

CHAPTER 4

The Contradiction within the Cult of *Thao Suranari* and Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in Commercial Age

It seems that the urban spirit cult of *Thao Suranari* has occurred since the 1970s (Pattana, 1999: 19). Charles F. Keyes (2002) points out that even though in 1963 the Chinese spirit shrine on the opposite of the monument was more revered, it was not at all uncommon for people to pay respect to the monument of *Thao Suranari*. But in the 1990s *Thao Suranari* cult became instead more important. People paid homage more to *Thao Suranari*, and, as a consequence, the activities of making votive offerings by votive *Phlaeng Khorat* increased (Keyes, 2002: 125).

The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* has been recognized as a representation of folkloric local identity and the appropriate performance for *Thao Suranari* spirit. With its ‘modern’ politeness adapted to suit the modern circumstance, it has been promoted as the representation of ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* while applied *Phlaeng Khorat* which adapted to fast rhythm singing has not. In this chapter, I will present the formation of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* which is created for *Thao Suranari* cult. I will discuss the reasons behind various worshippers’ exploitation of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in the cult. I discuss the marginal status of *Maw Phlaeng*, who, despite being a medium between worshippers and sacred spirit, and “conservators” of “local culture”, have earned a very low income, and even sometimes looked down upon as lacking in artistry talent. I will also try to present co-existence as well as contradiction of forms and ideas within the development of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in the commercial age.

4.1 The Formation of Votive *Phlaeng Khorat*

There was no clear information about when or by whom votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was created, but I presumed that it was created in the 1970s. I thought that at least it was not introduced before the construction of *Thao Suranari* Monument in 1934.

Sunthri Siri-angkun et al. (2012), academics from *Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University* asserted that since the celebration of *Thao Suranari* Monument in 1934, *Phlaeng Khorat* had been performed in front of the statue (*Sunthri Siri-angkun et al.*, 2012: 17).

The study of *Thaworn Subongkotch et al.* (1979) mentioned that performers settled their group in the city in 1956. It was not yet their intention to form their group for *Thao Suranari* cult. Before that time *Maw Phlaeng* performed in the countryside and served only rural people. Moreover, the study of Charles F. Keyes (2002) pointed that in early 1960s the atmosphere at the monument was very scary and silent (Keyes, 2002: 125). According to Pattana Kitiarsa (1999), *Thao Suranari* cult may have begun only in the 1970s. Thus, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in front of *Thao Suranari* monument may not be performed before that time.

Somkit Promjui et al. (2003) indicated that after *Nakhon Ratchasima* was conveniently and quickly connected to Bangkok by the construction of Friendship (*Mittapap*) Road in 1957, it brought about a lot of changes in the region. There was expansion and growth of commercial agriculture. Consequently, it was instable for rural people to own their land, and there was more of labor migration to Bangkok and abroad. The change was also affected by the presence of American army during Vietnam War (*Somkit et al.*, 2003: 88-95). Rapid change of *Nakhon Ratchasima* may be responsible for the rise of the cult of *Thao Suranari* and votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. According to *Thaworn Subongkotch et al.* (1979), in the 1970s votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was often performed at the monument especially at night although there were very few audiences (*Thaworn et al.*, 1979: 65).

Saipin Kaewngamprasert (1995) discussed that in 1990s there was a group of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* of *Chen Huarotfai* performing at the monument in town, and there was another group of *Saeng-Somchit Hinkhondong* performing at *Wat Salaloi* Temple. Furthermore, she pointed out that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* became more important when the sacred spirit of *Thao Suranari* was “proved” after the rumor of the miracle of *Thao Suranari* helping the survivors from the tragedy of building collapse of a well-known hotel in the province in August 1993 was spreaded (*Saipin*, 1995: 138-139).

Khorat people selectively use the symbol of *Thao Suranari* after the monument and history of *Thao Suranari* were constructed by the central state. Firstly, *Thao Suranari* was a symbol of national heroine, and they made use of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to worship the hierarchy of this power relation. Secondly, they also use the meaning of *Thao Suranari* and votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a tool for imagination of locality-based identity. Therefore, their votive acts represent a co-existence of different meanings.

Maw Phlaeng and clients used the meaning of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a song of *Thao Suranari* but they interpret it differently. *Maw Phlaeng* emphasized votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as intellectual heritage from their parents which were supported by sacred power. *Maw Phlaeng* used the stage of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to perform the identity of local culture while the clients used votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to show their gratitude to the spirit who helped them overcome their crisis. Both *Maw Phlaeng* and clients created identity relating to the existence of *Thao Suranari*. As they created shared identity from the songs of *Thao Suranari* which made them both descendants of *Ya Mo*, the economic crisis also brings them together. In the 1990s Thailand faced a big economic crisis and a lot of people have become economically insecure. A number of cults emerged to respond to psychological need of people, though they possess different characteristics. The cult of worshipping *Thao Suranari* to gain psychological support became more prominent.

In the cult of King *Chulalongkorn*, according to *Nidhi Eoseewong* (2003), people recognized the high status of the spirit of King Rama V as a king while trying to construct a status close to themselves as a father, so he becomes “*sadej por*” or “his highness the father” (*Nidhi*, 2003). In the cult of *Thao Suranari*, she attains the status of “grandmother”, but also a “national heroine”, and “loyal subject”. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* became a gift offered to her. People made this sacred spirit a ‘normal person’ who had emotions and can be satisfied by entertainment of the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* which supposedly belonged to her time. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* helped them focusing on a search for something belonging to the past or the cultural root of ‘family-based’ society. They used the past as a tool to create the meaning of the modern-day life.

Thus, the existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* represented traditional (local) culture, which was not used against modernity, but became a mosaic of modernization.

4.2 Traditionalized Modernity as the Performance for the Spirit

For way of comparison with study in another area of the world which discusses the co-existence of tradition and modernity. I will briefly review a study of David Attwell (2002) in the Zulu in Africa. David Attwell (2002) explained the changes of Zulu literature when it encountered the culture of modernity. The communication within their own local language was considered the obstacle of civilization. Local intellectuals, thus, needed to change their writing structure to preserve traditional custom and to negotiate with modernity. From his study, Attwell pointed out that there was a project of rewriting the expression of Zulu literature to get along with modern world literature. The modernized method of expressive forms was to construct an “amalgam” in a sense of keeping continuity in language with ‘mixture of different thing’. The other one was to construct a “mixture” that combined two things together. This form of retroactive method could keep the characteristic of the tradition with modernity, it could be considered in either way whether it was modernizing tradition or traditionalized modernity (Attwell, 2002: 99-111).

The methodology in the study of Attwell could be used to shine light on the construction of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. To some extent, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is also a mixture of new and old forms of performance. It is based on ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat*, but it is considered more appropriate to omit some part of rudeness for it to fit with modern polite ‘civilized’ society. However, it is memorized by the local people as belonging to the old tradition of *Khorat* culture. This is what Attwell might call the way of keeping continuity of traditional culture when it is confronting with modernity. Though Attwell’s study was based on changing language form in literature, and my study of *Phlaeng Khorat* is on the changing form of mundane entertainment into polite respectable language of votive act, I find his study useful in suggesting the co-existence of traditional and modern forms.

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was the “traditionalized modernization” or “modernization of tradition”. Its objectives were changed from entertainment to

sacred worship. Obscene words were changed to polite words which allow it to combine with the signs of sacredness of the local spirit and the national heroine. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* told stories in monologue according to sequence and consequence similarly to telling modern history. Votive performers, tell story in unilinear fashion starting from client's background, problems for which they want the spirit to help, client's achievement over the problems, and gratitude to the spirit for successful support. Yet, this story-telling structure was combined with the traditions of dance and costume. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* reflected the co-existence between tradition of form and modernization of content into politeness. The traditionalized form was not only to conform with 'traditional' standard, but it was also "designated" to be "appropriate" and respectful to the sacred spirit.

The clients constructed the collective memory by offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a worship of sacred spirit. To worship the spirit who came from the 'past,' one should offer the 'traditional' form of this local identity. By doing this the clients 'traditionalized' the votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. Their 'traditionalization' reflected the contradiction between the self-image of progressive life in modern society and the construction of collective memory from traditional society.

It is also an act of acceptance of higher authority. Both *Maw Phlaeng* and clients wanted to please the spirit who was in 'higher-class' and was their national heroine. They presented votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in a modest and traditional form because it was interpreted as 'traditional' of local culture. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* produced a result of nostalgic local identity. It invoked traditionalized pride of *Khorat* people as they are becoming Thai.

In 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* which is a form of entertainment, male and female *Maw Phlaeng* take turn in singing to outwit the opposite party. But once it becomes votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, *Maw Phlaeng* sing in praise of *Thao Suranari* in monologue. It is an activity for sacredness worship, not for entertaining people. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is modernization of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*. Its modernity gets along with high value of nationalism and sacred local spirit. The modernity and nationalism of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* assimilates with 'religious sense' of the spirit that Pattana Kitiarsa (1999) describes as "the popular religion".

The operation of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is a cultural socio-politics strategy, employing the traditional or local images to help votive clients to rehabilitate from sickness of modern crisis.

4.3 Clients' Reasons for Vowing of *Thao Suranari*: the Needs of Modern Individuals

Though modern public spaces should be arranged by reasons, but votive act represented 'irrationality'. The involvement of clients in votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and votive operation, therefore, concerned 'rationalization' of rationality in the public space; as Pattana Kitiarsa (1999) suggested that "you may not believe but do not offend the spirit".

Below, I discuss some clients' 'reasons' in vowing to *Thao Suranari* and offering her votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. These people were at their young age (in the twenties) when they vowed and made votive offerings. This suggested that belief in the spirit cult is not limited to only the older generation.

Thatpong Khongsip, 23 years old, from *Nongbuasala* Sub-district, *Muang* District, asked *Thao Suranari* to help him with entrance examination for Army Non Commissioned Officer School as he had recognized since he was a child that *Thao Suranari* would help those who wanted to be a soldier. However, *Thatpong* did not think of military profession as brave and patriotic. He thought of it as a career that would help him and his family to access various privileges of being a civil servant. This year *Thatpong* was Corporal with low income, only five thousand baht a month (excluding other extras), but it helped him and his family benefit the privilege; for example, he could claim medical expense for himself and his parents, he could ask for loan without guaranteed property. Moreover, it was a stable career in the long run. Since he was engaged in military service in 2013, he had offered votive *Phlaeng Khorat* three times. Every time he came with his parents and other relatives. He believed that *Thao Suranari* spirit kept helping him, so he would not limit the number of the offerings. He presumed that his success today was due to the support of *Thao Suranari*. Each votive act depended on two conditions: convenient occasions and occasions when something unexplainable made him think of *Thao Suranari*. *Thatpong*

had a technique to successfully plead *Thao Suranari*; never use the word “vow” because this word could have meaning of bribery. He suggested me to use the word “ask for” instead which made the person who pleaded appear humble when asking for a favor from the superior (*Thatpong Khongsip*, 2015, interviewed).

He decided to hire performance of votive ceremony at *Wat Salaloi* temple because he interpreted that it was home of *Thao Suranari*. Her relics were kept there. Offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was similar to offering a present to elderly in the family. It helped him imagine about the existence of *Thao Suranari* whose spirit helped him to secure family’ economic. For him, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a means which made his imagination and expectation come true. It became a core of the relationship between his family and *Thao Suranari* and became a condition of his family’s security. *Thao Suranari* was interpreted as a supporter for his poor family to access the rights and welfare of civil servants.

Jaruwat Nonthachai, (now 42 years old), was raised in a teacher family. He studied fine arts. However, he is now working in a university of technology and engineering. Since he was teenager, he had experienced votive acts for *Thao Suranari*. It was a turning point of his life from a junior high school student to a student in a vocational school, majoring fine arts. He was persuaded by his mother because she was told by a fortune teller that her son would be killed in a serious accident from motorcycle, a popular vehicle among teenagers at that time. She was very worried about this prediction, so she decided to vow to *Thao Suranari* to protect her son from this danger. *Jaruwat* added that his mother took after his grandmother as she being *Khorat* and appreciated traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* very much. Although she moved and was settled down in *Khon Kaen* Province at young age, there were many times that she hired *Phlaeng Khorat* groups who performed in that area (his grandmother passed away in 1992 at the age of 94). His parents moved from *Khon Kaen* to *Nakhon Ratchasima* in 1984, and when he started his study in vocational college in 1998, his mother started to vow to *Thao Suranari* about her son’s safety, and she often decided to offer votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a present.

Again, *Jaruwat*’s mother vowed to *Thao Suranari* for his son about the conscription at the age of 21. His mother asked *Thao Suranari* to help her son become

a soldier. His mother knew very well that *Thao Suranari* wanted men to serve their country as it was general recognition that *Thao Suranari* was a patriot. However, *Jaruwat* tried to find a way not to be conscripted, so he visited a hindu brahmin living in a faraway place. He and his friends believed that he had some charm and talisman that could help them get off with the conscription. The young men were involved in a secret rite and tactic which they believed that it could help them escape from the conscription. Certainly, not to be conscripted, he should stay away from the power of *Thao Suranari*. Finally, *Jaruwat's* mother was disappointed because he was not conscripted. His mother told him that apart from vowing to *Thao Suranari* about the conscription, she also vowed to *Thao Suranari* to protect her son from a serious accident, so she needed to offer *Thao Suranari* votive *Phlaeng Khorat* anyway.

Jaruwat vowed and offered votive presented by himself for the first time on competitive examination to work in an university of technology in 1999 and the second time on graduation examination in 2012. For the first vow, he was persuaded by his girlfriend who worked in the same university. He was in waiting lists, but was not called. So they asked *Thao Suranari* at the monument in town for helping them to work in the same place in *Nakhon Ratchasima*. When their wish was fulfilled, they offered flower garlands as votive presents but asked his mother to make a votive offering by *Phlaeng Khorat*. *Jaruwat* explained that as he was not free and thought that contacting *Phlaeng Khorat* group was complicated, he thought of his mother who did it several times before. She contacted the group and did the ceremony faster than him. The second time they did not offer *Phlaeng Khorat* but flower garland. He explained the difference of both votive forms that making votive offering by flower garland was for non severe problems; it was more personal worry. Graduation of master degree did not concern promotion and family's economic security. The achievement depended on his afford and the decision of his boss. This problem was not controlled by him (*Jaruwat Nonthachai*, 2015, interviewed). *Jaruwat* created a relation with the spirit of *Thao Suranari* when he encountered uncertain changes during adolescence about serious accident and applying for a job which determined his stable income, as well as graduation of master degree. Behind this relation, it was supported by his mother and his wife as adviser and votive assistants. Votive actions of his indicated a role of woman in worshipping the sacredness.

Though worshipping spirit may not be ‘scientific’; magical thought has sometimes been used for solving some crisis. In my opinion, the modern and rational thought is the subjective constructions of ‘reasonable being’. Modernity also represents a “becoming” process of human being. The votive actor as free agent is in continual process of ‘self construction’. In this way, the ‘meaning world’ has never existed before the appearing of ‘self’. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* can be defined as the condition of meaning contestation. In this condition, the so-called “rational subject” realizes its ‘truth’; and then it struggles to save the truth. It also struggles to save itself. While modernity sets order by a way of ‘rationalized meanings’, it also allows the freedom of self-construction and interpretation.

The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* had been experienced by many actors, particularly local intellectuals, performers, and clients. All these participants can “intend” and keep the meaning in different ways. Therefore, the modernity of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* can be represented the co-existence of the different meaning and contested meaning.

According to Ulrich Beck (1994), self-design and self-staging of individual are not only just a storyline of one’s own, but also life story written from his/her being with the networks of relationship. The networks can design what function of an individual will be, and they cannot be explained in the light of functionalist alone. In western culture where built-up knowledge, higher education, and job opportunities are more demanded, the old tradition has less influence on the people. However, the old traditions and institutions can have a role in the realm of spirituality such as being the source of courage for the people (Beck, 1994: 14-21).

The individual self-design of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* presents the social experiences of local identity, symbol of the central state appropriation, and economic crisis in daily life. An individual is awarded about self-image by not only the old institutions of the spirit cult and the sense of kinship, but also by the modern institutions of the central state and economic development. The individual has not only existed in an experience of the mind, but self-image of one’s own has been made from sign communication of the modern institutions and the old institutions. The individual will negotiate the tension between these institutions.

4.4 Local Politicians as Clients: the Need to Legitimize Local Power

Apart from serving the emotional needs of individuals in the urban area of *Nakhon Ratchasima*, the cult of *Thao Suranari* and votive offering of *Phlaeng Khorat* to her has also spreaded into the rural area. Certain replicas of *Thao Suranari* monument in smaller sizes have been made and established in many villages in the *Nakhon Ratchasima* area. Local people, as well as local politicians have treated these replicas of the monument with as much respect as the original monument in the town center. This is because it is not the monument that they respect, but the spirit of *Thao Suranari* within it. Some began to vow for favor from the spirit at the site of where these replicas were placed and began to offer votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as gift when their wishes have been granted. At this village level, apart from individuals' vow for private favor, local politicians also make vows and organize big votive *Phlaeng Khorat* ceremony in staged-performance for the whole community. The occasion becomes a political legitimization of local politicians.

Local Politicians' Vowing to *Thao Suranari*

Mr. *Bunchan Somruthai*, 41 years old, is a member of Sub-district Administration Organization, *Ban Nong Pue*, *Bua Yai* Sub-district where most villagers are farmers. He came in town with a friend to contact *Phlaeng Khorat* group to perform in annual celebration of the village. It is held on 13th April. Apart from offering food to the monks, the highlight of the celebration is the votive ceremony by *Phlaeng Khorat* for *Thao Suranari* for the villagers in his village, where duplication of *Thao Suranari* monument is a sanctuary. The villagers ask for blessing from *Thao Suranari* at this monument to help them to be successful and overcome various problems. Mr. *Bunchan* gave examples of neighbors who often vowed for many reasons such as returning of lost things, passing examination, or applying for jobs.

The monument at *Ban Nong Pue* was constructed in 2001 at the entrance of the village. It became a new sacred shrine of the village. Before 2001, the villagers paid respect to the sanctuary of *Pu-Ta* spirit, the ancestors' spirits who protected the village. They have a ceremony for *Pu-Ta* spirit in May, when they made offering of a boiled chicken, one bottle of rice spirit, chilly cigarette, food, and flower garlands.

They sculpt human, livestock and pet figurines, and then offer to *Pu-Ta* to protect their family. They have to communicate with *Pu-Ta* through a medium called “*Ta Jum*” who takes a role of medium between villagers and spirit. Once the duplication of *Thao Suranari* monument was built, it became the second sanctuary of the village, and it is very important because the villagers organized the celebration and votive ceremony there annually.

At first it was built for personal need of a villager who intends to put his ancestor's bone ashes there. The villagers protested about the ashes, but they allowed him to build the duplication of the monument because the villagers presumed that *Thao Suranari* was the sacredness of the whole province rather than personal needs. Since then, the duplicated monument has been the place where the villagers pay respect, make a wish, and vow to *Thao Suranari* like they did with *Pu-Ta* spirit. For personal votive offering, they often offer pork's head, sweets, seven kinds of fruits, *Sabai*, flower garlands, and alcohol drinks. But the different things is for the collective votive offering for *Thao Suranari*, they settle the fixed time and date on 13th April during *Songkran* days when those who work in other places could come back home. The votive ceremony for *Thao Suranari* was made more important and more significant than the votive ceremony for *Pu-Ta* spirit because *Pu-Ta* spirit is for personal votive offering, but for this monument the villagers share their money to hire *Phlaeng Khorat* group to perform for *Thao Suranari* annually. Everyone considers it a major celebration of the village, so the votive offering for *Thao Suranari* especially offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is considered as an important ceremony for everyone (*Bunchan Somruthai*, 2010, interviewed).

Bunchan and friends were representatives of the villagers who came to hire *Chen Huarotfai* group in front of *Thao Suranari* Monument in town. They hire this group consecutively many years because the first time they looked for *Phlaeng Khorat* group was in the front of the monument, the main place where *Chen Huarotfai* group performed. This year too, *Bunchan* informed that;

“We want *Maw Phlaeng* who only perform with fun and impresses the villagers. Last year, the villagers were satisfied with this group, and this year they chose the same group because they knew their performance style. *Phlaeng Khorat* is fun and inexpensive and is used to worship *Ya Mo* as well.”

Every time, they had hired votive *Phlaeng Khorat* including two female *Maw Phlaeng* and two male *Maw Phlaeng*. But this year, they wanted *Phlaeng Khorat* playing along with music so that the villagers would not get bored. But they failed because *Chen Huarotfai* group was booked by the others, so they had to hire another group for 5,500 baht for the 3-hour performance. However, they tried to negotiate with the head of the group to bring young women to perform in the show. *Bunchan* said that “Teenagers who drink can flirt with young *Maw Phlaeng*”. Although votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, emphasizes on meaning of sacredness because it is the song for *Thao Suranari*, if it is performed in a village, *Maw Phlaeng* are usually asked to add the ‘traditional’ sexual aspects.

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* can sometimes be hired as an offering to other spirit. Mr. *Kritchakorn Klumklang*, 47 years old, assistant of village headman, *Ban Suksombun*, *Wangnamkiaw* District, does not use votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to offer to *Thao Suranari* directly, although *Thao Suranari* is an important part of his and villagers’ votive ceremony. He chooses to hire votive *Phlaeng Khorat* group to perform for *Chao Por Luang Ratch*, the local spirit also worshipped by people in *Wangnamkiaw* District. He and his friends as leaders of community begged *Chao Por Luang Ratch* six years ago that if they won the election of committee of Sub-district Administration Organization, they would hire votive *Phlaeng Khorat* for *Chao Por Luang Ratch* and the villagers every year. They choose to organize the votive offering ceremony during *Songkran* days as it is a period that young people who work in other places come back home. First year, they planned to hire *Maw Phlaeng* group called *Kampan Baantaan*, a very famous group for applied *Phlaeng Khorat*, but they could not afford to pay for the group, and *Kampan Baantaan* group was not free on 12th April, so they randomly searched for *Phlaeng Khorat* groups around *Thao Suranari* Monument until they found *Samriang Chakkarart*, a member of *Chen Huarotfai*

group. In addition, they used to see the performance of this group, so they decide to hire this group until now. As *Kritchakorn Klumklang* is an important person who determines the hiring of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, he gives his reason that he already likes *Phlaeng Khorat* at the first place which involves his cultural background. He migrated from *Non Sung* District where many people still like *Phlaeng Khorat* and many famous *Maw Phlaeng* come from. He said that:

“I choose *Phlaeng Khorat* because I want young generation to remember *Phlaeng Khorat*. It is a symbol of being *Khorat* and it is a story of *Ya Mo (Thao Suranari)* even though new generation do not like or enjoy it. If I hire a musical group who uses electone, these kids can find in other parties, if I hire *Phlaeng Khorat*, *Maw Phlaeng* can perform many styles such as votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, traditional *Phlaeng Khorat*, country songs and general popular songs. They can also perform with and without musical instrument (*Kritchakorn Klumklang*, 2014, interviewed).”

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* becomes a part of political commitment between leader groups and other villagers. The leaders use votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to please *Chao Por Luang Ratch* in helping them win the election. The legitimacy of leadership does not stand on the support of votes alone, but it is guaranteed by sacred power of spirits either. Their victory in the election showed the support from the sacredness. The victory supported by the sacredness is a guarantee that the villagers made a correct decision. Expressing the gratitude to the sacredness through votive *Phlaeng Khorat* connects the spirit of *Chao Por Luang Ratch* and the spirit of *Thao Suranari*, or provincial spirit and national spirit.

Another example of the interlaced relation is reflected from worship rites and offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to *Thao Suranari* Monument in *Huay Thalaeng* District presided by the Mayor. Mr. *Phutthabut Mahabhuddarangsi*, Municipal Clerk, was one of the organizers said that previously people in the center of the district worship *Chao Por Khong* whose shrine was situated behind the district office. Once

Thao Suranari Monument was built, the priority of the spirit of *Chao Por Khong* was lessened. The ceremony held on 13th April 2014 was a result of the competition of two local political oppositions to promote themselves. The ceremony that day was a special case because it concerned *Thao Suranari* held by the Municipal Office normally on 23rd March which directly concerned *Thao Suranari* as a celebration of victory. But that year the old political group had organized the ceremony before hand, so on that day the new political group who just governed for the first term decided to arrange the ceremony about *Thao Suranari* in the occasion of *Songkran* days (Phutthabut Mahabhuddarangsi, 2014, interviewed).

The participants of the ceremony included heads of government sectors such as head of police, directors of schools, director of hospital and local politicians, and the citizen from District Culture Committee, teachers, students, Elderly club and village health care volunteers. The participants, therefore, seemed to be supporters of this political group. However, they were not interested in the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. They might focus on the meaning of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as the song for *Thao Suranari* spirit rather than its entertainment. They used votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to express the gratitude and to return the favor to the spirit of *Thao Suranari*. So their operation of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* did not only indicate the honesty towards the spirit of the heroine of the central state, but it also meant that they kept their commitment between themselves and people who supported them. The MC of the event often talked about leadership, bravery and sacrifice of *Thao Suranari* spirit. It seemed that *Thao Suranari* spirit was a model of leadership of those local politicians. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was considered as an agent between people and their recognition of leadership symbol. Even though these local politicians were not interested in the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, they used it to legitimize the leadership appropriate to people's interpretation of *Thao Suranari*.

4.5 Competition for Urban Space: Contradiction within Modern Development

Despite the popularity of the cult of *Thao Suranari* in town and despite the general acceptance of local people that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* should be performed in

front of the monument, the topic about the ‘proper’ place of performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* later became an issue.

The problem about the location of stage of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a consequence of modern scenery development around *Thao Suranari* Monument in 1991 in which the fresh market was removed, and the parks on both sides of the monument were refined. This project also covered the area where the stage of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was constructed. In a seminar concerning *Phlaeng Khorat* organized by *Nakhon Ratchasima* Teacher College in 1993, the *Nakhon Ratchasima* governor, Mr. *Damrong Rattanapanit*, said that:

“We had some problems about the place to perform *Phlaeng Khorat*. This is a long-lasting problem ... Where is in the town for them to locate the performances of *Phlaeng Khorat*? ... Some people want them to stay at the same place at the monument’s area. Some people want them to be a little bit farther on the site of the Memorial of *Thao Suranari*’s Army ... Our place is more and more occupied, so *Phlaeng Khorat*’s stage should be moved around. Now it is finally moved to an alley behind Chinese spirit shrine (cited in *Nakhon Ratchasima* Teacher College, 1993: 11-12).

Trairong Kampipong, a participant in the seminar, explained that the municipal arranged a new area for votive *Maw Phlaeng* behind Chinese shrine opposite the monument which belonged to the municipal to show that *Phlaeng Khorat* was still present with *Thao Suranari*. Nonetheless, the new area was not big enough for a number of *Maw Phlaeng* who wanted to perform votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. According to the municipal’s regulations, there were bids for renting government areas to perform the shows from which the rent was submitted to the municipal who granted the rental area for only three groups of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. Each group had to pay 7,000 bahts per year for three years as the fee to the municipal. After the end of the contract, the tenants could renew their contract on an annual basis (Ibid., 58; Ibid., 92). As the area of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was limited, there was some conflict about

how to share the clients between each group of *Maw Phlaeng* who had the contract with the municipal and those who did not (Ibid., 96).

Theeraparp Lohitkul (2008) was enraged that the stage for votive performance was removed, as evident in this writing:

“It is understandable that people in new generation do not care about *Phlaeng Khorat*, but it is hard to understand why stages of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* for (grandmother) *Ya Mo* at her monument were undignifiedly moved to an alley across the street. There is free space around *Ya Mo* monument that today becomes the location of supporters and protestors of People’s Alliance for Democracy, but not the space for *Phlaeng Khorat*!?! (*Theeraparp*, 2008: 113).”

This incidence of conflicts over the use of public space in the town center reflects the contradiction of development. To developers such as town planners, public space should be organized orderly. Stages of votive performance were seen as unorderliness, and as such, they have to be pushed aside into smaller lanes. However, as votive performance serve the psychological needs of the emotionally insecure modern citizens, both *Maw Phlaeng* and clients tried to fight back to regain their public space, (which they did in the end). The reclaim of the public space was also based on the claim that votive performance is a local culture that should be preserved.

4.6 Criticism of Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as Commercialism and Lack of Artistry

Nate Uttamung, a non-academic local intellectual suggested that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a part of ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* which survived from the increasing domination of modern entertainment. He also asserted that it survived due to *Thao Suranari*. However, he criticized that it was different from ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* as it did not have literary competition among *Maw Phlaeng*, and because it was performed by only a very few groups of *Maw Phlaeng* who were allowed to use common ground of the monument. He said that

“Nowadays, urban people did not watch *Phlaeng Khorat* anymore. It could be seen only at the monument of *Ya Mo*, but it became commercial. ... ‘Traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* in the past was performed from dusk till dawn with new content. If someone sang the same verses, it meant that person ran out of knowledge and was a loser. Yet, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* contained few contents. *Maw Phlaeng* sang them repeatedly as if *Ya Mo* could never get bored. Moreover, as skillful performers were expensive, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was performed by amateur performers. It loses the quality of the traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* (cited in *Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College*, 1993: 34).”

The monologue of the performance reflected changing nature of traditional mundane, dialogical fun of traditional *Phlaeng Khorat*, into more formal respectful *Phlaeng Khorat* as a votive offering to sacred spirit. *Maw Phlaeng* was a service provider while clients were service receivers. Both understood the meaning of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a gift or a product for sacred *Thao Suranari*. Clients would contact *Maw Phlaeng* at the counter to hire them, and then give *Maw Phlaeng* the payment as indicated on the board. *Maw Phlaeng* was designated to perform the show for the sacredness. The clients might or might not watch the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. The interaction between them was based on the recognition of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a ‘product’ for sacred spirit not a ‘product’ for human being. As it was a ‘product,’ their relationship was completed once the clients had paid the money.

Somkit Wetwijit, an audience, made a remark about the changing nature of traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* into votive *Phlaeng Khorat*.

“*Phlaeng Khorat* must be about improvisation. *Maw Phlaeng* had to get acquainted with clients or audience and had to know characteristics of relation of clients (in order to create verses). But in votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, once the clients paid, they just walked out since *Maw Phlaeng* was not interested in getting

acquainted with the clients (cited in *Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College*, 1993: 104).

Phodchara Suwanaphachana (2000) tried to defend *Maw Phlaeng* explaining that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a performance for votive ceremony, not for entertainment. Its contents are only concerned about the vow of vowers or clients; it sings a story only about *Thao Suranari*. Thus, it had repetitive form of performance. There cannot be a duel between *Maw Phlaeng*. Therefore, it lacks attractive quality (*Phodchara*, 2000: 97). In his second study, *Phodchara Suwanaphachana* (2001) elaborated that though the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* had general pattern similar to the traditional performance, yet, the contents of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* were about votive ceremony and it shortened steps of the show. It used repetitive verses without intellectual skill in live singing. It had limited time; normally there were two of male and female *Maw Phlaeng* for each team on the stage at the same time. There was no invitation song from male *Maw Phlaeng*. Before the show *Maw Phlaeng* would inform grandmother *Mo* the name of votive persons, the vow and the day they came to offer their votive gift as promised. It was a show for the grandmother *Mo*, so there were very few audiences (*Phodchara*, 2001: 57-58).

Raweewan Bunprakorb and *Sarttra Lao-akka* (2010) discussed that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* showing at the monument and *Wat Salaloi* Temple was commercial. It had fixed rate of charge according to the duration of the show. It did not need audience to listen to it because it was not for entertainment but it was for *Thao Suranari* only. *Maw Phlaeng* had prepared their verses in advance. So it was rather dry and could not arouse participation from audience. But if they were hired to show in other occasions, they needed to sing with more verses and perform some traditional dances (*Raweewan* and *Sarttra*, 2010: 195).

The issue about duration of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* performance and its commercial nature was discussed in a seminar of *Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College* in 1993. Some of *Maw Phlaeng* violated the regulations of municipal limiting the duration of show for 30 minutes; they performed only 15-20 minutes because there was no audience. Moreover, some asked for the charge of more than 300 baht as

regulated by the municipal. These problems were consequences of the bid to use municipal's areas to perform their show (cited in *Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College*, 1993: 126).

The person who used pseudo name “Authentic Child of *Khorat* (offspring of *Ya Mo*)” (2009) recognized votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a tool of showing local faith toward *Thao Suranari*. She acknowledged that as a show to offer and worship *Thao Suranari*, it is also a conservation of local culture. She also acknowledged that the fees that clients paid to *Maw Phlaeng* allow *Maw Phlaeng* to survive. The votive activity through *Phlaeng Khorat*, thus, was both a support for *Maw Phlaeng* and a conservation of *Phlaeng Khorat*. However, she criticized that *Maw Phlaeng* had become an employee in commercial relations. Some of her stories were published in a magazine well known among lower middle class people titled “The Couple” (*Koo Sang Koo Som*), for example:

“I am 100% authentic offspring of *Ya Mo* ... I believe in *Ya Mo* and often ask for her bless. Once my wish was fulfilled, I offered *Phlaeng Khorat* as a votive gift ... I watched almost the entire show of 30 minutes, but I did not enjoy anymore because during the show the performer group indirectly asked for the tips from time to time ... It was so irritating that I decided to walk out off the place ... All performers stopped their show and asked me where I was going and whether I would come back maybe to make sure if they were going to get some tips from me as the time was nearly over. I told them I would not return, this made the performers of *Phlaeng Khorat* whom I hired upset, and criticize me.”

“Why did they destroy valuable culture of *Phlaeng Khorat* like this? As I thought the charge was quite expensive for middle class like me: 350 baht for 30 minutes of votive performance and 700 baht for one hour of votive performance. I was willing to pay as my wish was fulfilled. I think I was one who supported their

existence today and gave them work and income, but they (some of them) were destroying their resource of survival by this dirty behavior. Sooner or later, there would be only a legend of *Phlaeng Khorat* for us, *Khorat* people (Authentic Child of *Khorat*, 2009).”

In defending votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and the profession of *Maw Phlaeng* Mr. *Sanan Hinkhondong*, a local *Maw Phlaeng* said that “the real” votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was the show in which *Maw Phlaeng* did not ask for tips or special rewards from clients. He gave his interview in *Matichon* News that “*I accepted that some of Maw Phlaeng had that behavior, but most of real Maw Phlaeng Khorat did not do as accused (asking for tips)*” (*Matichon* Online, 30 May 2009). His interview was published by INN and re-published in Esanlick website: “(bad accuse of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*) made people think votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was wrong and was marked as culture destructors” (Esanlick, 17 August 2012).

4.7 The Marginality of *Maw Phlaeng*

Despite being a “medium” between the sacred spirit of *Thao Suranari* and the clients through their performing of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, the social position of *Maw Phlaeng* has been rather marginal. As shown in the previous section, *Maw Phlaeng* have been criticized for their ‘commercialist-oriented’ behavior, such as asking for tips. Some people criticized that their performance is repetitive and boring. *Maw Phlaeng*, however, denied that they were engaged in commercial oriented activities. They tried to defend their profession as ‘conservator’ of ‘traditional’ performance.

Below, I discuss the contradiction of the marginal position of *Maw Phlaeng* and their attempts to gain recognition as conservators of local culture.

Lives of *Maw Phlaeng*: Conservators of Local Culture with Low Pay

Kriangsak Suk-Aram, 60 years old, was not born in *Nakhon Ratchasima*. He came from *Phetburi*, East of Thailand, but he became a local of *Khorat* by at least 2 ways; (1) married to a local woman particularly a daughter of a famous *Maw Phlaeng*,

Chen Huarotfai and (2) worked in this province in *Suranari* industrial area where he met his wife. Both of them work at the same factory. His cultural background, thus, was not involved with *Khorat* and *Phlaeng Khorat* culture. He had industrial background rather than folk culture background. However, since his marriage, he had known about *Phlaeng Khorat* from his wife's family, *Chen Huarotfai's*. He understood that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a conservation of locality of *Khorat*. He also defined it as a family heritage that *Chen Huarotfai* passed to his offspring. It was not material treasure, but it was intellectual and cultural base. He said that;

“If there was no *Phlaeng Khorat* but only *Ya Mo*, being *Khorat* would disappear ... Mom *Chen* raised up her children by performing *Phlaeng Khorat*. If they were in hard time and did not have any job, they could still rely on *Phlaeng Khorat* to make money... “Offsprings have to practice *Phlaeng Khorat* and to not leave it forgotten (*Kriangsak Suk-Aram*, 2014, interviewed).”

Kriangsak Suk-Aram now was assistant manager or assistant of the head of *Chen Huarotfai* group whose working area was mainly at the monument in town. He said that in 1990s, *Khorat* economy rapidly grew both in industry and real estate. He earned stable income from the factory. But votive *Phlaeng Khorat* business was not growing; no one hired *Maw Phlaeng*, so his wife quitted the group to work in the industrial factory and met him. Business of *Phlaeng Khorat* at that time could not afford *Chen Huarotfai's* family in contrary to the factory which could afford the family. *Chen's* children had to work in other fields. In 2013 *Kriangsak* and his wife together earned almost one hundred thousand baht a month which was enough for a family of five people. Their eldest daughter graduated in accounting and was looking for a job; the second daughter was studying in chemistry and the youngest son was studying in high school. They expected that their children would work in the field of their study; commercial and industrial jobs (*Ibid.*).

Yet, they were proud of their children who were taught by *Chen Huarotfai* about *Phlaeng Khorat* performance. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* helped them have extra income when they substituted absent *Maw Phlaeng*. He thought that the knowledge and the

performance of *Phlaeng Khorat* could teach his children to understand that it was hard to earn money and working reminded his children to think before spending it. More important than that, *Phlaeng Khorat* was a heritage of knowledge from *Chen Huarotfai*. It was knowledge *Chen* used for teaching her children and grandchildren to progress in their career (Ibid.). They recognized that knowledge of *Phlaeng Khorat* helped them earn income, and they expressed gratitude to *Ya Mo*. It was common that most *Maw Phlaeng* who performed votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to show the gratitude to *Thao Suranari*.

Although *Kriangsak* and his wife were not *Maw Phlaeng*, their children received the knowledge from their grandmother, Mrs. *Chen Huarotfai*. Although they were experts in votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, but not skillful in other types of *Phlaeng Khorat*, they acknowledged *Phlaeng Khorat* as heritage of knowledge from their grandmother who used to be famous and well honored in her knowledge of *Phlaeng Khorat*. Mrs. *Chen Huarotfai* was a head of the family and worked hard by performing *Phlaeng Khorat*.

The 1990s was the crisis period of *Phlaeng Khorat* as traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* was being forgotten. Mrs. *Chen* with her family fought very hard with this problem by creating votive *Phlaeng Khorat* at *Thao Suranari* Monument, and today votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was the source of extra income of *Kriangsak*'s family. Though the income was not much comparing to the income from the factory, it was regular and could afford stable living. *Kriangsak* was retired from the factory and his wife was the only one who gained fixed wage in the family; the eldest daughter was still looking for jobs, the second daughter was studying. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* had assisted them to gain self-respect and they owed gratitude to *Ya Mo*.

Mr. *Chanut Mungkhamklang*, 23 years old, from *Ban Nongna, Palasongkram* Sub-district, *Nongsung* District, was like most of *Maw Phlaeng* who learned *Phlaeng Khorat* because he has grown up in *Maw Phlaeng* family. "Rural people are not rich. Heritage for children is *Phlaeng Khorat*". Before being *Maw Phlaeng*, he studied in low fee government school until graduating with vocational certificate in electricity from Technical Institute situated in the town of *Nakhon Ratchasima*. After graduation at 18, he did not become *Maw Phlaeng* right away. Firstly, he worked as production

staff in Panasonic factory in *Chachoengsao* Province. His duty was to compress foam in refrigerator parts. He gained 180 baht/day, but if he worked overtime, his wage would be about 7,000 – 12,000 baht per month. It was enough for living alone. After working in this factory for six months, he moved to another industrial factory in *Samutprakarn* Province and worked as a maintenance staff. The wage was almost the same as in the first factory but the job was less hard. He worked here only four months. He only told me that he was tired and stressed from working in factories. He missed his hometown and decided to go back home. He was a monk in his hometown for one year, and then left the monkhood. He had health problems of being easily exhausted and tired. After rehabilitation and getting strong, he started to learn *Phlaeng Khorat* seriously from his grandmother named *Wongduen Nongna*. During a one year lesson of *Phlaeng Khorat*, he could change his expertise from electrician to *Maw Phlaeng*.

He told me that he and his colleagues focused on their meaning of arts as an offering song or “*Phlaeng Khorat Thawai*” rather than votive songs. He said that “We perform for *Thao Suranari*, for the sacredness, so we have to finish our performance as the clients hire us to perform for the sacredness”. He said that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was a name called by clients, but he and *Maw Phlaeng* in his group called it Offering *Phlaeng Khorat* (*phlaeng khorat thawai*). He suggested that the word “votive” *Phlaeng Khorat* is an insult to the sacredness because it suggests that the sacred spirit was helping suffering people and hoping for benefits in return. It should be called Offering *Phlaeng Khorat*. However, clients called it “votive *Phlaeng Khorat*” because from their point of view, the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* took place when their wish was fulfilled. They, therefore, hired *Maw Phlaeng* to return their gratitude to *Thao Suranari*. So, *Maw Phlaeng* called it like clients for comprehensive communication.

He also explained that “money from votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is vower money (money the clients have to pay as they dare not fail their promise to return to *Thao Suranari*). It is cursed money. *Maw Phlaeng* like him could not keep it for long, and could not be rich due to it, but money from the factory is the wage they can save”. He gained around 200 – 900 baht per day from this career of votive *Maw Phlaeng*,

particularly he would have more job during March to May because it was celebration of victory of *Thao Suranari* continuing from *Songkran* festival.

Although he had regular job from votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, he complained that “Sometimes I got bored. It is repetitive, nothing’s new. Advantage of working in a factory is meeting friends and getting new experience”. Besides the income, the thing that kept him with votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was the fun from singing dually with other *Maw Phlaeng*. Though the clients did not stay for the show, singing and fighting among *Maw Phlaeng* could replace the feeling of non progress in career (*Chanut Mungkhamklang*, 2012, interviewed).

Chanut was an example of a young man who did not achieve from the industrial sector though he could collect enough knowledge from this field. As he experienced the knowledge in *Maw Phlaeng* family, he could create his proper self. He changed the identity from a factory labor to a performer of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. He, like others, interpreted votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a show for the sacredness. His performance and stability in his life, thus, was controlled by power of this sacredness. He talked about offering *Phlaeng* of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, wage from votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as cursed money with which he could not become rich from this career, and one significant opinion about “Sometimes I got bored, staying at the same place”. These meanings of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* signified that he accepted the context or condition of being inferior to sacred power and being a marginal person in the age of ‘modernity’.

Samriang Chakarat, a female *Maw Phlaeng*, 40 years old, started practicing *Phlaeng Khorat* when she was 11 (1983) in a rural area in *Chakarat* District. After finishing *Prathom* 6, primary school, she quitted school in educational system. She said she wanted to take hairdresser courses but she had to learn *Phlaeng Khorat* because her parents who were *Maw Phlaeng* wanted her to have knowledge of *Phlaeng Khorat*. It was not difficult for her since she was grown up in *Maw Phlaeng* group who practiced *Phlaeng Khorat*. She decided to take hairdresser course in Bangkok at the age of 15 – 19 (1987 – 1991) but unsuccessfully worked as a hairdresser in Bangkok and faced the problem of higher expense than income, so she went back home to learn *Phlaeng Khorat* again and seriously.

Samriang Chakarat focused on *Maw Phlaeng* as an expert of *Thao Suranari* history because *Phlaeng Khorat* belonged to her. *Thao Suranari* appreciated *Phlaeng Khorat*, so it did not disappear. Every *Maw Phlaeng* must be able to tell stories about *Thao Suranari*. She told the story of when *Thao Suranari* fought against Lao soldiers, under *Chao Anouvong* in this way; - “*Thao Suranari* offered the idea of attacking plan. Once prisoner caravan stop to camp on the way, she ordered women to prepare sharp sticks as weapons. She ordered women to make Lao soldiers drunk and at ease by performing *Phlaeng Khorat*. After *Khorat* people destroyed the adversary army, *Thao Suranari* and *Khorat* people celebrated with *Phlaeng Khorat*. *Maw Phlaeng* was taught about the relation between *Phlaeng Khorat* and *Thao Suranari*.”

Samriang Chakarat said that *Maw Phlaeng* must have general knowledge as well since they had to consider which verses suitable for a particular situation or particular clients. For example, if the client was a student, the singing would concern study and examination. If a client was an employee, the singing would concern economic condition and lucky lottery. If they went out of town to villages to perform the show, they needed to search for some information about the hosts and neighbors, and stories about that village as the teacher did not write about it. Although it was votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, sometimes *Maw Phlaeng* had to improvise contents of the song, especially in the performance in rural villages. *Maw Phlaeng* had to perform votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and joyful *Phlaeng Khorat* to attract audience during two to three hours of performance. *Maw Phlaeng* had to present joking contents and give compliment to audience to create closer relationship between them in contrast to votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in town where most of the time there was no audience, with shorter performing time limit of only 30-60 minutes. *Maw Phlaeng*, therefore, need not have to sing for fun. *Samriang* preferred performing in rural villages to the performance in town because audience could share their feeling, but the performance in town allowed her to have regular income all year (*Samriang Chakarat*, 2012, interviewed).

Samriang Chakarat was an example of *Maw Phlaeng* who had social cultural base of rural community. She quitted national educational system and entered in educational system of *Phlaeng Khorat* where listening and local dialect were more

important than formal language. Her knowledge of *Phlaeng Khorat* was based on local knowledge and family knowledge, as her parents were *Maw Phlaeng*. She said that *Maw Phlaeng* must focus on and memorize the verses written by teachers. *Maw Phlaeng* must respect and show their gratitude to teachers. She recognized the origin and the existence of *Phlaeng Khorat* by connecting it to the history of *Thao Suranari*. These recognitions made her self-image and the existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* stable. And these recognitions were operated by *Maw Phlaeng* through the *Wai Kruu* ceremony, the performance, and telling stories of *Thao Suranari*. Moreover, these recognitions were results of story telling and operation of routine rites rather than a result of formal schooling system. It showed that they could build their own knowledge base by using *Phlaeng Khorat* as local knowledge and family knowledge combined with the history of *Thao Suranari* which was a product of the government.

Furthermore, *Samriang Chakkarart* had less chance to have high income profession due to limited education, so working as votive *Maw Phlaeng* from local knowledge and national history was not only an economic strategy but it also helped marginal people like her build her own self-image from a 're-classification' of power: power of marginal people limited to access knowledge in school, power of marginal people limited to access higher profession, power of family and community controlling local knowledge of *Phlaeng Khorat*, and power of *Thao Suranari* as a symbol of government power and as a symbol of sacred power in the local. Being offspring of *Thao Suranari* spirit, it helped them have working space in town. Therefore, the existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was more than conservation of cultural roots and local identity. By associating themselves with interpretation and acceptance of *Ya Mo*'s sacredness; it helped *Maw Phlaeng* who are almost marginal people to stand on their own feet and have honor in modern society.

Kawao Chokchai, 53 years old, a female *Maw Phlaeng* famous for applied *Phlaeng Khorat* explained that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was created as we believed that *Thao Suranari* was sacred and believed that this sacred being liked *Phlaeng Khorat* when she was alive, so they begged her for favour and promised to offer her votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in return. Most votive *Maw Phlaeng* were amateur *Maw Phlaeng* and old *Maw Phlaeng* who could not travel to rural areas. They were supported by *Thao*

Suranari at her monument. Votive *Maw Phlaeng* did not have to be skillful as the contents of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* involved with praise and blessing from *Thao Suranari* for votive clients only. In the rainy season as there were very few jobs in rural areas, skillful *Maw Phlaeng* would perform votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in town. The stage of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* opened opportunity to every group in the Association of *Maw Phlaeng*, and to the group of *Chen Huarotfai* that was outside the Association as well. This was because everybody was considered the grandchildren of *Thao Suranari*, and it was a stage of *Thao Suranari* to help *Maw Phlaeng* who did not have a chance to perform in rural areas.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the emergence of the performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in front of *Thao Suranari* monument in town, and it's later spread into the rural area. Despite *Thao Suranari* being a popular cult for local people and votive *Phlaeng Khorat* being a general offer, I argue that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* does have some internal contradictions. Yet, I argue that, certain contradiction can co-exist, as contradiction is part of the process of modernization.

First, I discussed the contradiction of “traditional” “form” of performance of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, and its ‘modernized/civilized’ politeness of verses.

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was presented in the “form” of ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* such as slow dancing, using *Khorat* language, and wearing traditional costume. But while ordinary *Phlaeng Khorat* performs for entertaining audience with dialogue between two performers contesting in sexually implied verses, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* focused instead only on monologue in praise of *Thao Suranari*. It was sung and performed with politeness and seemed to have fixed patterns. This change caused non-empathy between *Maw Phlaeng* and the audience. The audience became clients of the service who does not share any emotional involvement with the performers. In other words, traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* emphasized on dialogical relationship and entertainment for human being while votive *Phlaeng Khorat* focused on a monologue singing because *Maw Phlaeng* performed only for the spirit.

While the polite monologue form is suitable for the sacred spirit because it is so presented with humbleness and respectfulness in a hierarchical relationship of worshippers and the sacred spirit (through the medium of *Maw Phlaeng*), one find that the sacred spirit in this case, that is, *Ya Mo* is referred to as “grandmother” which is a kin and endearment term designating a close relations between the worshippers and the sacred spirit. This can be observed as a second contradiction within the hierarchical structure.

Thirdly, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* also reflected individualization of urban context. Though it was performed in the public area, it was a personal rite contrary to ‘traditional’ *Phlaeng Khorat* which fulfilled the needs of entertainment of groups and community.

However, when votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was performed in rural area, it became an institution of society created by social memory and ritual practice. It became a “truth” that everyone could access and retain its communal character. Community leaders and local politicians usually used votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to tie up individuals together. Community leaders hired votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to perform in the village in order to allow the villagers to acknowledge votive act together and enjoy the show together. The votive offering in the village even often add applied *Phlaeng Khorat* or country songs and contemporary songs not to offer to sacred spirit but to arouse communal participation.

Fourthly, I discussed the contradiction of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in the age of development. As development proceeds and the economy grows, some people could make more money, while some become economically insecure. The insecurity in economic situation partially gives rise to the cult of *Thao Suranari*, and votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. But as the economy further develops, it gives rise to competition for urban space, and the stages of *Maw Phlaeng* were pushed aside into the lane, so that they would not be an “obstacle” to the “orderliness” of modern town-plan development. *Maw Phlaeng* had to fight for an urban space by claiming that they are conservators of local culture. I also point out the fifth contradiction that as a conservation of local culture and a medium for communication with the sacred spirit,

Maw Phlaeng earn a very low income. By singing the monologue votive *Phlaeng Khorat*: they are also accused of lacking in artistry talent.



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