thought. Reflections on socialism made their way also into the domain of poetics, beginning with Chit Phumisak's socialist politics of poetics of the late 1950s. These poetics were revived in the "Art for Life" poetics of the 1970s when the struggle for political freedom took center stage in the national arena.

Angkhan's poetry does not explicitly reference these political and representational contexts. Instead, for Angkhan, all of Thai history culminates in Ayuthaya. For Angkhan, the Ayuthaya period (1350–1767) stands for a glorious era in Thai history, but above all it denotes artistic achievement and sophistication. This idealized state and period becomes pivotal in his vision of the nation. In his poems on the past, and in his art and *panithan* (artistic credo or manifesto) poems, this vision emerges with great clarity.<sup>18</sup>

In 1957 Angkhan wrote a poem entitled "Ayuthaya":

อยุธยาซึ่งฟ้า	ลงดิน แลฤ	Ayuthaya, your status higher than heaven come down to earth,
อำนาจบุญพรพระ	ก่อเกิด	The power and merit of the kings of old built up
เจดีย์ละอออินทร	ปราสาท	Beautiful chedis, palaces of Indra,
ในทาบทองแก้วเนื้อ	นอกโสม ๑	Pure gold on the inside and outside.
อยุธยาไฟโรจน์ใต้	ศรีบูร	Luminous fortress of Ayuthaya,
ทวารูจिरขมหอ	ระห้าย	Beautiful gates, strong towers.
อยุธยาซึ่งแมนสุร	สุรโลก ปานฤ	Ayuthaya, more than a valiant heavenly phenomenon,
ถนอดคุณสวรรคค้ายด้าย	แก้ตา ๑	Like the regions of the gods, Very much like heaven to the eye.
โอ้อุชยซึ่งฟ้า	มหาสถาน	O Ayuthaya, excellent place, greater than heaven,
มล้มมหากกล้าทหาร	ล่าแล้ว	You have fallen, brave soldiers are not to be found here anymore.
เสียแรงช่างเชี่ยวชาญ	ถนัด	Wasting the energy of those expert craftsmen that created you,
แสนสัตว์ป่ามาแก้สิ่ง	ปันก็ล้มไหมศวรรย์ ๑	Scores of wild animals came to aggravate you, ground you smooth, O great treasure.
พระศรีสรรเพชญ์นั่งกลิ้ง	กลางดิน	Silenced, Phra Si Sanphet rolls in the soil.
แรงแห่งหมู่มากกิน	ฟากฟ้า	Vultures, packs of dogs and swarms of crows eat This side of heaven.
ชลนครเจดุกุฉริน	เป็นเลือด	Tears run from the eyes of the spirit as blood,
นองหลากไหลไล่ห้ำ	ล้ม้วยเมืองหาย ๑	Flooding and flowing, caressing the world which has fallen and died, Its cities disappearing.
ฤกรุงเกลี้ยงทะแก้แล้ว	ไกรหาญ ๑	So, pulverized dauntless kingdom, ha ha,
โอ้อุชยปาน	ป่าช้า	O Ayuthaya, you resemble a burial ground.
โอสุรยมหาศาล	เหลือซาก	Of the great heavenly place is left only a carcass,
เลือดมนุษย์แห้งห้ำ	ลึกซึ่งบัดนี้ ๑	There is only human blood in this arid world, o deep shame. <sup>19</sup>

17 Thak Chaloehtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2007).

18 See for example "Ayuthaya," "Ayuthaya Wipayok," "Sinlapa Ayuthaya," "Sukhothai," and "Si Sachanalai" in *Kaviniphon* and "Ayuthaya" in *Lammam Phu Kradueng*. The theme of Ayuthaya and the past is also echoed in several other poems, such as in "Laeng Wanakhadi" in *Kaviniphon*. *Panithan*, from Sanskrit *pranidhana*, denotes the formulation of intent of the poet.

19 Angkhan, *Kaviniphon*, 42–43.

Angkhan begins “Ayuthaya” with two *khlong* stanzas from Si Prat’s seventeenth-century *Kamsuan Si Prat* that celebrate the glory of Ayuthaya, and then sets against these three *khlong* stanzas of his own that describe the fall of the city. For the remainder of the poem, he uses a meter called *kap yani* 11.<sup>20</sup> Against a vision in much of the writing of his contemporaries of democratic transformation and a poetics that draws strongly on elements of folk culture, Angkhan tells of the high culture of a grand past and juxtaposes these accounts with dramatic stagings of Ayuthaya’s downfall.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, the poet develops a distinctive poetic style marked by its highly Sanskritic lexicon and borrowings from Ayuthaya poetic style.<sup>22</sup>

As Trisilpa Boonkhachorn notes, in Angkhan’s writing the *bot chom mueang* of classical *nirat*, the episodes of admiration of the city, have been transformed into criticisms of modern life in which “the poet’s modern voice ironically denies that nostalgic tradition.”<sup>23</sup> The stations of the journey in Angkhan’s *nirat* are indeed no longer the geocultural landscape of the traditional *nirat*, and there is no longer a body of a lover – there is no lover at all, in fact – in this poetry. Instead, a moment and location in the past take the place of the lost object of desire. In this sense, there is a place that has been left by the traveler of the *nirat*, but there is no longer a home.

Angkhan’s “Ayuthaya” blends literary elements of the past and the present. To begin with, the two stanzas from *Kamsuan Si Prat* represent an example of classical Ayuthaya *khlong nirat* from the “Golden Age” of literature during the time of Phra Narai (1657–1688). Si Prat writes of the magnificence of the Ayuthaya of his time, a city at the height of its power and splendor. Significantly, Si Prat is leaving Ayuthaya on a journey into exile. As he does so, he evokes an image of the unearthly beauty and opulence of the city that is “like heaven to the eye.”

Following Si Prat’s stanzas, Angkhan’s lines emphasize the violence of the city’s destruction. These stanzas are replete with mockery and pain. The thematic of cultural loss of Angkhan’s lines complements the notion of departure into exile of Si Prat’s stanzas. The theme of former glory juxtaposed with images of devastation is recurrent in Angkhan’s poetic treatment of the old cities. The resultant tension becomes even more poignant in Angkhan’s meditation on the loss of Ayuthaya in “Ayuthaya Wipayok” (“The Perishing of Ayuthaya”):

20 *Khlong* and *kap* are the oldest meters used in Thai poetry.

21 See, for example, Naowarat Phonghaibun and Sujit Wongthet.

22 What Chetana Nagavajara has called the “rugged austerity” of the Ayuthaya style that Angkhan seeks to emulate perhaps lends itself well to communicating the emotion of pain and the critical message of the poems on Ayuthaya and cultural loss. See Chetana Nagavajara, “Art in Place of Nirvana: Western Aesthetics and the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanaphong,” in his *Comparative Literature from a Thai Perspective. Collected Articles 1978–1992* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1996).

23 Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, “Intertextuality in Thai Literary and Social Contexts: A Study of Contemporary Poets.” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1992), 192. Regarding Angkhan’s long *nirat*, *Lannam Phu Kradueng*, Klaus Wenk remarks that, although the titles of many of the 102 poems mark new stations on the way to Phu Kradueng, the content of the poems goes beyond the scope of the traditional *nirat*. According to Wenk, such formal criteria of *nirat* as the creation of links between the individual sections through certain formulas – the use of expressions like “having arrived in ...,” for example – are also not used in Angkhan’s *nirat*. Importantly, Wenk further remarks that Angkhan does not observe the traditionally strict metrical rules of *nirat*. Klaus Wenk, *Studien zur Literatur der Thai*, Band IV (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1989), 117–118.

หายอยุธยาทั่วฟ้า	สูญสวรรค์	Ayuthaya has disappeared all over the sky, Has vanished from the heavens.
เป็นป่าช้าศิลปินอัน	ค่าไร้	It is a burial ground of art Of inestimable value,
นมิดเพื่อฟ้าพื้น	ทิพโลก	Created to give rise to the dream of a Divine world,
เหลือกากปฏิญลไว้	ว่าเส่งมนุษย์ธรรม ฯ	Only residue, waste is left, Speaking of the scarcity of human ideals.
ไอศรีอโยธยา	เป็นป่าช้าที่ฝังฝัน	O Sri Ayodhya, You are a burial ground, defying the buried dream.
อมติลปมหัสจรรย์	มีงขวัญฟ้ามาจมดิน ฯ	Miraculous art of eternity, Auspicious spirit of the heavens, You have come to be submerged in the earth.
ปราสาทราชฐานแก้ว	แหลกลาญแล้วยังเจ็บคืน	Ratchathan Kaeo Palace, Though pulverized you are still winding in agony.
น้ำตาบ่รินริน	รับเรื่องไว้ในจิตรกรรม ฯ	Your tears are flooding and flowing, Crying the story in painting.
ศรีสรรเพชญ์อ่อนจนาง	วินาศสุนทรีย์ที่เลิศล้ำ	Si Sanphet, pitiful, Destroyed, the highest beauty,
พม่ากลับชาติมาซ้ำ	ให้สูญสิ้นวิญญาณไทย ฯ	The Burmese come alive to kill repeatedly, ‘Til the complete extinction of the Thai soul.
วูบวืดแต่คิดปะ	ราชบูรณะมหาธาตุยิ่งใหญ่	A pang of longing only for this art flares up, Great Ratburana Mahathat.
ขโมยปล้นชาติไทยไป	ขยี้ย่อยยับกับเข็ดิน ฯ	The Thai nation robbed, plundered, Then crushed to pieces under the soles of their feet.
กนกทิพย์ศรีวรัถย์ทอง	ต้องมือสัตว์ซึ่งเล็งคิด	The divine <i>khmua wan thong</i> patterns, Touched by the hands of those beasts without ethics.
ธรรมระชาทำลายป็น	ขุดฆ่าสิ้นทุกดวงใจ ฯ	<i>Dharma</i> broken, basely destroyed, climbed upon, Finding and killing every soul.
ปรางค์เจดีย์โอบสลัวิหาร	ดิรังจานคือรื้อกันใหญ่	<i>Prungs, jedis, bots, and wihans,</i> Those dull beasts took them all apart.
เอาอิฐหินดินไป	กินสิ้นโคตรโกลดเขลาหนัก	Taking the brick stones and earth, Devouring everything, brainless scum.
พญาไทโงนจึงเหลือ	ฟูเฟื่องเรืองโลกอัปลักษณ์	The Patriarch, a yellow lizard Under whom the world of the inauspicious prospered,
เจ็บแสนแก่เกียรติศักดิ์	อันสูงส่งเป็นผงธุลี ฯ	Deeply hurt in dignity, Once so high, now only particles of dust.
อยุธยาซึ่งฟ้ามาสถาน	ปัจจุบันปานกะกาขี้	Ayuthaya, higher than the domain of the heavens, Now only residue.
ของเดนสัตว์ปฐูพี	ที่ครองเมืองฟื่องเดชา ฯ	Leftovers of those animals that rule the earth, Prospering in their power.

แถวชัยวัฒน์นาราม	งดงามดั่งสวรรค์ชั้นฟ้า	The sheen of Chai Wathanaram, Beautiful like a stratum of the heavens.
มากมายหมู่หมากา	เรียงเกล็ดงุ้มคู่มารุมกิน ฯ	That pack of dogs and crows, those gloomy vultures, Assembling to devour it.
มหาชัยปราชัยสัตว์	สารพัดพินาศดิบหายสิ้น	Mahachai, disgrace of the animals, All ruined, utterly destroyed.
กรุงแก้วเปื้อนจอมดิน	หมิ่นว่าสูญตระกูลไทย ฯ	The precious city fallen apart, submerged under the earth, Insulted, meaning the disappearance of the Thais.
เศษอิฐปูนสะเก็ดสะเก็ดอื่น	จะรื้อฟื้นมีงขวัญไฉน	The remnants of brick and mortar sobbing, How can the spirit be revived?
แห้งแล้งมนุษย์ธรรมใน	สากลโลกนี้มีจริง ฯ	Exhaustion of human values, In this world, they do not really exist.
สิ้นศิลปอยุธยา	ทั่วดินฟ้าอับยศซึ่ง	The end of the art of Ayuthaya, Severely disgraced all over the earth and the sky.
เหลือแต่ธาตุเหลือถึง	สิ่งคู่สยามงามหน้าอช ฯ	Left are only traces and monkeys dwelling, In beautiful Siam, its inner beauty lost. <sup>24</sup>

As the speaker travels through the ruins of the old city in “Ayuthaya Vipayok” he names each devastated site. The techniques of punning and transfer of traditional *nirat*, however, are absent. Instead, each station of the journey is used simultaneously to evoke the glory and devastation of Ayuthaya. Although Angkhan describes several stages of history in his writing – from poems about nature located in an undefined point in the past<sup>25</sup> to the time of the Buddha<sup>26</sup> and from the periods of the Thai kingdoms up to the present<sup>27</sup> – the poet locates the culmination of Thai history and culture in Ayuthaya. In contrast, all descriptions of Bangkok and all accounts of modern life in Angkhan’s poetry speak of anguished alienation from the present.

When considering Angkhan’s treatment of the past in its entirety, his notion of Thai history seems always to culminate in Ayuthaya. Still more significant, however, is the thematic of collective cultural departure from this idealized period. This painful separation from the past becomes the most significant feature of the present in the poet’s writing. The complexity of his *nirat* lies in the fact that the various stages of time moreover intersect with different spaces, and that the movement through these dimensions is also manifold.

Angkhan retains the technique of contrasting two cultures that is a common feature of traditional *nirat*. Unlike in earlier *nirat*, however, the poet expresses no explicit disdain for features of the local or the peripheral. Angkhan’s poetry glorifies the “center” that is Ayuthaya, and his *nirat* move solely through the sites of central Thai power in accord with a nationalist, hegemonic perspective on Thai history. Nowhere does the poet contrast this center to peripheral cultures, however. Instead, from the locales of the old cities, there emerges a juxtaposition of two points in time rather than space as Angkhan mobilizes the force of the old Thai centers of power for his critique of present-day Bangkok.

24 Angkhan, *Kaviniphon*, 51–52.

25 See “Jaruek Adid” in *idem*, *Kaviniphon*.

26 See “Krap Phra Boromakhru” in *idem*, *Panilhan Kavi*.

27 See “Sanam Luang” in *idem*, *Bangkok Kaeo Kamsuan* and “Krung Thep Thailaen” in *idem*, *Lammam Phu Kru-dueng*.

What stands out in Angkhan's use of space is that the stations of the journey are not only the individual ruins of Ayuthaya, but also heaven and beyond. The space of the *nirat* now extends into the cosmos. This entry into the dimension of cosmological space constitutes a further feature that generates the vehemence of his rhetoric. Thus in "The Art of Ayuthaya" ("Sinlapa Ayuthaya," 1961) Ayuthaya, and by extension the Thai nation, is accorded divine status, but is at the same time shown to have lost its rightful place in the world and universe.

อยุธยาปูนป้าชา	สร้างสวรรค์	Ayuthaya, like the graveyard of heaven, The prosperous divine lotus,
บัวเพื่อพิชฌกนกวัดย์	ร่วงฟ้า	The <i>kanok wan</i> pattern, Have fallen from the sky.
มาเมื่อป็นอาจรพณ์	แหลกล่ม	Have decomposed, have been ruined ominously, Destroyed, fallen,
เหลวต้อทุกเส้นหญ้า	ป่าน้ำตาสยาม ฯ	Dissolute and base, every blade of grass, Flowing heavily with the tears of Siam. <sup>28</sup>

The geocultural landscapes in many of Angkhan's short *nirat* poems thus appear as sites of destruction. Significantly absent from the desexualized Thai literary present of Angkhan's writing is the body of the lover, which played such an important role in traditional *nirat*. Instead, inanimate objects – the ruins – are invested with something akin to corporeality and merge with the organic. "Ayuthaya Wipayok" and "Sinlapa Ayuthaya" leave the reader with the impression that the cosmos and the world join in mourning the fall of Ayuthaya. Its destruction, as described in "Sinlapa Ayuthaya," is felt across worlds and eras:

ไอ้อูชยามหาสดาน	ภินทนาการกลื่อนกลิ้ง	O Ayuthaya, that great place, Scattered brokenness, rolling,
เร้งกามาเตะทั้ง	นั่งเฉยสิ้นทั้งดินไตร ฯ	Chewed on and thrown away by vultures, crows and dogs, Completely motionless throughout the three worlds.
เสียงซากอิฐปูนสะอื้น	วังวงพื้นกรุงไทยไหว	The sound of the carcasses of brick and mortar sobbing, The ground of the Thai state trembling, solitarily,
ทุกผงทรายธุลีไป	ทุกนัยยะเสมอเพื่อเจรจา ฯ	Through each speck of sand and dust, Throughout all ages, deliriously.
แสบใจไทยทั้งชาติ	วินาศทุกเชื้อทุกเส้นหญ้า	Hurting the Thais throughout existence, Destroyed, embittered, every blade of grass,
เลือดท่วมเท้าช้างม้า	เป็นป่าช้าทั่วชั่วนิรันดร์ ฯ	Blood inundates the feet of elephants and horses, A burial ground throughout eternity.
เทพาให้จัดโลกบาล	ทุกวิมานมิ่งไม้ไอศวรรย์	The deities, the four guardians of the world, Every <i>niman</i> , every precious heavenly plant,
ชลนดรพรั่งลงพหลัน	สั่นดินฟ้าโศกาลัย ฯ	Cries heavily. The earth and the skies tremble with grief. <sup>29</sup>

The cosmos and the sites of the Thai kingdoms replace the landscape of the traditional *nirat*. At the same time, the body of the lover simply disappears, and desire is directed towards the recuperation of a premodern socio-aesthetic order; the theme of longing is employed to describe a

28 *Kaviniphon*, 45.

29 *Kaviniphon*, 47.

collective vision rather than the sphere of the personal. Where his poems critique the present, Thailand itself, as we will see, becomes the alienating, anxiety-provoking foreign territory through which the *nirat* traveler journeyed in traditional *nirat*. Anxiety is here no longer produced by travel in the territories under imperial Siam's suzerainty, but by what the poet perceives to be the detrimental impact of global culture on Thailand.

Unlike his contemporaries, who often use *nirat* and other genres to invoke ideals of political freedom and social justice, or to commemorate the political uprisings of 1973 and 1976, Angkhan's use of the poetic past is directed towards an entirely different purpose.<sup>30</sup> His concern lies neither in the sphere of concrete politics, nor in the realm of everyday struggles of identity between the local and the central. Instead the explicit scene of conflict in his writing lies in the domain of struggles over what form Thai cultural modernity is to take.

### Art for Life Poetics – Angkhan's Contemporaries

Against the progression of Thai right-wing ideologies in the latter half of the twentieth century stood the development of Thai socialist ideology – an ideology also thoroughly worked through in poetics. In the 1950s the Marxists Chit Phumisak and Asani Phonlathan launched their attack on *sakdina* decadence as encoded in classical literature.<sup>31</sup> During this time Chit Phumisak wrote *Art for Life, Art for the People* (1957), a polemic in favor of politically committed art.<sup>32</sup> According to Chit, revolutionary art was to be a political weapon against classical Thai *sakdina* culture, which had served the oppressive interests of the ruling classes.

Chit's manifesto objected not only to the contents of classical literature, but also to the fact of an elite literary language. Regarding poetic lexicon, the language of simple everyday and peasant speech was to replace traditional aristocratic vocabularies. In addition to identifying classical literature as an instrument that maintains the status of the elite, a further feature of Chit's revolutionary aesthetics was its almost obsessive condemnation of the sexual content of that literature. Although Chit argued for revolutionary literature to be socialist in content, he did not believe that the *forms* of classical literature had to be changed. The new literature was to be national in form and socialist in content, and hence a Thai Marxist aesthetics was created.<sup>33</sup>

With the revival in the 1970s of Thai Marxist thought, "Art for Life" poetics continued to exert a strong influence. In the course of the "Art for Life" debates, folk elements in Thai poetry came to have the connotation of resistance to unjust governance and social stratification. In their search for progressive Thainess, poets often turned to the regional and the rural, sometimes making use of their own cultural roots. On a thematic level, a shift in attention towards social problematics and the concerns of "the people" occurred. On a formal level, rhythms, elements, and fragments of folk songs were incorporated into "Art for Life" poetry.<sup>34</sup>

30 Thus Naowarat Phongphaibun reflects on the events in *Athit Thueng Jan* and *Tak Rung Rueang Payom*, and Khomthuan Khanthanu in *Natakam Bon Lan Kvang*.

31 This term denotes a highly hierarchized system of social ranking introduced in the Ayuthaya period that was originally based on control over land. *Sakdina* is sometimes translated as "feudal," and has in the present come to mean "elite."

32 Chit Phumisak, *Sinlapa Phuea Chivit Sinlapa Phuea Prachachon (Art for Life, Art for the People)*, (Bangkok: Nitisart, 1957).

33 See Kasian Tejapira, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927–1958* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2001). See also Yuangrat and Paul Wedel, *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand* (Bangkok: ABAC, 1987), 77–87.

## Poetics and the Nation

At stake in the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s especially is the question of the nation. The 1960s were marked not only by Sarit's indigenist nationalism and policy of accelerated development, but also by Thailand's security relations with the U.S. and by the Vietnam War. Benedict Anderson understands Bangkok's tightening of control over the rural population, its expansion of the education system, and the Americanization of the country as characteristics of the 1960s. At the same time, Anderson also ascribes the rise of the middle class and the formation of political and social consciousness and resistance to American influence.<sup>35</sup> The political radicalization of Thai students in the United States led to a questioning of policy at home and, finally, to active resistance. In the mid-1960s, the Communist Party of Thailand began its armed struggle. By 1973, opposition to the government that followed Sarit's, the Thanom Kittikhachorn-Praphat Charusathien regime, led to protests and the demand for constitutional rule. The government's violent suppression of these protests in 1973 was followed by a brief period of democratic rule, before further escalating state violence in 1976 ended this phase.

The cycles of poems that chronicle the events of 1973 and 1976 are suffused with a political vision and radicalism that is indicative of how politics and poetry were interlinked during these periods. The axis on which the writings of the "Art for Life" writers and their poetic heirs turn is democratic transformation – as the factor thought to be able to transform the nation into the counter-nation they envision. Naowarat Phongphaibun's collection of poems, *Phieng Khvam Khluean Wai (Mere Movement)*, is exemplary of this writing.<sup>36</sup> Weighted towards the more indigenous meter of *klon*, Naowarat's poems are suffused with the rhythms of folk songs and oral literature. Pieces with titles such as "Mere Movement," "Flute Song Over the Rice Field," "To the Children of the People," or "Krathum Baen" tap elements of the lives of urban workers as well as the cycle of agriculture and rural festivals to create symbols of "the people" and to partake directly in struggles over national transformation.

Against this Thai leftist counter-concept of citizenship and nationhood, Angkhan sets a poetry of heightened cultural consciousness. Throughout the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, his writing remained almost untouched by the social and political consciousness that is so strongly present in the writing of his contemporaries. Even in "Sanam Luang" – a station and poem in his long *nirat*, *Bangkok Kao Kamsuan*, from 1978 – Angkhan only laments the general decadence of the present. Although Sanam Luang is the place in Bangkok where the uprisings of 1973 and 1976 took place and is virtually synonymous with these events, the poet makes no mention of these pivotal political events in this poem.

In contrast to that of his contemporaries, Angkhan's political ideology thus appears conservative or even reactionary. A distaste for the quotidian, especially for the realm of day-to-day politics, also frequently becomes evident. Instead Angkhan posits ethical absolutes in combination with a primacy of aesthetics. Especially in his poems about art and in his artistic manifestos (*panitban*), the poet advances the salutary power of art as a redemptive force. Thus, while in his poetic manifesto "Kawi" ("Poet/Poetry") Naowarat vows to write truth and reflect life in his poetry, in Angkhan's manifestos we find first a pledge to "sacrifice and leave behind life" and

34 These poets include Naowarat Phongphaibun and Sujit Wongthet as well as Khomthuan Khanthanu.

35 Benedict Anderson, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1985), 12ff.

36 Naowarat Phongphaibun, *Phieng Khvam Khluean Wai (Mere Movement)*, (Bangkok: Chaophraya, 1980).

later to “forsake even *nirvana*” in the quest to create redemptive art.<sup>37</sup> In these poems, art becomes a way of giving (*than*, Thai; *dāna*, Pali) to the world. These pieces attack the rational present from the site of an essentialized past in which, as Suchitra Chongstivatana has argued, high art takes the place of religion.<sup>38</sup> It becomes clear that instead of a political order, strictly speaking, Angkhan envisions an order in which aesthetics play a central role.

In his writing, the present of the nation seems determined by a conventional understanding of Thai history as based on cultural continuity. In what reads as a programmatic call for a return to national cultural essence, one may discern a much more totalizing form of the nation than in the writing of his contemporaries. At the same time, however, Angkhan’s writing cannot easily be relegated solely to the domain of the nationalist center. The intensity of anxiety over cultural loss in these poems contends with the very legitimate question of how a local culture might sustain itself against global forces.

In close connection, Angkhan’s poetry highlights and plays off against each other the conflicts between an economic system geared toward a maximization of production and efficiency and a culture that he sees as based on modesty and humility. All striving in Angkhan’s system is to be directed towards ethical behavior and the creation of art. What sometimes appears as a facile critique of capitalism is a vision that the poet has lived and embodied like no one else, to the extent of living in poverty in old age.

What is more, his poetry’s elevation of Ayuthaya to the highest ideal of a socio-aesthetic order stands in critical opposition to the dominant ethos of governance introduced in the late 1950s.

### ‘Sukhothai’ as National Ideology and Style of Governance

From 1958–1963, Thailand was governed by the authoritarian regime of Sarit Thanarat which aimed to revive indigenous models of authority – above all, that of the premodern patriarchal system of Sukhothai. As Thak Chaloemtiarana writes,

Sarit’s regime tried to implement “traditional” concepts of political leadership seen as approximating Sukhothai paternalism.<sup>39</sup>

Under Sarit, the nation was conceived of as a large family, in which administrative officials were to take the role of heads of the family. Paternalistic leadership was provided by the army and legitimated by the monarch. As David Wyatt writes, under Sarit the king was “restored to the apex of the moral, social, and political order” and first assumed an active role in developmental and national affairs.<sup>40</sup> Political parties and trade unions were abolished and both the *sangha* and the press tightly controlled. Sarit abrogated the constitution and ruled by decree under martial law, arguing that historically the nation had only prospered under authoritarian rule.

37 See “Kawi” (“The Poet/Poetry”) in Naowarat Phongphaibun, *Phleng Khlai Phiu* (Bangkok: Samnakphim Pla Taphian, 1983). See Angkhan’s “Panithan Khong Kawi” (“The Pledge of the Poet”) in *Kawiniphon* and “Panithan Kawi” (“The Poet’s Testament”) in *Panithan Kawi*.

38 See the important piece by Suchitra Chongstivatana, “Kawiniphon Khong Angkhan Kalayanaphong: Sasana Haeng Sunthari (The Poetry of Angkhan Kalayanaphong: The Religion of Aesthetics),” *Pajarayasan* 14.1 (1987): 35–51.

39 Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 147.

40 David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 281.

Sarit's strict control over all institutions of the state, however, did not extend to the business sector. He further promoted national development through Western-trained technocrats. The hallmark of Sarit's policy thus lay in his emphasis of the indigenous in combination with his adaptation of a foreign body of knowledge into his program of modernization. Sarit can be termed a reactionary modernist in that he combined a vision of large-scale technological development with cultural nostalgia. Assessing the impact of Sarit's political philosophy, Thak stresses that, "Sarit, more than any other person in the modern period, set the pattern of present-day politics in Thailand."<sup>41</sup>

### Angkhan's Ayuthaya

Beginning in this period, Angkhan's poetry sets Ayuthaya, with its connotations of high monarchical culture, against Sarit's model of an indigenist, nationalist technocratic order. While Sukhothai bears the connotation of the parochial, Ayuthaya is the idealized high cultural world that Angkhan's poems constantly reference. Citing those elements of Ayuthaya culture that are metropolitan and cosmopolitan, his poetry evokes the image of a more complexly structured and specialized culture than that of "Bangkok-Sukhothai."

At a time when the notion of Sukhothai represents an important element of national ideology, Angkhan thus invokes the era of Ayuthaya as a period representing ideal, desirable Thainess. The conflict between Sukhothai and Ayuthaya has an actual historical correlate in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when a revived Sukhothai stood against and was eventually superseded by an emergent Ayuthaya. According to David Wyatt, Ayuthaya represented a change in the way Tai states organized themselves and marked a transition to a new political and economic order. In contrast to Sukhothai, Ayuthaya emerged as an imperial, highly organized and hierarchized polity that consciously situated itself in a larger world of international relations. Wyatt describes King Ramkhamhaeng as having created an essentially Tai culture as the foundation for his kingdom, while the rulers of the new Tai empire of Ayuthaya made the decision to incorporate "foreign" elements of statecraft into their political programs.<sup>42</sup> In this context, Ayuthaya itself can be understood as an amalgam of South Asian, Khmer, and other "outside" influences. Angkhan thus invokes as essentially Thai something that is itself a product of a premodern kind of globalization, a cosmopolitan culture superseding a more Tai and purportedly more homogeneous one.

With his acerbic criticism of the cultural present, the poet echoes elements of the longing for cultural autonomy found in Sarit's nationalism. In this Angkhan's poetry bears the marks of both modernism and a frequently reactionary political stance, especially where his poetry's nationalist-xenophobic content is concerned. Yet in setting a vision of Ayuthaya against Sarit's style of authoritarian paternal leadership à la Ramkhamhaeng, he also strongly opposes the prevailing national ideology of his time. Earlier it was noted that the modernity of Angkhan's writing moreover lies not only in the pointed way in which anguish over the threat of cultural homogenization is expressed, but also in his choice of poetic means. Thus, with regard to form as well, his poetry constitutes a serious reflection on cultural modernity and the possibilities of representation in contemporary Thailand.

41 Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 99.

42 Wyatt notes that there was "little social and political differentiation" in Sukhothai. *Thailand: A Short History*, 58.

## The Politics of Poetics – Prosody and the Past

In aiming to describe what constitutes the modernity of Thai poetry, the concepts of form and content have frequently been mobilized. Many scholars share a consensus that in traditional poetry, form and euphony in particular – as opposed to content – and the emulation of the past masters are paramount.<sup>43</sup> In the study of modern poetry, this theme of form-over-content is understood to be reshaped or even reversed: While certain forms are retained, content now takes precedence and becomes the primary field of contestation. Trisilpa Boonkhachorn insightfully modifies this binary in the following way:

The transference of poetic values from the musicality of sounds to the emphasis on the unity of sounds and messages guides contemporary poetry to express what really is rather than the idealistic or romantic expression.<sup>44</sup>

Prosodic choices can indeed not be divorced from meaning or content. As Barend Jan Terwiel has shown for the Thai literary and historical context, prosodic innovation was frequently intimately related to changes in governance and social structure.<sup>45</sup> Thai poetics has represented a contested site of discourse since premodern times. For hundreds of years, Thai poetry has thus been a constantly shifting field that engages with elements of South Asian poetics on the level of metrics, lexicon, convention, *rasa*, and genre as well as content (e.g., plots, motifs, religious ideas). Premodern manuals of poetics – such as the *Cindamani*, *Kaphayasaramvilasini*, and *Kaphayakantha* as well as *Tamma Chan Wanaphruet lae Matraphruet* from the Bangkok era – prescribed in detail the lexical and metrical possibilities of poets.<sup>46</sup> Significant in these manuals of poetics is the introduction of South Asian prosodic means. What results is the indigenization of South Asian poetics and their combination with Thai prosodic conventions.<sup>47</sup> The extension of South Asian poetics by such local prosodic features as rhyme and tonal constraints, in turn, gave rise to poetic possibilities that remained in flux in the centuries that followed.

43 As Trisilpa Boonkhachorn remarks, “It can be concluded that the first priority of poetic values or literariness is the musicality of words” (“Intertextuality,” 77). See also Manas Chitakasem, “Poetic Conventions and Modern Thai Poetry,” in *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, ed. Manas Chitakasem; Andrew Turton (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 39.

44 Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, “Intertextuality,” 192.

45 B. J. Terwiel, “The Introduction of Indian Prosody among the Thais,” in *Ideology & Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996). For an analysis of the poetics of politics and the role of Sanskrit in relation to vernacular languages in South and Southeast Asia, see Sheldon Pollock, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (1998): 6–37.

46 *Kaphayasaramvilasini* and *Kaphayakantha* likely predate *Cindamani*. These treatises on the *klblong* and *kap* meters were written in both Pali and Thai; it is not certain which language they were originally written in. *Tamma Chan Wanaphruet lae Matraphruet* is a textbook on *chan* meters translated from the Pali *Vuttbodaya* by Phraparamanuchit during the reign of Rama III (1824–1851) that explains and indigenizes 50 *chan wanaphruet*, *chan* governed by numbers of syllables, and 8 *chan matraphruet*, *chan* governed by syllabic instants.

47 See, for example, Klaus Rosenberg, *Die epischen Chan-Dichtungen in der Literatur Thailands. Mit einer vollständigen Übersetzung des Anirut Kham Chan* (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1976), and Thomas Hudak, *The Indigenization of Pali Meters in Thai Poetry* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1990).

## The Past in Present-day Poetics

A distinct feature of contemporary Thai poetry is that, for the most part, it is in meter. Through the use of traditional metrics such as *klon*, *kblong*, *chan*, *kap*, and *rai* the past is carried over into contemporary poetry. As past transgressions of the poetic order are incorporated into the body of possible poetic forms, the field of poetics diversifies and expands. Thus Angkhan's own poetry, once condemned on the grounds of its vulgarity and transgression of metrical rules, was subsequently awarded numerous literary prizes and became part of high school curricula. Trisilpa Boonkhachorn describes contemporary poetry's uses of traditional prosodic forms as "dialogues with the voice of Authority."<sup>48</sup> As Trisilpa further clarifies,

Contemporary texts demonstrate the admiration of the aesthetics of the past and conserve them by continuing their poetic traditions. But they also debate with the authority of the past and subvert a specific system of beliefs and ideology. In this way the relationship of the present to the hegemonic past is a dialectical relationship. Contemporary texts debate with authority and receive only the aesthetics, but drop political and social authenticating authorities.<sup>49</sup>

Since the 1950s much of Thai poetic discourse has moreover taken the form of explicit contestation in poetic manifestos (*pamühan*) rather than of theoretical texts. These manifestos have almost attained the status of a distinct genre. Even where there is no explicit manifesto, it can be argued that poets invariably participate in the discourse simply through their prosodic choices and innovations.

### Angkhan's Poetics

In the domain of prosody, the most remarkable feature of Angkhan's dialog with the past is his combination of divergent strata of language. His discordant use of registers engenders a tension that is evident in much of his writing, but becomes most marked in his poems about Bangkok. We saw how in "Ayuthaya" Angkhan first quotes two stanzas of admiration passage from a classical source and then sets his stanzas about the downfall of the city against these, converting the convention of admiration passages into one of admiration *and* deploration. In addition, a jeering, defiant tone pervades his own *kblong* stanzas. The mood conveyed is one of sadness combined with sarcastic bitterness. However, the poem drops its biting tone in the *kap* stanzas that follow, turning into a more straightforward narration of grief over the destruction of Ayuthaya.

In these *nirat* poems on the past, Angkhan juxtaposes widely divergent registers. Verses 11, 15, and 17 of "Sinlapa Ayuthaya," and verses 1–10 of "Ayuthaya Wipayok" are good examples of this juxtaposition of different strata of language, some of which remains evident in the English translation. In the poems on Ayuthaya, the reader thus reencounters the emotional content of pain of the traditional *nirat*, but finds it modified through variations of the *nirat* convention in tone, mood, imagery, and especially choice of lexicon.

48 Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, "Intertextuality," 156.

49 *Idem*, 202–203. *Klon*, for instance, is a meter thought to have folk origins. It was appropriated by the Ayuthaya court in the eighteenth century and later made use of for purposes of resistance to the dictatorships of the 1970s. Thus, it becomes more difficult to assign definite connotations of resistance or consent to genres and forms.

## Bangkok

Angkhan's poems about Bangkok register a formal and thematic shift. For one, the poet's tone becomes venomous and sarcastic. While we can still read these poems as *nirat*, the tone of lamentation of the traditional *nirat* intensifies into what Suchitra Chongstitvatana has described as a tone of *boriphat* – censure or accusation.<sup>50</sup> A further distinct feature of these poems is that Angkhan transforms the traditional emotional content of pain into rage in order to convey the state of crisis that he diagnoses for Thai cultural modernity.

On the level of poetic lexicon, one finds in Angkhan's Bangkok poems the most conflicting juxtaposition of registers. What is more, the aggressively hybrid poetic language of these poems no longer reflects the longing for the recovery of a lost ideal of Thai culture:

อนิจจา เกิดมาคอรัปชั่น	รอคืนวันคั้งบั้งรัฐประหาร	A pity, born for corruption, Waiting, day and night, crazy for coup d'états.
กินเมือง โศครุหมาบ้าอันธพาล	ประจานผลงานจับเมืองไทย ฯ	Ruling the country, that pack of crazed, depraved dogs. Disgraceful are the fruits of their doings, Sinking their teeth into Thailand. <sup>51</sup>

In two other poems, Angkhan writes:

มวลดโรคสังกรรมะเร็งพิษร้าย	ได้เรียนมหาวิทยาลัยสวรรค์ ฯ	Those vile, diseased, cancerous ones, Studied in the university of heaven,
รับปริญญาามาแล้วอัศจรรย์	หลุหรรยงก็ง่าที่ปริญญาตรี ฯ	Received the various miraculous animal degrees. Joyfully, the tree lizard received a B.A.
ปลุกผีลูกทุกป่าช้ากล้า	คำกัญชยาตีพื้นวิเศษศรี	Waking the ghosts of every burial ground, Dealing in hashish, superb, splendid opium,
พยาธิพุงควายวิสามันธุ์ชนิดี	สอนวิธีดูดเลือดคนเอกอธรรม ฯ	Worms of the buffalo's stomach of extraordinary quality, Teach a blood-sucking method, gorging on <i>adharma</i> . <sup>52</sup>
สุราฯขวัญยุโรปดื่มขัง	วิเศษชะงัด ก็ดี	Drinking captivating alcohol, the spirit of Europe, superbly effective,
ห้าน่าเมาเสมอสัตว์	ต่ำช้า	Deranged, drunk, like low, base animals,
สรรพภัยชำระสารพัด	พิษย่อย ถึงเกล	All foolish dangers, all vile poisons are there,
คอยคลื่นน้ำกลบหน้า	น้ำใหม้นรกานต์ ฯ	Waiting for the waves of insanity to bury their faces, to rot and burn in hell. <sup>53</sup>

50 The verb *boriphat* means to reproach, censure, or accuse.

51 “Tuen Thoet Lok Manut” (“Wake Up, Humanity!”), *Panithan Kawi*, 37.

52 “Beng Ngan Bat Sop Jop Phop Trai” (“Excreting Work Eternally Vile”), *Panithan Kawi*, 57.

53 “Benjasin” (“Five Precepts”), *Bangkok Kao Kamsuan*, 125.

While the message of Angkhan's poems on the present sometimes becomes repetitive or tends toward the fanatical, the energy of challenge that is generated by the juxtaposition of widely divergent registers is engaging:

พระนครบงกคโก้	กาคสวรรคต์	Royal City, trendy Bangkok, refuse of the heavens,
กิ้งก่าหลนโลมมหันต์	ห่ามเลื้อย	Chameleons, lizards, huge lice are sure to creep there.
คางคกอีง่างพลัน	เป็นใหญ่	All of a sudden frogs and toads are masters,
หยาบเด่นบินเรือยเจื้อย	เมื่อยแค้นขะชะขาม ฯ	Vulgarily moving and flying on and on. Fatiguing, this region of the waste of Siam.
กรุงเทพ๑สถานท่วยท้าว	เทวดา	Divine City, domain of gods,
เพ็ญย่ำแสงสวรรคัมมา	เพื่อท่อง	Out to pursue heaven to feed off.
อาบเหงื่อต่างน้ำหา	สิ่งหนึ่ง	Showering with sweat instead of water,
ลึ่งนั้นอาจเช่าซื้อ	หมดแม้วิญญาณ ฯ	Pursuing just one thing, That thing can be rented, including even the soul.
กรุงเทพ๑ชื่อเทพเจ้า	เดินดิน	Divine City with the name of the gods,
งกเพื่อกอบโกยกิน	ชั่วมือ	The gods relegated to the earth, Persistently avaricious.
อมนุษย์ร่วมเลื้อยบิน	คลาคล่ำ	In a pack inhuman beings crawl, fly together.
ที่นี้ขายเช่าซื้อ	หมดสิ้นวิญญาณ ฯ	Here the entire soul is sold, can be bought and rented. <sup>54</sup>

And, in an untitled poem in *Panithan Kawi*, Angkhan writes:

สี่หน้าพระดำยหน้า	ระยดิน	With four faces the god shakes his head, fed up with the earth.
ครึนครุ่นเขียวฉวัด	หมิ่นหล้า	Three-eyed, turbid green, Longing for and despising the world.
นิวเคลียร์ถ่อยไฟทมิฬ	มล้างโลก	Nuclear, <sup>55</sup> base fire of the vicious <sup>56</sup> Will destroy the world.
สมัยใหม่ใจมนุษย์บ้า	คลั่งก้านิวเคลียร์ ฯ	In the modern age why is humanity so insane? Crazed with dealing in nuclear material. <sup>57</sup>

The linguistic hybridity of the Bangkok poems differs from that of the Ayuthaya poems. Again the poet combines evocative religious concepts and a highly Sanskritic idiom with a lexicon of Thai words that includes “vulgar” language and curses. But in these critiques of the present, the high proportion of neologisms and English words stands out. These pieces add another dimension to Angkhan's cultural critique and let the reader sense the accelerated pace of industrialization and globalization of the 1970s and 1980s in Thailand.<sup>58</sup> With this distinctive poetic lexicon, Angkhan succeeds in making vivid the notion of a threatening material and ideological modernity.

54 “Benjasin” (“Five Precepts”), *Bangkok Kao Kamsuan*, 125.

55 Angkhan uses the English adjective “nuclear” as a noun in Thai.

56 Angkhan uses the word “*tamil*,” which stands for “vicious,” “dangerous,” or “depraved.”

57 Untitled, *Panithan Kawi*, 39.

58 The language of the Bangkok poems also evokes the Vietnam War years, a period in which the influx of American GIs seeking “Rest and Recreation” also shaped Thai cultural forms (Personal communication, Thak Chaloehtiarana).

## Metrical Choices

In the late 1950s and in the 1960s, when national ideology is expressly modeled on Sukhothai, Angkhan not only writes obsessively about Ayuthaya, but does so in a genre (*nirat*) and meter (mostly *khlong*) that signifies Ayuthaya. Where metrical choices are concerned, it seems appropriate for Angkhan to prefer *khlong*, an indigenous Thai meter that may reach back to the fourteenth century. This creates a correspondence between the formal elements and the intentional content of his poetry. The complexity of the meter can be understood to parallel the complexity of Ayuthaya culture that Angkhan seeks to invoke. In addition to *khlong* the poet also uses *kap* extensively. Both *khlong* and *kap* are used for didactic purposes and concur with this tendency in Angkhan's writing.

*Khlong* is a meter closely associated with Ayuthaya *nirat*. *Khlong* is the oldest form of poetry and may have been used for more than six centuries. The oldest work in this meter is *Ongkan Chaeng Nam Khlong Ha* ("The Royal Water Oath"), from the reign of Ramathibodi I (1350–1369). Because of its tonal and rhyming constraints *khlong* is believed to be indigenously Thai. Klaus Wenk notes that most literary works from the Ayuthaya period are in *khlong* or *lilit* – the latter of which is a form that is again made up largely of *khlong*. In addition to *nirat*, *khlong* was also used for didactic literature such as *Phali Son Nong*.<sup>59</sup> Due to its complex rhyming and tonal constraints, *khlong* is considered the most difficult of the indigenous Thai meters.<sup>60</sup>

The other meter that Angkhan uses prolifically and that can also be brought into close association with Ayuthaya is *kap*. Trisilpa notes that in the past, *kap* was used as a verse form for narration as well as to compose textbooks in every field. In contemporary poetry, as Trisilpa writes, it has developed from a "soft and smooth rhythm to a concise and powerful prosodic form."<sup>61</sup> She maintains that between 1973 and 1976 *kap yani* was the most popular prosodic form used to compose poems of social consciousness.<sup>62</sup> Angkhan, in contrast, uses the critical-didactic charge of *kap* to lament cultural loss.

## Poetic Extremes

Angkhan's poetics signify at once a high degree of reverence for a specific past, religion, and art as well as a high measure of irreverence for the cultural, intellectual, and bureaucratic establishment of his day. Where his use of registers is concerned, his poetic decisions are frequently aimed against a corrupt bureaucratic elite, responsible in part for the cultural crisis that Angkhan's poetry deplores. Furthermore, they are directed against a rigid academic elite. This hostility is evident in the many spiteful passages that mock academic institutions and conventions. What Angkhan advocates instead is an elite culture that is not institutionally based.

Angkhan's strategy in setting Ayuthaya against Bangkok-Sukhothai and in juxtaposing divergent registers serves his larger aim of advocating a desirable cosmopolitanism – without calling it that – over and above an undesirable form of globalization. In this context, Angkhan's divergent registers invoke largely incommensurable identities. Further, in his poetry the level of argument and the level of representation stand at odds with each other. On the level of argument, Angkhan calls for a return to the culture of Ayuthaya. The poetics that he develops, his deployment of

59 Klaus Wenk, *Phali lebrt die Jüngerer (Phali Son Nong): Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Soziologie Thailands*. (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1977).

60 Not all forms of *khlong* are complex, but forms such as *khlong si suphap* can be considered complex.

61 Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, "Intertextuality," 187.

62 Trisilpa Boonkhachorn "Intertextuality," 190. *Kap* probably originated from the Pali meters *kap sanwilasini* and *kap kantha*.

Ayuthaya style in combination with very contemporary linguistic elements, however, are somewhat opposed to the intentional content of his writing. It is in this ironic tension between argument and form that the attraction of his poetry lies. On the one hand, Angkhan presents forceful statements about issues of globalization and Thai culture in which he calls for a kind of purity; on the other hand, he creates an extremely hybridized poetic language. He thus mixes an intentional content that conjures up the image of a premodern cosmopolitanism with a poetics highly reflective of present-day globalization. What results is a call for, as well as an experiment in, a desirable kind of present-day cosmopolitanism.

## Conclusion

Angkhan's poetic journey through national historiography registers as one in which the anxiety of the traditional *nirat* has been raised to the level of fear, the object of desire is not recoverable, and temporary cultural dislocation has become extreme alienation. With his focus on Ayuthaya, with his allegorical subject that stands for "humanity" rather than "the people," and with the abstract collective, rather than a single lover, that his *nirat* are addressed to, Angkhan's poems on the past improvise on literary convention to make a bid in the competition over the definition of the Thai cultural present. With the movement away from the parochial towards the cosmopolitan, the poet's vision ultimately transgresses also the confines of nation and nationalism. The poet has thus transformed the lamentation of traditional *nirat* into what, with all caveats about its apparent nationalism and xenophobia, we can understand as strident criticism of Thai cultural modernity. In so doing, Angkhan has made high cultural forms, rather than solely those of folk origin, available for effective critiques of the present.