

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes how the meaning is constructed in each short story, followed by the discussion of how Laotian Identity is formed. Deconstruction of truth claim and narrative techniques will be analyzed in three topics namely, binary opposition and stereotyping as violence, text as a self contradiction, and undecidability of the text or the free-play of the meaning.

Binary opposition is a basic idea of distinguishing different objects. It is also a main methodology of western metaphysics. According to Lacan, human beings firstly learn the opposition through the loss of jouissance or the state of being inside the mother's womb. When infants were newly born, they were taken away not only from safety, warmth and hunger but also from the unity with their mothers. As a result, the first binary opposition human beings learn is the loss and the retrieval.

E.g. Loss  
Retrieval

Depart  
Return

In “Phaeng Mae” (Mother Beloved), the return to the old village where Boukham has left is symbolic; it is the subconscious of the desire to return to the state of jouissance which is the wholeness or the completeness. By using the technique of metafiction or the storytelling of the other storytelling, the anonymous narrator “I” creates the mystery around the notion of “who is he?” and “who is his mother?” as the narrator does not give more information about his own mother. The only information the readers learn is that Bounkham's mother died when Bounkham was only 8 years old.

Upon arrival at the village, the narrator thinks that the peaceful surroundings look familiar as if it was his own birthplace even though it is not. The pregnant woman they meet can also be interpreted as the symbolic mother who deserves protection and nourishment as to give birth to a child refers to the continuity of life, and it is an obligation not only for the family but also for the whole community to

support pregnant women. According to Partha Chatterjee, this presumed collective obligation is not only a historical artifact but also the fragmented imagination (Pinkaw, 64). Therefore, Boukham's repressed fragments of memories surface, and the remembrance of the "origin" is accomplished without going to the place the narrator himself has left. In other words, his visit to this village is a symbol of returning to his own place. To explain how the return is related to the Laotian Identity in the New-Thinking Era, Anant Kanjanapan claims that Identity is coined with a Primordialist View or the genetic-oriented inheritance (Kanjanapan, 130). In this text, to depart from the mother is symbolically the loss of the origin. Therefore, to return to the mother's place even by the process of remembering is the desire to restore and maintain the same old state of Laotian Cultural Identity. However, this kind of generalization by the genetic-oriented theorists subconsciously blocks racial integrity or ethnic diversity. If the group is not led by Bounkham, they might not receive adequate co-operation from the village as the woman they meet might not trust them at the beginning.

The binary opposition of loss VS retrieval is extended in "Mok Tao" (Wrapped Ash Delight). The inner conflict of Nang Piew can be explained by Levi Strauss's concept of the raw and the cooked:

Nature  
Culture

For Nang Piew, nature is represented by a desire to possess the belt while culture is socialization such as shame, the sense of guilt which polishes Nang Piew's behavior. If there is no social sanction, Nang Piew might not return the silver belt to Nang Oie. When the culprit has taken her neighbor's silver belt, the headman of the village has to set up the meeting and give a chance for the culprit to re-enter the society through the traditional ritual of self-repentance. This ritual also functions as the saving-face strategy to maintain the harmony of the village.

Another binary opposition in this text is

Order  
Disorder

Through the narrator's voice, before the loss of Nang Oie's silver belt, the village shares love, solidarity, sincerity, and brotherhood for many generations. In this text, the social order is operated through the sacredness of the sooth-sayer. Nang Piew has to return the silver belt to Nang Oie as she believes in supernatural power of the sooth-sayer. After she learns that Nang Oie plans to seek advice from the sooth-sayer, she has no hesitation to return the belt. This social order is regulated by the community, not by the law. Nang Piew always worries that she would not be able to wear the belt in public rather than worrying about the police. According to Rakow, the role of the headman or Khun Baan was already abolished during the 1960s by the Pathet Lao or the communist government (Rakow, 118). Therefore, to enforce this kind of resolution means they impose the local measure against the central measure or the mainstream Laotian Identity framed by the government:

Local  
Central

In this text, as the conflict in this story is solved within the community, it proves that tradition mode of conflict resolution can bring back the harmony without the help legal support and this mode is more effective. In short, the community values localized autonomy and believes that their own mode of resolution has the power to control its members' behavior with the aim of compromising. From this respect, it can be argued that the system of conflict resolution is:

Oral tradition  
Written regulation

These events link to the Laotian Identity as the oral tradition is regarded as the purer way of living. Figuratively, it can also be interpreted that the belt that is uncovered possibly signifies the lost tradition, and their uniquely localized way of conflict resolution is a restoration of the traditional Laotian Identity.

In "Moo Po" (Father's Friend), the main binary oppositions are

Sanity = Useful  
Insanity Useless

Michel Foucault explains that the concept of madness is distorted by capitalism that dominates the system and the rule of a society. Foucault regards mad people as marginalized because they cannot contribute to the dynamic of production (Charoensin Olan, 273). From this assertion, sanity connotes productivity of the individual while insanity connotes losses. In this story, the father's friend whose name is Yan has gone aboard to study but he comes back without a degree and has gone mad. Through the father's narration, Yan has no danger to the society but always does useless activities and could not contribute anything to the society. When Yan was young, he was very hard-working and got the best grades at school, but many friends remark that "Your intelligence will run you over".

While producing discourse of Unitarianism, the stereotyping of ambitious person is constituted. In this text, the father demarcates

Reality  
Reverie

For the father, he has to stop himself from dreaming (looking into the sky and wanting to be a bird) when he finds that there is a lot of garbage on the ground. For him, having an idea is nothing unless it is put into action. The father says that while Yan was pursuing his study aboard, the father just went to a vocational school. When Yan has gone mad, he put the paper and plastic bags on his shoulders in disguise of a garland. In the father's eyes, Yan does not produce anything as those dirty paper and torn bags can not be sold. Unlike the father who sees abnormality through his observation, his daughter sees that Yan is a useful person as he cleans up the mess scattered on ground. In other words, as a means of socialization, the father who is considered more experienced is the one who provides the meaning of the phenomena to his daughter. In terms of Laotian Identity, it can be interpreted that the society discourages deviation, and the desirable model of the individual has to be productive. The text also suggests that Lao people can live normally without foreign education.

The argument about productivity extends to "Kwai Dauy San" (Buffalo Passenger). The main event is when the pilot is not happy to carry the buffaloes back to Vientiane because of the waste of time, labor and oil. The binary opposition can be summed up as

Worth  
Worthless

In this text, the confrontation of the pilot and the buffaloes can be interpreted as the clash of the different attitudes. The main reason why the government wants to take the buffaloes to Vientiane is to show them in the annual report. In socialist Ideology, it is worthwhile to enforce physical labor as it is the real mode of production. The outcome of production, therefore, is not a means for exchange. From the very beginning of the text, the narrator depicts that everything in Attapru is very cheap, and sometimes people can just ask for food without paying anything. From this point, we can see that rural people do not pay attention to profit and losses. The production for the citizen of Attapru, therefore, is not always commodities for sale. Moreover, to propagate its citizen to “take sides”, the agricultural production is one of the goals of the government to build up the country. However, the pilot thinks that it is a waste of time, money and labor to carry the buffaloes on the plane back to the capital city because, first of all, Attapru Airport is not well equipped. Therefore, he has to speculate the distance between the aircraft and the airport manually which is not quite safe for the pilot. Secondly, it takes them four hours to get all the buffaloes into the aircraft. Lastly, the pilot complains about the cost of the oil. Unlike the capitalist counterpart, the socialist government takes all outcome of production such as labor, capital, time as collective production. To consolidate his argument, the narrator as a city person constitutes a counter discourse of the capitalist ideology which maximizes profit from any kind of investment or activity.

Regarding Laotian Cultural Identity, the text portrays differences between

City  
Country

In the rural space, buffaloes are not alienated as that area is the right place for them. On the contrary, when they are transported onto the plane, the pilot has to calculate the balance and weight in order to fly the aircraft to the destination. Therefore, buffaloes become “otherness” in the aircraft as the aircraft is not designed for them.

Another obvious binary is

Public  
Personal

The pilot feels that the buffaloes have violated his space, and feels uncomfortable to share the space with the buffaloes which smell badly in the aircraft. The buffaloes do not realize that the aircraft is not their own place. The situation of the “buffaloes” is relevant to Laotian cultural Identity; the city people need to have their own space. Moreover, city people hardly comply with the mainstream Socialist Identity which values public space. According to Professor Dr. Chartthip Nagasupa, the utility of the space in socialist ideology has to be for the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Nagasupa, 293). For the city people, they do not grow rice and vegetable by themselves. In order to acquire commodities, they have to exchange their labor to get the money to buy commodities. In city people’s perception, buffaloes are just their burden as they do not make a living by using buffaloes.

In “Ploy Nok” (Freeing the Birds), the power of the public also invades the area of the woman’s personal life. In this text, Kavao, full of shame, has to accept the banishment by leaving the small village to live with the man whom she has a baby with as a mistress because the rumor of her pregnancy spreads in the community. Kavao is not only abused by the capitalist society but also by her traditional community. In this text, the society does not consider that she is abused. When virginity is lost without marriage, punishment is automatically rendered. The binary opposition of City vs. Country is repeated again in this text. It seems that she has to move to the city as nobody there will pay attention to her past. In the city, people live with different rules and attitudes. However, to move to the city is not a means to free herself, as the text symbolically portrays her situation as a “bird’s cage”.

Another binary opposition from this incident is

Purity  
Pollution

The narrative symbolizes abundant natural resource and women’s virginity as purity. At this point, women are objectified as “national treasure” which is the source of



nourishment. Meanwhile, the text equates deforestation with the loss of virginity. When Kavao was sexually exploited and has to undergo the social bondage, the text, in parallel, foregrounds the event of the transformation of the “natural resources” into “personal assets” from the forestry concession. It can be interpreted that Laotian Cultural Identity is polluted by capitalism, and Laotian Cultural Identity is rescued by Socialism. An obvious incident is Pukao’s consent to join the forestation company because lucrative income and Kavao’s father’s consent to let her go with the Chinese man without considering the potential danger. To end the exploitation, the text introduces the scene of “protest” and “revolution” as the resolution to retrieve the pre-capitalist state.

In “Lao Tevada” (Angel’s Whisky) and “Kem Kad Nak” (Copper Gold Belt), scientificity can manipulate superstitious people to surrender to the scientific and rational thinking. In other words, the modern attitude is highly valued compared to the traditional attitude:

Scientificity  
Superstition

Modernity  
Tradition

The characterization of Sonchai is contradictory to that of the fortune teller. Sonchai does not see the sacredness of the spirit house. When people gather for the ceremony to ask for the spirit’s pardon and the fortune teller dances and recites the magic, Sonchai cannot stop laughing. Sonchai’s worldview is different as he was sent to the military camp where he might have absorbed the new paradigm trained by the army that might shapes his perception towards traditional rituals. When the ceremony starts, Sonchai defines himself as an observer rather than a participant who shares the sense of communal belonging of the ritual.

As Sonchai regards himself as a learnt person, he establishes the hierarchy between him and the villager:

Knowledge  
Ignorance

Levi Strauss, nevertheless, explains that superstition shares the determinist character

as scientificity, and if one does not set the scientificity as a standard, the magical thought or superstition is another kind of paradigm which also has its own logic (Charoensin Olan, 63). In this respect, the violence of scientific superiority is created as Son Chai thinks that people should believe only what they can see. Sonchai thinks that he should prove that the villagers' ritual of asking for pardon is a waste of time, and that the fortune teller does not have any magical power. In short, we can see that special meaning which is communally defined by the villagers is devalued. In denying the community's ritual and seeing it as ridiculous, Sonchai joins the event and challenges the fortune teller who conducts the ceremony in a dual of whisky.

The technique of burlesque or mockery used to convince the readers of the senselessness of superstition is a kind of violence. Whether accidentally or not, Sonchai has burnt the spirit house without regretting or feeling that he has an obligation to compensate for what he has done. He claims that there are two reasons that nobody tries to stop the fire. The first one is that the well is located far away, and the latter is that everybody is afraid of the power of the spirit house. Sonchai anticipates that the fortune teller will not be able to withstand the whisky. Therefore, he wants to prove his assumption in front of the public. The fortune teller then gets seriously sick and is taken to hospital. In terms of Laotian Cultural Identity, the text seems to suggest that superstition should be erased as sacredness is something that can not be proven.

In "Kem Kad Nak", Aunt Man who is supposed to be superior and respected as she is the owner of the house and the elderly is manipulated. The concept of ownership or seniority is also ignored when the man imposes the superiority of scientificity and masculinity on Aunt Man's "space". To reverse the binary opposition of the age hierarchy, the man demonstrates how Aunt Man's belief can be questioned. When the man and his wife move their belongings into the house on the day they arrive, Aunt Man does not let them in as she has been consulted for an auspicious day with the fortune teller who says that the dark night of Sunday is not a good time to move in. After that, his wife argues for him that they had to undergo trouble of burrowing the car from the office. His wife convinces Aunt Man that if she does not let them in, they will have to redo the process of burrowing the car and the office might not allow the burrowing. The man and his wife do not care if the house is



“ready” or not. They see Aunt Man as being senseless. In addition, the young people think they are smarter as they can explain the situation concerning Aunt Man’s missing silver belt. They insist that the silver belt is somewhere in the house.

From the very beginning, being convinced by his wife’s argument, the man sees the obligation as a man among female family members to take care of the house even though he is uncomfortably living in the wife’s relatives’ house and prefers to live in a rental place near his office. The man, therefore, is upset when he cannot assert his masculinity as the head of the family or *Porbaan* (พ่อบ้าน) as expected when he first moves into the house. The man believes that if he stays there, the women in the house would feel safe. This event shows the legitimacy of asserting masculinity. The man also confirms the stereotype of women as weak and needing protection. While asserting his masculinity, he claims that he has contributed a lot to Aunt Man. The man says that he has grown vegetables and built a chicken coop and pigsty therefore Aunt Man does not have to spend much money on food. From this event, it can be interpreted that the narrator wants to reverse the position of the receiver to the giver. The characterization of Aunt Man, thus, is represented to justify the masculine role in the family.

As for Laotian Cultural Identity, rigid code of conduct vividly remains. Laotian people are still living in extended family. The stereotypical gender roles are also conditioned by an inescapable value. Scientificity expands its hold to Laotian life. For instance, Aunt Man unconsciously realizes that her daily schedule is controlled by the power of the media as she cannot skip the episode of the soap opera. Despite the different attitudes found in the text, the family’s affinity is still strong. The male individual is still regarded as central unit of the family. However, it seems that young people do not have to obey the elderly every time if they can convince others that they are more rational and the elderly’s reasons are not always right.

In “Kadook American” (American Bone), the stereotyping of the stronger is also reversed:

<u>Strong</u>	=	<u>Lao</u>
Weak		American

In this text, the stereotyping of American people is reconstituted through the voice of Lao soldier as very weak as they cannot stand common discomfort such as walking in the jungle without wearing shoes, drinking water from creek or sleeping outside in the tent. For the Americans, to eat raw meat and vegetable, to drink natural water or to walk amidst the sunlight in the beginning of the summer season is hardships. To construct meanings, this text foreground physical strength rather than technological advancement. The stereotyping of Lao people tends to be easy-going and not alienated to the nature while the stereotyping of the Americans is the people who have to depend on artificial accessories in order to survive. In this text, it seems that the Americans make their life difficult as they try to kill other people with senseless reason. To kill living creatures as the Lao soldier claims must be for survival.

Although the American army has aircrafts for heavy bombardment, they cannot defeat the Lao people. For the narrator, the American army is an enemy. From the very beginning, the binary opposition is clearly demarcated:

Invader  
Defender

War  
Peace

In this text, apart from the American army, the narrator also mentions the French and the Japanese who have invaded Laos. Those countries, therefore, are portrayed as war-makers. Lao soldiers have to protect themselves from danger. Through the Lao soldier's voice, Lao people are peace lovers, they help the American people dig up the bones for humanitarian purpose. The narrator also says that his vengeance gradually fades away.

In "Nak Tod" (The Prisoner), the main conflict is about the tenure right of the property previously owned by a rich family. The binary opposition is

Land  
Landless

The violence is created when the news editor "take sides" with his staff who has been unfairly accused by the senior revolutionary soldier with the charge of stealing a

chicken. This text claims that the only possible way for revolutionary men to have a house is to take houses from others. At this point, it sounds like revolutionary men rob the houses from innocent people and they are not good people.

Apart from binary opposition as violence, there is also the self-contradiction of the text which can reveal how the meaning is constructed with concealment of the incongruity of the story. In other words, the self-contradiction of the text, as in one sentence legitimates the thing that it denounces and accepts. For example, when the feminist group said “This place welcomes everybody, even the prostitute”, it seems to say that these people are open-minded towards prostitutes. However, with the use of phrase “even the prostitute”, the residue of prostitute being “not good women” is also clear.

In “Nak Tod”, where both sides of people value “personal connection”, the main argument is the news editor also uses his connection the same way as the Lao authority counterpart does. Therefore, he practices the action that he blames. To frame the readers, the news is written from the viewpoint that the revolutionary man is the wrongdoer as the Lao authority who is supposed to maintain equity gives privilege to the senior officer’s case. Meanwhile, the news editor does not present the comments from the readers as he has promised. The complaints that put him to jail are the comments from his staff that has a conflict of interest with the government. The editor wants to blame the using of connection to gain benefit; however, he does the same thing as the senior military officer he has criticized. In other words, the editor does the thing that he has severely criticized. The main suspense is about told and untold stories. When series of investigations are conducted, none of the details is told. Therefore, the story told by the news editor is one-sided.

Communication with the mass through newspaper is considered one of discursive practices. From this respect, it is questionable, the editor does not listen to the revolutionary man at all which is contradictory to what he claims that the comments from people which appear in the newspaper gain more trust than that of the police or the court as they could show the true voices of the people. The editor merely helps his staff, Pukham, to defend for Pukaew, Pukham’s young brother. The claim of the use of powerful connection, thus, is dismantled as the text itself shows Pukham employing the relationship with the newspaper to frame the readers’ perception.

Therefore, the editor's voice is not the people's voice and this voice can not be considered neutral. This situation also shows that his column is a pseudo-communication as the complaint comes from his staff, not from the readers.

By asserting the legitimacy of the young men to stay in their house, the editor locates the fixed and stable position of the young men and the revolutionary man's family as he does not agree with the confiscation and re-distribution of properties. The news editor tells about a senior revolutionary officer accusing the two brothers of stealing chicken, gold and radio, and calling the victim of the stealing *pachachon* (The people) instead of *chaobaan* (The villager). Actually, he thinks that "villagers" is a more appropriate term to call the victim of the stealing. But in the socialist context, *Pachachon* is indiscriminately applied to all people, while *Chaobaan* seems to be hierarchical register and connotes them as uneducated folks. The choice of term is questionable. The term *Chaobaan* connotes people who hardly have independent thinking. The editor claims that the substitution of the word "People" to "Villager" is merely to exacerbate the sentence because he thinks that the term *Pachachon* provokes the communal census to convict the boy. In relation to Laotian Cultural Identity, it is clear that the two political polarities remain, and the society is not yet harmonized. Although the two brothers have been sent to the seminar, they retain the bourgeois attitude towards the tenure right. From the language the news editor uses, it presupposes the attitude towards class structure. The first group of people (News editor and former landlord) still regards that the commoner whom they call *chaobaan* is just the folk who are not equal to them while the second group (Lao authority and the officials) regards that the society became classless. Therefore, the second has to call all social members *Pachachon*.

In "Phaeng Mae", without closer reading, the readers might assume that the situation of the village is already brought back to pre-war state. The self-contradiction of this text, unlike the writer's intention, is the fear of invaders clearly remains, and the reassurance is not adequately portrayed as there is a trace of danger as when the groups enter the village. Therefore, the narrator fails to impose the normal state of the village. Regarding the village as a closed-space, it seems that if there is a stranger in the village, the member of the village would automatically recognize him. Upon arrival at the village, they meet one lady who seems to be suspicious of their presence

in the village, which signifies a deep-rooted fear for strangers. This incident reflects the collective sense of “us”. When Boukham makes a reference to his uncle, the lady suddenly becomes friendly. After the war and displacement, people who have been divided build the specification of the boundary in their mind of the “other”. In other words, “the stranger” is someone they do not know well. If Boukham did not make a reference to his uncle’s name to confirm the solid prove of the shared genealogy, the “otherness” would not be easily erased. Therefore, the sense of collective identity will only be confirmed by the previously shared identity.

In “Nammayot” (A Nickname), an attempt to establish the notion of “the trouble is all from the other<sup>2</sup>” is not fully developed as it appears that the villagers are tolerant with the existence of uncle Plao despite the gossip from some people that he is reactionary. To prove the statement that everybody puts negative stereotype towards Uncle Plao, the text must convince the reader that nobody gives him sympathy. One obvious reason that people still recognize him as a social member is when an officer comes to collect the biographical data of the villager and Uncle Plao’s name has been recorded as a people from old regime five days before the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation. The headman and one of the villagers defend for him that the consensus of the high rank officer is not allow to associate people with the “old regime” or “new regime”. When the rumor stops by the request of the headman, Uncle Plao can continue his life as usual. It doesn’t seem that there is discrimination or segregation towards Uncle Plao. If the headman thinks that Uncle Plao’s image is “an old Vientiane people”, the headman will not give him any protection. In relation to the self-contradiction of the text, what the writer attempts to portray is that Uncle Plao is an outsider, and the society is not yet harmonized. However, many characters of the story do defend for him as they regard that Uncle Plao is also one of their community members. At the end, Uncle Plao complies himself with mainstream ideology by joining the army. Hence, it can be interpreted that Uncle Plao also wants to be accepted.

In “Kong Mai”, without closer reading, the readers might assume that Laotian Identity is tainted by external factors. However, the absence of Lao actress, Lao nudity,

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<sup>2</sup> “L’enver est les autres” or “the hell is others” is Albert Camus’s existentialist saying.



and Lao alcoholic drink is the vivid self-contradiction in this story. Negative aspect of society is portrayed through the adjectives “Thai”, “Japanese” and “Vietnamese”. The self-contradiction of the text is that the widespread of prostitution is poorly convinced. In relation to the capitalist influences, the motivation of becoming a prostitute is likely to be the need of money. Considering the brothel as “a market”, there is only one buyer and only one seller as there is one full-time prostitute and one customer in this brothel. To prove that capitalism erodes Lao Society, competition can be one conviction, but in this story, the writer makes the generalization that prostitution becomes a social problem by showing the small and almost empty brothel. Thus, his claim that the existence of one prostitute already destroys the Lao society is not convincing. The customer’s mentions “To have the same old *Pa Dak* (refers to having the same sexual partner) all year long is boring”. The readers might have a question in their mind “Why don’t you just go somewhere else?” The situation shows that the customer does not even have choices. The main reason that this customer keeps visiting this brothel might be that it is the only one available brothel in the city.

For the prostitute’s career, she is not very successful as a prostitute. If being prostitute can make adequate money, there must be more prostitutes in this brothel. From the prostitute’s perspective, visiting a brothel is not popular as some nights, the only one prostitute does not even have any customer. On those the nights, the owner of the bar will deduce her pay. The only motivation to work that she claims is to support her children.

It is inadequate to conclude that the Laotian Cultural Identity is totally deteriorated in the case of the government officer’s daughter; she is just a part-time prostitute as the customer has to wait for this “new” product. The man does not take good care of his family; his daughter might not have enough money. The text makes a reference to imported items such as “Thai actress”, “Japanese woman in a small piece of clothes”, “Vietnamese curtain”, “Foreign beer” and the consoling song for bar girls and prostitutes sang by Sunaree Rajasrima. The text itself denies that there are such things in their country. Therefore, they have to import them from foreign countries. Thus, an attempt to portray that Lao society is demoralized by prostitution is failed.

In “Kwai Dauy San”, the technique of naturalization of the text which makes everything appears to be “natural” is broken down when the reader finds that the pilot also takes the chickens back to Vientiane as they are very cheap. Unlike the government who claims to use the buffaloes for public purposes, the pilot just takes the chicken back home for personal consumption. When the captain asks his crew to take the buffalos into the aircraft, they make the buffaloes bleed as they have never learned how to handle buffaloes. From this point, it is not likely the buffaloes’ false nor the pilot’s as they are not familiar with this animal. Through the pilot’s dialogue, the map is destroyed because a buffalo breaks the cage of the chicken and the chicken excreted on the map. The reason why the chicken is taken to the aircraft is skipped. Referring back to the beginning of the text, the pilot’s mission is to take only buffaloes. Bringing chicken into the aircraft, as a result, is beyond the government’s command. Furthermore, the pilot has to bear the responsibility by themselves. The text deconstructs itself as it is said in the very beginning that everything in Attapru is very cheap. Therefore, it can be assumed that the chicken sold in Attapru is extremely cheaper than in Vientiane, and it is tempting to the pilot to carry chicken back home without paying the fee. To conclude, the text is a self-contradiction as the pilot is entrapped by sequences depicted by himself.

Regarding undecidability of the text or the free-play of the text, Geoffrey Hartman explains that the notion with various constraints of New Criticism theory imposes strict demarcation between “creative” and “critical” writing. Hartman opposes the hierarchy of the text as a host and the critic as a parasite as he thinks the production of criticism shares the same method as that of producing the text. In other words, the critic’s role is not secondary role of mere explication (Norris, 91-92). In terms of deconstructive reading, a text cannot be approached with single logic. To read deconstructively is to tell a story of reading (Charoensin Olan, 183). Therefore, each reader would have his/her own interpretation of the text. For Lacan, “all discourse is in a sense of a slip of the tongue, so people can never mean precisely what they say and never say precisely what they mean. The meaning is always in some sense a near-miss, a part-failure, and one can never certainly articulate the truth in some pure unmediated way” (Eagleton, 146-147).

Padamalangula asserts another theory about undecidability of text: if “A” and “Not-A” represents a pair of opposition, and “P” is an element involving these two opposing terms, “P” will be undecidable when the readers assume all of these followings simultaneously:

1. “P” is “A”
2. “P” is “Not-A”
3. “P” is both “A” and “Not-A”
4. “P” is not “A” nor “Not-A” (Padamalangula,16-17)

Padamalangula explains that the undecidability of the element “P” breaks all logical conclusions as the four truth values cannot be true at the same time (Padamalangula, 28-29).

To apply the above formula to “Kwai Dauy San”, the element “P” can be equated with the Chaos in the plane that some readers can argue that:

1. Chaos is from “Pilot”
2. Chaos is from “Buffaloes”
3. Chaos is from “the government’s order”.
4. Chaos is both from “Pilot” and “Buffaloes”, “the government’s order”.
5. Chaos is not from “Pilot”, “Buffaloes” nor “the government’s order”.

From the above formula, argument 1 can be explained as the pilot is not well-prepared and does buy some cheap commodities back to Vientiane for personal consumption. For argument 2, all troubles such as the bad smell and the break of the hydraulic system are from the buffaloes. Some readers might agree with this received meaning of worthlessness of buffaloes on the aircraft. For argument 3, it can be assumed that the government overlooks the fact that the aircraft itself is not designed to accommodate the buffalo as there is no separate cargo compartment. For argument 4, it is possible that all aspects contribute to the problem. For the last argument, when human beings have to share space with buffaloes and chickens, it is not unusual for them to be uncomfortable. In this text, the “meaning” of *Kwai* or Buffalo, therefore, is no longer fixed. The meaning is variable depending how it is read. For ordinary usage, buffaloes are fundamental means of agriculture, and they are beneficial to farmers. However, when the context shifts, this meaning of buffaloes changes.

Likewise, when producing the girl's motivation in becoming a prostitute in "Kong Mai", the readers might hold different assumptions. Their assumptions must be:

1. The father does not give her enough money.
2. The father gives her enough money but she needs more money
3. The motivation does not concern money at all.

After the exclamation of surprise from the man and his daughter, the story ends. It is unclear what causes prostitution. In this story, some readers might think that prostitution is caused by foreign influences. Others might think that it is because of the failure of communist's government

1. The cause of prostitution is foreign influences
2. The cause of prostitution is the failure of communism
3. The cause of prostitution is both foreign influences and the failure of communism
4. The cause of prostitution is not foreign influence nor the failure of communism

Pattarakulvanich explains that in sexist and misogynist text, women will be portrayed as abnormal people (Pattarakulvanich, 2). As quoted in the article entitled "Hemmingway's women: A case study of the Indian Camp", Kolodny asserts that "to read the text is impossible to avoid the historical condition which generates gender bias" (Quoted in Pattarakulvanich, 2)

In "Kong Mai", it is possible that the absence of "proper lady" leads to an undecidability to judge whether being a sex worker is a heroine or an antagonist. To consider the "A" and "Not-A" formula:

1. Being a sex worker is an antagonist
2. Being a sex worker is not an antagonist

From the above formula, argument 1 the society does not accept that being a sex worker is a good career as the money that should be spent for the family is spent in the brothel because of an availability of a sex worker, and this business supports outside-marriage sex, which leads to the argument that a sex worker helps maintains her well-being of her family while causing troubles to other families. The second argument nullifies the role of antagonist as she cannot force the customer to visit the brothel. In other words, the motivation of the customer to visit her is beyond her responsibility. Moreover, it seems that the government does not provide her any other social welfare

to support her family.

In “Ploy Nok”, the undecidability of the text is about the emancipation of “Kavao”. By exposing the fact that Kavao cannot live without a husband, it perpetuates the concept of women dependency upon patriarchy society. Dr. Montira Rato, a professor of Vietnamese at Chulalongkorn University asserts in the article entitled “Class, Gender and Representation of Peasant women in Vietnamese Literature” that socialism cannot emancipate women. In fact, socialism is rather compatible with a patriarchal gender-biased system (Rato, 61). In this story, the comparison between the communist liberation with the release of the bird from the cage is quite effective. However, the text fails to equate the communist liberation with the emancipation of the women as women did not deliberate themselves from an oppression done by men. In this text, Kavao is just freed from the hold of the bad man by a good man. Hence, the structure of patriarchy society persist, and the role of women in the communist era is not better than that in the capitalist era as the women still have to choose the right husband. Kavao shifts from a businessman to a revolutionary warrior. Metaphorically, it is a transfer of the object from the former powerful man to the new powerful man. In this text, Kavao does not mention how uncomfortable she was when she has to live with the man her father approves of. The text does not mention anything about how the Chinese merchant looks either. Some readers might think that Kavao just complies with social expectations. At the end of the story, Kavao gives up her factory as the government would confiscate it anyway. It is also better for her to gain praise from her workers than to resist the social current. Returning to her ex-boyfriend can be read as a social compliance. In other words, Kavao is heading to the new power as her ex-boyfriend is now considered a revolutionary warrior.

Another important example of undecidability of the text is the matter of Naming. In “Nammayot” (A Nickname), the meaning of *Plao* (ปลา) constitutes an ambiguity as *Plao* can be translated into different meanings, for example, “empty” and the negation “no”. For the first meaning, Belsey explains that being “Plao” or “Blankness” is also a discourse. Belsey suggests that blankness can be referred to the prohibition to put something in. Therefore, naming Uncle Plao is another form of



resistance to be labeled. Considering silence as a reaction, the free-play of meaning would be operated in the reader's perception. For instance, some readers might think that silence is a form of resistance while the other might think that being silent is admittance.

Aunt Plao whose name literally means "empty" or "no" tells the anonymous narrator that her husband whose name is Uncle Plao is accused by the people that he is a reactionary agent. The one who seems to be unhappy is Aunt Plao. The accountability of the narration might be that the man learns the story of Uncle Plao from Aunt Plao. In other words, no one knows exactly what Uncle Plao feels as he is portrayed as a silent person who bears any kind of identities people imposed on him. It is possible that Aunt Plao is the symbol of resistance as she says to the man that Uncle Plao should try to explain before he dies. Then, Aunt Plao thinks the imposed stigmatization should be denied. The man says that Aunt Plao is very talkative, and the story told by Aunt Plao seems to be a piece of the play. At this point it is possible that Aunt Plao could dramatize the matter to gain sympathy from the listener. It is possible that people just call them "Plao" from three assumptions. The first reason is that they do not have any child. The second reason, their mind is empty. The last reason, they are very poor. The man mentions that when Uncle Plao was young, he did not have fixed career, he used to be a laborer, a cart rider, a guard etc.

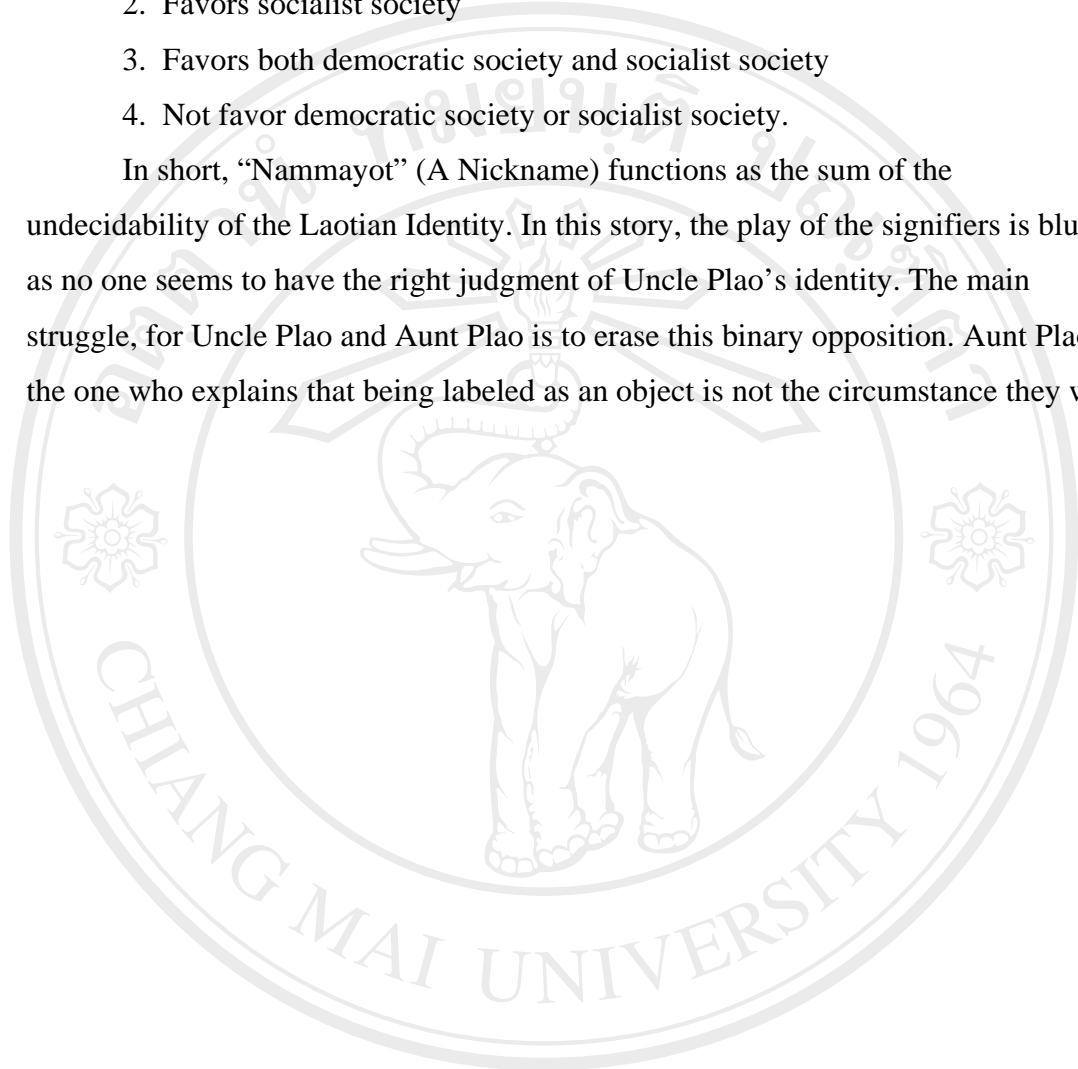
The familiarity of class differences, by the way, is something which cannot be easily erased. Facing with the officer, Aunt Plao who gets used to speaking pattern derived from the feudal society automatically says in a humble manner "my husband was only a cleaner, why do you call my husband a puppet soldier". The officer then responds that even Aunt Plao herself speaks with the register of feudalism. The officer then reproaches her that she cannot escape from the previous social structure.

Uncle Plao does not have a new nickname until he is killed by a puppet soldier six months after working with the government in the new regime. After that, he gets a new nickname, "the new socialist man". Aunt Plao says that the birthplace does not make people reactionary or revolutionary. Aunt Plao claims that Uncle Plao works because he just wants to have food, shelter, clothes and medicine. When somebody labels him "an old Vientiane person", he just accepts it because it is true. As depicted in the text that Uncle Plao is very quiet. Therefore, it is very difficult to guess what his

political standpoint is. Uncle Plao might

1. Favors democratic society
2. Favors socialist society
3. Favors both democratic society and socialist society
4. Not favor democratic society or socialist society.

In short, “Nammayot” (A Nickname) functions as the sum of the undecidability of the Laotian Identity. In this story, the play of the signifiers is blurred as no one seems to have the right judgment of Uncle Plao’s identity. The main struggle, for Uncle Plao and Aunt Plao is to erase this binary opposition. Aunt Plao is the one who explains that being labeled as an object is not the circumstance they want.



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