

CHAPTER 2

Constructions of *Khon Khorat* and the National Heroine

“*Khon Khorat* did not like being called “Laotians” or “*Khon Isan*.”

“*Khon Khorat* did not eat sticky rice as a main dish, unlike Laotians and *Isan* people.”

“*Khon Khorat* had their own dialect called “*Khorat* dialect” different from Laotian and *Isan*.”

“*Khon Khorat* was proud of being *Khorat*. They realized that they were unlike Central people and Bangkokians.”

“However, some educated *Khon Khorat* did not like speaking *Khorat* dialect as it made them sound like hicks, old-fashioned, and it made them get bad services from public officers and private company employees. They preferred speaking Bangkokian dialect.”

“*Khon Khorat* often defined themselves as “*Ya Mo*’s grandchildren.” They created their own identity in conformity with *Ya Mo*, the heroine defeating Laotian army in 1826. This was the identity confirming that they were not Laotians.”

This chapter is to explain the origin of *Khon Khorat* and a brief history of the existence of *Thao Suranari* or *Ya Mo* since these two subjects were strongly related to the existence of *Phlaeng Khorat*, especially to the creation of the identity of the performance. Although the social memory of the existence of *Phlaeng Khorat* was tightly bound with the existence of *Thao Suranari*, being *Khon Khorat* and being *Ya Mo* were both created and transformed in different periods of time, affecting the change of *Phlaeng Khorat*. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the background

of *Khon Khorat* and collective memory of *Ya Mo*, and then to make a connection of how these two subjects are related to *Phlaeng Khorat*.

2.1 The Historical, Political, and Ethnic Complexity of *Khorat*

Mahasila Weerawong, a Laotian philosopher in the 19th century, suggested that *Phrachao Ngoom* of *Chiang Thong* or *Luang Phrabang* (1350 A.C.) expanded power down to *Khorat* plateau during his reign, implying that the provinces in this area were parts of Laos Kingdom and inhabited by Laotians. *Ayutthaya* Kingdom at that time did not want to rule this area. In 1540 - 1543 *Somdej Phrachaiyachettha Rachachao* of *Chiang Thong*, the King of Laos, and *Phramaha Chakrapat* of *Ayutthaya* built the *Sri Song Rak* reliquary stupa (*prathat*) for marking the border between two Kingdoms. However, local communities were independently self-governed and were still the residence of Laotians, *Suay*, *Kuoy* or Khmer (cited in *Suriya Smutkupt* et al., 1997: 135-136).

From an interview with *Narumon Piyawith* by a Thai writer *Teeraparb Lohitakun* (2007), there is another historical account specifying a different period of time. *Narumon Piyawith* was a researcher of *Khorat* Dialect who suggested that there were ancient local people from Mons, Khmers, Laotians, and many other ethnic groups. During the reign of King *Narai* (1656 – 1688), *Ayutthaya* sent some governors to build cities. These governors and their family brought some cultural practices from *Ayutthaya* with them, which then combined with ancient local cultures, such as wearing *Jongkraben*, having *Dok Kratum* hairstyle, eating stream rice, inventing their own vocabulary and language (*Teeraparb Lohitakun*, 2007: 114). *Sujit Wongthet* (1995) assumed that *Khon Khorat* might be a combination of groups of people from the eastern coast; *Chanthabiri*, *Rayong*, *Chonburi* and *Prachinburi* and the other one from the areas of *Chao Phraya* River basin. Due to the fall of *Ayutthaya* in 1767, several groups fought for power. The main group was the group of *Muen Theppipit* with an army from the east coast moving up to *Nakhon Ratchasima* to prepare the army. But it was defeated later by the group of *Phra Chao Taksin* with people from *Thonburi*. Cultures and dialect accent of *Khon Khorat* were, therefore, differed from

Isan cultures. However, they were more similar to eastern and central cultures such as dialect, and non-glutinous rice diet (Sujit, 1995: 14-15).

In the 18th century, as Siam won the war against Laos, it relocated Laotian prisoners in *Saraburi*. Especially in 1777, Siam brought 5,000 Laotians from Vientiane to work at construction sites. The prosperity of Bangkok at that time attracted immigrants from the neighbor areas to settle down in Siam as well. At the end of 1817 Siamese army successfully attacked Vientiane and brought a lot of Laotian war prisoners to settle down in *Isan* area of Siam (Phasuk Phongphaichit and Christ Baker, 1996: 23-24).

Term Wiparkpojnakij (1987) explains that in 1826 during the reign of King Rama III, there were army troops led by *Chao Anouvong* from both Vientiane and *Champasak* invading *Nakhon Ratchasima*. There was an army commanded from Bangkok to march from *Ayutthaya*, *Prachinburi*, *Kabinburi*, and *Nakhon Nayok* to enter *Nakhon Ratchasima*. Some pieces of historical writings said that *Chao Anouvong*'s intention was to retrieve the people of Laotian ethnic back to Vientiane after a long period of their captivation in *Nakhon Ratchasima* and *Saraburi*, since the period of *Thonburi* and King Rama I. They were forced to engage in labor toil of building the city of Bangkok. Some pieces said that there was a side effect of the conflicts of King Rama III's succession to the throne of *Chao Anouvong*. He wanted to take his Laotian people back to Vientiane, but King Rama III rejected the move. Some pieces said that *Chao Anouvong* wanted to declare an independence from Bangkok in the context of Bangkok's confrontation with British colonialism (*Term*, 1987: 661-670).

Additionally, *Sujane Kanparit* (2016) explains that Vientiane was a tributary state paying tribute to both Bangkok and *Huế* (Vietnam), and declared friendship to *Luang Prabang*. When *Chao Anouvong* knew that Laotian people in the territory of Siam were in trouble from the threat of tax burden and a draft of able-bodied men into labor, he approached *Huế* for an aid in resistance against Siam, and negotiated with other cities in the region not to obstruct him (*Sujane*, 2016: 67-83). It can be assumed that *Chao Anouvong*'s resistance against Siam was supported by many governors in

the region even though it was recorded that the essential cause was a forced-negotiation of Vientiane on other cities.

After the defeat of *Chao Anouvong* by Siamese army, some Laotians were left and settled down in *Khorat* (Suriya et al., 1997: 138-139). The historical, political, and ethnic significance of *Khorat* is an “in-between” space between Thailand and Laos. According to the record of Etienne Aymonier in 1895, the leader of explorers of right side Land of *Mae Kong* River, different ethnic group such as Laotians, Khmers, Mons and Siamese Thais all lived together in *Nakhon Ratchasima* (Suriya Smutkupt et al., 1997: 130-131).

Puangkhaimuk Kunaratanapruk (1978) pointed out that being *Khorat* people related to colonialism, politics and economy in the reign of King *Chulalongkorn* (1868 -1910). In this period *Nakhon Ratchasima* and Northeastern region encountered French colonization. Although Siam had reformed the bureaucracy by applying a centralized state administration system in 1887 and had given the land of the left of *Mae Kong* River to France in 1893, France did not stop expanding its power in *Nakhon Ratchasima*. France built Consular in *Nakhon Ratchasima* and *Ubon Rachathani*, intervened and blocked Siamese administration, especially over Laotians, Yuans, Khmers and Chinese. France persuaded these people to register themselves under the rule of France. It also incited people to act against Siamese government. Moreover, France showed its power by constructing enormous and beautiful Consular decorated with French flags all around the place, and also boasted that French flag would flap over *Isan* region soon (*Puangkhaimuk*, 1978: 121-123).

In 1891 the government of King *Chulalongkorn*, King Rama V, reformed “Laos Provinces” which were under the rule of Siam by changing the name of *Nakhon Ratchasima* from “*Laos* of Middle Part” to “Middle *Laos*”. This showed that Siam considered *Nakhon Ratchasima* as “*Laos*” or non-Siam. However, in 1893 when Siam gave the left bank of *Mae Kong* River to France after being defeated in Franco-Siamese War, Siam started to rebuild modern Thai central state, Laotian ethnics and other ethnic groups living in *Khorat* were therefore forced to become citizen of Thai central state, especially by census survey of nationality in 1899. In the process of Thai-zation, Laotian ethnics accepted some Siamese Thai or *Thai Khorat* cultures by

combining them with their original cultures. For example; they ate non-glutinous rice from Siamese cultures but still kept their dialect, the belief in *Phi Fah, Phi Taen, Phi Poo Taa* (Spirit of gods, goddesses and ancestors) from Laotian cultures (*Suriya Smutkupt et al., 1997: 143-148*).

The first military presence in *Nakhon Ratchasima* was initiated in 1892 as the governor of *Nakhon Ratchasima* petitioned to Bangkok to send troop to help suppress bandits which were causing problems to the population. After suppression of the bandits, the military force remained in *Nakhon Ratchasima* as *Nakhon Ratchasima* Guard Military Army.

According to *Puangkhaimuk*, *Khorat* people cooperated with Siam when Siamese government opposed to French domination. Public officers, merchants, and *Khorat* people showed their loyalty by donating more than four thousand bahts to buy some weapons to protect the city during the conflict between Siam and France in 1893. Because of the pressure from the great power of France, Siamese government decided to build the first railway from Bangkok to *Nakhon Ratchasima* in 1900. The railway was considered as political and economic strategies to protect the city from the power of France and to transport people and merchandise. Military reform was firstly done in *Nakhon Ratchasima* in 1895. The city mural was renovated, and the city canals were dredged. This development was to make *Khon Khorat* loyal to Siam (*Puangkhaimuk, 1978: 125-145*). In 1900, King Rama V even visited the military base in *Nakhon Ratchasima*.

Suriya Smutkupt et al. (1997) suggested that being *Khon Khorat* was related to central cultures and eastern cultures rather than Laotian cultures or *Thai-Isan* cultures. Though comprised of different cultures, *Khon Khorat* had become “*Thai-ized*”.

The loyalty of *Khon Khorat* to Bangkok was to be tested again in 1933; this time it was not a question of loyalty to France’s Laos as against Siam; but it was a question of loyalty to the new Thai government. In 1932 there was a revolution in Thailand, originated by the People’s Party. However, in 1933, the new government’s power was contested by Prince *Bovaradej*, in order to restore the power of the king (*Keyes, 2013*). Prince *Bovaradej* rebel took place on 11-25 October 1933. His military

strong hold was based in *Nakhon Ratchasima*. After he had been defeated, a lot of civil servants and military officials from *Nakhon Ratchasima* were investigated and punished due to the charge of being cooperators with the rebel (*Saipin Kaewngamprasert*, 1995: 58).

Thao Suranari monument was established in January 1934. It was the country's first movement of commoner, in the sense that *Thao Suranari* whose monument was being erected was a commoner, who was not of royal blood. While certain discourse claimed that it was a symbolic domination of power from Bangkok over *Nakhon Ratchasima*, some claimed that it may be a local initiation to establish the monument as a symbol of local loyalty to Bangkok. But why is the monument of *Thao Suranari* so important?

2.2 *Thao Suranari* as a Discourse in Modern National Context

Saipin Kaewngamprasert (1995) suggested that the story of *Thao Suranari* appeared in government document for the first time in the reign of King *Chulalongkorn*. It was mentioned in a letter in which *Phraya Prasitthisankarn* (Major General *Phraya Singhasenee* or *Sa-ard Singhasenee*) wrote to the King on 29th November 1900 when he knew that His Majesty would come to *Nakhon Ratchasima* (*Saipin*, 1995: 288). In 1899, *Phaya Prasitthisankarn* had ordered a construction of small stupa containing *Thao Suranari*'s bone ash at *Wat Klang* Temple or *Wat Pra Narai* Temple where the ceremony of taking oath of loyalty took place (*Ibid.*, 72). Prince *Damrong Rachanuparp* guessed that the Lady *Mo* (*than phu ying mo*) was honored *Thao Suranari* during the reign of the King Rama IV (*Ibid.*, 309). But his article entitled "Legend of *Nakhon Ratchasima*," published in the article collection entitled "Archeology of *Nakhon Ratchasima*" in 1969, indicated that King Rama III granted *Thao Suranari* honor as the Lady *Mo* (*khun ying mo*) (*Ibid.*, 325). *Saipin* criticized this script on the point that it tried to invent a role of *Thao Suranari* as a protector of Siam from the invasion of *Chao Anouvong*, the king of Vientiane (1804-1827). But when she was alive, the visions of territory and the central state did not yet exist. *Saipin* expressed her opinion about this manuscript that it was written in the context when Siam was fighting over the land on the left side of *Mae Kong* River with

France in 1893 (*Rattanakosin* Era 112). Therefore, Siamese scholars at that time wrote the history of *Thao Suranari* as a regional model of loyalty to assure that *Isan* region belonged to Siam, not to France (Ibid., 324). In addition, the name of “*Thao Suranari*” was widely known when it appeared in a play entitled “*Thao Suranari (Mo) fighting against Vientiane rebel*” to show in “*Seua Pa Scout Legend festival*” on the occasion of anniversary of the King *Vachirawut* on 5-7 January 1912. *Nakhon Ratchasima* people took this play to show again in front of the town-hall at *Nakhon Ratchasima Seua Pa Scout Club* when the King visited the province on 3 December (Ibid., 293-294).

Saipin Kaewngamprasert (1995) described that after *Bovaradej* rebel in October 1933 the People’s Party government organized blessing ceremony on 17th November 1933 in order to encourage and change the attitude of *Khon Khorat* from rebellion to patriotic attitude. The government held worship ceremony to the city shrine and wreath ceremony to the stupa of *Thao Suranari* (*Saipin*, 1995: 67). *Thao Suranari* therefore was being changed from being ancestor spirit of her family to being city spirit as her memorial monument was just a stupa at *Wat Klang Temple*. *Nakhon Ratchasima* leaders, however, paid more attention to decorate the container of her relic (Ibid., 73). Later, *Phraya Kamthorn Phayapthit*, the provincial governor proposed the government to build *Thao Suranari Monument* in front of *Chumpon City Gate* where a lot of people travelled through around this area, and could easily appreciate her elegant statue. The monument was officially inaugurated on 16th January 1934. This event was published in national newspapers to invite people to the celebration. The train ticket from Bangkok to *Nakhon Ratchasima* was discounted (Ibid., 76-77). *Saipin* analyzes that *Thao Suranari* monument was a symbol of honoring commoners related to the politics of the government taking over the power of the king after revolution in 1932. She mentioned that “the presence of *Thao Suranari* monument at this moment was a representative of People’s Party to announce that commoners could be history makers like kings” (Ibid., 8).

Saipin explained that the People’s Party government gained advantage from *Thao Suranari* monument in producing nationalism by projecting her as a patriotic citizen. Under *Phibunsongkhram* government, there was a nationalist campaign

claiming territory on the left side of *Mae Kong* River from France (Ibid., 98). The government propagated the idea of nationalism in the meaning of *Thao Suranari* through an encouraging song called “*march Ratchasima*” composed by *Luang Wichitwathakan* in 1939. This song was sung in various activities in the province and it had been used as provincial anthem since then (Ibid., 172).

Lyrics of ‘*Ratchasima*’ composed by *Luang Wichitwathakan* 1939:

(refrain) *Ratchasima is like a mural stone.*

Siam will be on the throne thanks to Ratchasima.

Since ancient time, Ratchasima people were brave and enthusiast.

North or south battles, Nakhon Ratchasima blood never bleed.

(refrain)

Once our heroine the great Thao Suranari,

the bravest of feminine, our victory heroine of our city. (refrain)

We are Ratchasima people walk forward to fight them.

If enemies annoy us fight them fight them don't be scared.

(refrain 2 times)

The manuscript entitled “*Thao Suranari*” by Major Gen. *Luang Sriyotha* et al. (1934) is another important source on *Thao Suranari* Monument. According to the book, Col. *Phra Reungrukpatchamitra*, head of military official of provincial army and *Phraya Kamthorn Phayaphit*, head of administration department initiated the construction of the monument. Though the book honors *Thao Suranari* as a commoner who fought against the enemy, the detail written before the introduction of the book was Royal Blessing Prayer which paid respect to the king. The detail of Royal Blessing Prayer is as follows:

Royal Blessing

Wasantadilok Verse

“I would be at your feet, the divine King of Thailand.

Your majesty of the great kindness to the people.

Lead the nation and people to everlasting success.

Support and maintain all religions to be all existence.

Strongly determined to keep rules of constitution.

To the happiness and prosperity, to the fraternity.

With more right and freedom with no worries.

To the people of all the happiness and glory.

This is the great king full of virtue.

People never stop adoration and praying at your majesty’s feet.

May the king over your subjects long life for all time.

Also happiness of all as I sing for you, Chai Yo.

Your Majesty forever reigns and provides a protective canopy over your loyal subjects.

We, military and civil officials of Nakhon Ratchasima Province”

(Luang Sriyotha et al., 1934: Administration).

So, the book aimed to signify *Thao Suranari* as a patriot and loyal to the king as well as to People’s Party government. *Thao Suranari* monument was therefore a symbol of good citizen or good follower who was brave and could devote herself to the country, as well as loyal to the king, at least, in the idea of Major Gen. *Luang Sriyotha et al.* in 1934. In 1948 *Nakhon Ratchasima* was chosen as headquarter of the

Thai National Army of Northeastern Region or National Army Region 2. This signified the complete central control over the northeastern region and *Nakhon Ratchasima* province.

Table 2.1 Brief trajectory of *Nakhon Ratchasima* as the location of military and political strategy

Time	Incidence
1817	Siam attacked Vientiane and brought Laos prisoners to settle in <i>Khorat</i> and <i>Saraburi</i> .
1826	<i>Chao Anouvong</i> attacked <i>Khorat</i> and brought Lao people back to Vientiane. <i>Thao Suranari</i> fought against his troops and could present people being relocated back to Vientiane.
1892	<i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> petitioned to Bangkok to send troop to suppress bandits.
1893	Siam gave land on left bank to France (i.e. the present-day Lao territory). France, however, still pursued expansion policy by building a large consulate in <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> .
1893	Public officers, merchants, and <i>Khorat</i> people showed loyalty to Siam by raising four thousand bath to donate to government to buy weapons.
1894	More military forces were stationed in <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> city mural was renovated.

Table 2.1 Brief trajectory of *Nakhon Ratchasima* as the location of military and political strategy (continued)

Time	Incidence
1899	A small stupa containing <i>Thao Suranari</i> 's relic was built in <i>Wat Khang</i> temple.
1900	King Rama V visited military base in <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> . <i>Phaya Prasitthisankarn</i> (Major General <i>Phraya Singhasene</i> or <i>Sa-ard Singhasene</i>) wrote to the King on 29 th November 1900 (before the king's visit mentioning <i>Thao Suranari</i> (<i>Saipin Kaewngamprasert</i> , 1995: 288)).
1900	Railway to <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> was constructed.
1932	People's Party's Revolution.
1933	Prince <i>Bovaradej</i> rebel had <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> as its base.
1934	<i>Thao Suranari</i> monument was established.
1939	Another problem with France over some territories in Indochina took place. Though the military utilized forces from <i>Udon Thani</i> , <i>Surin</i> , <i>Ubon Ratchathani</i> , forces in <i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> must also stand alert.
1948	<i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> was chosen as headquarter of Thai National

	Army, of Northeastern Region, or National Army Region 2.
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Table 2.1 Brief trajectory of *Nakhon Ratchasima* as the location of military and political strategy (continued)

Time	Incidence
Late 1950s-1975	<i>Nakhon Ratchasima</i> was military base for US forces during Vietnam War.

2.3 *Thao Suranari* as a Cult

Sujit Wongthet (1995) believed that before the building of *Thao Suranari* monument in the middle of the city, the sacred value worshiped by *Khon Khorat* must have been the city shrine. He made reference to the travel poem of *Nirat Nong Khai* composed by Mr. *Tim Sukhayang* in the reign of King *Chulalongkorn* mentioning that the army from Bangkok was going to *Nong Khai* to eliminate rebels, and stopped at *Khorat* and participated in worship the city shrine as ritual to deity (*Sujit Wongthet*, 1995: 20-21). However, the army did not go paying respect to the relic of *Thao Suranari* kept at *Wat Klang* Temple. *Saipin Kaewngamprasert* (1995) analyzed that the sacredness of *Thao Suranari* only took place after the construction of the monument in 1934.

According to *Nidhi Eoseewong* (1995), Thai people had background thought about monuments as a ritual image, not as a remembrance of a personage and event (*Nidhi*, 1995: 89). *Khorat* people considered themselves related to *Thao Suranari* by calling themselves “grandchildren of *Ya Mo*” or “children of *Ya Mo*”. They paid respect (such as worship and vow) to the monument as the spirit with same status as deity of the city shrine. Besides, the symbol of *Thao Suranari* was reproduced as amulets over which an incantation was recited by famous monks. Furthermore, the sacredness of *Thao Suranari* was narrated in a style of personal anecdotes by local

famous people and general ones. It was said that she would be satisfied when worshiped by *Phlaeng Khorat*. *Saipin Kaewngamprasert* (1995) suggested that she would be angry when her “offspring” did not worship her and bad incidence would happen in the province such as the collapse of Roya Plaza Hotel on 11th August 1993 (*Saipin*, 1995: 128-138).

The relocation and reconstruction of *Thao Suranari* stupa from the temple to be the statue in the public area was possibly influenced by the King *Chulalongkorn* Equestrian Monument built in 1908. *Nidhi Eoseewong* (1995) expressed that the King’s monument became a model of other monuments in the following period (*Nidhi*, 1995: 102). However, the original of *Thao Suranari* monument built in 1934 were placed on a lower base than today’s 2.50 meter base (*Saipin*, 1995: 121). It made people feel closer to her; they did not feel like they were ruled by the central state. While King Rama V Equestrian Monument is bigger than the actual size for those who came to pay respect to the monument could feel the greatness of the monument and could also conceive themselves as being small commoners who were protected by the power of the King, *Thao Suranari* statue was placed on a lower base implicitly showing the status of *Thao Suranari* as a commoner. This feeling of *Thao Suranari* monument was expressed in the way local people treated *Thao Suranari* like their kin (imaginary). They liked calling *Thao Suranari* or “*Ya Mo*” or grandmother *Mo*. They also defined themselves as her relatives. They called themselves “children of *Ya Mo*” and “grandchildren of *Ya Mo*”.

Since the location of *Thao Suranari* is in front of *Chumpon* city gate where many main roads intersect, (as well as, there are spacious common areas around the monument), it is easy for visitors to get access. Moreover, the spacious common area is convenient to hold any activities or ceremonies. Just driving in this area, you could closely see the monument and could easily pay respect to her. Charles F. Keyes (2002) suggests that *Thao Suranari* or *Ya Mo* “is not a personage of the past, but a potent spirit who acts in the present”. The spirit had been remembered by local people as a powerful local spirit, not that much as a national heroine (Keyes, 2002: 117).

Charles F. Keyes explains that the belief in *Thao Suranari* stemmed from the rituals and practices related to her (*Ibid.*, 124-125). The cult of *Ya Mo* is one of the

new cults that have emerged in Thailand in recent years as a response to the economy in globalization. People would seek the help from the spirit of *Ya Mo* rather than to have knowledge of the actual historical facts about the action of *Thao Suranari* in 1827 (Ibid., 128). The cult of the spirit represented the feelings of insecurity in people of modern Thailand (Ibid., 130). “The memory of *Thao Suranari* that seems to be the strongest is neither that of an elite, who would use the monument, nor that of academic historians who would deconstruct the nationalist narrative, but that of the spirit of grandmother *Mo* herself, who makes the past directly effective in the present” (Ibid., 130-131). Noticeably, ‘*Nakhon Ratchasima* people’ interpreted the meaning of *Thao Suranari* Monument from a nationalist doctrine to being a local spirit. Furthermore, they transformed (the national heroine) into a relative. They called this national heroine grandmother *Mo* which had nothing to do with political doctrine. But in political view, although *Ya Mo* existed or not was not really an issue, by honoring the ‘spirit’ of *Ya Mo* in the middle of the city facilitates local acceptance of nationalism and national power.

Nidhi Eoseewong (2003) described a sect of worshipping King *Chulalongkorn* by the middle-class people. They respected his majesty as a person as they knew that he really existed. People gave him a concept as Father of Modernization of the country since he reformed administrative systems, public-utility system and especially abolished slavery like western countries. They worshiped him and even called him “father” though he was a king in higher class (*Nidhi*, 2003). For the name “*Ya*” of *Thao Suranari*, according to *Saipin Kaewngamprasert*’s review of literature written in 1920s - 1970s, *Thao Suranari* was only called “*Khun Ying Mo*” or “*Khun Ying MÓ*” or “*Than Phu Ying Mo*” or “*Thao Suranari*” (*Saipin*, 1995: 158-171). There was no source of calling her “*Ya*”. The word “*Ya*” could signify mother of father and sister of father’s mother. *Saipin* referred from a person who claimed to be a descendant of *Thao Suranari* and found that *Thao Suranari* was a daughter of ordinary villagers. She was married to *Phraya Palad Thongkum*, a head of *Nakhon Ratchasima* in 1771. Without any child, so she adopted a niece or nephew with an unidentified name. This young relative was the beginning of the family tree of *Thao Suranari* (Ibid., 195). According to the book of *Laung Sriyotha et al.* (1934), *Thao Suranari* was called “*Na*” by *Mae Thong Lua* (*Laung Sriyotha et al.*, 1934: 5).

The endearment term of “*Ya*” was developed later. The concept of “*Ya*” compromises both feminine and masculine characters and depicted an ordinary human being. They treated her like a local spirit and ancestor, but this spirit was sacred. *Suriya Smutkupt et al.* (1997) found some stories about *Ya Mo*. Some were myths considering her as a local ghost. She was mentioned in a legend where there was a competition to construct two cities; *Simma* and *Khorat*. *Ya Mo* constructed *Khorat* while *Phor Phaya* constructed *Simma*. The woman finished the construction first, so she won the victory, and *Khorat* had maintained its glory since then. In contrast, the city of the man, who was ashamed of the defeat, became mysteriously deserted (*Suriya*, 1997: 178; *Ibid.*, 192). The existence of *Thao Suranari* at the local level was an outcome of cultural process of *Khorat* people who adapted themselves and compromised with the central state. Thus, it was not necessary for them to academically discuss about the historical facts. They preferred calling her “*Ya Mo*” not only to assure her real existence, but also to demonstrate a kin relationship between them and spirituality. The name “*Ya Mo*” showed that the local people worshipped her for her powerful status.

At *Wat Salaloi* Temple, there was a ritual ceremony of the provincial government that created sacred value or existence of spirit to the monument by using Brahman ceremonies. It raised the status of “spirit” as a deity. Annually worship ceremony of *Thao Suranari* comprised of Brahman ritual at *Wat Salaloi* Temple on 23rd March was the celebration of the victory over Laotian army of the patriotic *Thao Suranari*. At the center of the ceremony, the offering was placed in front of the monument where the density of sacredness was believed to be present there more than other areas. Although the participants of the ceremony were from different groups, the groups at the center of the ritual were Brahmans, public officers, local politicians, and businessmen while common villagers were standing outside. Once the ritual ceremony was over, villagers outside would have an occasion to go to the center to take the offering as it was considered good luck, but certainly they had less chance than those who were at the center to take “special items”. Ritual ceremony was the performance space of both the political actors of the central state and the economic actors of local entrepreneur.

Thao Suranari's spirit met the need of people who want to be successful in modern society. It was not only recognized by the local people, but also by almost every group national wide. For example, an entertainment website, Siamdara.com (2013) published news about a folk female singer from *Khorat, Takkataen Chonlada* who worshiped *Thao Suranari* on the occasion of the launch of her new album. This website insisted that this *Khorat* artist had never forgotten her hometown; consequently, she came to ask *Thao Suranari* for blessings every time she launched a new album to help her gain good income. Besides nine types of fruit and seven-color, seven-cubit silk (in accordance with her seventh album), she also sang a song from the new album to *Ya Mo* (Siamdara.com, 2013).

In sport circle, one of sport teams that had the most fan clubs was Thai international woman volleyball team. They came to fulfill their vow after their victory over a rival in Asian Women's Volleyball Championship organized in *Nakhon Ratchasima* on 13th- 21st September 2013. They fulfilled the vow by offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and a march from the stadium outside the town to the hotel for 15 kilometers.

In these activities, they were encouraged by their fan club. A lot of sport fans participated in these activities with them. The common area of the Monument was so crowded. *Kiattipong Ratchatakriangkrai* (47 years old), trainer of the team who was a local of *Nakhon Ratchasima* said that

“Today we come to pay respect to *Khun Ya Mo*, to fulfill our vow and to ask her for blessing...*Khun Ya Mo* was a heroine, a sanctity of our *Khorat* city. I'm *Khon Khorat*. The captain is also *Khon Khorat*. Every time we had a competition in *Khorat*, we every time ask for blessing. The success we got many times makes us feel encouraged and she tries to help us” (SiamSport.com, 2013a).

Wilawan Aphinyapong (31 years old) Captain of the team, also a local gave some interview that

“Every time we come (to *Khorat*), we come to pay respect her first, ask her for blessing. This is the first time we organize a big ceremony to fulfill our vow...I feel the sanctity. Our team feels comfortable and encouraged. Everyone ask for being champion and this makes us strong (Ibid.,).”

“Because I believe if you vow for something, you must come to fulfill that vow...personally, I’m *Khon Khorat*. I believe and trust in *Mae Ya* as every time I ask her for something, *Mae Ya* blesses me (SiamSport.com, 2013b).”

After the vow fulfillment event of Thai international woman volleyball team, an article appeared in free copy magazine for advertising business in *Nakhon Ratchasima*, whose columnist was *Bansalat Krusri* (2013). It criticized comments on Facebook of Mr. *Ponlop Supamorn* in which the detail accused the vow fulfillment of volleyball team was credulous. *Bansalat* also indicated that it made *Khon Khorat* unhappy that they joined the rally against this idea which was big news on late September 2013 and they even rewarded a person who could bring Mr. *Ponlop* to present his apology to *Ya Mo*. *Bansalat* also compared this case to the incidence where Mrs. *Saipin Kaewngamprasert* was exiled from *Khorat* in 24 hours after publishing her thesis. He said that

“This academic fact affected the faith of people who believed in and respect *Khun Ya Mo* who was considered a deity. Everyone pays respect, asks for blessing and gives their vow like most Thais who still believe in this...There may be those who do not believe in this at all but just only few groups. Since we studied Thai history from primary school to undergraduate school, everyone remembers by heart the heroic act at the field of *Toong Samrit* (*Bansalat*, 2013: 22-23)”.

Another sacred place of *Thao Suranari* was involved with *Wat Salaloi* temple. According to historical tales and local historical records, after the battle, *Thao*

Suranari brought back villagers to the city. During the break, *Thao Suranari* desired to build a temple to devote to the dead in the battle. Hence, she ordered people to build a small boat of banana tree and banana leaves like *Sala*, and then released in the river. She made a wish wherever the boat stopped, she would build a temple at that place. The boat stopped at location of the temple nowadays; she named the temple “*Salaloi*” built in 1827. She was a supporter of the temple until she passed away in 1852 (unnamed author, 2011: 27-28). Her husband and people held the funeral and kept her relic in a stupa in the temple. Yet, *Wat Salaloi* Temple used to be deserted once until renovated by the monk dean of *Nakhon Ratchasima* Province in 1938. It was granted (*Wisoongkhamsima*) temple boundary from King *Bhumibol Adulyadej*, King Rama 9, on 2nd February 1956. In 1967, a new *Ubosot* (hall) was built with Thai fine art applied concept (Ibid., 16-20); the *Ubosot* shaped like a boat floating on the water. In 1978, *Phrathep Ratanadirok*, the abbot wanted to build *Thao Suranari* Monument in the temple, apart from the existing stupa containing her relic. But the monument was her statue in sitting post praying and listening to the preaching. In 1982, the 200th anniversary celebration of *Rattanakosin* Kingdom, monks and local people renovated the temple again (Ibid., 22-23). Extraordinary incidences were interpreted as *Thao Suranari*’s supernatural power for example on 4th June 1978 at 13.59, the day of molding statue of *Thao Suranari* at *Wat Salaloi* Temple, it was told that it was very hot, but at auspicious time, the sky above the ceremony became dark; the sun was encircled by a halo (unnamed author, 2011: 22).

In the present time, miniatures of replicas of *Thao Suranari* monuments are being built in the rural areas for example in *Ban Phra Pleung*, *Nok-Ok* sub-district, *Pak Thongchai* district. The monument was built in 2011. It was a human sized monument situated in a temple near a school. *Phra Athikarn Sian Suntakayo*, the abbot, 61 years old said that he desired to build this monument to indirectly teach students to be hard working and to live with good morality because *Thao Suranari* would help those who were hard working and well behaved only. He also cooperated

with teachers to bring students to pay respect to the monument. The monument became new sanctity of the village¹.

This monument of *Thao Suranari* in *Ban Phra Pleung* was vowed for favor for the first time by Mrs. *Pian Piyanart*, 79 years old in 2012. She said that she wanted *Thao Suranari* to help her grandchild in her public teacher examination. Once she was satisfied with the result, she offered her votive *Phlaeng Khorat* by *Somnuk Khondong* group for two hours. She said besides votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a favorite thing of *Thao Suranari*, she could sing and dance along with *Maw Phlaeng* (singer) or performers as well. After that she regularly offered flower garlands and new clothes to the monument, especially on *Songkran*'s festival. Nonetheless, she also vowed to *Phi Poo Taa* and offered boiled pork head (Mrs. *Pian Piyanart*, 2013, interview). *Thao Suranari* at *Ban Phra Pleung* became sanctity initially by *Phra Athikarn Sian Suntakayo*, teachers, students and Mrs. *Pian*. They ritually treated the monument regularly. Villagers usually had knowledge about the existence of national heroine. Thus, the detail of sanctity of *Thao Suranari* and news of successful vow made people easily accept the status of the significance of this monument.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the sensitive issue and the historical, political, and ethnic complexity of *Khon Khorat* and *Nakhon Ratchasima*. Situated on a plateau connecting the central region of ethnic “Thai” who eat non-glutinous rice and ethnic “Lao” who eat glutinous rice, *Khon Khorat*, being in the “in-between” cultures had to

¹ Before the construction of *Thao Suranari* monument villagers believe in three things; (1) Buddha's foot print, (2) Buddha image in posture of *Naga* protected (*Prang Naga Prok*), (3) *Luang Phor Chim* or spirit of ancient abbot that the villagers respected the most; he was a preacher and an expert in telling future (*Phra Athikarn Sian Suntakayo*, 2013, interviewed).

Mr. *Yut Sangsanoi*, 52 years old added that villagers still respected *Phi Poo Taa* or village protector ghosts. Among the sanctities, villagers preferred vowing to the spirit of *Luang Poo Chim* because they could ask for almost everything except all vices and immoral practice. They could even ask not to be conscripted into military service which was a forbidden favor of *Thao Suranari* (Mr. *Yut Sangsanoi*, 2013, interviewed).

Villagers usually offered boiled pork head, food and fruit to *Luang Poo Chim*. In the case of big and important favor, they would offer votive *Phlaeng Khorat* since they shared common memory that when *Luang Poo Chim* was still alive, that he adored *Phlaeng Khorat* (Ibid.). About agriculture, Mr. *Chatre Sangsanoi*, 84 years old said that villagers worshipped *Mae Phosop* (goddess of rice) by offering dessert, food, particularly her favorite food boiled chicken and indispensably fruits (Mr. *Chatre Sangsanoi*, 2013, interviewed).

construct an identity that would comply with the dominant power. The threats of France expansion into the “Lao” territory in northeastern part of Siam had made *Khon Khorat* claim loyalty to Bangkok government through the story of *Thao Suranari* and her heroic deed against the army of *Chao Anouvong*. Her stupa constructed in 1899 and her being mentioned in a letter to King Rama V before his visit to *Khorat* in 1900 seemed to prove the point.

Khon Khorat had to prove their loyalty to the Bangkok government again after Prince *Bovaradej* rebel in 1933 when the construction of *Thao Suranari* monument in 1934 was supposed to be a symbol of loyalty to Bangkok government. The monument was not only a political symbol, but it had also become a cultural symbol uniting the different ethnic groups living in *Khorat* to become a united *Khon Khorat* who are all “descendants” of “Grand Mother *Mo*”.

As Thailand entered modernization, *Khon Khorat* turned to the Grandmother *Mo* to ask for protection, not from political threats and threats of war as in the old days, but from the threats of economic insecurity. Hence, the spirit of *Thao Suranari* has been turned into a cult. The cult of *Ya Mo* responded to economic insecurity of modern life.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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